

RUSSIA: A TERRORIST STATE AND SPONSOR OF TERRORISM

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Abstract: *This paper explores Russia’s role in international terrorism, highlighting its involvement in political terrorism through the calculated elimination of political adversaries and former intelligence agents. The Kremlin has employed tactics such as planned assassinations, using highly toxic substances like polonium-210 and Novichok, while leveraging its intelligence agencies to carry out these covert operations. This analysis shows how these actions align with Russia’s broader strategy of transnational repression, which the Russian government justifies as part of its “political warfare” against perceived enemies.*

The paper also delves into Russia’s relations with extremist groups in the Middle East, specifically Hezbollah and Hamas. These relationships reflect a calculated strategy of fostering indirect support for terrorism, thus contributing to the perpetuation of violence and instability in the region. By supporting these organizations, Russia enhances its geopolitical influence, particularly in opposition to Western powers, while promoting violent ideologies and fostering conflicts that destabilize the Middle East.

In addition, Russia’s dual approach of maintaining ties with both Israel and groups like Hamas reveals the contradictory nature of its foreign policy. While aiming to expand its influence in the region, Russia’s actions indirectly support extremist groups, posing a significant risk to regional peace and exacerbating global security challenges. Ultimately, this paper argues that Russia’s actions are consistent with the characteristics of a terrorist state, as they perpetuate terrorism, political violence, and instability.

Keywords: *terrorism; security; Hezbollah; Hamas, crime; terrorist groups; Russia.*

Introduction

In November 2022, the European Parliament declared Russia a “state sponsor of terrorism” (Official Journal of the European Union 2023), stating that Russian atrocities against Ukrainians and the destruction of civilian infrastructure violate international humanitarian law. However, the label given to Russia by the European Parliament is not legally binding. This allegation is supported by Sajjan M. Gohel, a counterterrorism expert and visiting lecturer at the London School of Economics (LSE), in a report to Al Jazeera “The EU does not have a centralized list of state sponsors of terrorism and no equivalent mechanism. Therefore, there will be no immediate legal consequences. The European Parliament has limited influence in decision-making on foreign policy, which falls within the competence of the 27 EU member states” (Shankar 2022).

This paper argues for Russia’s inclusion in the list of state sponsors of terrorism based on its actions in multiple countries, which can be considered forms of international terrorism. This list includes, according to the U.S. Department of State, Syria, Iran, North Korea, and Cuba (Plenary 2022). This argument is supported by several countries, including the United States, which have often considered such actions as acts of terrorism, even if the perpetrators are state agents and not members of an organized terrorist group. Such actions fall within the broad definition of terrorism, which includes the use of violence or intimidation to achieve political or ideological goals. Therefore, considering its history of violent actions against dissidents and critics in other countries, Russia meets

the criteria to be considered a state sponsor of terrorism and should be included in the corresponding list of states with such activities (Byman 2018).

Over the years, Russia has been involved in the assassination of its dissidents outside its borders, actions that involve violence and have an evident political motive. These actions are not just individual crimes but also serve a broader purpose: intimidating and deterring other critics of the Russian regime. For example, when a Russian dissident is killed in another country, it sends a clear message to other critics that nowhere in the world are they safe and that the Russian regime can exert its power even beyond its own borders.

Such assassinations could be seen as a form of internal violent politics that simply spills beyond a country's borders – intimidating and condemnable, but not a threat to other nations and different from the familiar image of terrorism. However, Russia also backs violent groups on the ground that employ terrorism tactics. In Syria, Russian military forces have closely collaborated with Lebanese Hezbollah, long described by the United States as one of the world's primary terrorist groups, to fight against enemies of the Assad regime. In Ukraine, Russia has supported anti-regime separatist militias with funding, training, weapons, and direct military assistance, and some of these groups have used violence against civilians. The commander of U.S. forces stated in March that Russia is arming the Taliban in Afghanistan, leading to the deaths of American soldiers as a result (Byman 2018).

A particular case is the 2014 crash of a Malaysian commercial flight that killed all 298 people on board. Kiev requested the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for Russia to compensate all civilians involved in the conflict, as well as the victims of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, which was shot down over eastern Ukraine. However, the ICJ rejected most of Ukraine's requests, only concluding that Russia “fails to take measures to investigate the facts [...] regarding persons who allegedly committed offenses” (France 24 2024).

1. Assassinations and Assassination Attempts of Political Opponents

The Kremlin has orchestrated transnational reprisals, justifying them as “political warfare” (Bokinskie 2024). Among such reprisals are individual assassinations, thus qualifying Russia to be considered a state sponsor of terrorism (Byman 2018). When selecting individual targets, the Kremlin focuses its efforts on persons who may be deemed traitorous, meaning cooperating with intelligence agencies from NATO countries and/or those considered to have previously engaged in armed conflicts against Russia or those who have clashed with Russian security services due to their political or business activities (Shekhovtsov 2020).

One such assassination is that of former intelligence officer Alexander Litvinenko, who during the instability in Russia in the 1990s worked for security services, investigating organized crime and its links to the KGB and FSB, with Vladimir Putin among those accused. After fleeing to the UK, where he was granted political asylum, he continued to expose these connections in his writings.

He was killed by radiation poisoning in 2006. His background and manner of death are detailed in the “Report into the death of Alexander Litvinenko” (Owen 2016). On November 1, 2006, Litvinenko suddenly fell ill and was admitted to Barnet Hospital. After two weeks, he was transferred to University College Hospital (UCH), where his condition gradually worsened until he passed away on November 23. Extensive examinations and scientific analyses were conducted on Litvinenko's body, as well as samples taken from it. This investigative process began prior to and revealed elevated levels of polonium in his body. He suffered a fatal cardiac arrest at 20:51 on November 23 and was pronounced dead at 21:21, due to multiple organ failure, including progressive heart failure (Owen 2016).

Another well-known case is the use of a neurotoxic agent in the attempted assassination of former intelligence officer Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in 2018. On March 4, they were found critically ill on a bench in Salisbury. Later, it was discovered that they had been poisoned with a nerve agent, in an attack that was supported by the Russian state. This was followed by an

extraordinary series of accusations and denials from the highest levels of governments in the months that followed, culminating in diplomatic expulsions and international sanctions. Police linked the attack to another poisoning in June, in which Dawn Sturgess and her partner, Charlie Rowley, were exposed to Novichok in nearby Amesbury, after handling a contaminated perfume dispenser. Sturgess died in hospital in July of the same year. Experts from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) tested samples of the chemical substance, and Russia accused the UK of blocking access to the OPCW investigation, but its proposal for a new joint investigation was rejected by the international chemical weapons watchdog in The Hague on April 4. The final conclusion was that Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia were indeed poisoned with a nerve agent in an attack that was attributed to Russia, despite its objections and attempts to block the investigation. (BBC 2018).

The most well-known case of assassination attempt is that of Alexei Navalny in 2020 when he was poisoned with Novichok, a Soviet-made neurotoxic agent, during a trip to Siberia. He was later airlifted to Germany where he received treatment and spent his recovery period. Following this incident, Navalny accused Vladimir Putin of being behind the attack and upon his return to Russia, Navalny was sentenced to over 10 years in prison and claimed to endure “hellish” conditions in isolation (Hot News 2023). On February 16, 2024, he died in a high-security penal colony named “Arctic Wolf” (DW 2024).

In December 2022, Russian tycoon Pavel Antov, known as the “sausage king”, fell from the window of a hotel in Rayagada, India, shortly after celebrating his 65th birthday. His friend Vladimir Bidanov, who was with him, died in the same hotel. According to Indian authorities, the two had travelled through the jungle and consumed excessive alcohol, with Bidanov dying from a heart attack. Shortly after his friend’s death, Antov was found dead, having fallen from the hotel roof (Smerea 2024).

Dan Rapoport, a businessman and investor, was found dead outside his home in Washington in August 2022. He was known as a supporter of Alexei Navalny and a critic of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. His wife rejected the suicide hypothesis, denying the existence of a farewell note. Rapoport, 52, was the founder of a technology consulting firm and had business ties with Ivanka Trump. Alongside him, Mikhail Lesin, former Russian Press Minister and founder of Russia Today (RT), was found dead in a Washington hotel in November 2015, with a “head injury”. It was speculated that he intended to strike a deal with the FBI to protect himself from corruption charges (Smerea 2024).

The list of assassinations of Putin’s opponents is longer, as they met their end in Russia. Boris Nemtsov, a critic of Putin, was fatally shot in 2015 on a bridge in Moscow. The assassination sparked international condemnation. Lawyer and tax expert Magnitsky died in prison in 2009 after revealing a €230 million fraud. Natalia Estemirova, a journalist specialized in exposing human rights abuses in Chechnya, was kidnapped and killed in 2009. Lawyer Stanislav Markelov, known for defending journalists critical of Putin, was shot near the Kremlin, along with journalist Anastasia Baburova, who tried to help him (Smerea 2024).

From the presented cases, it is obvious that the Kremlin has demonstrated a willingness to kill perceived enemies. These attacks come amidst several unexplained deaths of former security services employees, contesters of Russian government, prominent Russians in exile, their business partners, and other potential targets of the Russian state inside or outside the country. Even in cases where evidence is clear – such as the use of rare radioactive isotopes and neurotoxic agents available only to the Russian government, or the identification of Russian intelligence agents– the government continues to deny its role (BBC 2020). More importantly, it continues to use assassination as a tactic in the face of vocal international condemnation. In addition to eliminating the targeted individual, this overt campaign sends a message to those involved in political, intelligence, or business activities related to the Russian state. The impact of each assassination extends beyond the individual in question.

2. Russia's Relationship with Hezbollah

The collaboration between Hezbollah, the Shiite militant organization from Lebanon, and Russian Intelligence Agencies (RIA) has emerged as a complex and intriguing aspect of the geopolitical landscape in the Middle East. Hezbollah, founded in the early 1980s, has evolved into a powerful regional actor with a dual identity as both a political party and a militant group. Its historical ties to Iran and Syria have significantly shaped its regional presence and influence. RIA, particularly the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), have expanded their activities in the Middle East, positioning Russia as a key player in regional affairs. The collaboration between Hezbollah and RIA reflects a convergence of common interests, officially declared in efforts to combat terrorism and stabilize the region (Haddad 2005).

Hezbollah, the Shiite Islamist organization, has evolved from a militant group into a dominant political force in Lebanon. Founded during the Israeli occupation of Lebanon, Hezbollah engaged in resistance against Israel and became a significant presence in Lebanese politics in the 1990s. In 2000, it succeeded in compelling Israel to withdraw its troops from southern Lebanon, consolidating its regional reputation. A key moment was the 2006 war with Israel, during which Hezbollah achieved a propaganda victory. In the 2010s, it militarily intervened in the Syrian conflict in support of the Assad regime, attracting criticism and strengthening its alliance with Iran. Despite providing social services to the Shiite population in Lebanon, Hezbollah has faced increasing pressure to address the country's political and economic crises (Haddad 2005).

Although, as stated, in its relationship with Russia, the organization's purpose is to combat terrorism, Hezbollah is considered a terrorist organization due to its history of violence and radical ideology. Founded on the ideological principles of Ayatollah Khomeini, Hezbollah promotes the destruction of Israel and employs terror to achieve its political objectives. Over the decades, Hezbollah has carried out violent actions against civilians, including kidnappings, suicide attacks, and assassinations, both in Lebanon and abroad. Hezbollah has expanded its operations globally, using terrorist infrastructure to carry out attacks against Jewish and Israeli targets worldwide. Additionally, Hezbollah has been involved in conflicts in the Middle East, supporting authoritarian regimes and participating in armed struggles. Despite its attempts to present itself as a legitimate political force, Hezbollah has continued to resort to violence to maintain and consolidate power in Lebanon and the region. Thus, its violent actions and influence in regional conflicts have led many countries and international organizations to consider it a terrorist organization (Azani 2013).

Hezbollah aims to fight against Israel for the liberation of occupied Lebanese territory. It also seeks to expand its political influence in Lebanon and support regional allies, such as Assad's regime in Syria. The organization also provides social services to the Shiite community in Lebanon. Its organizational structure is complex, with a strong military wing and a well-developed political and social presence. This structure allows it to influence both domestic and regional politics and establish foreign relations, including with Russia. The Russian Federation has a complex array of intelligence agencies, including the Federal Security Service (FSB), Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), and Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR). The FSB focuses on internal security, the GRU on military intelligence, and the SVR on foreign espionage. These agencies collaborate to promote Russia's interests and are involved in various operations, including cyber and disinformation campaigns (Adamsky 2018).

The collaboration between Hezbollah, the Shiite militant organization based in Lebanon, and RIA represents a complex and multifaceted relationship that has developed over several decades. Understanding this collaboration requires exploring the historical context that has influenced their interactions. Originating in the tumultuous landscape of Lebanon in the 1980s, Hezbollah emerged during a civil war, Israeli occupation, and various sectarian factions vying for control. In this context, Hezbollah became a Shiite resistance movement deeply tied to the theocratic regime of Iran. Iran,

seeking to establish a Shiite stronghold against Israel and promote its revolutionary ideals, became a significant supporter of Hezbollah, providing financial, military, and ideological support (Daher 2019).

Following the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the emergence of the Russian Federation under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin. During this period, RIA, including the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, underwent significant transformations. They sought to adapt to a new global order characterized by multipolarity and an evolving security landscape. The historical context of the collaboration between Hezbollah and RIA begins to take shape in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This period was marked by a series of events that laid the groundwork for their interaction. Firstly, Hezbollah consolidated its position in Lebanon, transitioning from a guerrilla group to a political and military force with significant influence in Lebanese politics. Secondly, under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, Russia adopted a more assertive foreign policy agenda, seeking to regain its status as a major global player. As part of this strategy, Russia sought to consolidate its presence in the Middle East, a region with historical ties dating back to the Soviet era (Nizameddin 2008).

Amid greater common interests, Hezbollah's closer relationship began in 2015, when Russia intervened militarily to support Assad, creating a common strategic interest between Moscow and the terrorist group: preserving the Syrian regime and containing Islamist extremist groups, including ISIS. This laid the foundation for deeper collaboration (Adamsky 2018). The Federal Intelligence Service (FSB) and the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces (GRU), in particular, have been involved in collaborating with Hezbollah in Syria. While their immediate objectives aligned in Syria, collaboration also extended to information sharing and coordination. Hezbollah's expertise in the region, including its knowledge of local actors and the terrain, complemented Russia's military operations. RIA has benefited from Hezbollah's human intelligence assets and local networks, which have provided valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of the Syrian conflict (Azani 2013).

Another dimension of their collaboration has emerged in the field of counter-terrorism. Both Hezbollah and Russia faced threats from Islamist extremist groups operating in Syria and the Middle East in general. Hezbollah had extensive experience fighting groups such as al-Qaeda and its affiliates. RIA has sought to leverage this expertise in their efforts to neutralize terrorist threats, both regionally and globally. Their cooperation included sharing information about extremist networks, intelligence analysis, and joint operations. In addition, collaboration between Hezbollah and RIA has acquired a clandestine dimension, especially in the field of arms transfers and logistics. Reports suggest Hezbollah may have received weapons and support from Russian sources, facilitated through secret channels. While the exact extent and nature of this secret collaboration remain shrouded in mystery, this underscores the complex nature of their relationship (Adamsky 2018).

In conclusion, the analysis of potential collaboration between Hezbollah and the RIA reveals a complex and multifaceted relationship within a rapidly changing global landscape. Although there is no definitive evidence to confirm a direct and formal alliance between these two entities, various factors suggest that their interests may converge in strategically important regions such as the Middle East.

Hezbollah's extensive global presence, its expertise in asymmetric warfare, and its ties to Iran provide it with a unique set of capabilities and interests, while Russia, under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin, seeks to expand its influence and counterbalance Western dominance on the international stage. In a period marked by growing uncertainty, shifting alliances, and emerging security challenges, it is crucial to understand and address the potential collaboration between non-state actors like Hezbollah and state actors such as Russia.

This complex nexus underscores the continuously evolving nature of international relations, where both traditional and non-traditional actors pursue their interests in an interconnected and rapidly changing world. It is the responsibility of the global community to adapt and effectively respond to these dynamics, prioritizing diplomacy, conflict prevention, and the protection of international norms and values to maintain global stability and security.

After the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia shifted its focus towards the Middle East, aiming to counter U.S. influence. This led to the development of ties with Hamas, a radical group that rejects Israel's right to exist. Although many countries classified Hamas as a terrorist organization, Russia refrained from doing so and engaged diplomatically with the group. This support allowed Hamas to strengthen its position in the region. While Russia claimed it sought peace and balance, its actions indirectly contributed to regional instability, aligning with its broader goal of expanding influence in the Middle East.

3. The Relationship between Russia and Hamas

Hamas, established in 1987 as a branch of the international Muslim Brotherhood, severed ties with the organization in 2017. During the Soviet era, the USSR supported militant groups with similar goals, particularly the destruction of Israel. The Soviet Union, before perestroika, consistently backed the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) led by Yasser Arafat, as Israel's occupation of Palestine was viewed as an adversary to Soviet interests (Кузнец 2021).

Hamas is recognized as a radical Islamist group that consistently advocates for armed resistance against Israel and denies Israel's right to exist. Its stance remains supported by a significant portion of the Palestinian population. In 2005, Hamas formed a political party, “Change and Reform”, which won the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council elections, surpassing Fatah by 4%. Afterward, Fatah leaders refused to form a coalition with Hamas, leading to Ismail Haniyeh's appointment as Prime Minister. This resulted in international sanctions against the new government. Violent clashes broke out between Fatah and Hamas, culminating in a brief civil war in 2007. Hamas gained control of Gaza (Кузнец 2021).

Russia's relationship with Hamas can be better understood through its foreign policy, which incorporates a blend of Realism and pragmatism. Russia's foreign policy has evolved, particularly since Vladimir Putin's rise to power. One of the key factors influencing Russia's relations with the Middle East is its unique stance on religion, often using “faith-based diplomacy” to promote peace through cooperation between religious leaders. Russia positions itself as a Eurasian civilization, distinct from both the Western and Eastern blocs, emphasizing its unique role in global geopolitics (Ahmadian și Barari 2021).

In the post-Soviet era, Russia shifted its focus toward the East, seeking to expand relations with Muslim-majority countries, including the Middle East. The Soviet Union's ideological opposition to Islam led to limited engagement with Muslim states, but following the USSR's collapse, Russia moved to establish more substantial ties with the region, marking a key shift in its foreign policy. The expansion of these relationships reflects Russia's broader geopolitical interests and its desire to strengthen its influence in the Middle East (Albright 2006) (Ahmadian și Barari 2021).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia shifted away from Westerns, particularly after observing NATO's eastward expansion and the U.S. military's growth. Under Putin, Russia focused on the “near-abroad” states, which became critical for its influence and security. These countries are of significant importance due to their geographical proximity and economic ties with Russia. At the same time, Russia distanced itself from the West, aiming to reduce Western influence in these regions (Chaadaev and Kamenskii 1991).

Russia's worldview includes three major threats: The West, China, and the Muslim world. The West's threat stems from Russia's attempts to expand influence in neighbouring countries, while China's growing power presents an increasing challenge. The Muslim world is seen as a multi-dimensional threat, especially due to the instability in regions like Afghanistan and Iraq. To address these concerns, Russia has strengthened ties with Islamic countries, notably through the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Additionally, the Middle East remains a key area of focus for Russia's foreign policy, with the region serving as a platform for both increasing global influence and engaging in negotiations with the West (Chaadaev and Kamenskii 1991).

Russia's involvement in the Middle East has evolved significantly from the Soviet era to Putin's leadership. During the Soviet Union, the region was seen as a battleground against imperialism, with Israel viewed as an ally of the West. After the Soviet collapse, Russia initially focused on relations with the West, but failures in this approach led to a shift in policy (Chaadaev and Kamenskii 1991).

Under Putin, Russia aimed to restore its influence in the region, prioritizing economic interests, particularly in energy, and positioning itself as a mediator in Middle Eastern conflicts. Russia's policy was driven by the need to counter U.S. influence, protect internal stability, and prevent the spread of extremism. Additionally, Russia strengthened its presence by forgiving debts of Arab countries and reopening dialogue with Hamas in 2006 (Epstein 2007).

Russia has consistently aimed to play an active role in resolving the Middle East conflict, focusing on stabilizing Palestinian territories, fostering Palestinian unity, and resuming Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. After Hamas won the 2006 elections, Moscow seized this opportunity to enhance its diplomatic influence by maintaining relations with both sides, in contrast to the U.S., which only engaged with Israel (Epstein 2007).

Russia does not classify Hamas as a terrorist organization, noting the absence of violence in Russia and viewing Chechnya as an internal matter. Its relations with Hamas have helped Russia balance its strong ties with Israel and strengthen its influence in the Islamic world. Following the 2008 war with Georgia, Russia further solidified its relationship with Hamas to counter Israel's activities in neighbouring states, employing a strategy aimed at balancing and expanding its regional influence (Katz 2010).

Russia has taken an ambiguous stance in its foreign policy, particularly regarding its relations with groups labelled as terrorist organizations by many countries, such as Hamas. Following Hamas' victory in the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections, Russia viewed this success as an opportunity to counteract U.S. influence in the Middle East and began engaging with the political movement. Although Hamas was not officially classified as a terrorist organization by Russia, Moscow continued to interact with Hamas leaders and facilitated high-level meetings, actions that some perceived as direct support for a group known for resorting to violence and terrorism (Katz 2010).

For the past two decades, Russia has maintained a working relationship with Hamas, raising concerns about potential indirect support through its ties with Iran and the use of private military networks like the Wagner Group (Winer 2023).

The Wagner Group, a paramilitary organization operating under the Kremlin's de facto control, has played a key role in advancing Russia's geopolitical interests through covert operations. Wagner mercenaries have been active in conflicts across Ukraine, Syria, Libya, the Central African Republic, and Mali, where they have been accused of war crimes and atrocities against civilians. In Africa, the group has provided military training and protection for pro-Russian governments, while in Syria, it has cooperated closely with Iranian forces and Hezbollah. Some Ukrainian sources claim that former Wagner operatives, after leaving Belarus for Africa, participated in training Hamas militants, particularly in the use of drones for attacks. While these claims have not been independently verified, Wagner has a history of supporting extremist groups to destabilize regions of strategic interest to Moscow (Karelska 2023).

Another significant player in this network is Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the ideological and military backbone of the Iranian regime, which has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United States and other Western countries. The IRGC has been instrumental in backing Iran's proxy groups across the Middle East, including Hamas, Hezbollah, and Shiite militias in Iraq and Syria. Russia's ties with the IRGC have strengthened since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, with Iran supplying Moscow with attack drones and other military equipment. This partnership extends to Hamas, as Russia and Iran coordinate efforts to counter Western influence in the region (Winer 2023).

The close cooperation between Russia, the Wagner Group, and the IRGC points to a calculated strategy of supporting extremist and terrorist organizations to destabilize Russia's geopolitical adversaries. By maintaining ties with Hamas and refusing to classify it as a terrorist organization, Russia not only strengthens its foothold in the Middle East but also leverages terrorism as a tool to expand its influence and undermine Western interests in the region (Winer 2023).

Through these actions, Russia indirectly financed and supported regimes and organizations involved in terrorist activities. While the Kremlin claimed that its primary goal was to maintain a balanced role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and contribute to regional peace, its support for groups like Hamas had contradictory effects, contributing to instability in the region. Continued meetings and collaborations with Hamas leaders, who oppose Israel's recognition and advocate for violence in the name of Palestinian independence, indirectly enhanced the group's ability to attract financial and logistical support from Russia.

This policy can be seen as a form of financing and encouraging regimes that use terrorism as a tactic against their adversaries. In this way, Russia was perceived not just as a diplomatic player but as an actor actively contributing to fuelling conflicts by supporting extremist and terrorist groups to extend its influence in the Middle East and counter the U.S. strategy in the region.

Conclusions

Analyzing the provided information, it is clear that the Kremlin has employed a strategy of eliminating political opponents and former security agents it deems traitors, through well-planned assassinations. These actions fit into a broader model of transnational repression, which Russian authorities justify as part of a “political war”. The use of rare and toxic substances like polonium-210 and Novichok, along with the direct involvement of Russian intelligence services, indicates a systematic approach to intimidating and eliminating adversaries, regardless of their location.

Additionally, the relationship between Russia and Hezbollah reflects a strategic alliance based on shared interests in the Middle East. Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict, alongside the Assad regime and with Russian support, has solidified this cooperation, offering benefits to both parties. While Russia strengthens its regional influence, Hezbollah receives military and logistical backing, helping to maintain its operational capabilities.

Russia's relations with Hamas are also complex and part of its broader strategy to extend its influence in the Middle East, amidst rivalries with the West and the balancing of geopolitical forces. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia adopted a more flexible and pragmatic policy toward Islamic regions, and its interactions with groups like Hamas are consistent with this approach. Although Russia does not categorize Hamas as a terrorist organization, its ties with groups like Iran and Wagner suggest indirect support for extremist movements, which significantly impacts regional stability.

Russia's role in the Middle East is ambiguous, particularly regarding its policy toward Hamas. By not designating the group as a terrorist organization but continuing engagement, Russia highlights its desire to counter U.S. influence in the region. However, this policy fosters instability and prolongs conflicts, as Hamas is known for its advocacy of violence and refusal to recognize Israel. Russia's support for extremist groups, especially through connections with Iran and Wagner, risks further destabilizing the region and strengthening regimes that promote violence, undermining peace efforts.

Moreover, Russia's dual approach in the Middle East, maintaining ties both with Israel and extremist groups like Hamas, creates a fragile balance that could easily escalate conflicts. Despite Putin's pragmatic and realpolitik-driven strategy, support for Hamas and other extremist groups risks intensifying regional tensions and could lead to greater international isolation for Russia, given the global condemnation of terrorism.

In conclusion, Russia's policy toward Hamas and other extremist organizations reflects a strategic choice aimed at countering Western influence in the Middle East, but it also contributes to

regional instability and perpetuates violence. This approach has contradictory effects, undermining peace efforts while enhancing Russia's geopolitical position.

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