

# Russia's "New World Order" and the Israel-Hamas War

Bat Chen Druyan Feldman and Arkady Mil-Man | No. 1801 | December 18, 2023

Since the Hamas attack on October 7, Russia has taken a distinctly pro-Hamas line, and President Vladimir Putin even linked the fate of Russia and the fate of the Palestinian people. This position stems from an approach embraced by Putin whereby the world is transitioning from a unipolar to a multipolar order. According to this approach, Israel belongs to the West, led by the United States, and as such is part of the pole that is hostile to Russia. The discourse among Russian academics, opinion makers, and foreign policy experts reveals a consensus in their views regarding this perception. Therefore, against the backdrop of increased tensions between Russia and the United States, Israel must understand the beliefs that shape Russian policy, which seeks to breach the existing world order. Israel must also recognize the critical role that Russia assigns the Muslim world in the new world order it seeks to establish.

The narratives presented by Russian President Vladimir Putin regarding the war between Israel and Hamas claim that the West, led by the United States, is responsible for this conflict and for other regional conflicts. Putin blames the US for the war, as well as for the failure of the political process between Israel and the Palestinians, once Washington appropriated for itself the role of sole mediator and sidelined the Quartet. In addition, Putin accuses the US of fanning the flames of war and alleges that Washington is trying to use the subsequent chaos to weaken its rivals, including Russia. It is doing so, according to the Russia leader, to thwart the emergence of a multipolar new world order and to ensure that the US-led single superpower order survives. Putin asserts that Russia does not sit by idly, and it has launched a campaign of national liberation against "American hegemony" on the battlefields of Ukraine, where "the fate of Russia, and the entire world – including the fate of the Palestinian people – will be determined."

In contrast, many Russian experts – academics and members of research institutions with close ties to the Putin regime – provide different explanations for the outbreak of the war. Most of these are related to processes and circumstances in the Middle East in recent years, but barely touch on the issue of American and

Western responsibility, as Putin insists. For example, Vasily Kuznetsov, from the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences, [proposes](#) various reasons for the Hamas attack on October 7, including an attempt by the organization to obstruct any rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia and to halt the regional normalization process; internal power struggles between Palestinian factions and Hamas's efforts to take control of the Palestinian Authority; and the domestic Israeli crisis, which led Hamas to believe that Israel was weakened. According to Kuznetsov, the timing of the attacks was determined by the symbolism of the Yom Kippur War – the only war in which, according to the Arab perspective, Israel failed and was defeated. Vladislav Tolstykh, a senior lecturer at the prestigious Moscow State Institute of International Relations, points out that on a regional level, the closer ties between Saudi Arabia and Israel was a key catalyst for the Hamas attacks, especially given that Riyadh sees itself as the current leader of the Arab world. According to Tolstykh, Israeli construction in the West Bank and its treatment of Palestinian prisoners were also among the reasons for the attack. Alexander Dynkin, the head of the Russian International Affairs Council, vehemently [rejects](#) the assertion that the United States was behind the Hamas attack and argues that it is unlikely that it planned the attack while supporting the normalization process between Israel and Saudi Arabia, adding that Washington does not benefit from any escalation between Israel and Hamas. As an aside, none of these researchers write about the ties between Hamas and Iran.

Within the community of experts, there are different voices, distinct from the narratives presented by Putin. Fyodor Lukyanov, one of the leading experts in foreign policy and close to the presidential mechanisms, [argues](#) that the Hamas attack, whether carried out “alone or with the participation of their good friends from Iran,” achieved nothing. He went on to describe Hamas militants as “religious fanatics.” Unlike the official Russian position, Lukyanov says that “the utterly barbaric actions of Hamas quite naturally provoked a commensurate response from Israel,” and argues that Hamas is seemingly indifferent to the number of Palestinian fatalities. According to Lukyanov, Hamas members are not hiding behind the civilian population – they “believe that it is a holy mission for which it is worth dying.” He stresses that he does not see how the conflict can be resolved.

Some experts have addressed the failure of US policy in the Middle East. For example, Timofey Bordachev, the program director of the Valdai Discussion Club – in which Putin has participated for many years – also [related to](#) the failure of US policy, which he believes is the result of commitments to too many actors that cannot possibly be met. For example, with regard to the war in Gaza, the United

States openly supports Israel, and that support endangers its standing in the Muslim world; at the same time, American pressure on Israel is not well received by Israelis, who see the US as an unconditional ally. Former Russian and Soviet ambassador to Yemen, Libya, and Tunisia Veniamin Popov is a senior research fellow at the Russian International Affairs Council who holds a virulently anti-Israel position. He [argues](#) that United States actions have deliberately marginalized the Palestinian issue and that the war in Gaza is a major blow to US foreign policy – despite the successes scored by the United States in the region, especially the normalization process between several Arab countries and Israel, i.e., the Abraham Accords. Now, the US support for Israel and the military assistance it provides have turned Washington into “a partner in the tragedy.” According to Popov, one of the most significant aspects of the Gaza war is that the Muslim world has become unified. He cites as proof the resolution passed on November 11 at the Arab League summit in Riyadh and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, which brought the Palestinian issue back onto the global agenda. Popov believes that the Muslim world can look out for its own interests – in other words, it can become one of the poles in the new, multipolar world order that Putin aspires to create.

Indeed, Putin’s comments on the war in Gaza are part of his perception of the new, multipolar world order that he seeks. In his most recent speeches, Putin attacked the United States, claiming that the “dictatorship of American hegemony” is weakening, and that it is dangerous to the rest of the world. He claimed that the situation in Gaza is proof of this. This motif appears in speeches and articles by others, too. Ivan Timofeev, the director general of the Russian International Affairs Council (which has close ties to the presidential regime), [argues](#) that the war between Israel and Hamas reflects the weakness of the unipolar world order. At the same time, he says that the Gaza war, like other conflicts, is the result of US weakness and imbalance in the system of international relations and is not the outcome of a deliberate American policy to maintain the current world order, as Putin argues. Lukyanov also [contends](#) that the war in Gaza is another stage in the reconstruction of the world order, which began at the start of the current century.

Some of these experts stress the importance of the Muslim world in bringing about the new world order. Ruslan Mamedov, a senior researcher from the staunchly anti-Israel Center of Arab and Islamic Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow, [argues](#) that leaders of the Arab states are still mired in the old unipolar world order. Only by breaking this paradigm, he argues, can a new world

order be created. He is critical of the Arab states' inaction over the Palestinian issue, but he is also aware of the differences of opinion between countries (the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt) and Hamas, which they see as posing a threat to their regimes. Aleksandr Dugin, one of the most prominent ideologues in the extremist Russian nationalist camp, [portrays](#) the war in Gaza as part of a broader conflict between Russia and the West. According to Dugin, now that the Western nations and their "Israeli proxy" are attacking the Muslim world, the Muslim countries will recognize that the conflict between Israel and Hamas is part of the battle over the new world order, and will then better understand the war that Russia is waging in Ukraine. He believes that Russia and China are allies of the Muslim world in the battle over a multipolar world. Each of the poles will have to prove its right to exist through a struggle: Russia versus Ukraine; China versus Taiwan; and the Muslim world through finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If the Muslim world does not manage to come together to form a unified pole, the process of transitioning to a multipolar world will be delayed.

An analysis of the discourse among Russian experts reveals that support for Putin's narrative is far from unequivocal and some even put forward contradictory positions. This is not, however, a case of pluralism in the Western sense of the concept, although it does appear that there is some degree of freedom of expression when it comes to issues that do not directly threaten the regime. At the same time, the thesis that the world is undergoing a process of transforming from unipolar to multipolar is very much part of the Russian mainstream and is accepted even by those who express opinions that do not match the official Russian position exactly. According to this worldview, the Muslim world is an important part of the multipolar architecture and is a pole that would be friendly toward Russia; hence Moscow's efforts to foster stronger ties with those countries. Israel, according to this worldview, belongs to the West led by the United States and is part of the pole that is hostile to Russia. Against the background of the increasing tension between Russia and the United States, Israel must understand the positions that shape Russian policy, which seek to breach the existing world order. Israel must interpret Russia's actions vis-à-vis Israel and the war in Gaza through this prism. The anti-Israel position that Russia has taken since October 7 is further proof that Jerusalem must start to view Moscow's ties with various nations and organizations in the context of the multipolar world that Russia aspires to create.

Editors of the series: Anat Kurtz, Eldad Shavit and Judith Rosen