

Despite Fears of Wider Middle East War, Russian Emigres in Israel Say They Are Unlikely to Leave

By [Moscow Times Reporter](#)

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Survivors, friends and relatives attend a memorial for the victims killed at or kidnapped from the Supernova music festival during the October 7 attacks by Palestinian militants, on the eve of the attacks' first anniversary in Tel Aviv. **Jack Guez / AFP**

As Israel marks the first anniversary of the deadly Oct. 7 Hamas attack amid fears of a wider war erupting in the Middle East, Russians who fled to Israel following the invasion of Ukraine told The Moscow Times they have little interest in returning to their homeland.

The anniversary of Oct. 7 comes as Israel remains deeply engaged in deadly fighting in Gaza, escalates hostilities with Hamas ally Hezbollah in Lebanon and confronts the looming threat of a broader conflict involving Tehran.

But despite the escalation, some Russian emigres said the political situation in Russia poses a

far greater risk to them than the violence currently unfolding in the Middle East.

"Right now, we're not even considering going back [to Russia]," Anna, who moved to Israel with her husband to avoid the Kremlin's mobilization in fall 2022, told The Moscow Times.

"There are risks everywhere, but in Russia, it's particularly dangerous given our political stance," Anna said. "We loved Moscow. We had a great life before 2022 and leaving was heartbreak. But for us, it's just not safe to return."

Around 65,000 Russians [have moved](#) to Israel since 2022 using the country's repatriation program, which allows people with Jewish ancestry to obtain citizenship — making it one of the top destinations for wartime emigres.

Like Anna, many Russians in Israel said that while the current situation in the Middle East is far from stable, it feels less threatening than the political situation in Russia.

Their names have been changed for safety reasons as The Moscow Times has been declared an "undesirable" organization in Russia.

"It's hard to explain to people who don't live here, but the rocket attacks don't feel the same as they might in other countries. Most people here really don't stress about it," said Denis, 27, who moved to Israel from Russia for political reasons.

Related article: [Russian Liberal Media Isn't Telling the Full Story About Gaza](#)

Another woman who moved to Israel with her family said she felt a surge of patriotism during and after the Hamas attack, which sparked widespread solidarity among Israelis.

"The feeling inside Israel doesn't make you panic or want to run away. On the contrary, there's a sense of 'I want to stay here, I want to live here, and I want to help the country in any way I can'," Valentina, 42, told The Moscow Times, referring to Hamas' deadly Oct. 7 assault.

The attack — which saw thousands of rockets fired toward Israeli border communities and the storming of nearly 50 different sites, including a massacre of festivalgoers — killed 1,205 people according to official Israeli figures. Some 251 people were captured and taken as hostages to the Gaza Strip in 2023, of whom 97 are still held captive in the coastal territory, including 34 the Israeli military says are dead.

The Oct. 7 attack has become the worst in the country's history and sparked a devastating war in Gaza last year that has since expanded into Lebanon.

Since last month, Israel has conducted massive strikes on Hezbollah strongholds around Lebanon and launched ground operations across the border. The war has killed more than 1,110 people in Lebanon and forced more than one million to flee their homes.

To the south, Israel's campaign in Gaza in retaliation to the Oct. 7 attack is far from over. Israel's military offensive on Gaza has reduced swathes of the territory to rubble and displaced nearly all of its 2.4 million residents at least once amid an unrelenting humanitarian crisis.

According to the health ministry in Hamas-controlled Gaza, 41,909 people, the majority of whom were civilians, have been killed in the territory since the start of the war. The figures have been deemed to be reliable by the United Nations.

The fighting in Gaza and Lebanon has been accompanied by the threat of war with Iran, raising fears of an all-out regional conflict.

Despite the threat, some Russians who moved to Israel told The Moscow Times that they trusted the Israeli army to protect its citizens.

Related article: [Driven From Home by War, Russian Emigres in Israel Resolve to Stay Despite Hamas Attacks](#)

Others said they were more concerned by the threat of knife attacks or shootings, which regularly occur in parts of Israel.

Anna recalled a recent apparent [terror attack](#) in Tel Aviv that happened close to an area she and her family frequently visit.

“There’s no way to protect yourself from that kind of violence,” she said. “You just hope you’re not in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

Some compared the danger of war in Israel to the hostilities in Russia, particularly to Ukraine’s Aug. 6 incursion into Russia’s Kursk region that continues to this day.

“It feels as if the [Russian] government has abandoned its citizens. One thing that truly astonishes me is how many people in Moscow are not aware of what’s happening in Kursk, Belgorod or elsewhere,” said Valentina, referring to Russian regions bordering Ukraine that have faced regular cross-border attacks since the start of Russia’s invasion.

“In Israel, that’s simply not possible — no one can ignore what’s happening in the regions of the country that were attacked,” she said.

Some Russians in Israel told The Moscow Times that even though they disagreed with the government’s policy regarding Gaza, expressed concern over the regionwide escalation and were considering the possibility of moving from Israel to another country, the idea of going back to Russia is one that they are not ready to reconsider.

“Returning to Russia? It seems like madness to me,” Denis said. “Even without the ideological concerns, it simply doesn’t make sense.”

AFP contributed reporting.

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