



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on December 8, 2010

U.S. Cables: Russian, Israeli Mafias Gaining Power, Infiltrating Governments

Among the secret U.S. diplomatic cables released recently by WikiLeaks are several from Moscow, Tel Aviv, and other capitals expressing concern over the connections between, and rising influence of, the Russian and Israeli mafias around the world. The extent of their control over certain governments was also noted, with one expert describing the existence of “virtual mafia states” among former Soviet republics.



An American [embassy cable from Spain](#), highlighted by the German publication [Spiegel](#), details a high-level Spanish prosecutor's conclusions about certain former Soviet states like Russia, Belarus, and Chechnya. After more than a decade of investigations into the world of organized crime, prosecutor Jose Gonzalez called the nations “virtual mafia states.” Ukraine is apparently following the same path.

“For each of those countries, one cannot differentiate between the activities of the government and organized crime groups,” said the Spanish prosecutor, charged with investigating the Russian mob in particular. He also claimed Russia's “intelligence” apparatus was “absorbing” mobster kingpins and that the Russian mafia already dominates “certain strategic sectors of the global economy” like the aluminum industry.

[Another cable](#) from a U.S. consulate in Russia's far east detailed various criminal activities ranging from corruption of the fishing industry — “often said to be the most criminalized industry in the Russian Far East,” according to the document — to illegal logging operations which exist due to “corruption and complicity by the authorities”.

The corruption and crime extends all across Russia, too. Regarding Ramzan Kadyrov, the president of the Russian Republic of Chechnya, a cable from the American embassy in Moscow explained that his leadership was based on the “organization of corruption.” It also claimed he was backed by powerful forces in the Russian regime, and that U.S. diplomats suspected he wanted to eliminate rivals using mafia tactics.

And some of those Russian mobsters, it turns out, have close ties to Israel. “Many Russian oligarchs of Jewish origin and Jewish members of organized crime groups have received Israeli citizenship, or at least maintain residences in the country,” [wrote](#) the U.S. ambassador in Tel Aviv in a separate cable. According to sources cited in the document, the Russian mafia has “laundered as much as USD 10



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billion through Israeli holdings."

Other American cables from Israel highlight the growing problem of organized crime in that nation as well. In a message sent from the embassy in Tel Aviv entitled "[Israel, A Promised Land for Organized Crime?](#)", U.S. diplomats explain the increasing influence and reach of the Israeli mafia — even in America. "Organized crime (OC) has longstanding roots in Israel, but in recent years there has been a sharp increase in the reach and impact of OC networks," noted the cable, signed by the U.S. ambassador there. "Given the volume of travel and trade between the United States and Israel, it is not surprising that Israeli OC has also gained a foothold in America."

Other statements in the cable expose the U.S. government's seeming inability to do anything about it. "Israelis who are known to work for or belong to [organized crime] families are not automatically ineligible for travel to the United States ...," explained the document. "It is fair to assume that many known [Israeli organized crime] figures hold valid tourist visas to the United States and travel freely." But these problems have not gone unnoticed: "Given the growing reach and lethal methods of Israeli OC, blocking the travel of known OC figures to the United States is a matter of great concern."

An interesting point brought up by [analysts](#): there is some crossover between alleged mafia members and government officials. For example, a former major general in Israel, Dan Ronen, is now the chairman of a "security" business called H.A.Sh Security Group. Ben Shabat, a man the U.S. embassy in Israel suspected of involvement in organized crime based on media reports, is also a leader in the firm.

How far the gangsters have corrupted the Israeli government is not known, according to the cable. "It is not entirely clear to what extent OC elements have penetrated the Israeli establishment and corrupted public officials," it said. "The Israeli National Police insists that such instances are rare, despite the occasional revelation of crooked police officers in the press." The profit motive is so strong, however, that "Arab and Jewish Israeli criminals routinely cooperate" to further consolidate their criminal empires.

But Israeli officials do realize that there is a big problem. Authorities there "have engaged in a vigorous campaign against organized crime leaders ... but they remain unable to cope with the full scope of the problem," the cable stated.

According to a [Reuters report](#), Israel passed an anti-organized crime law in 2003. Five years later, police created a specific unit charged with tackling the problem. The Israeli police website, cited by the news agency, said the Israeli government first recognized an "Israeli version" of organized crime in the late seventies. Twenty years later it labeled the criminal syndicates a strategic threat — "specifically those connected to former Soviet states."

But one of the biggest concerns unveiled among the released cables dealing with organized crime was the collaboration of various regimes — specifically Russia's and those of other former Soviet states — with the mafia syndicates. U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, for example, [said](#) in a leaked document that "Russian democracy has disappeared." He even called the regime "an oligarchy run by security services."

Another U.S. cable, this one from Thailand, details the bribing of witnesses and other means used by the Russian regime to protect suspected arms trafficker Viktor Bout. He was arrested in Thailand on various charges and was supposed to be deported to America. The Russian government lobbied fiercely on his behalf, calling the deportation "illegal."

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was obviously upset by the leaked revelations. "To our



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[American] colleagues, I would like to advise you not to interfere with the sovereign choice of the Russian people," he [said](#) in an interview with Larry King.

The [power](#) of the Israeli mafia and its ties to Russian oligarchs have been the subject of scrutiny and debate for many years. Of course, the Russian government's involvement in nefarious activities goes far beyond crime, and that, too, is well known. As *The New American* magazine and other sources have detailed, the regime has been connected to [Islamic terrorism](#), [assassinations](#), and more. But there are still more [WikiLeaks](#) documents waiting to be released. What else will be revealed? Stay tuned.

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