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Global Engagement Center

GEC SPECIAL REPORT

MORE THAN A CENTURY OF ANTISEMITISM:

HOW SUCCESSIVE OCCUPANTS OF THE
KREMLIN HAVE USED ANTISEMITISM TO SPREAD
DISINFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For over a century, Tsarist, Soviet and now Russian Federation authorities have used antisemitism to discredit, divide, and weaken their perceived adversaries at home and abroad. Today, Kremlin officials and Russia's state-run or state-controlled media spread conspiracy theories, fueling antisemitism intended to deceive the world about its war against Ukraine. These tactics build on a long tradition of exploiting antisemitism to create division and discontent.

In this two-part report, the U.S. Department of State's Global Engagement Center (GEC) documents how successive occupants of the Kremlin have exploited antisemitism for disinformation and propaganda purposes. Part One details the contemporary Kremlin's use of antisemitic disinformation in the context of its war against Ukraine and describes how Russia's leaders and propagandists spread anti-Jewish conspiracy theories to shift blame and distort world events. Part Two provides a historical overview of how Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union used this insidious technique to further their ends.

In an attempt to defend its [unjustifiable](#)¹ neo-imperial war against Ukraine to the international community and domestic audiences, today's Russia often deploys antisemitism as its rhetoric of choice. The Kremlin falsely portrays Ukraine and its supporters as Nazis, antisemites and "Russophobes," demonizes Ukraine's Jewish president Volodymyr Zelenskyy, accuses Jews of being the worst Nazis, and manipulates the history of the Holocaust for political purposes. The Kremlin's propagandists weaponize antisemitism, attempting to silence Jews in Russia who oppose the war. According to new U.S. government information, Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) has provided funding and direct tasking to push content online, which has often been featured alongside antisemitic content. Even as it spreads disinformation about Russia fighting alleged Ukrainian and Western Nazis, the Kremlin cynically deploys openly antisemitic, neo-Nazi groups, such as Task Force Rusich, to wage its war against Ukraine.

The Kremlin also spreads antisemitic conspiracy theories, playing on centuries-old prejudices to mislead audiences about the world's alleged hostile intentions towards Russia and to make Jewish people scapegoats for these attacks. This report details three examples of these lines of effort. First, Russia's leaders consistently refer to the so-called "Golden Billion" conspiracy theory that stems from antisemitic tropes about alleged Jewish world control and evil intentions. Second, Russia's disinformation and propaganda [ecosystem](#)² targets prominent Jewish figures to portray as puppeteers behind secret cabals that seek to dominate the world's politics and the economy. Third, Russia's security services and prominent religious figures attempt to resurrect the ancient antisemitic "blood libel" conspiracy, accusing Jews of ritualistic murders.

Russian authorities' exploitation of antisemitism as a tactic to spread disinformation and propaganda dates back over 100 years. One of the earliest examples of this malign influence activity was the Russian Empire's Tsarist Security Service's fabrication of the now infamous Protocols of the Elders of Zion in the early 1900s. In the 1920s, Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin used antisemitism to consolidate his power. In the late 1930s, he launched efforts to systematically eliminate Jewish influence in all spheres of Soviet society, cementing antisemitism as an official state policy. Until Stalin's death in 1953, the Soviet security apparatus continued to deploy antisemitic disinformation campaigns — such as the witch hunt against “rootless cosmopolitans,” the targeting of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, and the notorious “Doctors' Plot” — to portray Soviet Jews as traitors and Western spies. During the 1960s-1980s, the Committee for State Security (KGB) implemented several antisemitic active measures, a Soviet term for covert influence operations, to discredit its perceived adversaries - the Catholic Church, West Germany, the United States — as antisemitic. The KGB also targeted the Zionist movement and Soviet Jewish dissidents.

President Putin and the Kremlin use their disinformation and propaganda apparatus to exploit centuries-old anti-Jewish prejudice to serve their perceived state interests. The Tsarist and Soviet-era, and now the current, occupants of the Kremlin, have worked to discredit, divide, and weaken their perceived adversaries, falsely accusing them of Nazism, attempting to sow discord in their societies, and spreading anti-Jewish conspiracy theories. In the process, the Kremlin feeds the flames of antisemitism, which is [rising](#)³ globally. This report intends to expose the Kremlin's dangerous antisemitic disinformation to the public in hope of minimizing the harmful impact of Russia's information manipulation.

PART 1: ANTISEMITIC DISINFORMATION AND CONSPIRACY THEORIES IN THE WAR AGAINST UKRAINE AND BEYOND

INTRODUCTION

Part One of the report documents the contemporary Kremlin's use of antisemitism as a tool of disinformation and propaganda in its war against Ukraine. It also examines how Russian Federation officials and state media promulgate antisemitic conspiracy theories to distract and mislead international audiences.

Antisemitic disinformation and propaganda are a staple of the Kremlin's efforts to manipulate international and domestic public opinion about its war against Ukraine. The GEC's July 2022 [bulletin](#),⁴ titled "To Vilify Ukraine, the Kremlin Resorts to Antisemitism," showed how Moscow uses antisemitism to support one of its pretexts for the war — the false claim that Ukraine is a Nazi state in need of "de-Nazification." In one extreme example, in an attempt to discredit Ukraine's Jewish president as a Nazi, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov [speculated](#)⁵ in May 2022 that Adolf Hitler "had Jewish blood, too," adding that the "wise Jewish people say that the most ardent anti-Semites are usually Jews." In January 2023, [Lavrov](#)⁶ [exploited](#)⁷ the historical memory of the Holocaust and the Second World War, alleging that today's Russia is a victim of alleged Ukrainian and Western "Russophobia" and "Nazi" aggression. Russia's intelligence services provide funding and direct tasking to push content online which has often been featured alongside antisemitic content, while the Kremlin's propagandists fuel antisemitism to silence domestic war opposition. Moscow hypocritically deploys antisemitic neo-Nazi paramilitary groups in Ukraine, while simultaneously accusing Ukraine and its partners of Nazism. Russia's [disinformation and propaganda ecosystem](#)⁸ disseminates antisemitic conspiracy theories vilifying prominent Jewish figures.

USING ANTISEMITISM TO VILIFY UKRAINE AND ITS SUPPORTERS

Russia consistently uses antisemitism in its disinformation and propaganda campaigns about its war against Ukraine. The Kremlin repeatedly targets Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy with accusations that he himself is a Nazi and "inauthentic Jew" to justify the [lie](#)⁹ that Russia is pursuing "[denazification](#)"¹⁰ of [Ukraine](#)¹¹ as one of the goals of its so-called "special military operation." When critics point out that Zelenskyy, who won the 2019 [election](#)¹² in Ukraine with 73% of the votes, is Jewish himself, with family members who were [killed](#)¹³ by Nazis during World War II, the Kremlin counters with additional disinformation aiming to delegitimize Zelenskyy's Jewish heritage and to convince the public that Jews can be the most [ardent](#)¹⁴ Nazis.

In an attempt to malign and discredit President Zelenskyy, the Kremlin's [propagandists](#),¹⁵ [Russian intelligence-linked](#)¹⁶ [websites](#),¹⁷ and high-ranking government officials falsely portray him as an inauthentic Jew. For example, in September 2023, President Putin [claimed](#)¹⁸ that "Western curators" installed Zelenskyy as Ukraine's leader because he was an "ethnic Jew" and would be able to "cover up" for the "anti-human essence" of the modern state of Ukraine and for its alleged "glorification of Nazism." In June 2023, Putin [said](#)¹⁹ Zelenskyy was not a "Jew, but a disgrace to the Jewish people." Russia's former President and current Deputy Chairman of the Security Council, Dmitri Medvedev advanced similar arguments, claiming in October 2021 that Zelenskyy "[lost](#)"²⁰ his Jewish identity. One of the Kremlin's most prominent propagandists, [Vladimir Solovyov](#),²¹ also [claimed](#)²² Zelenskyy was not really Jewish, while Solovyov's [associates](#)²³ and [state-owned media](#)²⁴ falsely accused Ukraine's President of betraying his Jewish family and ancestors. Before President Putin launched his full-scale war against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, [Margarita Simonyan](#),²⁵ the editor-in-chief of RT and Rossiya Segodnya, Russia's state-funded propaganda mouthpieces, disseminated a [video](#)²⁶ with Zelenskyy, showcasing antisemitic stereotypes of Jews as cowards, to falsely deny Moscow's preparations for the full-scale invasion. Russia's Embassy in London posted an antisemitic [cartoon](#)²⁷ depicting Zelenskyy with a large "Jewish" nose. [Medvedev](#),²⁸ on several occasions, [compared](#)²⁹ Ukraine's president to Adolf Hitler.

The Kremlin also falsely claims that Jews were among the worst Nazis. In May 2022, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov [responded](#)³⁰ to an Italian journalist's question about Zelenskyy's heritage with an antisemitic [conspiratorial](#)³¹ statement, speculating Adolf Hitler "had Jewish blood, too" and adding the "wise Jewish people say that the most ardent anti-Semites are usually Jews." Government of Israel officials immediately [demanded](#)³² an apology for Lavrov's "unforgivable, outrageous" remarks and "lies...meant to blame the Jews themselves" for the Holocaust. Yair Lapid, Israel's Foreign Minister at the time, [wrote](#)³³ the "lowest level of racism against Jews is to accuse Jews themselves of antisemitism." According to Israel Prime Minister's office, President Putin later privately [apologized](#)³⁴ for Lavrov's comments.

MANIPULATING THE HOLOCAUST TO WHITENASH THE KREMLIN'S CRIMES

The [U.S. Department of State](#)³⁵ has used the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance](#) (IHRA)³⁶ working definition of antisemitism since its adoption in 2016. Additionally, according to IHRA, [Holocaust distortion](#)³⁷ is a form of antisemitism defined as "rhetoric, written work, or other media that excuse, minimize, or misrepresent the known historical record" of the Holocaust.

In the [words of IHRA experts](#),³⁸ the main forms of Holocaust distortion include:

- Intentional efforts to excuse or minimize the Holocaust or its elements, including the roles played by collaborators and allies of Nazi Germany.
- Gross minimization of the numbers of victims.

- Blaming Jews for the Holocaust.
- Casting the Holocaust as a positive historical event.
- Attempting to blur responsibility for the crimes of the Holocaust.
- Accusing Jews of “using” the Holocaust for some manner of gain.
- Use of the term “Holocaust” to refer to events or concepts that are not related to the genocide of European and North African Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators.
- State-sponsored manipulation of Holocaust history to sow political discord within or outside a country’s borders.
- Trivializing or honoring the historical legacies of people or organizations complicit in the crimes of the Holocaust.
- Using imagery and language associated with the Holocaust for political, ideological, or commercial purposes unrelated to this history in online and offline forums.

Moscow has consistently engaged in Holocaust distortion. Speaking at a [meeting](#)³⁹ of the Pobeda Organizing Committee, a Kremlin [consultative body](#)⁴⁰ on state policy regarding “patriotic education” and war veterans, in September 2023, President Putin spread disinformation, trying to [misappropriate](#)⁴¹ the legacy of the Holocaust to justify his war of aggression against Ukraine. Putin attempted to diminish the Nazi role in the murder of Jews in Ukraine during the Holocaust, [claiming](#)⁴² “it was Banderites [a pejorative term used to describe the followers of [Stepan Bandera](#)⁴³] and their ilk who gave the direct orders. Even the Germans — even the SS troops — didn’t consider it possible to take part in these mass repressions. They put practically everything in the hands of local nationalists and anti-Semites.”

In January 2023, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov distorted the Holocaust in a cynical attempt to portray Russia as a victim in the war Moscow launched against Ukraine. In a press conference, Lavrov falsely [equated](#)⁴⁴ Western support for Ukraine’s fight against the Kremlin’s aggression to the extermination of Jews by the Nazis during World War II. Lavrov claimed the United States, NATO, and the EU are “using Ukraine to wage a proxy war against Russia with the old aim of finally solving the ‘Russian question,’ like Hitler, who sought a final solution to the ‘Jewish question.’” Nazis coined the [term](#)⁴⁵ “the final solution to the Jewish question” at a secret meeting in January 1942, known as the Wannsee Conference, to denote a plan for the “systematic mass murder” of Jews. Notably, two days after Moscow launched the full-scale war in February 2022, Russian state media agency Novosti [published](#)⁴⁶ (and later [deleted](#)⁴⁷) an op-ed praising President Putin for deciding to “resolve the Ukraine question.”

[Israel](#),⁴⁸ the [United States](#),⁴⁹ the [European Union](#),⁵⁰ the European Jewish Congress (EJC),⁵¹ [Yad Vashem-the World Holocaust Remembrance Center](#),⁵² which is the Israeli authority on the Holocaust, and others, condemned Lavrov’s comments. Yad Vashem Chairman Dani Dayan [called](#)⁵³ Lavrov’s statements an “insensitive, delusional, and dangerous misinterpretation of historical facts” and an “utter distortion of the history and an affront to the actual victims of Nazism.”

[Echoing](#)⁵⁴ Lavrov's antisemitic statements, President [Putin](#)⁵⁵ and the Kremlin's propagandists also draw false equivalency between Nazi antisemitism and so-called "Russophobia," which Russia often invokes when it tries to silence and discredit criticism of its malign activities. For example, the Kremlin disseminates false narratives minimizing the role of antisemitism in Nazi ideology. Vladimir Solovyov and other pundits on Russian state television [asserted](#)⁵⁶ Nazism does not automatically imply antisemitism but can instead reflect "Russophobia." Russian [diplomats](#),⁵⁷ state-funded "journalists" and Kremlin-aligned "[experts](#)"⁵⁸ [describe](#)⁵⁹ Russians as the "[new Jews](#),"⁶⁰ falsely [alleging](#)⁶¹ global anti-Russian discrimination and Nazi-like efforts to [exterminate](#)⁶² ethnic Russians worldwide.

The term "Russophobia" has antisemitic roots. Reportedly [coined](#)⁶³ by 19th century Russian poet and diplomat Fyodor Tyutchev, it was popularized in the 1980s by prominent nationalist mathematician [Igor Shafarevich](#).⁶⁴ In both an antisemitic essay and a book titled "Russophobia," Shafarevich "[accused](#)⁶⁵ Jewish intellectuals in the Soviet Union of being motivated by a hatred of Russia." Citing various antisemitic conspiracy theories, Shafarevich [claimed](#)⁶⁶ Jews were playing an "exclusively large role" in what he described as a "Russophobia" movement. He also [depicted](#)⁶⁷ denunciations of antisemitism as an attempt to censor legitimate criticism and promoted the now [debunked](#)⁶⁸ conspiracy theory claiming Jews killed Russian Tsar Nicholas II and his family in 1918 as part of a "ritual murder," when in fact Judaism [prohibits](#)⁶⁹ ritual murders and the Bolsheviks who murdered the Tsar's family were ardent atheists.

WHATABOUTISM AND HOLOCAUST DISTORTION AS TOOLS OF DISINFORMATION

The Kremlin's [propagandists](#)⁷⁰ attempt to deflect global criticism of Russia's Holocaust distortion by using "[whataboutism](#),"⁷¹ while simultaneously falsely [accusing](#)⁷² their critics of malign activities such as spreading "[fakes](#)."⁷³ In May 2022, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) [blamed](#)⁷⁴ Israel for making "anti-historical statements" and alleged Israel supports a "neo-Nazi regime in Kyiv." The MFA also targeted the [EJC](#)⁷⁵ and [Josep Borrell](#),⁷⁶ High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Lavrov [called](#)⁷⁷ the critics "unscrupulous politicians," claiming their criticism was an admittance of guilt. Dmitri Kulikov, a pro-Kremlin host on Russian state television [blamed](#)⁷⁸ all Europeans for "burning" the Jews during the Holocaust.

Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem spreads false claims distorting the Holocaust even as the world community marked International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, 2023. Solovyov [shared](#)⁷⁹ a post on Telegram comparing President Zelenskyy to Hitler. Yevgeniy Satanovskiy, a pro-Kremlin pundit on state television, [accused](#)⁸⁰ Poland of emulating the Nazi plans to exterminate all Jews during WWII by seeking to "finish" all Russians. President Putin [drew](#)⁸¹ false parallels between the "barbarian Nazi plans" to murder Jews and others to the "crimes" allegedly being committed by "neo-Nazis" in today's Ukraine.

RUSSIA'S FEDERAL SECURITY SERVICE'S PROMOTION OF ANTISEMITISM

Russia's security services are systematically using antisemitism as part of their covert efforts. According to new U.S. government information, Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) has tasked content to websites like *SouthFront*, which share antisemitic and bigoted articles in addition to their anti-Ukraine and anti-U.S. disinformation. The FSB has provided funding and direct tasking to push content online, which has often been featured alongside this antisemitic content. The FSB's use of websites like *SouthFront* to publish disinformation alongside bigoted content highlights the FSB's willingness to support the promotion of antisemitism around the world.

The FSB not only funds antisemitic proxy outlets, but also works to promote the Kremlin's "denazification" disinformation. On June 5, 2022, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) [published](#)⁸² what it identified as a report from Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) on disinformation themes the Russian government should promote to improve the "informational-propagandistic support" of its "special military operation" against Ukraine. The FSB concluded Russia had inadequately supported the "denazification" claim and recommended a "massive injection" of new allegations accusing Ukrainian nationalists of killing children in the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic" and "Luhansk People's Republic" — parts of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk and Luhansk provinces that Russia has controlled since 2014. The FSB also [called](#)⁸³ for the creation of a "network of propagandists" to spread the fabrications, including using World War II veterans from Russia and Ukraine in staged videos where participants would call on Russia to "stop fascism in Ukraine." Lastly, the FSB [recommended](#)⁸⁴ establishing "anti-fascist" front groups in countries that had been part of the Soviet Union and targeting the European Union with disinformation claiming life in Europe is worsening because of its support for Ukrainian "Nazis."

New U.S. government information shows there has been a broader ideological effort by the Kremlin and Kremlin-linked oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev to equate "Russophobia" to Nazism, analogous to antisemitism, in new regulations and propaganda. By doing so, Kremlin propagandists can ignore the poly-ethnic makeup of Ukraine and apply a blanket label of "Nazi" to the so-called "Russophobic" Ukrainian leadership. Specifically, these actors have called for special attention to be paid to the "question" of the Jewish roots of President Zelenskyy and a significant portion of the Ukrainian leadership. In relation to this, one actor advised Konstantin Malofeyev and an FSB officer to use the example of "Judenrats" — Jewish administrative agencies formed during World War II and subordinate to the German administration. From the Kremlin's perspective, the subordination of Ukrainian leadership to the anti-Russian West makes a good analogy. Using this mindset, these actors also suggest labeling NATO as a "Russophobic," and therefore "Nazi" military political organization. Russian influence actors linked to the Russian government run and/or support Telegram channels that promote bigotry and conspiracy theories, including antisemitic conspiracy theories. One such channel, "30 Silver Pieces" (@Thirty_Silver_Pieces), is specifically devoted to

spreading antisemitism around the world. Many of these channels also peddle racist, anti-LGBTQI+, and anti-immigrant commentary. The full spectrum of Russian malign influence actors is involved in these online operations, including Russia's intelligence services.

The name "30 Silver Pieces" is a [reference](#)⁸⁵ to the Biblical story of Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus Christ's 12 disciples, who betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

FUELING ANTISEMITISM TO SILENCE WAR CRITICS

Since launching the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Moscow increasingly exploits antisemitism to discredit perceived adversaries and score political points. Speaking at the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) in Vladivostok in September 2023, President Putin [mocked](#)⁸⁶ Anatoliy Chubais, a former high-ranking Russian government official who left Russia after the invasion, with an [antisemitic](#)⁸⁷ [remark](#).⁸⁸ "The fact that Anatoly Borisovich [Chubais] is hiding there [in Israel] for some reason... I was shown some photo from the Internet, where he is no longer Anatoly Borisovich Chubais, but some Moisha Israelievich, who lives there. Why is he doing this? He ran away," Putin said, according to [Meduza](#).⁸⁹ [Alexandra Arkhipova](#),⁹⁰ an expert in anthropology and folklore studies, [argued](#)⁹¹ that Putin was engaging in "people's antisemitism" to appeal to his "nuclear electorate." Arkhipova traced the theme of Putin's mockery to the Soviet state-sponsored antisemitism in the post-WWII era, when Soviet Jews had to hide their identities by adopting Russian sounding names to avoid persecution, including for the allegation of "dual loyalty" to Israel.⁹²

The Kremlin also encourages state-sponsored antisemitism as it silences domestic Jewish opposition to the war, according to Kirill Martynov, the chief editor of the independent Novaya Gazeta Europe. In his [article](#)⁹³ from September 2022, Martynov highlights the case of Leonid Gozman, a long-time Putin critic and a target of the Kremlin's propaganda machine. In August 2022, Gozman was [arrested](#)⁹⁴ for comparing Joseph Stalin to Adolf Hitler. In June 2022, Russian Federation authorities [opened a criminal case](#)⁹⁵ against him for allegedly failing to inform them of his Israeli citizenship in the time required by local law. Martynov [writes](#)⁹⁶ that Kremlin propagandists regularly highlight Gozman's Jewish background, and in this way court Russian ultra-nationalists, who view Gozman as a "Jew with evil plans to dismember Russia." In one example of an antisemitic attack on Gozman, Russian state television pundit Aleksandr Sosnovskiy [accused](#)⁹⁷ him of betraying his fellow Jews, drawing associations between Gozman and Jews who allegedly cooperated with the Nazis during WWII. Other Jewish critics of Putin's war of choice on Ukraine faced similar treatment. For instance, Vladimir Solovyov used [pictures](#)⁹⁸ with a Star of David to discredit Yekaterinburg's independent former mayor Yevgeniy Royzman in August, 2022. In 2013, Putin's [reportedly](#)⁹⁹ [favorite](#)¹⁰⁰ newspaper, [Komsomolskaya Pravda](#),¹⁰¹ published an [op-ed](#)¹⁰² criticizing Gozman as a "liberal," with the author expressing "pity" that the Nazis had not made "[lampshades](#)¹⁰³ out of the ancestors of today's liberals." Gozman left Russia in 2022 when he was released from pre-trial detention, and gave an interview after his departure [saying](#)¹⁰⁴ that antisemitism is thriving among Russia's diplomats and security services.

Content published on websites operated by Russia's security services confirm Gozman's assertions. For example, the [Strategic Culture Foundation](#),¹⁰⁵ an online publication directed by Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), published an [article](#)¹⁰⁶ calling Jewish war opponents, the prominent Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky and Russia-born Israeli businessman Leonid Nevzlin, the "biggest Russophobes" ungrateful for the Soviet army's liberation of Auschwitz. When [former](#)¹⁰⁷ Assistant Secretary of Russia's Security Council Aleksey Pavlov [called](#)¹⁰⁸ for the "[desatanization](#)"¹⁰⁹ of Ukraine in late 2022, he demonized prominent Ukrainian Jews and the Jewish Chabad Lubavich movement. According to [Pavlov](#),¹¹⁰ "the main vital principle" of the movement is the "superiority of the sect's followers above all nations and peoples."

NEO-NAZI PURVEYORS OF ANTISEMITIC DISINFORMATION SERVE THE KREMLIN

As it spreads false claims about the need to "denazify" Ukraine, the Kremlin hypocritically [deploys](#)¹¹¹ nationalists with neo-Nazi views who espouse antisemitic disinformation into battle in Ukraine. One of these groups is Task Force Rusich, a neo-Nazi paramilitary organization that has participated in combat alongside Russia's military in Ukraine and was [sanctioned](#)¹¹² by the United States in September 2022. Rusich also has a long history of fighting among the ranks of Russia-backed proxies in the Donbas region of Ukraine, and in 2015, Rusich mercenaries were accused of, and filmed, committing atrocities against deceased and captured Ukrainian soldiers as reported in the September 2022 [U.S. Treasury sanction designation](#).¹¹³ Alexey Milchakov, the leader of Rusich and a former [paratrooper](#)¹¹⁴ with the Russian Armed Forces, is a [self-described](#)¹¹⁵ Nazi with a reputation for extreme brutality. In 2011, Milchakov [gained](#)¹¹⁶ notoriety after posting photos of himself killing a dog on social media. [Rusich](#)¹¹⁷ is also [affiliated](#)¹¹⁸ with the Kremlin-backed [Wagner Group](#),¹¹⁹ a U.S.-sanctioned Russian Ministry of Defense [proxy force](#)¹²⁰ and a significant [transnational](#)¹²¹ criminal organization [founded](#)¹²² and financed by pro-Kremlin oligarch Yevgeniy Prigozhin, who [died](#)¹²³ in a plane crash in August, 2023 after mounting a failed mutiny. According to investigations by independent Russian media outlet [Fontanka](#)¹²⁴ and the think tank [New America](#),¹²⁵ Milchakov fought as part of Wagner in Syria in 2017.

[Dmitriy Utkin](#),¹²⁶ Prigozhin's second-in-command who also [died](#)¹²⁷ in the plane crash, was a former special forces [officer](#)¹²⁸ in Russia's military intelligence, popularly known as the GRU. Utkin used "Wagner" as his personal call sign, apparently to pay respect to the 19th century German composer Richard Wagner, a vehement [antisemite](#).¹²⁹ Utkin had the [reputation](#)¹³⁰ of being an [admirer](#)¹³¹ of Nazi ideology and reportedly [had](#)¹³² "tattoos of Nazi 'SS' [epaulets](#)¹³³ along his collar bones." President Putin [hosted](#)¹³⁴ Utkin at the [Kremlin](#)¹³⁵ in 2016 to mark the Heroes of the Fatherland Day. The same year, Milchakov [attended](#)¹³⁶ an award [ceremony](#)¹³⁷ led by Sergei Aksyonov, the co-called "Head of the Republic of Crimea" and Vladislav Surkov, Putin's aide at the time, "known as the [grey cardinal](#)¹³⁸ in Russia," who coordinated policy towards

Ukraine. In an [interview](#)¹³⁹ published on Telegram on February 11, 2023, Prigozhin said he did not care whether some of his fighters follow the ideology of the Third Reich, as long as they are skillful at killing Ukrainians.

Another Rusich [fighter](#)¹⁴⁰ Evgeny Rasskazov, known on social media as “Topaz,” regularly disseminates pro-Nazi and antisemitic content. On April 20, 2022, he [published](#)¹⁴¹ a Telegram post appearing to celebrate Adolf Hitler’s birthday. Rasskazov called the Nazi dictator “our comrade-in-arms,” a “friend,” and an “example for many of us,” who “taught us to fight for our native lands, which historically belong to our people.” In another [post](#),¹⁴² “Topaz” shared a message from a “knowledgeable” source claiming that Jews concocted a conspiracy to forcibly vaccinate Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine to accelerate the arrival of the Messiah. Rasskazov also [encouraged](#)¹⁴³ Jews to leave Russia.

According to a German intelligence report [cited](#)¹⁴⁴ by *Der Spiegel*,¹⁴⁵ the white supremacist group the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) and its paramilitary arm, the Imperial Legion, also directly participate in the Kremlin’s war against Ukraine. RIM has reportedly been [involved](#)¹⁴⁶ in Moscow’s military [operations](#)¹⁴⁷ in Libya and Syria and has “[indirect ties](#)”¹⁴⁸ to Wagner. In April 2020, RIM became the first white supremacist group to be [designated](#)¹⁴⁹ by the United States as a “global terrorists.” RIM has provided paramilitary-style training to white supremacists and neo-Nazis in Europe and actively works to rally these groups into a common front against their perceived enemies. It has “sought to raise and move funds using the international financial system with the intent of building a global network of violent groups that foster extremist views and subvert democratic processes,” [said](#)¹⁵⁰ Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian E. Nelson. “RIM and its supporters continue to exacerbate Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine through their fundraising efforts,” Nelson added.

The Moscow-based Sova Center for Information and Analysis, which studied Russian nationalism and was [shut down](#)¹⁵¹ by Russian authorities in April 2023, [describes](#)¹⁵² RIM’s ideology as a “classical fusion of Orthodox monarchism and imperial nationalism,” which views the “last 100 years of Russia’s history through the prism of the ‘global Zionist conspiracy.’” Disinformation and propaganda aimed at inciting anti-Jewish hatred is prevalent in RIM’s digital content, ranging from centuries-old conspiracies such as the anti-Jewish blood [libel](#)¹⁵³ trope claiming Jews kill Christian children and drink their blood to antisemitic lies tied to current events. For example, one [article](#)¹⁵⁴ on RIM’s website warns about the increasing “Zionist pressure on [Russian] public consciousness” to achieve the “Judaization of the Russian culture and of the national spirit.” The author claims that the alleged upsurge in “Jewish activity in Russia” is “connected to the general expansion” of Zionism, which seeks to “restructure the world” for its benefit and to bring about the “coming of the anti-Christ.”

RIM also engages in Holocaust distortion, [spreading](#)¹⁵⁵ disinformation claiming that the “Holocaust of the Russian people” outsizes the murder of the Jewish people in Treblinka and Auschwitz-Birkenau, Nazi death

camps during World War II. RIM falsely blames Jews for a variety of alleged misdeeds, from [waging](#)¹⁵⁶ a “Kosher terror” against Russian nationalists in the 1900s to [leading](#)¹⁵⁷ the “policy of the Ukrainization of the Russian population of Malorossiya” and [organizing](#)¹⁵⁸ the Holodomor in the 1920s, to [undermining](#)¹⁵⁹ Russia’s defense industry in the current war against Ukraine, and to [seeking](#)¹⁶⁰ to de-populate the planet. Despite the mounting evidence pointing to RIM’s antisemitic white supremacist views, the Russian government continues to defend the group. Following the United States’ April 2020 designation of RIM as “global terrorists,” the Russian Foreign Ministry’s spokesperson Maria Zakharova [claimed](#)¹⁶¹ there was “no reasonable explanation for the hasty U.S. decision.” Zakharova [said](#)¹⁶² Russia had the “impression that it was made primarily for propaganda purposes,” because of the “Russophobia of the U.S. establishment.”

PROMULGATING ANTISEMITIC CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Russian leaders and propagandists weaponize antisemitic conspiracy theories, leveraging pre-existing prejudices to distract and mislead audiences. The “Golden Billion” and similar conspiracy theories target known Jewish figures and allege that secret, powerful Jewish cabals control the media, economy and politics, and seek to dominate the world. According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a U.S.-based antisemitism watchdog, these [conspiracy theories](#)¹⁶³ stem from “longstanding antisemitic tropes, particularly the notion that rich and powerful Jews work behind the scenes, plotting to control countries and manipulate global events.” As the American Jewish Committee [reports](#),¹⁶⁴ these constructs “capitalize” on the “imagery of a conniving cohort, such as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or the New World Order theory.”

THE GOLDEN BILLION

One of the conspiracy theories stemming from antisemitic tropes about so-called Jewish control and evil intentions is the “Golden Billion” conspiracy theory. Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russian leaders, including President Vladimir [Putin](#),¹⁶⁵ Foreign Minister Sergey [Lavrov](#),¹⁶⁶ Deputy Chairman of the Security Council Dmitri [Medvedev](#),¹⁶⁷ the Council’s Secretary Nikolai [Patrushev](#),¹⁶⁸ and the Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Sergey [Naryshkin](#),¹⁶⁹ [consistently](#)¹⁷⁰ promoted the so-called “Golden Billion” conspiracy theory attempting to deflect the blame for the war against Ukraine by falsely portraying Russia as the victim of a Western plot. The “[Golden Billion](#)”¹⁷¹ conspiracy theory purports that a group of wealthy mostly Western elites has conspired to appropriate most of the planet’s natural resources for the exclusive use of their own populations — the “Golden Billion” — at the expense of the rest of the world.

Russian writer Anatoly Tsikunov, publishing under a pseudonym A. Kuzmich, [coined](#)¹⁷² the term the “Golden Billion” in 1990, in an [article](#)¹⁷³ “Russia and the Market in the Context of Soviet and International Law” and a book titled “The World Government’s Conspiracy: Russia and the Golden Billion.” Tsikunov [argued](#)¹⁷⁴ Western elites “realizing that ecological change and global disaster would see further competition for world resources ultimately rendering the world uninhabitable for all but a billion of them,” seek to take control

over Russia's natural resources. In his 1999 [article](#)¹⁷⁵ "The Concept of the 'Golden Billion' and the New World Order," the conservative Russian writer Sergei Kara-Murza (no connection to the imprisoned Russian pro-democracy advocate [Vladimir Kara-Murza](#))¹⁷⁶ described the "Golden Billion" as an effort to create a "chosen people," a [reference](#)¹⁷⁷ to Jews, [claiming](#)¹⁷⁸ "part of the global elite that determines economic and military policies and controls the mass media, will never under any circumstances include the people of Russia among those who have a chance to get on the lifeboat of the golden billion." To demonstrate this alleged Western hostility towards Russia, Russian [conspiracy](#)¹⁷⁹ theorists [invented](#)¹⁸⁰ a quote by former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, falsely claiming she said it would be "economically feasible for only 15 million people to live in Russia." In June 2018, Russian Foreign Ministry [spread](#)¹⁸¹ this false claim on social media. In January 2023, Leonid Slutsky, the head of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) and of the Russian Duma's Committee on International Affairs, re-invented the lie, [claiming](#)¹⁸² it was first stated by the former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who was allegedly after Russia's natural resources and wanted to reduce Russia's population to 15 million people. Patrushev had also [echoed](#)¹⁸³ these claims.

[Researchers](#)¹⁸⁴ and [journalists](#)¹⁸⁵ identified references to the "Golden Billion" conspiracy theory by Russian leaders over more than two decades, and found that it closely echoes the infamous antisemitic [creed](#)¹⁸⁶ *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

VILIFYING JEWISH PUBLIC FIGURES

Russia's propagandists also target prominent Jewish public figures and families with antisemitic false narratives. Network Contagion Research Institute [concluded](#)¹⁸⁷ in its 2020 report that "conspiratorial depictions of Jews are often camouflaged as conspiracy theories about specific individuals." The American Jewish Committee (AJC) [explains](#)¹⁸⁸ that antisemites often target prominent Jewish figures, using "coded language in which that person's name or face becomes synonymous with dangerous antisemitic conspiracies or tropes," ranging from a "Jewish plan for world domination to a Jewish puppet master who manipulates international events and creates social conflict for his own gain." According to the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), antisemitic conspiracy theories [depicting](#)¹⁸⁹ Jews as "controlling global agendas" overwhelmingly attack "high-profile Jewish people, such as George Soros and the Rothschild family."

Kremlin-linked entities consistently singled out [George Soros](#),¹⁹⁰ a Hungary-born American philanthropist of Jewish descent who "lived through the Nazi occupation of 1944-1945." Soros is the founder of the [Open Society Foundations](#),¹⁹¹ a "private funder of independent groups working for justice, democratic governance, and human rights" around the world. The AJC [clarifies](#)¹⁹² that "criticizing Soros or his politics and actions is not antisemitic... However, when Soros is used as a symbol for Jewish control, wealth, and power, the criticism may be an updated version of traditional antisemitic tropes." EUvsDisinfo, the flagship project of the European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force, [collected](#)¹⁹³ over 200 examples of pro-

Kremlin largely antisemitic disinformation about Soros. In 2016, two groups [linked](#)¹⁹⁴ to Russia's military intelligence [carried](#)¹⁹⁵ out a hack-and-release operation against the Open Society Foundations, [altering](#)¹⁹⁶ the released documents to make it appear that Soros funds the Kremlin's opposition in Russia.

In their attempts to slander Soros, Russia's leaders and government entities frequently portray him as a secret force behind world events, recycling long-standing antisemitic tropes about Jewish people as all-powerful conniving manipulators and warmongers to distort reality. For example, President Putin accused Soros of controlling the government of [Georgia](#)¹⁹⁷ in 2004, and at least [twice](#)¹⁹⁸ in 2018 claimed Soros "[interferes](#)¹⁹⁹ in all affairs around the world." In 2021, Patrushev attempted to [link](#)²⁰⁰ Soros to "efforts to destabilize nations worldwide." In 2023, he [identified](#)²⁰¹ the "Soros Foundation" as the "main world center for planning and implementing 'color revolutions'" and [claimed](#)²⁰² Soros "controls" European parliamentarians. Naryshkin [said](#)²⁰³ in 2019 Soros was part of a world-wide "hybrid methods" campaign to brainwash the public into abandoning so-called "traditional values." Russia's Foreign Ministry [spread](#)²⁰⁴ false claims about Soros' supposed involvement in the development of alleged [biological weapons in Ukraine](#)²⁰⁵ in 2022.

Russia's state-controlled media, as well as publications linked to Russia's military and intelligence agencies, echo these claims. Russia's [state-controlled](#)²⁰⁶ foreign-facing disinformation outlets RT and Sputnik described Soros in derogatory terms such as the "[exterminator of cultures](#)"²⁰⁷ or the "[puppet master](#)"²⁰⁸ who "[pulls the strings](#),"²⁰⁹ "[salivates](#)"²¹⁰ over the "opportunity" to exploit global crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, and controls foreign [leaders](#)²¹¹ and international [organizations](#).²¹² "Documentary" [films](#)²¹³ and [programs](#)²¹⁴ on Kremlin-controlled television [channels](#)²¹⁵ recycled these antisemitic [claims](#).²¹⁶ A television [program](#)²¹⁷ on the state-controlled Perviy Kanal featured footage of Vladimir [Zhirinovsky](#),²¹⁸ a late ultra-nationalist Russian politician from the LDPR notorious for aggressive rhetoric calling for violence against women and threatening the West with nuclear weapons, claiming that the "extremely wretched" Soros was not a real Jew.

Leading Russian academic journals in the field of military and security studies, including a periodical published by Russia's Ministry of Defense, regularly [publish](#)²¹⁹ false claims about Soros, including accusations of his involvement in the U.S. government program to develop "strings of the Ebola and HIV viruses as biological weapons," another lie in the Kremlin's never-ending campaign to spread disinformation about biological weapons. The Strategic Culture Foundation (SCF), an online journal [directed](#)²²⁰ by the SVR and closely affiliated with Russia's Foreign Ministry, [blamed](#)²²¹ Soros for a litany of absurd allegations, from "ousting" pro-Kremlin European heads of state and [inciting](#)²²² religious, ethnic, and racial conflicts to [financing](#)²²³ a "Nazi regime in Ukraine." The latter claim feeds into the broader Russian government's [narrative](#)²²⁴ portraying Jews as the most ardent antisemites and supporters of Nazism. The SCF also attacked Jewish-Americans in general, [blaming](#)²²⁵ them for "pushing [President] Obama to war."

Russia's state media, Russia's intelligence proxies, and other disinformation outlets also consistently targeted the [Rothschild family](#).²²⁶ For instance, the flagship weekly news analysis program "Voskresnoye Vremya" on the state-controlled television channel Perviy Kanal (Channel 1) featured a [story](#)²²⁷ in 2017 about the "powerful" Rothschild family's "struggle to control the world." The [story](#)²²⁸ cited conspiracy theories to depict the Rothschilds as the "key players in the secret government" that "have ruled the world for centuries" and [included](#)²²⁹ footage from a Nazi propaganda film about the family. The Times of Israel [said](#)²³⁰ the segment "paints the Rothschild family as an international cabal" and "part of a Jewish conspiracy to take over the world." Valeriy Fadeyev, the host of "Voskresnoye Vremya" at the time, today [serves](#)²³¹ as President Putin's advisor and head of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights. Similarly, Russia's state-funded media outlet Sputnik [identified](#)²³² the Rothschilds and the "Jewish diaspora" as controlling world politics and finances, as well as having the "main mechanisms" for influencing world events. Echoing the "Golden Billion" conspiracy theory, the FSB-tasked disinformation website [SouthFront](#)²³³ accused the Rothschild family of seeking to [reduce](#)²³⁴ the world population to gain more access to the earth's resources. The FSB-tasked disinformation website [News Front](#)²³⁵ claimed the Rothschilds and others have manipulated the Covid-19 pandemic to establish [control](#)²³⁶ over the world population. U.S.-sanctioned Russian purveyor of disinformation [Katehon](#)²³⁷ blamed the Rothschilds for instigating the [Holocaust](#)²³⁸ and [praised](#)²³⁹ President Putin for "purging Russia from the evil Rothschild money changers."

THE "RITUAL MURDER" CONSPIRACY THEORY

Russian authorities disseminate the "ritual murder" conspiracy theory, which is rooted in the medieval antisemitic claim [known](#)²⁴⁰ as the "blood libel," accusing Jews of murdering Christian children for religious purposes. In Russia, this conspiracy theory is tied to the murder of the Russian Tsar Nicholas II and his family in 1918. According to the independent media outlet [Meduza](#),²⁴¹ the "supporters of this theory allege that the Bolsheviks who committed the murder also performed some kind of Jewish blood ritual as part of a supposed 'worldwide Jewish conspiracy.'" In 2017, Russia's Investigative Committee [opened](#)²⁴² an investigation of the "ritual murder" claims at the [initiative](#)²⁴³ of the Patriarchal Commission. [Secretary for the Commission](#),²⁴⁴ Bishop Tikhon Shevkunov, [rumored](#)²⁴⁵ to be President Putin's confessor, [said](#),²⁴⁶ "We are treating the ritual murder versions most seriously. Moreover, a significant part of the Church's commission [investigating the claims] has no doubts that this is what it was." Not long after the investigation was announced, a commentator for the independent Russian media outlet Novaya Gazeta Aleksander Soldatov, [opined](#)²⁴⁷ that the investigation was a state propaganda effort to "look for foreign and domestic enemies who create problems for Russia." It has been more than five years and no results of the investigation have been announced.

PART 1: CONCLUSION

The Kremlin exploits antisemitism as a tool of disinformation and propaganda and uses it to attempt to deceive domestic and international audiences about its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine. As part of its disinformation campaign to support its false claim that Ukraine is a Nazi state, the Kremlin claims that Ukraine's Jewish president is a Nazi and, using an antisemitic trope, claims that Jews in general can be the worst Nazis and antisemites. Trying to portray Russia as a victim in the war it started, Moscow also engages in Holocaust manipulation, falsely claiming the West is seeking to annihilate Russians, just as Hitler tried to eliminate Jews during the Holocaust, and claim and that so-called "Russophobia" is a new form of antisemitism. Additionally, Russia's FSB provided both funding and direct tasking to websites, which share antisemitic and bigoted articles in addition to their anti-Ukraine and anti-U.S. disinformation, while the SVR's proxy site and other state-linked propagandists fuel antisemitism against Jewish critics of Russia's war against Ukraine. Even as it spreads disinformation about the need for Russia to "de-Nazify" Ukraine, the Kremlin deploys neo-Nazi proxies who promote vehement antisemitism to the frontlines in Ukraine.

The Kremlin and its disinformation and propaganda ecosystem systematically disseminate false claims vilifying prominent Jewish figures such as George Soros and the Rothschild family. This disinformation echoes age-old [themes](#)²⁴⁸ at the core of the anti-Jewish conspiracy theories "including (but not limited to) deception and pretense; global dominance; dual loyalty; greed; betrayal; genocidal bloodlust; supernatural evil; appropriation of land, identity, and privilege."

The Kremlin's propagandists build on centuries-old antisemitic conspiracy theories to concoct false narratives about world events, portraying prominent Jews as evil and powerful manipulators, while demonizing Judaism in the eyes of Russia's population. Russia's leaders have deployed antisemitic conspiracy theories and other types of antisemitic disinformation and propaganda for decades in order to distort the facts about global events and create a media environment more conducive to advancing their political aims.

PART 2: TSARIST RUSSIA'S AND THE SOVIET UNION'S LONG HISTORY OF SPREADING ANTISEMITISM

INTRODUCTION

Part One of this report examined the contemporary Kremlin's antisemitic disinformation, primarily in the context of its war against Ukraine, and its promulgation of antisemitic conspiracy theories to deceive international audiences. Part Two explores the long history of the systemic use of similar anti-Jew hatred by Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union to advance their political objectives.

Over one hundred years ago, the Russian Empire's Tsarist Security Service created *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an infamous forgery purporting a world-wide Jewish conspiracy. *The Protocols* was intended to blame Jews for Russia's domestic political issues. Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin used antisemitism to discredit his political opponents in the 1920s and turned anti-Jewish hatred into state policy in the late 1930s. Throughout Stalin's rule, Soviet security services used false claims and fabrications to accuse Soviet Jews of disloyalty and betrayal. After the Stalin era, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the KGB's efforts included active measures to portray its perceived adversaries like the Catholic Church and West Germany as antisemitic. According to the *KGB Lexicon. The Soviet Intelligence Officer's Handbook* edited by [Vasilij Mitrokhin](#),²⁴⁹ a former senior archivist in the KGB's foreign intelligence archive, active measures (aktivnyye meropriyatiya in Russian) "aimed at exerting useful influence on aspects of the political life of a target country...misleading the adversary, undermining and weakening his positions..."²⁵⁰

Under the chairmanship of Yuriy Andropov (1967-1982), the KGB increased antisemitic disinformation attempting to delegitimize Zionism, undermine Jewish organizations, incite antisemitism in the United States and the Middle East, and silence domestic dissidents.

CREATING THE PROTOCOLS OF THE ELDERS OF ZION

*"If ever a piece of writing could produce mass hatred, it is this one...
This book is about lies and slander."²⁵¹*

— Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

One of the earliest examples of Russia's use of antisemitism for propaganda and disinformation purposes is the creation and distribution of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Its twenty-four sections [purport](#)²⁵² to be the recorded minutes of secret meetings of Jewish leaders who were supposedly conspiring to dominate the world: to "take over industries, infiltrate governments and use a stranglehold on the media to advance their hidden agenda at the expense of non-Jews."

While the precise origins of *The Protocols* are not universally agreed, prominent scholars point to the involvement of Russia's Tsarist Security Service (Okhrana), the earliest predecessor of the Soviet Union's and the Russian Federation's intelligence services. According to Christopher Andrew, British historian of intelligence services, and Col. Oleg Gordievsky, former head of the KGB residency in London and a defector, there is a "strong probability" that Peter Rachkovsky, head of the Paris-based Foreign Agency of the Okhrana from 1884 to 1902, was "responsible for the fabrication" of *The Protocols*.²⁵³ In 1999, based on declassified information from the Soviet archives, Russian historian Mikhail Lepekhin [identified](#)²⁵⁴ Rachkovsky's employee [Mathieu Golovinski](#)²⁵⁵ as *The Protocols*' author. Okhrana likely produced the forgery to "foster the belief...that the prime cause of discontent among the politically minded elements in tsarist Russia was not the repressive policy of the bureaucracy, but a world-wide Jewish conspiracy."²⁵⁶

An abridged version of *The Protocols* [appeared](#)²⁵⁷ in the Russian newspaper Znamya (Banner) in 1903. Two years later, Tsarist Russian government official Sergei Nilus [published](#)²⁵⁸ the full text as an appendix to his book *The Great in the Small: The Coming of the Anti-Christ and the Rule of Satan on Earth*, [claiming](#)²⁵⁹ he had received a copy of the summary of the secret meetings from a friend.

The Protocols spread outside Russia after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. In their attempts to discredit the revolution, the supporters of the fallen Tsarist regime [presented](#)²⁶⁰ *The Protocols* as evidence of a Jewish-Communist conspiracy to "enslave the world." The tract resurfaced between World War I and World War II to become "one of the central texts in Nazi and fascist anti-Semitism, becoming the most influential forgery of the 20th century."²⁶¹

The Protocols [remain](#)²⁶² relevant to [growing antisemitism](#)²⁶³ around the world today, despite being exposed as a forgery over a century ago. In August 1921, [The Times](#)²⁶⁴ revealed that large sections of *The Protocols* had been hastily plagiarized from *Dialogue in Hell Between Machiavelli and Montesquieu*, a book published in Geneva in 1864 by Maurice Joly. Dialogue in Hell was a polemic against the then-Emperor

of France, Napoleon III. It sought to expose what Joly saw as Napoleon III's unscrupulous, evil methods, with Machiavelli expressing the supposed thoughts of Napoleon III. *The Protocols* simply changed the villain from Napoleon III to an imaginary international Jewish conspiracy, using many of the identical words and arguments that Joly employed in his attempt to discredit Napoleon III. Golovinski's colleague at the Paris-based *Le Figaro* newspaper was Joly's son, who presumably [introduced](#)²⁶⁵ Golovinsky to *Dialogue in Hell*. The Times concluded that "fully 50 paragraphs in *The Protocols* are simply paraphrases of passages in the *Dialogues*." The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) [calls](#)²⁶⁶ *The Protocols* "probably the most influential antisemitic text ever written" that "continues to inspire antisemites to this day."

STATE-SPONSORED ANTISEMITISM UNDER STALIN (1924-1953)

Joseph Stalin turned antisemitic activity into an official state policy. Although the Soviet Union officially [condemned](#)²⁶⁷ and even banned antisemitism as a "[reactionary relic](#)"²⁶⁸ of Tsarism in the 1920s, Stalin continued using Jew-hatred as a tool for achieving his political goals, mainly the consolidation of power. In the early 1920s, "there was a rapid roundup of the leaders of all Jewish and other nationalists' underground groups," to concentrate all power in the hands of the Bolsheviks. Many Jewish groups were dissolved and their leaders "either exiled or permitted to immigrate."²⁶⁹ In the second half of the 1920s, Stalin deployed antisemitism to discredit the political opposition within the Bolshevik party by spreading propaganda about the opposition's alleged "[Jewish character](#)."²⁷⁰ In the late 1930s, after consolidating his power, Stalin cemented antisemitism as an [official](#)²⁷¹ state policy. According to Gennadiy Kostyrchenko, a Russian scholar of the topic, this policy aimed to systematically eliminate "[Jewish influence](#)"²⁷² in the social, political, and cultural spheres of Soviet society. The Kremlin imposed forced Jewish [assimilation](#),²⁷³ which came into full force in the late 1940s, when the Jewish cultural elite was increasingly [demonized](#)²⁷⁴ as the West's "fifth column." At the same time, the state escalated anti-Jewish repressive measures, including the closure of Jewish cultural and political institutions, ostracism of Jewish scientists, and removal of Jews from positions of power, as well as arrests and executions of Jewish leaders and activists. Andrei Sakharov, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, nuclear physicist, and a critic of the Soviet regime noted that an "unenlightened zoological kind of anti-Semitism was characteristic of Stalinist bureaucracy."²⁷⁵

In support of state-sponsored antisemitism, Stalin and his security services deployed disinformation and propaganda, depicting Jews as outsiders, and, ultimately, as enemies disloyal to the Soviet state. In the 1920s, Soviet authorities justified the arrests of "right-wing Jewish nationalists" by [accusing](#)²⁷⁶ them of cooperating with the Zionist movement and supporting "global imperialism." One of the KGB's predecessors, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), fabricated tens of "counter-revolutionary" cases against the "criminal activities of the nationalist Jewish underground."²⁷⁷

WITCH HUNT AGAINST “ROOTLESS COSMOPOLITANS”

In 1943, Stalin and his propagandists [intensified](#)²⁷⁸ attacks against Jews as followers of “rootless cosmopolitanism,” a nineteenth century term denoting preference for internationalism and foreign influence, in an effort to promote the “new Soviet nationalism” and patriotism. Stalin and his mouthpieces depicted “rootless cosmopolitanism” as an instrument for Western cultural and ideological expansion, and “cosmopolitans” as morally corrupt outcasts with a “national [inferiority](#)²⁷⁹ complex,” who rejected their own culture and subjugated themselves to the interests of foreign nations. “Rootless cosmopolitans” became “synonymous with Jews,” who were accused of sharing “cultural values with Western Jews and therefore were less than completely loyal to the Soviet Union.”²⁸⁰ False claims accusing Jews of “rootless cosmopolitanism” and of intentions to undermine the Soviet Union are rooted in the “dual loyalty” antisemitic [trope](#).²⁸¹ Stalinist accusations of “rootless cosmopolitanism” also echo Adolf Hitler’s [charges](#)²⁸² about a “poison injected by the international and cosmopolitan Jew[s],” who he claimed had concocted a conspiracy to destroy the Aryan race.

By using the terms “cosmopolitan” and “Zionist,” the Soviet authorities tried to avoid possible accusations of overt antisemitism. This manipulation was reflected in a popular [saying](#)²⁸³ of the time: “to avoid the reputation of an antisemite, call a kike a cosmopolitan” (“Чтоб не прослыть антисемитом, зови жида космополитом.”) By 1946, Stalin “began to stimulate an anti-Semitic campaign,” which resulted in a “purge of Jews from the party machinery, diplomatic service, military apparatus, and intelligence services.”²⁸⁴ At its early stage, the campaign against the “cosmopolitans” was largely [non-public](#).²⁸⁵ The Party issued confidential directives to fire Jews from positions of power, but state-controlled media did not openly attack Jews until the late 1940s.

Stalin’s antisemitic campaign took a [public](#)²⁸⁶ turn on January 28, 1949, when *Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party, published a front-page [editorial](#)²⁸⁷ titled “About One Anti-patriotic Group of Theatre Critics.” According to historian [Boris Sokolov](#),²⁸⁸ the article became the first publication that openly called upon the Soviet public to join the struggle against the “rootless cosmopolitans.” Likely [commissioned](#)²⁸⁹ and edited by Stalin himself, the article [identified](#)²⁹⁰ as “rootless cosmopolitans” several Jewish theater critics, claiming they had betrayed their commitments to the Soviet people and represented “insidious anti-patriotic forces” seeking to destroy the ideological unity of Soviet society. The article equated cosmopolitanism with “parasitism” that destroys healthy plants and accused it of promoting bourgeois ideas “hostile” to the Soviet people. The publication in *Pravda* triggered further “[exposés](#)”²⁹¹ of alleged Jewish “cosmopolitans,” leading to harsh repressions against the critics — forced confessions, job terminations, and imprisonments.

ANTISEMITIC DISINFORMATION TURNS DEADLY: JEWISH ANTI-FASCIST COMMITTEE

The case of the [Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee](#)²⁹² is yet another example of the Soviet authorities' use of antisemitic disinformation and propaganda during the Stalin era. In 1942, the Soviet government set up this organization, composed of a group of Jewish public figures, to garner foreign Jewish support for the war against Nazi Germany. In 1944, the Committee drew Stalin's ire after [proposing](#)²⁹³ to establish a Jewish Soviet Socialist Republic in Crimea, an initiative Stalin initially embraced to attract Western investments, but later abandoned in favor of other plans to manipulate the West.²⁹⁴ By 1947, the Soviet Ministry of State Security (MGB), one of the KGB's predecessors, began fabricating a criminal case against the Committee's leaders, falsely [accusing](#)²⁹⁵ them of spying for the United States of America. The organization was [disbanded](#)²⁹⁶ in 1948. Its chairman, Solomon Mikhoels, was assassinated the same year. Following a secret trial in 1952, thirteen Jewish intellectuals were [executed](#)²⁹⁷ as part of the case.

The MGB concocted [disinformation](#)²⁹⁸ that formed the basis for the case against the Committee. In a fabricated forced "confession," Mikhoels' acquaintance "admitted" to receiving a task from Mikhoels to gather information from Stalin's daughter and her husband about the dictator's health to pass to the United States, leading to the decision to cause the Committee chairman's death. Soviet security services lured Mikhoels to Minsk, [murdered](#)²⁹⁹ him, and then ran over his body with a truck to make the death look like a car accident. To mitigate "[provocative rumors](#)"³⁰⁰ about the state security services' involvement, the authorities gave Mikhoels a [state funeral](#)³⁰¹ and published an [obituary](#)³⁰² describing him as a "great artist and a major public figure" who "dedicated his life to serving the Soviet people." At the same time, the government spread disinformation [alleging](#)³⁰³ that Mikhoels died "at the hands of Zionists or 'Polish fascists' sent to Belorussia."

The MGB officers [produced](#)³⁰⁴ disinformation-filled interrogation files and used physical violence to force the interviewees to sign them. Such files formed the core of the MGB's accusations against the Committee's leaders, falsely depicting them as enemies of the Soviet Union allegedly engaged in a wide-ranging Jewish conspiracy in the interests of the United States, other Western countries, and foreign Jewish organizations. According to the 1952 [indictment](#)³⁰⁵ authorized by the Deputy Minister of State Security Mikhail Ryumin, the Committee served as a cover for an "underground nationalist resistance movement conducting sabotage and spying" activities at the behest of "reactionary circles in the United States." One of the conspirators' alleged [goals](#)³⁰⁶ was to force the Soviet government into establishing a "Jewish republic" in Crimea, which could later be used by the United States as a "launching ground" for attacks against the USSR.

In addition to the false allegations of conventional espionage, the indictment claimed the Committee — supported by a wider network of "recruited" Jewish journalists and writers — used Jewish media and cultural institutions to disseminate "nationalistic propaganda" inciting the Soviet Jews against assimilation and the Soviet government. The MGB cited the Committee-edited *Black Book of Soviet Jewry*, a [documentation](#)³⁰⁷

of the Nazi crimes against Soviet Jews authored by well known Soviet writers Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasilii Grossman, as an example of the Committee's supposed collusion with the "Jews reactionaries" in the United States. Echoing classic antisemitic conspiracy theories, the MGB accused the Jewish authors of the book of portraying Jews as a separate category of people, set in opposition to others; of exaggerating Jewish contributions to world civilization; and of implying that Jews were the only victims of Nazism.

THE DOCTORS' PLOT

Not long before his death in March 1953, Stalin and the MGB launched one of the most notorious Soviet antisemitic disinformation and propaganda campaigns: the "[Doctors' Plot](#)."³⁰⁸ Echoing a medieval [canard](#)³⁰⁹ of Jews as poisoners, the Soviet Union [falsely](#)³¹⁰ accused a group of doctors, most of them Jewish, of conspiring to murder Soviet leaders by poisoning and other insidious means.

Stalin orchestrated the "Doctors' Plot" based on bogus claims accusing a Jewish doctor at the Kremlin Polyclinic of intentionally causing the death of the Soviet politician Andrei Zhdanov.³¹¹ Additionally, [Ryumin](#),³¹² a senior MGB investigator at the time, accused his boss, Minister of State Security Viktor Abakumov, of preventing an investigation into a similar "terrorist activity" by a Jewish therapist. Shortly thereafter, and reportedly [following](#)³¹³ Stalin's close guidance, the Central Committee issued a [directive](#)³¹⁴ claiming that a secret group of doctors working on orders from "foreign agents" was carrying out "terrorist activity against the heads of the party and the government." Under increasing pressure from Stalin to "expose" the doctors, the MGB used a group of medics, mostly informants for the security service, to fabricate "expert" opinion "confirming" the existence of the "Doctors' Plot." Some thirty-seven doctors and members of their families were arrested as part of the case and "were beaten almost to death."³¹⁵

On January 13, 1953, disinformation about the so-called "Doctors' Plot" became public. State information agency [TASS](#)³¹⁶ and Communist Party's [main newspaper](#)³¹⁷ [Pravda](#)³¹⁸ "exposed" the alleged doctors' murder of Zhdanov, and the conspiracy to deliberately lead Soviet military leaders to early deaths. The Soviet press also accused the MGB of the "lack of vigilance" in pursuing the alleged conspirators.³¹⁹ Some fifty Jews working in the MGB were arrested.³²⁰ The articles accused the "doctors-murderers," also described as "doctors-saboteurs" and "doctors-poisoners," of intentionally undermining the Soviet leaders' health by ignoring test results, by giving them incorrect diagnoses, by prescribing wrong treatments, and by overdosing them with medicine. Just like during previous disinformation campaigns against "rootless cosmopolitans" and the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, Stalin's propaganda [claimed](#)³²¹ the accused were "hired agents of foreign intelligence services." According to this false narrative, the doctors received their orders to "eliminate" Soviet leadership from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), an "international Jewish nationalist-bourgeois organization" controlled by the United States' government intelligence services. [Pravda](#)³²² referred to the "terrorist group" of doctors as "anthropoid beasts" who committed "monstrous crimes," urging the Soviet people to be vigilant and active about exposing the "fifth

column” in their midst. The publications spurred rumors about the Jewish doctors’ plans to poison regular citizens and about imminent pogroms, “gripping the country in a paranoid spasm of fear.”³²³

According to a historian of Soviet antisemitism Louis Rapoport, Stalin planned to use the “Doctors’ Plot” as a pretext for committing genocide against the Jewish people. As Rapoport [wrote](#),³²⁴ the conviction of the doctors would result in hanging.

Then “incidents” would follow: attacks on Jews orchestrated by the secret police, the publication of the statement by the prominent Jews, and a flood of other letters demanding that action be taken. A three-stage program of genocide would be followed. First, almost all Soviet Jews . . . would be shipped to camps east of the Urals . . . Second, the authorities would set Jewish leaders at all levels against one another . . . Also the MGB [Secret Police] would start killing the elites in the camps, just as they had killed the Yiddish writers . . . the previous year. The . . . final stage would be to “get rid of the rest.”

Today, Russia’s leaders resuscitate similar narratives about fifth columns to boost “patriotism” in Russia’s society as the Kremlin wages its war against Ukraine. For example, President Putin [claimed](#)³²⁵ the West was looking to “to provoke civil unrest in Russia and use its fifth column in an attempt to achieve this goal.” Putin condemned those who oppose the war as “national [traitors](#),”³²⁶ the “people [who] are mentally there [in the West] and not here with our people, with Russia.” The Russian people, Putin [elaborated](#),³²⁷ 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.” The former chief rabbi of Moscow Pinchas Goldschmidt, who left Russia after Moscow’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, [warned](#)³²⁸ that Jews in Russia will be “made scapegoats for the hardship caused by the war in Ukraine.” In July 2023, the Russian government [labeled](#)³²⁹ Rabbi Goldschmidt a “foreign agent.”

OPERATION ZARATHUSTRA: ANTISEMITIC DISINFORMATION THROUGH ACTIVE MEASURES CAMPAIGNS (LATE 1950s-EARLY 1960s)

In the late 1950s, the KGB [embarked](#)³³⁰ on an active measures campaign to alienate West Germany from its Western partners by portraying it as the epicenter of a new wave of Nazi antisemitism, an approach analogous to Moscow’s tactics in its war against Ukraine. According to [Ion Mihai Pacepa](#),³³¹ the former top general in the Romanian foreign intelligence service (DIE) prior to defecting to United States in 1978, the KGB launched the operation in 1957-1958 and codenamed it Operation ZARATHUSTRA to “symbolize that German antisemitism was as immortal as Friedrich Nietzsche’s aphoristic book *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.”³³² Led by Ivan Agayants,³³³ the head of the KGB’s First Chief (Foreign Intelligence) Directorate’s specialized disinformation section Service A (founded as Department D in 1959), Operation ZARATHUSTRA entered its testing phase.³³⁴

Before deploying the plot abroad, Agayants first needed to gauge the effect of the antisemitic provocations that his team planned to carry out. In late 1959, he directed a squad of intelligence officers to covertly topple Jewish tombstones and deface a cemetery with swastikas and antisemitic slogans in a village not far from Moscow. The officers avoided detection and reported back to Agayants that, while most villagers had been shocked and appalled by the vandalism, a small number reignited their own antisemitic viewpoints as a result and became anti-Jewish activists. With the “success” of this type active measures (covert information operations) validated, Agayants gradually took Operation ZARATHUSTRA global.³³⁵

It began in West Germany.³³⁶ On Christmas Day, 1959, residents of Cologne awoke to red and black swastikas and antisemitic slogans daubed on a well-known synagogue. Black paint covered the inscription of a memorial to victims of Nazi tyranny. The authorities arrested two Germans from a right-wing political party for committing vandalism, later discovering that the individuals had repeated contact with Russian personnel on a military base in East Germany earlier in the year. In the next two months alone, the West German government recorded 833 antisemitic incidents across the country. Thomas Rid documents that by early 1960, the wave of antisemitism had spread to East Germany, with hundreds of cases of vandalism and anti-Jewish crime recorded.³³⁷ The trend, he notes, “oddly appeared to be a global phenomenon,” with acts of antisemitic vandalism and hateful crimes occurring in the UK, Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Norway, and Switzerland. Soon after, South Africa, Canada, Mexico, the United States, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Chile, Israel, Argentina, Ecuador, Spain, Greece, and Hong Kong saw similar incidents. In some cases, such as in Italy, neo-fascist groups were apprehended for the crimes.³³⁸ The Soviet and Eastern European press blamed “West German Nazis” for these incidents and for other KGB-organized antisemitic violence.³³⁹ KGB agents also reportedly planted disinformation about these incidents in Western press.

The Kremlin appears to have cultivated and coordinated these operations in West Germany. In 1960, British intelligence declassified two encrypted messages sent from Moscow to Berlin. The first telegram, dated December 1959, read, “In West Germany, our comrades have an extremely easy task for they will be able to use the Nazis for discrediting the class enemies.”³⁴⁰ This message was circulated to Communist Party activists in West Germany with the help of East German authorities. The journalist who broke this story alleged that the message also detailed how the authorities could cast the apprehended provocateurs as Nazis given their activities, and if necessary, Nazi leaflets could be provided by a special division of the East Berlin Ministry of State Security (Stasi) to aid the masquerade.³⁴¹ This message circulated shortly before the Christmas 1959 Cologne incidents of vandalism. In the second intercepted missive, assessed to be from January 1960, Moscow lauded the success of its active measures campaign. It read, “undercover comrades have proved to the world that a potential Nazi threat exists not only in Germany but in the whole Western world. The socialist [Soviet] government’s argument that West Germany is a potential bastion of Nazism and that consequentially West Germany must under no circumstances be re-armed has been considerably strengthened.”³⁴²

Moscow predicted the reaction correctly. Fears and protests against perceived German-exported antisemitism increased pressure dramatically on the West German government. The KGB operatives and their East German partners helped incite a new wave of antisemitism, using active measures tested by Agayants in the village in Russia, spurring “organic antisemitism” to grow. Cognizant of the fire they were playing with, Moscow warned East Berlin that “our comrades must, however, continue to work amongst Nazis with the greatest skill to prevent them from unwittingly helping to strengthen Nazi movements.”³⁴³ In other words, the Kremlin sought to generate antisemitism in the Western world and simultaneously avoid bolstering Nazi movements – a reckless and unwieldy course of action.

Multiple sources confirm this Kremlin-driven antisemitic campaign, although not always labeled under the code name Operation ZARATHUSTRA. According to Sergei Kondrashev, the head of Service A in the mid-1960s, the KGB and its East German partners “instigated right-wing hate sessions against Jews and arranged that Jewish tombs be desecrated and swastikas painted.”³⁴⁴

Based on accounts compiled by Thomas Rid in his book *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare*, at least seven Soviet and Eastern Bloc intelligence professionals, in addition to Pacepa, have corroborated the existence of this operation.³⁴⁵ Pacepa notes that in addition to the East German Stasi, Communist Romania’s DIE was also assigned to contribute to Operation ZARATHUSTRA.³⁴⁶ Oleg Kalugin, the once New York-based former senior KGB officer wrote that his “fellow officers paid American agents to paint swastikas on synagogues in New York and Washington,” and added, “our New York station even hired people to desecrate Jewish cemeteries ... and wrote antisemitic letters to American Jewish leaders” to attempt “to show that America was inhospitable to Jews.”³⁴⁷ When during his 2017 interview with Kalugin, Rid presented an image of the 1959 Cologne synagogue defacement, Kalugin stated, “Oh, we did it ... we did it in many places of the world.”³⁴⁸ In the [audio](#) recording of the interview provided by Rid, Kalugin referred to the activity as “maintaining antisemitism.”³⁴⁹ Kalugin also wrote that officers at the KGB’s New York residency, sometimes referred to as a “cell” or a “base of operations,” would ensure that “the Soviet press immediately picked up any TASS reports on this issue, creating the appearance of rampant antisemitism in the United States.”³⁵⁰

The ghost of Operation ZARATHUSTRA lingers not only in the ongoing antisemitic disinformation the Kremlin uses today as it wages its unjustifiable war against Ukraine, but also in other acts of contemporary “organic” antisemitism to which the Kremlin’s influence operations reportedly contribute. The Kremlin’s disinformation targeting Ukraine is eerily reminiscent of the Kremlin’s framing of West Germany and the West writ large as “antisemitic societies.”

“HITLER’S POPE” (1960s)

During the Stalin period and after his death, the Soviet government exploited antisemitism for propaganda and disinformation purposes and to target perceived foreign adversaries. In one disinformation operation to discredit the Vatican, the KGB targeted Pope Pius XII, the leader of the Catholic Church (1939-58) and an ardent opponent of communism, whose [tenure](#)³⁵¹ during World War II [continues](#)³⁵² raising [questions](#)³⁵³ among scholars. In his 2013 book *Disinformation*, Pacepa described his role in a KGB operation to defame the pontiff. Pacepa traced the decision to target Pius XII to Stalin himself and the 1945 Radio Moscow broadcast proclaiming Pope Pius XII to be “Hitler’s Pope,” an allegation implying Pius’s support for antisemitism and the Nazi crimes against the Jews. But it was Stalin’s successor Nikita Khrushchev who approved a concerted disinformation campaign against the Pope in February 1960.³⁵⁴

As part of the campaign, [Pacepa](#)³⁵⁵ writes, the KGB tasked the Romanian DIE with infiltrating the Vatican archives, hoping to find *kompromat* (compromising information in Russian) on the Pope to use in future disinformation operations against Pius XII. The DIE dubbed the mission SEAT-12. Pacepa’s job was to secure access to the Vatican archives in exchange for a (false) Romanian commitment to resume diplomatic relations and provide a loan to the Holy See. Pacepa told Vatican officials that Romania needed the archives to “find historical roots that would help the Romanian government publicly justify its change of heart toward the Holy See.” For two years, three DIE officers posing as priests dug through the papal archives, finding no *kompromat* but still passing documents related to Pius XII to the KGB.

In 1963, Agayants, reportedly [told](#)³⁵⁶ Pacepa and his colleagues about a new phase of “SEAT-12.” Agayants claimed that the KGB masterminded the production of “The Deputy, a Christian Tragedy,” a controversial [theater play](#)³⁵⁷ by a German producer, accusing Pius XII of inaction regarding Hitler’s slaughter of the Jews during the Holocaust. “The Deputy” has been “translated into more than 20 languages” and performed in “more than 80 cities worldwide.”

The KGB continued active measures to “compromise” the Catholic Church, including the “study” of its connections to “fascist regimes” into the mid-1970s.³⁵⁸

VIRULENT ANTISEMITISM UNDER ANDROPOV'S KGB (1967-82)

The Kremlin's reckless use of antisemitism to spread disinformation in pursuit of its own strategic objectives did not cease as the Cold War progressed further into the 1960s and 1970s. Some of the Soviet Union's most lasting and vicious antisemitic active measures operations took place during this period under the leadership of KGB head Yuri Andropov. While Andropov's tenure as the Soviet leader from late 1982 to early 1984 was short-lived, his 15-year legacy as Chairman of the KGB was undeniably impactful. According to Mitrokhin, Andropov had a personal interest and obsession with countering Zionism - Zionism being second only to the United States as a target at that time for Soviet active measures.³⁵⁹

Conspiracy theorist thinking in Moscow played a large role in the KGB's disinformation efforts targeting Jewish groups. Arkadiy Shevchenko, the Under Secretary-General of the United Nations in the mid-1970s who defected from the Soviet Union to the United States in 1978, writes in his own account, *Breaking with Moscow*, how "many [in Moscow] are inclined towards the fantastic notion that there must be a secret control center somewhere in the United States." This shadowy group, they believed, in large part consisted of the Jewish lobby. Combined with Soviet concerns over global perceptions of its treatment of Jewish emigres, these conspiratorial ideations caused Andropov's KGB to embark on a decades-long campaign of antisemitic active measures, including disinformation.³⁶⁰

COPYCAT THREATS AND OPERATION PANDORA

With the rise of the U.S.-based [extremist](#)³⁶¹ Jewish Defense League (JDL) in the late 1960s, the KGB saw an opportunity to again deploy active measures, including antisemitic disinformation. In the JDL's [call](#) for Jews to defend themselves using "all necessary means," including violence, the KGB saw an ideal scapegoat.³⁶² Just over a year after the JDL sent intimidating telegrams to six Arab missions at the UN in September 1969, KGB officers in New York sent threatening forged letters, purportedly from the JDL, to the heads of Arab missions to the UN, aiming to provoke protests from said missions to both the UN Secretary General and the U.S. government.³⁶³ Around the same time, KGB operatives in New York also mailed letters with racist diatribes to African diplomats, purporting to be from white supremacists and average American citizens. The diplomats, as well as U.S. and foreign press, publicized the forged letters to demonstrate alleged rampant racism in the United States. According to Kalugin, these plots were all planned in the KGB's Moscow headquarters with approval from the Communist Party Central Committee.³⁶⁴

In a combination of further tactics used to stir up antisemitism and racial tensions in the United States, Moscow leadership instructed the KGB residency in New York to copy the alleged JDL tactics and to initiate Operation PANDORA.³⁶⁵ Likely dubbed PANDORA after the eponymous Greek mythological figure who, upon opening a container she was told to never open, unleashed evil and chaos upon the world, Moscow's operation aimed to ignite ethnic and racial tensions in the United States. In November 1970 and January 1971, two bombs went off – one outside the Soviet airline Aeroflot's New York offices and one outside the

Soviet cultural center in Washington, DC. Anonymous calls placed following the bombings included the use of JDL slogans, despite the JDL praising but never claiming responsibility for the bombings.³⁶⁶ Again, the KGB had created a scapegoat. Soviet intelligence officers in New York received authorization to plant an explosive device in what one KGB senior official described as “the Negro section of New York” at “one of the Negro colleges.” The KGB residency was then ordered to place anonymous calls to black organizations and claim JDL responsibility for the bombing. While it is unclear whether this component of PANDORA moved forward, other portions of the operation proceeded. Per Mitrokhin’s account of the effort, Andropov also approved the fabrication of fake JDL leaflets denouncing crimes committed by “black mongrels” for distribution to militant black groups. Incendiary letters were sent to black youth and student groups recounting fictitious abominable acts committed by the JDL and calling for revenge. In both cases, the KGB hoped to incite “mass disorders in New York.”³⁶⁷

OPERATION SIG: ANDROPOV’S ANTISEMITIC ACTIVE MEASURES IN THE ARAB WORLD

The KGB and its subservient Eastern Bloc intelligence agencies also dedicated significant resources to cultivating antisemitic and anti-U.S. hatred in the Islamic world. The primary objective of these campaigns was to prove “the connection between the U.S.A., ‘American capital,’ ‘American imperialism,’ etc., and Zionism ... using interchangeably ‘Zionism,’ and ‘Jews’ or ‘Judaism’” in their narratives. The Soviet intelligence apparatus and its allies would use disinformation to spread overall narratives that Jews were the shadow puppeteers of capitalist countries through positions of power and ownership of private firms, print and radio media outlets.³⁶⁸

In this vein, Andropov launched Operation SIG (Sionistskiye Gosudarstva, or Zionist Governments) in 1972 with the goal of turning Muslim-majority countries into frenzied enemies of “American Zionism” through the use of antisemitic active measures designed to inflame longstanding enmity towards Jews and irredentism in the Middle East.³⁶⁹

According to Pacepa, Operation SIG included the dispatch by the Romanian DIE of approximately five hundred undercover agents of influence to Libya, Iran, Lebanon, and Syria by 1978. Pacepa [describes](#)³⁷⁰ these operatives as “thousands of doctors, engineers, technicians, professors, and even dance instructors” who all had “the task of portraying the United States as an arrogant and haughty Jewish fiefdom financed by Jewish money and run by Jewish politicians, whose aim was to subordinate the entire Islamic world.”

Operation SIG extended beyond Communist Romania’s security services. Pacepa recounts a 1978 estimate from Moscow, saying: “...the Soviet bloc intelligence community had sent some four thousand such agents of influence into the Islamic world. The assumption was that about 70-75 percent of those assets would end up being really useful.” As he later learned, the dispatch of such agents continued until the fall of the Communist bloc in 1989.³⁷¹

As a part of Operation SIG, the Soviet Union and its communist bloc allies systematically printed, translated, and distributed *The Protocols* around the world. According to Pacepa, in 1972, the KGB supplied the DIE with an Arabic translation of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and “documentary” material supposedly “proving” the United States to be a Zionist country with a goal to transform the “Islamic world into a Jewish fiefdom.”³⁷² Pacepa estimates that “over the course of twenty-plus years” of his tenure with Communist Romania’s intelligence, “hundreds of thousands of copies” of *The Protocols* were distributed in Muslim countries.³⁷³ The Kremlin’s operations to promote *The Protocols* extended beyond the Middle East. Pacepa wrote: “The Securitate’s [Romania’s political police Pacepa joined in 1951] first major [disinformation] task [during the Cold War] was to help Moscow reignite anti-Semitism in Western Europe by spreading thousands of copies of [*The Protocols*], in that part of the world. It had to be done secretly, so no one would know that the publications came from the Soviet bloc.” [Aleksandr Sakharovsky](#),³⁷⁴ chief Soviet intelligence adviser to Romania at the time, and head of Soviet foreign intelligence from 1956 to 1971 who helped establish the Securitate, urged Romanian intelligence officers to fight the war of ideas with the United States “waged with a powerful new weapon called dezinformatsiya.” “Here is the future of the world,” Sakharovsky told the leadership of the Securitate in 1951, when he brought a copy of the Nilus edition of *The Protocols* to Romania and “ordered it to be translated, multiplied and surreptitiously disseminated around Western Europe,” according to Pacepa.³⁷⁵

Four decades later, Moscow has dusted off this Soviet-era tactic. In 2011, Russian independent media [discovered](#)³⁷⁶ Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ plan to distribute *The Protocols* and another antisemitic book *Kabbalah: Conspiracy Against God*, to Russian embassies globally as part of a package of “spiritual and ethical literature.”

OPERATION SIMON: TARGETING JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

Echoing the period of Stalin’s rule, Andropov’s KGB deployed active measures in the 1970s targeting Jewish organizations, seeking to discredit them in the eyes of their supporters, to pit them against each other, and to undermine Zionism. In February 1972, as part of Operation SIMON, a KGB agent broke into the Paris offices of the World Jewish Congress (WJC), gaining access to names, addresses, and financial contributions data of the WJC’s supporters in France and other countries. Disinformation specialists at Service A, the KGB’s First Chief (Foreign Intelligence) Directorate’s specialized disinformation section, then produced numerous forgeries “based on the format of the stolen documents,” and mailed them to addresses in Europe and North America over the next few years on behalf of a non-existent “Union of Young Zionists.” The KGB’s mailings included false claims about the WJC’s leaders’ alleged embezzlement of money collected for aid to Israel, “evidence” that newspapers are being bribed to promote “pro-Israel” propaganda, and “material” aiming to demonstrate that the WJC had links to Jewish radicals who worked to provoke antisemitism to increase immigration to Israel.³⁷⁷ The operation [reportedly](#)³⁷⁸ caused “great harm” to the WJC in Paris, including criticism from many of WJC’s supporters and a “sharp drop in donations alongside an atmosphere of suspicion.”

PUSHING THE UN TO ADOPT A RESOLUTION DECLARING ZIONISM IS RACISM

"[The United States] does not acknowledge, it will not abide by, it will never acquiesce in this infamous act ... A great evil has been loosed upon the world."³⁷⁹

—Daniel Patrick Moynihan, 12th United States Ambassador to the United Nations, November 10, 1975

At the same time as domestic antisemitic media coverage surged in the USSR to criticize the emigration of Jews from the country to Israel, a controversial draft resolution emerged in the Third Committee of the UN's General Assembly.³⁸⁰ In 1975, [resolution 3379](#) on the "Elimination of all forms of racial discrimination" appeared aimed at determining "that Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination."³⁸¹ The Kremlin and Andropov's KGB were eager to throw the Soviet Union's weight behind the resolution, first and foremost because the KGB was the ghost writer and secret patron of its creation.³⁸²

Despite not formally sponsoring the initial draft of resolution 3379, the USSR — especially Andropov's KGB — worked relentlessly to lay the groundwork for influencing the developing world to adopt the resolution and its core antisemitic tenet even before the draft existed. Per Pacea, by 1975 the "KGB community" had "disseminated hundreds of anti-American and antisemitic cartoons around UN headquarters in New York" to such an extent that the DIE "had to assign a graphics expert to its station in New York. Pacea claims Andropov used to extol the effectiveness of cartoons in convincing audiences in the developing world. When a group led by Arab missions to the UN formally introduced the resolution, the stage already had been set by the KGB and its Soviet bloc allies."³⁸³

Resolution 3379 narrowly [passed](#)³⁸⁴ on November 10, 1975, with 72 in favor, 35 against, and 32 abstaining. The Kremlin considered the resolution's passing a major diplomatic victory and a demonstration of the Soviet Union's support for Arab countries.³⁸⁵ Soviet propaganda outlets across the USSR — some of which still exist in Russia today — hailed the resolution in a slew of antisemitic articles comparing Zionism to fascism and Hitler's Third Reich as well as channeling the essence of *The Protocols*.³⁸⁶ According to Israeli scholar Baruch A. Hazan, in the mid-1970s, "virtually all instruments of international propaganda [had] been mobilized to battle Zionism." The Soviet media spread disinformation equating Zionism with Nazism and Israeli soldiers with Nazis, dismissing acts of antisemitism as Zionist "provocations," and portraying Zionists as spies.³⁸⁷ Scholar of antisemitism William Korey also documented an extensive chronology of virulently antisemitic Soviet state media articles meant to demonize Zionism in the late 1970s in his book *Russian Antisemitism, Pamyat, and the Demonology of Zionism*.³⁸⁸

At the urging of President George H.W. Bush, the UN General Assembly ultimately voted to [repeal](#)³⁸⁹ resolution 3379 on December 16, 1991. Many newly emerged countries from the collapsed Communist bloc as well as the disintegrating Soviet Union voted in favor of the repeal.

DISINFORMATION TARGETING SAKHAROV

Just as the Kremlin's propagandists fuel antisemitism to silence the opponents of its war against Ukraine today, Andropov's KGB used antisemitic disinformation and propaganda to target opponents of Soviet policies. Mitrokhin documented numerous related KGB active measures campaigns.

In November 1975, Andropov authorized active measures to discredit Andrei Sakharov, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, nuclear physicist, and a critic of the Soviet regime. A KGB document titled "*Complex Operational Measures to Expose the Political Background to the Award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Sakharov*" listed eight active measures against Sakharov, including directions to spread fabrications about his alleged links to Western intelligence services and affiliations with Zionism.³⁹⁰ The document proposed:

*To inspire public statements by public personalities in the Arab countries, condemning the Nobel Committee's decision on Sakharov, presenting this as a deal between Sakharov and Zionists in return for Sakharov's pronouncements on the question of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union, as the Zionists had a decisive influence on the Nobel Committee when it awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 1975. It should be noted that the "Sakharov Hearings" in Copenhagen were also a form of payment to Sakharov by the Zionists in return for his pro-Israel activity...*³⁹¹

Branding Sakharov "public enemy number one," Andropov subsequently expanded disinformation campaigns against Sakharov to include focus on his Jewish wife and fellow dissident, Elena [Bonner](#).³⁹² According to Mitrokhin, these active measures involved several forgeries, "among them a bogus State Department evaluation which dismissed Sakharov as a worn-out political dilettante and a fabricated letter from Radio Liberty's Russian staff denouncing his links with the Zionists."³⁹³ Echoing the Kremlin's current disinformation operations to [demonize](#)³⁹⁴ the LGBTQI+ community, the KGB spread false claims linking Sakharov to the "gay liberation movement."³⁹⁵ Additionally, the KGB fed Western media stories claiming Sakharov suffered from a mental disease and was "unable to undertake independent decisions" because of his controlling wife. The KGB attacked Bonner with false claims, depicting her as "Sakharov's evil genius" and letters threatening to reveal the secrets of her "dark past."³⁹⁶

As Andropov transitioned from KGB head to leader of the Soviet Union, the deep-seated antisemitism that had metastasized within Soviet security services did not dissipate. While internal KGB and Kremlin historical records of systemic antisemitism from this period largely remain inaccessible, memoirs of defectors suggest that antisemitism continued to play a role in the Soviet Union's active measures abroad. For example, Col. Oleg Gordievsky, former head of the KGB residency in London and another defector, recalls how during the 1981 Polish Solidarity movement, he was struck by the obsessive, blatantly antisemitic assessments made by KGB leadership when considering Solidarity's prominent Jewish members as evidence of a Zionist conspiracy.³⁹⁷

THE SOVIET ANTI-ZIONIST COMMITTEE (1980s)

Under Andropov's occupancy of the Kremlin, on March 29, 1983, the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) [agreed](#)³⁹⁸ to follow the recommendations of the KGB and of the Central Committee's Department of Propaganda to establish the Soviet Anti-Zionist Committee ("the Committee"). The CPSU [appointed](#)³⁹⁹ the Committee's leaders and directed the KGB and the Department of Propaganda to supervise and support it. Headed by anti-Zionist Jews, the organ would serve as a seemingly credible anti-Zionist propaganda mouthpiece for the Soviet state for over a decade. The deployment of Jews for such a role [was](#) an "intentional choice on the part of the KGB, meant to deflect accusations of antisemitism."⁴⁰⁰ Following the CPSU's orders, state propaganda outlet *Pravda* announced in an antisemitic article that eight prominent persons of Jewish background had themselves appealed for the creation of such a Committee in order to expose "the anti-people and anti-humanitarian nature of the diversionary propaganda and policy of Zionism."⁴⁰¹

The Committee also lent a Jewish voice to the Kremlin, which at the time was still grappling with backlash over its restrictions on Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union. The previously mentioned *Pravda* announcement featured an appeal stating, "Jews, citizens of the USSR, are part and parcel of the Soviet people." Simultaneously, the overall media campaign both within the Soviet Union and abroad continued to denounce "international Zionism" as subversive. The Committee served dual purposes of aiding the Kremlin in demonizing Zionism while also promoting Moscow's disinformation that Soviet Jews did not want to immigrate from the Soviet Union.⁴⁰²

In Kremlin-staged press conferences in 1984, the Committee's leadership promulgated anti-Zionist propaganda and myths about Jewish emigration and family reunification. Soviet propaganda outlets expeditiously published articles to amplify the Committee's words and describe how Soviet Jews living abroad had allegedly written letters describing how they were misled by Zionist propaganda to believe in a better life in Israel. Novosti's coverage of said letters claimed Jewish emigres had denounced "the Zionist" as the "snarer of souls."⁴⁰³

In addition to acting as propagandists to domestic and international Jews, the Committee served as ideal messengers to Arab audiences. The group issued public statements in the Soviet press condemning actions taken by Israel in Lebanon and Palestine, penned articles attacking Israel and Zionism to be published by Soviet international media outlets, and even participated in Soviet Hebrew-language programs broadcasted into Israel.⁴⁰⁴

In 1984, the Committee took on an even more aggressive role and extreme rhetoric. State propaganda outlet *Pravda* published an article featuring "specialist" commentator on "anti-Zionist questions" Vladimir Bolshakov's thesis on Zionism, which formulated Zionism as the overall equivalent of Nazism in terms of its alleged aggression and Nazi-like subversive ideology. Days after the *Pravda* article, *TASS* reported the Com-

mittee had denounced Israel and the United States for its aggression and equated Israel and Zionism to Nazism and Nazi-like policies and practices. The Committee held another press conference in May 1984 at the press center of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. David Dragunsky, the Committee's head, claimed to "expose the methods borrowed [by Israel] from the arsenal of Nazi war criminals..." This event achieved even wider press coverage by domestic and international Soviet media.⁴⁰⁵ As William Korey extensively documents, *TASS*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, and other state media outlets (which still function to the present day) repeatedly published articles, excerpts, and glowing reviews of vehemently antisemitic texts.⁴⁰⁶ This massive state media amplification of a given Kremlin objective or narrative remains in place to this day.

CONCLUSION

Leaders of Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union, and now today's Russian Federation, along with their state-run or state-controlled media and security services, have successively exploited antisemitism for over a century. These malign actors spread disinformation and propaganda to weaken their perceived adversaries and advance their interests. This trend began with the fabrication of one of the most influential anti-Jewish texts, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, by the Tsarist Security Service and continued with Stalin's state policy of antisemitism falsely accusing Soviet Jews of trying to destroy the USSR, spying for the West, and poisoning Soviet leaders. The Andropov-era KGB's operations also sought to discredit Jewish organizations, sow discord, and inflame antisemitic hatred in the West, while consistently attempting to delegitimize Jewish dissidents and demonize Zionism. To serve its political ends, today's Kremlin promulgates false pretexts for Moscow's war against Ukraine such as the need for its "denazification," spreads antisemitic conspiracy theories, operates antisemitic websites, and uses neo-Nazi groups.

Mimicking disinformation tactics of the past, Putin's Kremlin repeats cynical lies, manipulating the history of the Holocaust and the Second World War, obscenely exploiting the suffering and sacrifice of all those who lived through the Shoah and World War Two, and falsely accusing Jews, and supporters of Ukraine in general, of neo-Nazism. Kremlin officials and propagandists label those telling the truth about Moscow's malign actions as "Russophobes" to cover up Russia's documented war crimes and atrocities in Ukraine, and to portray the true perpetrator -- Russia -- as the victim. The Kremlin's disinformation efforts target both international public opinion and audiences inside Russia itself.

To obfuscate its disinformation efforts, the Kremlin funds the infusion of antisemitic content through its ecosystem of proxy outlets, even as it sends actual neo-Nazi mercenaries to "denazify" Ukraine. In the process, the Kremlin detracts from critically important global efforts to combat antisemitism and propagates Holocaust distortion, a form of antisemitism. With antisemitism on [the rise around the world](#),⁴⁰⁷ it is vital that the international community calls out this particularly pernicious form of Russian disinformation. This report is aimed at exposing the Kremlin's use of antisemitism to fuel its disinformation campaigns; we hope it will contribute to collective efforts to reduce the dangerous effects of information manipulation, and that it will raise awareness of the origins of antisemitic disinformation and propaganda worldwide.

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