

Madame Gu: The U.S. Department of Justice's next target in sanctioning Russia

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12/02/2022



Madame Gu

Hailey Brown - The U.S. has undertaken the role of financial policeman in the effort to hinder Russia's ability to fight its War in Ukraine through tough sanctions. The newest target is a [\\$156 million dollar yacht, Madame Gu](#), owned by Russian Oligarch Andrei Skoch, which was labeled as blocked property in June. The yacht's blocked status means it cannot employ U.S. citizens, make use of American companies for upkeep, or use the dollar. Any violation of these rules would result in penalizing action — such as its seizure — by the United States.

Political acts, such as sanctions, occur across multiple [scales](#). Scale informs the geographic extent of an action, all the way from the individual level to the global level. Understanding the importance of scale can help make sense of how the U.S. seizing a yacht in Dubai impacts Russia. Madame Gu is linked to a Russian Oligarch who has been the subject of U.S. sanctions, like many other oligarchs. The U.S. is seizing oligarch-owned assets to then sell and use the profits to fund Ukraine's rebuilding efforts.

Thus, while sanctions against oligarchs exist on the individual scale, their impact funnels all the way up to the national scales of warring countries, and global scale geopolitical competition. Scale also comes into play when considering the city of Dubai, which has been a sanctuary for Russian oligarchs and their yachts and jets. The city has also been a source of frustration for U.S.

officials involved in the effort to sanction Russia, who have accused the United Arab Emirates of enabling Russian efforts to acquire weaponry and evade sanctions. The disconnect between the United States and the Emirates on how to address Russia can be attributed to their respective [geopolitical codes](#). Geopolitical codes are a calculation of how allies, enemies and threats inform how a country positions itself in the global neighborhood. The Emirates has kept an ambiguous position on Russia, maintaining diplomatic relations and acting as a safe haven for Russian assets, while simultaneously offering aid to Ukraine. This complicates the U.S.'s ability to enforce sanctions against Russia. Madame Gu is one piece of the ongoing diplomatic struggle between the U.S. and the Emirate's geopolitical codes.

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