

How Russia's elite are maintaining their national identity while fleeing the state

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View from the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, UAE

Anna Johnson - When Russia began conscripting soldiers to fight in the war in Ukraine, thousands of men fled to avoid fighting. At the same time, many other Russians were fleeing to avoid anti-Russian sentiments and sanctions in European countries. Russian multibillionaires have [found a new home in Dubai](#) in the United Arab Emirates where they have been able to maintain their Russian identity by banding together.

The Russian diaspora in Dubai has had to find a connection with each other to protect their sense of national identity despite leaving their homeland. [National identity](#) is based on how people view the place they live and their attachment to a nation. Typically, this identity is built on living in that nation, but in this case, these Russians have had to find a way to preserve their ties to their nation while fleeing their obligations to their country. The UAE exists in an apolitical realm, isolated from anti-war protests due to its heavy restrictions on free speech and freedom of assembly. Even if Emiratis wanted to protest the presence of Russian communities, they would not be able to. Wealthy Russians have been able to resume their lives in isolation from the war - preserving their existing relationship with their nation and avoiding the reckoning with national identity that Russians who have remained in Russia have had to face. Russians in the UAE have been able to operate their businesses

remotely, capitalizing on the economic vacuum left by the mass exodus of Western companies due to the war. In Dubai, Russia's elite have been finding connections with each other by frequenting Russian-owned businesses established in the year since the war began. Dubai has continued direct flights to and from Russia despite the fighting, allowing Russians to travel to and from their home state freely. This lifeline into Russia feeds national identity by allowing Russians the option to return to the state to reestablish their connections to the nation.

This group has been able to maintain this identity because of the United Arab Emirates' [geopolitical code](#) which establishes its relationship with allies and enemies. The UAE's apolitical stance in the war in Ukraine has fostered an atmosphere of safety for Russians allowing them to continue to offer direct flights to Russia. This geopolitical code is in direct conflict with the attitudes of much of the Western world which has placed heavy sanctions on Russia's elite and created an anti-Russian atmosphere by rallying behind Ukraine.

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