



United States Mission to the OSCE

The Russian Federation's Ongoing Aggression Against Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador Michael R. Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Last Friday at sunset, the Jewish people of Ukraine began to celebrate Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. The day before, President Zelenskyy celebrated together with some of the members of Ukraine's vibrant Jewish community. He met with Jewish leaders, including Rabbi Meir Stambler and nearly three dozen other rabbis, and presented awards to 15 Jewish-Ukrainian soldiers. In Kharkiv, the city's Chief Rabbi, Moshe Moskovitz, who presides over the largest synagogue in Ukraine, told an LA Times reporter: "In darkness we find light... Our enemy wants us to be hiding and crying in the dark... But for centuries we have celebrated our holidays in time of war and hardship – this is so meaningful to us."

Mr. Chair, why am I even raising this? Because one of the biggest lies on the planet is that President Zelenskyy is presiding over a "Nazi regime." That's what the Russian Federation keeps repeating in this Council. Every week. The logic of this Russian propaganda is supposed to work something like this: Ukrainians are Nazis, and since Nazis are evil, Russia must get rid of them. So, you are left with the following statement: because they are evil, Russia must get rid of all Ukrainians in Ukraine. That, dear colleagues, is the claim that the Russian Federation is trying to sell to *you* every week.

Let me start by quoting Russian President Vladimir Putin. On June 16th, he argued, "I have a lot of Jewish friends. They say that Zelenskyy is not Jewish, that he is a disgrace to the Jewish people. This is not a joke and not an attempt at irony, because today neo-Nazis, Hitler's disciples, have been put on a pedestal as heroes of Ukraine."

Mr. Putin has since doubled down on such racist lies. On September 5th, Putin claimed, "Western curators have put a person at the head of modern Ukraine – an ethnic Jew, with Jewish roots, with Jewish origins... And this makes the whole situation extremely disgusting, in that an ethnic Jew is covering up the glorification of Nazism and covering up those who led the Holocaust in Ukraine at one time."

This cynical attempt to manipulate and distort the history of the Holocaust to further Russia's aim of seizing and subjugating the democratic state of Ukraine is an affront to the victims and survivors of Nazism, and indeed to all of us. And it is not just the Russian President who is obsessed with this false narrative about people's Jewishness. Kremlin propagandist Vladimir Solovyov said on September 6th, "when Blinken, a Jew, is coming to visit Zelenskyy, a Jew, to discuss the actions of de-facto Nazi troops against Russia, that speaks volumes." The volumes spoken by these lies and innuendo have another name. Antisemitism. Blatant and vile antisemitism leveraged to advance Russia's war of conquest and perpetuate Russia's atrocities and abuses against the people of Ukraine – citizens of democratic Ukraine who

come from a variety of backgrounds, ethnic Ukrainians to be sure, but also other ethnicities – Jews, Crimean Tatars, Russians, Belarusians, and many others.

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem, the Auschwitz Memorial, and many Jewish civil society organizations have all roundly rejected Putin’s claims that democratic Ukraine needs to be “de-Nazified.”

So has Natan Sharansky, an original member of the Moscow Helsinki Group and now honorary Board Member of The Jewish Agency for Israel, who said, “Ukrainians can be proud of electing a Jewish president, who has united the Ukrainian people in a difficult struggle against barbaric aggression. And we Jews can be proud that a representative of our people plays such a unique historical role in mobilizing not only the Ukrainian people, but the entire free world, to protect our future.”

And so has Rabbi Moshe Reuven Azman, who said, "I'm proud of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who stood with his nation at the beginning of the war even though it was a danger to his life, showed extraordinary courage, and continues to defend the Ukrainian people. I, along with all of Ukrainian Jewish society and the entire free world, support President Zelenskyy."

Since Russia raises the issue of Nazism in its weekly statement, let’s take a moment to compare civil society in Ukraine with civil society in Russia. Surely Nazi regimes are incompatible with civil society, in fact they rabidly and brutally attack civil society. In Ukraine, President Zelenskyy has welcomed robust civil society engagement. Just look at how many Ukrainian civil society groups have come to the OSCE at the invitation of the Ukrainian delegation. On September 12th, President Zelenskyy listened to tens of thousands of his fellow citizens who demanded greater transparency from their government officials. Responding to their voices, he returned to Ukraine’s Rada a draft bill and demanded that the bill ensure Ukraine’s officials disclose their financial assets now, not in the future. Why? Because the leaders of democratic Ukraine listen and respond to civil society. Ukraine is better off for it.

I don’t need to tell you how this contrasts with what is taking place in Russia. Take, for example, Father Ioann Kurmoyarov. On August 31st, the Kalininsky District Court of St. Petersburg sentenced Kurmoyarov to three years in prison. What had he done? He posted videos outlining his opposition to Russia’s war based on his religious beliefs.

In one of these posts he said, "the most painful thing is that our army, the Russian army, is committing crimes. That's the trouble – that my beloved country is behaving absolutely not in a Christian, not in a human way, [but] in fact is doing the same thing that Nazi Germany did in the 1930s and 1940s."

Consider also which side engages in dehumanization. On September 11th, Sergey Mardan, a popular blogger, pondered aloud on a widely broadcast talk show whether Ukrainian blood carried a harmful, defective genome. He previously claimed Ukrainians were "undead" and "simply animals."

This dehumanization of Ukrainians is also evident in a June 1st conversation between propagandists Andrey Norkin and Alexander Kazakov on another talk show. Norkin said, “it’s easier to fight against a dehumanized enemy.” Kazakov responded, “no, you are not

formulating it correctly. It's easier to kill the dehumanized enemy." Norkin then readily agreed, saying, "well, good! Let it be." This is on Russian TV.

Mr. Chair, here's the thing: when you build up an entire justification for war using a lie that is based on antisemitic and dehumanizing hate speech, it doesn't take a lot of effort to call it out. Because we've seen this sort of thing before. We know what horrors it leads to: torture, disappearances, rape and other forms of gender-based violence, and the removal of children from their families. Dehumanization is a tactic used to remove the moral restraints against the commission of atrocities, thereby enabling them to occur. We must all reject and condemn Russia's lies regarding the so-called "denazification" of Ukraine, which seeks to equalize Ukrainian identity and culture with the worst atrocities of the 20th century. But we all know who is committing these atrocities today. Who launched missile and drone strikes against civilians last night? Furthermore, we all know that Ukraine is a pluralistic, open society. A diverse, democratic society with a Jewish president and a Muslim Minister of Defense clearly shows us the power of tolerance and inclusion.

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