United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

OBTAINED BY AMERICA FIRST LEGAL FOUNDATION

October 31, 2024

Case No. FL-2023-00013

Reed Rubinstein
America First Legal Foundation
611 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, #231
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Mr. Rubinstein:

As we noted in our letter dated September 30, 2024, we are processing your request for material under the Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"), 5 U.S.C. § 552. The Department of State ("Department") has identified 19 additional responsive record subject to the FOIA. Upon review, we have determined that 4 records may be released in part and 15 records may be released in full.

An enclosure explains the FOIA exemptions and other grounds for withholding material. Where we have made redactions, the applicable FOIA exemptions are marked on each record. Where applicable, the Department has considered the foreseeable harm standard when reviewing these records and applying FOIA exemptions. All non-exempt material that is reasonably segregable from the exempt material has been released and is enclosed.

We will keep you informed as your case progresses. If you have any questions, your attorney may contact Kevin Bell, U.S. Department of Justice Trial Attorney, at kevin.k.bell@usdoj.gov and (202) 305-8613. Please refer to the case number, FL-2023-00013, and the civil action number, 22-cv-03386, in all correspondence about this case.

Sincerely,

Avery Bullard

Avery Bullard
Section Chief
Office of Litigation and Appeals

Enclosures: As stated.

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The Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552)

FOIA Exemptions

(b)(1) Information specifically authorized by an executive order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy. Executive Order 13526 includes the following classification categories:

1.4(a) Military plans, systems, or operations
1.4(b) Foreign government information
1.4(c) Intelligence activities, sources or methods, or cryptology
1.4(d) Foreign relations or foreign activities of the US, including confidential sources
1.4(e) Scientific, technological, or economic matters relating to national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
1.4(f) U.S. Government programs for safeguarding nuclear materials or facilities
1.4(g) Vulnerabilities or capabilities of systems, installations, infrastructures, projects, plans, or protection services relating to US national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
1.4(h) Weapons of mass destruction

(b)(2) Related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency

(b)(3) Specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than 5 USC 552), for example:

ARMSEXP	Arms Export Control Act, 50a USC 2411(c)
CIA PERS/ORG	Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 USC 403(g)
EXPORT CONTROL	Export Administration Act of 1979, 50 USC App. Sec. 2411(c)
FS ACT	Foreign Service Act of 1980, 22 USC 4004
INA	Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 USC 1202(f), Sec. 222(f)
IRAN	Iran Claims Settlement Act, Public Law 99-99, Sec. 505

(b)(4) Trade secrets and confidential commercial or financial information

(b)(5) Interagency or intra-agency communications forming part of the deliberative process, attorney-client privilege, or attorney work product

(b)(6) Personal privacy information

(b)(7) Law enforcement information whose disclosure would:
(A) interfere with enforcement proceedings
(B) deprive a person of a fair trial
(C) constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
(D) disclose confidential sources
(E) disclose investigation techniques
(F) endanger life or physical safety of an individual

(b)(8) Prepared by or for a government agency regulating or supervising financial institutions

(b)(9) Geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells

Other Grounds for Withholding

NR Material not responsive to a FOIA request excised with the agreement of the requester

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GEC-RUS Snapshot Narrative Tracker

1/26/23 #106

"HIDING HIMARS BEHIND NUCLEAR REACTORS" DISINFO: Russian state media and pro-Kremlin Telegram channels are amplifying false claims Ukraine is storing Western-supplied weapons within its nuclear power plant (NPP) compounds. On January 23, Sergei Naryshkin, the head of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), accused the Armed Forces of Ukraine of stockpiling "most valuable" weapons systems — specifically HIMARS, ammunition for air defense systems, and large caliber artillery shells — behind nuclear reactors. He alleged several wagons of ammunition arrived over rail at the Rivne NPP in late 2022. "The calculation is based on the fact that the Russian Armed Forces, understanding the dangers of a nuclear catastrophe, will not strike the territories of the NPPs," Naryshkin said. He went on to accuse Kyiv of international terrorism and "holding hostage tens and even hundreds of thousands civilians in its own nation and neighboring states." Naryshkin also alleged "if a large detonation of weapons stockpile and destruction of NPP occurs due to a 'lost' Ukrainian air defense missile, Moscow will be accused of bearing the blame for the tragedy." IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi debunked these false claims on January 24, saying the agency established a permanent presence at all Ukrainian nuclear power plants and its inspection of nuclear facilities found no military equipment.

RUSSIA COLLECTING MORE "EVIDENCE" OF "U.S. BIOLABS": Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov claimed the West "politicized" the reaction to "data" that Moscow has provided on "U.S. biolabs." In December 2022, on the sidelines of the Ninth Review Conference of the Convention on the Prohibition of Biological and Toxin Weapons (RevCon), the Russian MOD presented "evidence" of Kyiv and Washington working with biological weapons components. "Unfortunately, the response is negative, politicized. People simply refuse to accept obvious things," Ryabkov said. Additionally, the Russian Duma commission investigating the "biolabs" is preparing to release their report in March 2023. State Duma Member Yarovaya called on foreign parliaments to investigate Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) reports about the labs, which, in reality, are civilian defensive biological threat reduction laboratories. Senator Kosachev added that an earlier Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) resolution condemned development of biological weapons, noting that labs are in CSTO countries.

Wagner & Cyber Front Z Co-Host Event

The Wagner Group's Serbia project, Orly (Eagles), co-hosted an event with pro-Kremlin disinformation operation outfit Cyber Front Z. The four-hour long January 22 event, entitled "Serbia: A New Front for Settling Scores with Russia," featured Orly head Aleksandr Lysov and guest speaker Irina Ustinova. The event, per Cyber Front Z, aimed to "talk about the latest developments in the Balkans and the growing tensions around Kosovo." This collaboration is especially troubling given the malign nature of both entities. Headquartered in St. Petersburg, Cyber Front Z calls itself a "people's movement" working to defend Russia. In its rapidly growing Telegram channel, launched on March 11, 2022, the group claims it is working to combat the "flood of fake news and disinformation" coming from Ukraine, the U.S., and Western Europe about the "special military operation." This outfit reportedly has links to U.S.-sanctioned Yevgeniy Prigozhin and is housed at the Wagner Center. The Wagner Group, financed by Prigozhin, is facing new U.S. sanctions as of January 26 for its actions in Ukraine and several African countries.

"Special Military Operation" Coming to Theaters Near You

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Kremlin-funded propaganda outlet RT announced on January 24th it will mark the one-year anniversary of Russia's war on Ukraine with an international documentary film festival dedicated to the "heroes of the special military operation." Titled "aRTel.doc: Time of Heroes," the festival will feature 25 films, roundtable discussions, and "pitch" sessions for inspiring filmmakers. The films will cover five categories of "heroes": soldiers, poets and musicians, people of Donbas, volunteers and doctors, and war correspondents. In addition to celebrating state war propagandists, the films will praise foreign "journalists" who promote Kremlin-aligned disinformation about Russia's war in Ukraine. For example, a film titled "Donbas. That's Why I am Here..." will laude the work of "journalists" from Germany, Finland, Italy, the UK and other nations for reporting from Donbas "despite the threat of criminal persecutions" in their home countries. The festival's partners included state news agency RIA Novosti and RT's foreign state propaganda twin Sputnik.

1/24/23 #105

LAVROV SPREADS DISINFO ON UKRAINE IN SOUTH AFRICA: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov launched his Africa tour with disinformation and propaganda-ridden remarks at the January 24 meeting with Naledi Pandor, his South African counterpart. Lavrov tried to absolve Russia of any responsibility for the war in Ukraine, arguing the West created a situation of an "almost real" war with Russia, which it allegedly "has been preparing for a long time." Falsely claiming the war is "aimed at saving civilians," he also asserted Moscow has consistently sought a diplomatic solution to the conflict, while the West insisted on Ukraine's victory. Lavrov said Western sanctions against Russia and the PRC were "elements of a neo-colonial policy" and thanked South Africa for an "independent and balanced position" on the topic, despite "attempts" by the "collective West to draw African states into their anti-Russia policy." The Russian government's paper of record *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* also framed Lavrov's visit as a West vs. Russia "battle for Africa." A few days before Lavrov began his trip, Russia resumed disinformation about global food insecurity, claiming the United Nations "distorts the facts" about the implementation of the Black Sea grain export initiative.

WAR PRIESTS TO THE FRONT: Head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, called on priests and parishioners to join the war effort physically and spiritually. Addressing priests during a festive meal this past weekend, Kirill called on the clerics "to mobilize our parishioners to collect clothing and food. Look for opportunities, collect money, send parcels, *if possible, go yourself*, support the servicemen." In the same speech, Kirill compared the current war to the Great Patriotic War (WWII) and the War of 1812, saying that "the entire Western world has turned against Russia." He further extolled Russia as a country "which rejects the worst manifestations of globalization" and "has become a beacon for the world" and "people [who] see Russia as a country that exemplifies loyalty to traditional values." Kirill's call of the ordained and faithful to participate in the war follows remarks from the Church's media head earlier in January, when it was announced that there was a shortage of military chaplains in the warzone. The Patriarch has been far from quiet on Russia's war efforts, previously saying that Russia's "struggle is not against flesh and blood," but against the "world rulers of darkness" and the "spirits of evil."

Au Revoir, RT En Français

Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem reacted with accusations of censorship to the freeze of bank accounts belonging to RT France, also known as RT en Français. In January 2022, GEC publicly exposed RT as a purveyor of Kremlin disinformation, and in March, the EU banned RT for its links to the Kremlin. Yet, RT

OBTAINED BY WIKILEAKS FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

France continued to produce content for broadcasts in Francophone African nations and online. Following the December 2022 round of EU sanctions, French authorities froze the outlet's finances, leading to the looming shutdown of its Paris-based operations. In a January 21 Telegram post, the outlet's chief editor Xenia Fedorova called the move "the latest attempt to silence alternative viewpoints," condemning "blatant censorship and silent consent from the mainstream French media." Kremlin propagandist Margarita Simonyan echoed the claims in a sarcastic tweet: "So much for the Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité." Similarly, in Telegram post, the Russian MFA quoted spokesperson Maria Zakharova's vow to retaliate: "You reap what you sow." On her personal Telegram account, Zakharova further suggested Élysée Palace should worry about "bakers' protests against high energy tariffs" instead. Russia's state-affiliated media amplified these claims. With its fate unknown, RT France could join the South Africa-based RT bureau to target both Anglophone and Francophone audiences across Africa.

Exploiting the Memory of World War II

Russia appears to be escalating disinformation portraying its perceived adversaries as supporters of Nazism. Addressing World War II veterans to mark the 80th anniversary of the breaking of the siege of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) on January 18, President Putin accused "many countries, including in the former Soviet republics" of "glorifying Nazism." Putin specifically targeted Latvia claiming, "they hold annual SS marches there, openly, protected by the local law enforcement agencies… under the pretext…that they allegedly fought for national independence." Kremlin propagandist Vladimir Solovyov said Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine refer to all their enemies — whether German, Ukrainian, Polish or American — as the "Germans." Commenting on the potential delivery of German tanks to Ukraine, the chief editor of RT Margarita Simonyan implied Germany's current government was Nazi, urging Berlin not to "paint over" the Balkenkreuz (the straight-armed cross that became the symbol of the Nazi military) allegedly displayed on the tanks.

1/19/23 #104

LAVROV WEAPONIZES ANTISEMITISM, AGAIN: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov again resorted to antisemitism to spread propaganda and disinformation about Moscow's war in Ukraine. In his January 18 press conference "on the performance of Russian diplomacy in 2022," Lavrov engaged in Holocaust distortion, falsely equating Western support for Ukraine's fight against the Kremlin's aggression to the extermination of Jews by the Nazis during World War II. Lavrov said, "Like Napoleon, who mobilized nearly all of Europe against the Russian Empire, and Hitler, who occupied the majority of European countries and hurled them at the Soviet Union, the United States has created a coalition of nearly all European member states of NATO and the EU and is using Ukraine to wage a proxy war against Russia with the old aim of finally solving the 'Russian question,' like Hitler, who sought a final solution to the 'Jewish question.'" Israel, the European Jewish Congress (EJC), Yad Vashem-The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, and others condemned Lavrov's remarks. Russia's Foreign Ministry dismissed the EJC's statement with typical "whataboutism" about alleged antisemitism in Ukraine.

DISINFORMATION TARGETING UKRAINE'S LEADERS: Kremlin-aligned propagandists are disseminating false narratives aimed at discrediting and sowing discord among Ukraine's leaders. State television host and Kremlin propagandist Vladimir Solovyov implied Ukraine's government was responsible for the January 18 helicopter crash in the town of Brovary that killed at least 14 people, including several top officials from Ukraine's interior ministry. Solovyov alleged the Ukrainian government had purchased unsafe helicopters from France to save money. Solovyov also claimed the crash could have been a "special operation" of Ukraine's

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military intelligence to settle a supposed conflict between Kyrylo Budanov, the military intelligence chief, and Denis Monastyrsky, the Interior Minister killed in the accident, over control of illegal weapons market. Similarly, on January 16, pro-Kremlin media amplified disinformation spread by Ilya Kiva, an expelled Ukrainian MP and a supporter of Russia's war against Ukraine. Kiva wrote that President Zelenskyy is planning to "liquidate" the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, supposedly because of the latter's growing popularity and authority among Ukraine's population.

Wagner Looks for Recruits in Serbia, Vučić Displeased

The "PMC Wagner Center" in St. Petersburg recently welcomed a "new resident" group, the "Russian-Serbian Cultural and Information Center for Friendship and Cooperation 'Eagles'" reportedly with the help of Russian state media outlet RT. The Center offers free accommodation for any "project" aiding in Russia's "defense capability … including in the information sphere." The new project is reportedly designed to both recruit volunteers to fight in Ukraine and conduct "information war" against anti-war Russian expatriates in the Balkan country. Commenting on the development in an interview, President Vučić denied there were Wagner entities in Serbia and denounced the recruitment of Serbs to fight in foreign wars as illegal. Vučić was also critical of efforts to recruit Serbs into the Wagner Group using Serbian language online websites and social media ads. Meanwhile, head of the Just Russia - For Truth party in Russia called for the formal legalization of Wagner as a reward for aiding the Russian Armed Forces in allegedly capturing Soledar, a capture disputed by Ukraine.

Wagner Serves "Anti-Colonialist" Promos With a Side of Racism

Russia continues to promote itself as the leader of "anti-colonialist" movement in Africa against the backdrop of its colonialist war against Ukraine. The Kremlin-backed PMC Wagner Group, financed by the U.S.-sanctioned Yevgeniy Prigozhin, is disseminating propaganda videos portraying its mercenaries as saviors coming to the aid of African soldiers fighting against "France's colonialism" in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Cote D'Ivoire. Yet, Wagner not only extracts natural resources and threatens stability as the GEC has previously exposed, but also exploits Africans living in Russia for its own benefit. Zambian national Lemekani Nathan Nyirenda and most recently a Tanzanian national, Tarimo Nemes Raymond, were both reportedly recruited by Wagner from prisons in Russia and died while fighting in Ukraine. Wagner's recent propaganda video even features the groups' misadventures in Africa set to a song with rather racist lyrics by Russian rock musician Konstantin Stupin, underscoring rampant white supremacy among Wagner's leadership and fighters.

1/17/23 #103

KREMLIN CONTINUES TO STRIKE CIVILIANS, THEN LIE: Ukraine and the West accused Russia of killing at least 40 people in a Kh-22 missile attack on a residential building in Dnipro on January 14. The Kremlin is again denying it is striking civilian targets in Ukraine. However, Kremlin spokesman Peskov said, Russia has "not been delivering strikes on residential buildings or social infrastructure facilities. Military targets - both evident and obscure - have been attacked." The latter part of this statement reflects a broader trend of Russian officials and propagandists alleging civilian housing and infrastructure are covertly housing military personnel and equipment and are therefore valid military targets. In his reasoning, Peskov cited Ukrainian Presidential Aide Oleksii Arestovych, who claimed a Ukrainian interception of the Kh-22 caused the Russian missile to fall on the residential building. Ukraine denied this claim, stating it does not have the means to shoot down Kh-

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22s. On January 17, Arestovych resigned from his post, stating he made a "fundamental mistake." Unfortunately, Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem had already capitalized on his claim.

EU AND NATO AS U.S. "VASSALS," EU AS NATO "VASSAL": Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is disseminating false claims aiming to discredit the Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation signed on January 10, and to create fissures in transatlantic unity on the war in Ukraine. Pro-Kremlin media amplified Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zakharova's comments saying the declaration "reaffirmed the EU's full subordination to the bloc [NATO], which is a military instrument being used to ensure U.S. interests." State news agencies TASS and RIA Novosti highlighted Zakharova's statements about the United States' alleged motives to "pull the EU into the 'geostrategic competition'…so that Europe will play the role of America's vassal, rapidly ceding its political and economic positions and hence becoming increasingly more dependent" on Washington. Labeling anybody who opposes Moscow's war in Ukraine a U.S. "vassal" is a long-standing practice of the Kremlin. President Putin recently said the U.S. and its "vassals grossly interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign states by staging provocations, organizing coups, or inciting civil wars."

Turncoat Medvedchuk Reestablishes Self as Kremlin Mouthpiece

Disgraced former Ukrainian member of parliament and Putin ally Viktor Medvedchuk published an article in Russia's pro-Kremlin *Izvestiya* – his first major public statement since his April 2022 arrest by Ukraine's SBU and subsequent September 2022 swap with Russia as part of a prisoner exchange. In the article, Medvedchuk blamed the United States for the origins of the war in Ukraine and described Washington's behavior following the Cold War as disingenuous. Medvedchuk asserted, instead of trying to build a better world with former Eastern bloc countries included, the United States tried to turn these countries into colonies by inciting ethnic conflicts. The allegedly newly minted Russian citizen then "quoted" President Bill Clinton as having said, "Using the blunders of Soviet diplomacy, the extreme arrogance of Gorbachev and his entourage, including those who openly took a pro-American position, we achieved what President Truman was going to do to the Soviet Union with the atomic bomb." There is no evidence outside of the Russian information environment of Clinton making these statements leading *The Insider*'s Antifake series to conclude the quote is a fabrication. In January 2023, Medvedchuk was stripped of his position as a People's Deputy in the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada and of his Ukrainian citizenship.

Disinformation Surrounding Alleged OSCE Vehicles in Donbas

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) announced on January 16 that it is "not present in Donbas," likely to counter a potential Russian disinformation campaign. Pro-Kremlin propagandist Aleksandr Kots published on January 15 a video titled "Is OSCE Returning to Donbas?" The video appears to show vehicles with OSCE markings being moved through a checkpoint towards what Kots claimed was the town of Luhansk. The OSCE said "any vehicles with OSCE markings in Donbas" are "not used for OSCE purposes." Pro-Kremlin Telegram channels speculated Russia confiscated the vehicles to use them for its own purposes at the front. Reporting on the video, pro-Kremlin media repeated false claims attacking the OSCE as spies. Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said he was concerned Russia could carry out a "provocation" using the vehicles. Russia has a history of conducting false flag operations including during the ongoing war against Ukraine.

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GEC-RUS Snapshot Narrative Tracker

1/12/23 #102

CLAIMS SURROUNDING THE CAPTURE OF SOLEDAR: Yevgeniy Prigozhin, pro-Kremlin oligarch and financier of the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group, announced on January 11 the "full liberation" of the Ukrainian town of Soledar. Prigozhin stressed the storming of Soleder was conducted solely by Wagner. Pro-Kremlin pundits largely joined in the celebratory chorus, but the Russian MOD contradicted Prigozhin's claims. The MOD said in a January 11 briefing that its troops were attacking, "storming," and "blockading" the town. They did not mention the alleged "liberation" of Soledar in its January 12 briefing. The apparent rift between Prigozhin and the MOD is echoed by the replacement of General Surovikin as head of the "special military operation" with General Gerasimov, Chief of General Staff, and the reported appointment of General Lapin to lead Russian Ground Forces. According to the Institute for the Study of War, Surovikin is a "favorite of Prigozhin and the siloviki (strongmen) faction." Meduza highlights Prigozhin's and the Head of Chechnya Kadyrov's past criticism of Lapin as "incompetent." Ukraine's military has denied Russia captured Soledar, while the UK Ministry of Defense said "heavy fighting" there continues as of January 12.

"U.S. IS FUELING THE CONFLICT" DISINFORMATION: The Kremlin is continuing to cast U.S. security assistance to Ukraine as aggression fueling the conflict. In a January 6 interview, Russia's Ambassador to the United States Antonov called the U.S. intentions to provide Bradley infantry fighting vehicles to Ukraine as "encouraging Ukrainian radicals to commit new horrible acts." He said, "with every delivery, [Ukrainians] feel impunity" to "cynically continue killing peaceful civilians" in Donbas, Zaporizhzhya, and Kherson regions "of the Russian Federation." Antonov further claimed the United States started "a real proxy war with Russia in 2014" by supporting "Nazi criminals in Kyiv," alleging the 2014-2015 Minsk Agreements aimed to "give Kyiv time to build its military capability" and "weaken Russia." He closed by claiming Washington does not care about Ukraine and intends "to fight [Russia] till the last Ukrainian." Antonov continued this narrative on January 10, saying U.S. intentions to train Ukrainians in Oklahoma on Patriot missiles use is "confirmation of U.S. de-facto participation in the Ukrainian conflict on the side of Nazi criminals in Kyiv." Russian state media widely amplified Antonov's comments.

Patriarch Kirill Preaches from the Political Pulpit Again

Following his liturgy in Moscow on Sunday, January 8, Patriarch Kirill called Russia's struggle for moral principles "a struggle for the future of all mankind" and expressed his hope for an early end to church schisms in Ukraine. Per Kirill, "Ukrainian dissenters" and "dressed-up bishops" will soon be punished, since the current regime in Kyiv will not be in power for much longer. The head of the Russian Orthodox Church expressed his confidence in this inevitability, while simultaneously stressing the Russian Church stands together with the Ukrainian people, who are both martyrs and true believers of the faith. The Patriarch called Ukrainians and Russians "one people" who sprung from the "Kyiv baptismal font." He suggested the contradictions between the representatives of "one nation" were caused by "external forces" who were envious of the "one [Orthodox] people." Archpriest Andrei Tkachev added to this sentiment, expressing "the whole world" rests on the "shoulders of Russian soldiers." Previously, Kirill preached Russia's "struggle is not against flesh and blood," but against the "world rulers of darkness" and the "spirits of evil." This rhetoric follows the Russian government's recent propaganda efforts to portray the "special military operation" as a holy war against Satanism.

Russian Disinformation at International Gatherings

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Moscow's participation in the 13th Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) in Turkey on January 9 is another example of the Russian government using its seat in multilateral organizations as a platform for spreading disinformation and propaganda. The head of the Russian delegation and Deputy Speaker of the Russian State Duma Sergei Neverov disseminated false claims about the Kremlin's war in Ukraine, including allegations about the "Nazi regime in Kyiv" committing "terrorist acts" against civilians, and about the United States trying to "contain other countries." Neverov also falsely accused the United States of developing biological weapons in Ukraine and violating the Chemical Weapons Convention. Russia appears to increasingly target Asia with the "U.S. military biolabs" narrative. For example, the Russian Ministry of Defense's spokesperson recently claimed the United States is "transferring" Ukrainian "bioweapons" projects to Cambodia, Singapore, and Thailand.

1/10/23 #101

"WE ARE NOT AT WAR WITH UKRAINE," PATRUSHEV: Pro-Kremlin media are amplifying Secretary of Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev's disinformation-filled January 9th interview with Russian media outlet Argumenti I Fakti. Patrushev falsely blamed the West for the Kremlin's war in Ukraine, repeating standard Kremlin talking points about alleged Western intentions to divide Russia, destroy the Russian language, and cancel the "Russian world." According to RT and other media, Patrushev said Russia was fighting not with Ukraine, but with NATO, describing the war as Moscow's response to the alleged U.S. plot to "hone the technologies of separating and pitting [parts of] one nation against each other," implying Russia and Ukraine are one nation. He further claimed "many Ukrainians understand" the West is using them against Russia and that the United States might "use Ukrainian Nazis" for future coups and "sabotage operations in other countries." Patrushev attempted to substantiate his assertions accusing the United States and Ukraine of planning an attack on Russia by saying Washington withdrew from Afghanistan to "focus" on Ukraine.

DUELING STRIKES, DUELING CASUALTY CLAIMS: Russia claims it killed 600 Ukrainian servicemen in a "retaliatory operation" against the city of Kramatorsk in the northern part of Donetsk Oblast on January 8. The strike, Russia says, was in response to a Ukrainian strike against a military hostel in Makiivka, Donetsk on New Year's Eve that Ukraine said killed 400 Russian troops. Russia's Ministry of Defense announced the military death toll in Makiivka to be 89, confirming a successful Ukrainian strike had occurred despite the disputed casualty number. However, in the case of the Russian strike on Kramatorsk, the Ukrainian government and international media outlets dispute Russia's claim it killed 600 Ukrainian servicemen. According to the mayor of Kramatorsk, several residential buildings and two educational institutions were damaged and there were no civilian casualties. A CNN team on the ground in Kramatorsk reported "no indication of any massive casualties in the area ... nor any unusual activity including in the vicinity of the city morgue," and a Finnish journalist on the scene reported similar observations. Even Russian military bloggers had their doubts, with one pro-Kremlin channel stating the strike was a "media retaliatory operation" instead of "the real destruction of enemy personnel."

Russia & PRC Propaganda Agreement Uncovered + Biolab Bonanza

A recently uncovered propaganda agreement between Russia and the PRC signed in July 2021 sheds light on the two powers' false narrative convergence on biolabs in Ukraine. The lengthy agreement, available here (click link at own risk), was led by Russia's Ministry of Digital Development, Communication and

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Mass Media, and by PRC's National Radio and Television Administration. The two sides pledged to "further cooperate in the field of information exchange, promoting objective, comprehensive and accurate coverage of the most important world events." The bilateral agreement lists 64 joint media projects that had either been launched or were in development at the time of signing. TASS and Xinhua pledged to exchange reporting, and other state outlets agreed to publish supplements promoting the other country. Hacked emails between Russian and PRC state media officials show the level of coordination between the two players. Russia may have scored its payoff from the agreement following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, when PRC state media frequently echoed Kremlin talking points. Moreover, the PRC has repeatedly amplified Russia's "U.S. biolabs" conspiracy theories and disinformation claims pertaining to Ukraine in the last year.

U.S. Embassy Moscow Video Countering Disinfo Triggers Kremlin Wrath

The Kremlin's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem went into vitriolic overdrive in response to U.S. Embassy Moscow's January 4 video appeal to the Russian people. The video countered the Kremlin's disinformation about Russophobia in the West, highlighted past cooperation between Washington and Moscow and broad appreciation for Russian culture, and ended with a message of solidarity for Russians who seek peace. Deputy Chairman of the Security Council Medvedev responded with on Telegram, calling the U.S. officials "first-rate freaks" spreading "stillborn nonsense" with "limitless cynicism" as they are "the heirs of Goebbels," and threatening to put hypersonic missiles "100 miles off the Potomac." State Duma officials similarly called the video "Nazi propaganda" and interference in Russia's internal affairs. State media and pro-Kremlin Telegram channels echoed these sentiments, with their commentary inadvertently amplifying the video to a wider Russian audience. Five days since its launch, the video garnered 145K views on Telegram and 839K views on Twitter.

1/5/23 #100

THE T5AR'S 5PEECH: President Putin focused his 2022 New Year's Eve address to the nation on Russia's "special military operation," painting it as an existential struggle to secure Russia's "sovereignty" and "true independence." Flanked by Russian Armed Forces personnel in a departure from his traditional Kremlin backdrop, he recycled disinformation narratives about the hypocrisy of the West. Putin claimed "Western elites" pretended to help resolve "the conflict in Donbas" and "encouraged neo-Nazis" to continue "terrorist action against peaceful civilians." He then accused the West of "lying about peace while preparing for aggression" and "cynically using Ukraine as a means to weaken and divide Russia." He further alleged the West unleashed "a full-blown sanctions war," but Russia prevailed. Finally, he claimed this "struggle" serves as an example for other nations in their "quest for a just multipolar world order." Beyond the familiar motifs, Putin appealed to Russians' patriotism, stating that defending the Motherland is a "sacred duty" and that "moral and historical truth" is on their side. In denial of the evidence of atrocities committed by Russian troops in Ukraine, he called 2022 the year when "mercy, solidarity, and empathy became important in Russia."

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Putin's speech struck a grim tone in comparison to the cynicism of his upbeat 2021 New Year's Eve address, which he gave while amid planning a war.

SOWING DISCORD BETWEEN UKRAINE AND NEIGHBORS: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem engaged in another round of malign messaging to paint Ukraine as oppressive towards its ethnic Hungarian minority to the dismay of its neighbor, Hungary. On December 18, the allegedly Hungary-based, conspiracy-oriented YouTube channel PestiTV PROMO published a "documentary," alleging Ukraine is committing human rights violations, linguistic genocide, and ethnic cleansing against ethnic Hungarians of Transcarpathia. Pro-Kremlin Telegram channels amplified the video. The FSB-tasked News Front and pro-Kremlin Telegram channels further claimed an allegedly ethnic Hungarian brigade within the Ukrainian Armed Forces was "sent to slaughter" in order to "eliminate possible active participants in the region's separatism from Ukraine." Deputy Chairman of the Security Council Medvedev and pro-Kremlin "journalist" Gasparyan expanded the claims to include false narratives alleging Poland, Romania, and Hungary are all aiming to seize parts of Ukraine.

The Kremlin's Disinformation Guide Summing Up 2022

Since Russia's February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin has regularly provided written instructions (metodichka in Russian) to state-controlled media on how to cover President Putin's war. Meduza said it obtained a metodichka explaining how the Kremlin's propagandists should summarize 2022. The handbook "advises" the propagandists to spread disinformation that Putin's war "prevented an impending NATO attack" on Russia, that the alleged "denazification of Ukraine" has been successful, that the Russian economy is starting to boom, and that Western support of Ukraine is declining. The guide features four sections. The "main themes" section recommends promoting the Kremlin's persistent disinformation narrative that the war was necessary to stop a Western attack on Russia aimed to "divide and conquer the Russian people." The "Special Military Operation" (SVO) section lists "the protection of millions of Russian people, the return of Russian lands, and the strengthening of national security" as the supposed successes of the war. The "strengthening Russia" section says the war "united" Russia's society as evidenced by an allegedly "unconditional support for the SVO." The "New World Order" section claims the war turned Russia into a "leader of countries" that "do not recognize Western exceptionalism" and a "leader of a just, democratic, and multipolar world."

Putin Orders Production and Screenings of "Patriotic" Documentaries

The Kremlin continues tasking the Russian government and state-affiliated institutions to conduct disinformation and propaganda campaigns about the war in Ukraine. Following his November 25 meeting with a group of mothers of Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine – apparently handpicked for their pro-Kremlin views – President Putin ordered the Russian Ministry of Defense and the Families of the Warriors of the Fatherland Committee to support the production of propaganda documentary films. The Committee is a non-profit organization that will reportedly be sponsored by the Kremlin. The documentary films will highlight the supposed "heroism," "valor," and "courage" of the participants in the "special military operation." Putin also ordered the Russian Ministry of Culture to organize the screening of documentaries depicting Russia's "struggle against the spread of Neo-Nazi and Neo-fascist ideologies" and other "patriotic" endeavors in theaters across the country.

12/23/22 (Limited-distro mini-snapshot edition on reaction to President Zelenskyy visit to Washington)

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GEC-RUS Snapshot Narrative Tracker

Kremlin officials responded to President Zelenskyy's December 21 surprise visit to Washington, D.C., by accusing both Ukraine and "the West" of showing no signs of wanting peace. MFA spokesperson Zakharova offered characteristically undiplomatic commentary, referring to President Zelenskyy in profane terms. Separately, President Putin took a few questions from the media following a State Council meeting to discuss "end-of-year results," in place of his usual annual press conference and public call-in show. Putin commented that U.S. support for Ukraine will "only prolong the conflict" and claimed that Russia wants "to end the conflict." Some media analysts have claimed that Putin used the word "war" in his press conference, instead of the mandatory "special military operation" term, but when the quotation is in its full context, it appears that Putin was likely referring to "Ukrainian civil war," and not the current Russian war against Ukraine.

Relevant Excerpts from President Putin's Press-Conference: While taking questions from the media, Putin answered a question about whether a "special military operation" has stalled. He reiterated a persistent Kremlin disinformation narrative about the "ongoing Ukrainian conflict since 2014" (implying that it is actually a civil war, and not a Russian invasion) and claimed that Russia's "goal is not to whip up the military conflict, but to end this war."

- **On the U.S. role in the current situation in Ukraine**: Putin said, "Washington has long been involved in the processes in the post-Soviet space, has long sought to divide the Russian world." As to resolving the situation in Ukraine, Putin said that since 2014, Russia was simply "led by the nose [made a fool of]" and, to a certain extent, they had achieved their goal when they divided, disunited and pitted the citizens of Ukrainian regions against one another]. However, Putin admitted, "It is here where Moscow has failed; No one [else] wants the unification of the Russian people... No one wants unification and strengthening, except us. But we are doing it and we will do it;"
- **On the possibility of protracting the conflict**: Putin claimed that Russia does not seek to spin the "flywheel of the conflict" in Ukraine, but "to end the war that began there in 2014. The sooner the conflict ends, the better." He said that the situation actually started developing less perceptibly, "the West preferred not to speak or notice anything" way back in 2014, after the Kyiv "coup d'état that was instigated by the United States, when cookies were handed out on Maidan (referring to Undersecretary Victoria Nuland's visit there)." Putin added, "I have spoken about this many times. But our goal is not to whip up the military conflict, but to end this war. This is what we want, and this is what we will try to do." [*Analyst note: Some sources have reparted that this quotation was the first time Russian President Putin called the "Special Military Operation" a war, While it is clear that Putin used the Russian ward for "war," he was likely using it to reinforce the Kremlin disinformation narrative of a Ukrainian civil war, "or "grazhdanskaya voina," and not Russia's current invasion.*

President Zelenskyy Visit

- Kremlin warns of a 'long' war after Biden offers more support on Zelensky's visit to US - CNN reporting on Kremlin statements
- US Pro-War Media Coverage of Zelensky's Washington Trip Obsesses Over Military Aid - Sputnik (RU state media)
- Kremlin Spokesperson Peskov: In Moscow's eyes, "Neither President Biden nor President Zelensky uttered any words that could be construed as, so to speak, potential readiness to take heed of Russia's concerns."

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- Commenting on the peace plan that Zelenskyy's office is developing: "We are not aware of it. We have heard Zelensky's statements about various steps, a peace plan. But all that he has said until now did not take into account the reality on the ground, which one simply cannot ignore."
- "Washington seems intent on waging a proxy war against Russia using Ukraine as a tool."
- The Kremlin laments the fact that the US president failed to warn his Ukrainian colleague against shelling residential areas in Donbass. Peskov also said that "neither side called for peace."
- Further weapons deliveries from the US and other countries "will only serve to prolong the suffering of the Ukrainian people."

- Russian Ambassador Antonov: "Zelensky's visit to the American capital, the talks in Washington, showed that neither the administration nor Zelensky are ready for peace. Their focus is on war, on the death of ordinary soldiers, on further tying the Ukrainian regime to the needs of Washington."
  - Antonov's interview received widespread coverage in Russian media and was amplified by Iranian state media.
- MFA Spokesperson Zakharova: "The talks in Washington showed that neither Ukraine nor the United States seeks peace. They are simply determined to continue fighting."
  - And in typical Zakharova fashion: "Have you heard anything about negotiations, about any kind of communication with Russia? Of course not. Zelensky publicly spoke about our country in a boorish manner – he cannot in principle do otherwise; even his 'masters' do not dare to do that. They have made some attempts, remarks, but they have not sunk that low yet. Apparently, Zelensky has nothing to say, being rude is the only thing he can do."
  - Zakharova said of Zelenskyy *from the podium* that he is "not only a 'son of a bitch', but also their [the EU and U.S.] tool in countering our country."
  - On Zelensky's visit to Bakhmut before his visit to Washington, Zakharova stated, "the President of Ukraine went [to Bakhmut] on the same day to appear before American curators in the image of a '*fearless cowboy*' and to demand an increase in their already considerable military assistance."
  - On Zelenskyy's trip to the United States as "the return of an American saboteur." "The trip was fully paid for by Washington. Zelenskyy traveled across the ocean on an American government jet liner. It all looked like a trip of a saboteur, whom the United States threw into the territory of Ukraine - for some time he was taken out for ideological indoctrination – and then returned back."
- Russian media cited prominent U.S. figures that criticized those applauding Zelenskyy, who said that he was "begging for aid while the U.S. gets nothing in return." This narrative was heavily featured in overseas Russian media but is outside the GEC's mandate to pursue further.

On U.S. Patriot Missile Systems & Broader Lethal Aid

- President Putin: "Our adversaries proceed from the idea that this [Patriot] is supposedly a defensive weapon. Alright, we'll keep that in mind. And an antidote can always be found. We will crack Patriot missiles, too." Putin added that the Patriot deliveries will be "in vain," and would "just prolong the conflict, that's all."

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- Putin: "I think the resources of the United States and NATO countries are not yet at the state of exhaustion. The thing is, Ukraine is receiving weapons from the countries of the former Warsaw Pact, mostly Soviet-made [weapons], and these really are close to exhaustion. Of these deliveries, we have knocked out virtually everything."
- Debt From US Military 'Investment' Aid Will Make Ukraine 'Failed State' Controlled by West - Expert - according to Sputnik (Russian state media)

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12/21/22 (Wednesday edition) #99

WITH HANUKKAH COMES ANTISEMITISM: The Kremlin's propagandists resort to antisemitism to vilify Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. State-owned and pro-Kremlin media outlets and Telegram accounts are amplifying Russian state television host Vladimir Solovyov's remarks calling Zelenskyy a "demon." Solovyov also claimed Zelensky was not a "real Jew" because he "ordered" the bombing of a "children's hospital" on Channukah. Pro-Kremlin pundit Yevgeniy Satanovskiy wrote a Channukah-themed Telegram post describing Zelenskyy and his "support group" of Ukrainian Jews as a "pro-Nazi minyan." In Judaism, a minyan is the quorum of ten Jewish adults required for certain religious procedures. Both Solovyov and Satanovskiy are Jewish and have been using this fact to argue their attacks on other Jews cannot be considered antisemitic. Russia has a history of exploiting antisemitism for disinformation and propaganda purposes during its war against Ukraine, including delegitimizing Zelenskyy's Jewishness and portraying Jews as the most ardent Nazis.

MORE BIOWEAPONS DISINFO "GIFTS" FROM THE KREMLIN: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem continues to iterate on its persistent narrative alleging the United States engaged in military biological weapons (BW) activity in Ukraine. State-funded outlet RT and the FSB-tasked News Front amplified claims alleging U.S. Department of Defense sent research teams to Ukraine to gather anthrax samples from human patients. These claims further advance the false narrative that the United States used Ukraine as a research and testing ground for biological weapons. Per the SVR-directed New Eastern Outlook, Russian television channels have also been featuring scaremongering segments on "U.S. biolabs" and bioweapons in former Soviet countries, especially Ukraine and Georgia. SVR Director Naryshkin stated in a December 19 article he believed the West will "step up the development of the latest weapons systems and will accelerate research on the creation of biological, genetic and other weapons." As for the reality of the labs, the U.S. Cooperative Threat Reduction Program has helped partners fight COVID-19, dispose of chemical weapons in Syria and Libya, and reduce the threat of state and non-state actors acquiring or developing biological weapons.

"Russia is Here Forever" and Other Occupation Chronicles

Kremlin-installed "authorities" disseminated disinformation-filled Russian-language newspapers in Kherson and Mykolayiv regions while the areas were occupied by Moscow. Ukrainian media outlet NikVesti analyzed fifteen newspapers, including "Komsomolskaya Pravda," reportedly favored by Putin. According to their analysis, the "authorities" also founded new regional newspapers, such as "Our Kakhovka," and created a clone of the established regional outlet "Ridne Prybuzhzhya" to reinforce Kremlin's disinformation about the history of the region. The publications featured some of the Kremlin's most persistent historical disinformation narratives, such as claims that Russians and Ukrainians are one people connected by Christian Orthodox religion, and proof of "the Russian origins" of southern Ukraine. One outlet, "Naddnepryanskaya

Pravda," claiming to represent "independent journalism" with "responsibility to publish the truth," featured stories about "U.S. military biolabs" testing "deadly viruses" by using drones to airdrop tuberculosis-infected U.S. dollar bills over Luhansk.

Putin's Desire to Hear Out Russian Public Melts

Putin has cancelled his yearly New Year's Eve press conference for the first time in 10 years as Russia faces setbacks in its war against Ukraine. The highly choreographed, live television event has lasted for up to 4 1/2 hours in the past, and typically features Putin talking about a wide range of domestic and foreign policy issues. The show is one of Putin's primary opportunities to recap the Russian government's perceived successes from the last year and engage with the Russian public. This also makes the event a "propaganda and disinformation year in review," as Putin frequently goes off script in his answers to show strength while endearing himself to the Russian people. However, amid losses on the battlefield, the mobilization of 300,000 Russian men, and a reported decline in public support for the war, the UK Defense Ministry has speculated the Kremlin fears the event could be "hijacked by unsanctioned discussions about the 'special military operation.'"

12/15/22

U.S.-AFRICA SUMMIT NARRATIVES: During the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, Russia amplified disinformation about U.S. intentions in Africa and propaganda about disagreements on paths to end Russia's war in Ukraine. Some pro-Kremlin outlets claimed the recently announced U.S. strategy towards Africa aims to "exploit critical minerals" and "strategic maritime areas for deployment of fleet," while "using Africa as a pawn in the competition between the United States, China, Russia, and other major powers." Others claimed the goal of the Summit is to "force Africa to fear Russia." A Russian show "60 минут" claimed the United States "lured African states with the sweetest promises of a free trade zone and investments in return for their support of anti-Russian sanctions." On the eve of the Summit, President Putin ordered the Russian Ministry of Science and Higher Education to organize a research study about "the history of the origins, development, and consequences of European colonialism on the African and other continents," an apparent attempt to deflect attention from the colonialist nature of Russia's war on Ukraine [discussed on the right side.] In their coverage of the Summit, Russian state-sponsored media outlets and pro-Kremlin proxies seized on specific portions of a U.S. media report about the Summit to mislead readers, boost Kremlin propaganda, and amplify the narrative African leaders disagree with "sanctioning and punishing Russia" as a path to end the war.

DR. STRANGEPUTIN – FIRST STRIKE THEORY: At a press conference in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, Russian President Putin speculated Russia may alter its nuclear doctrine as a result of the war in Ukraine. Putin said Russia may "adopt" the idea of a disarming first strike from the U.S. doctrine. According to Putin, Russia not only has "more modern and more effective" cruise missiles, but also hypersonic systems, which "do not yet exist in the States." Putin's bolstered his heightened aggressive rhetoric towards the West during a statement to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on December 9, claiming, "the potential for conflict in the world is growing, and this is a direct consequence of the attempts by some Western elites to maintain their political, economic, financial, military and ideological dominance by any means." Putin added the "annexation" of Ukraine's regions and turning the Sea of Azov into "an internal sea of the Russian Federation" are successes of his "special military operation."

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GEC Report: U.S. Weapons Diversion Reduction Plan Spun to Criticize U.S. Aid

A GEC report examined narratives on Twitter, VK, and Telegram in Russian, English, and Spanish languages surrounding an October announcement from the State Department on the U.S. Plan to Counter Illicit Diversion of Certain Advanced Conventional Weapons in Eastern Europe ("the plan"). Across all platforms and languages, the report found most posts criticized the plan and the U.S. provision of weapons to Ukraine. Few posts overtly applauded the effort, though many objectively reported on its release with neutral sentiment. Most criticism of the plan did not discuss its details but speculated about the circumstances of its publication or alleged the publication of the plan signals the Ukrainian government is exploiting U.S. support. Furthermore, many post overlooked the preexisting safeguards outlined in the plan, implying no controls were in place prior to its publication and portrayed the United States' actions as careless and unchecked. Across platforms and languages, social media conversations about the plan were highly critical, portraying the circumstances of its publication as suspicious and producing narratives attempting to undermine the plan's legitimacy and discredit U.S. military involvement in Ukraine. Please contact info@geciq.com for U.S. government access to the report and info@geciqglobal.com for those outside the U.S. government.

Batman Versus Ilya Murometz

As Russia continues waging war against Ukraine, the Kremlin is tasking the Russian government and state-affiliated institutions to conduct disinformation campaigns. President Putin ordered Russian state entities on December 11 to rebuild destroyed museums in the Russia-controlled territories of Ukraine, previously saying the museums must promote Russian traditions and history. He also ordered to "popularize Russian historical and folklore heroes" who represent "traditional values" in mass consumption products. Putin had emphasized the importance of merchandize in children's education, lamenting "Batman is famous, but our bogatyr [Russian folklore warrior hero] is not." Putin also mandated academic institutions to conduct "research studies" on the history of Western colonialism in Africa, a topic the Kremlin weaponizes to reduce Africa's support for Ukraine, in advance of the second Russia-Africa Summit. Separately, the Russian State Duma adopted a bill banning the use of foreign language words by state employees and introduced a prison term for desecrating the Ribbon of Saint George.

12/13/22

STIRRING THE POT IN KOSOVO: Russia appears to be using the reemerging conflict between Kosovo and Serbia to distract attention from the war in Ukraine. Serb protesters in northern Kosovo blocked main roads on December 11 following an exchange of fire with police after the arrest of a former Serb policeman amid rising tensions between authorities and Kosovo's Serb minority. The protests ignited just two days before Kosovo announced on December 13 it intended to formally apply for EU membership. Russian MFA spokesperson Zakharova claimed on her Telegram channel on December 11 that "this is exactly the situation that the European Union has essentially modeled for years." Serbian president Vučić said on December 11 Kosovo was "the brainchild" of the United States, while Russian Ambassador to Serbia Botsan-Kharchenko accused Kosovan authorities of aggravating the Serb minority, stating "Pristina's attitude towards the Serbs in Kosovo resembles...everything that happened and is happening in Ukraine." Pro-Kremlin Telegram channel "Druid" said tensions are a result of the "hybrid war between the West and Russia and the last Orthodox enclave in Europe standing for traditional values." Several Russian politicians and political scientists similarly offered pro-Kremlin commentary, with one comparing Kosovo to Ukraine and Taiwan.

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"SNAKES IN A PAN" IN A STIR-FRY OF LIES: Kremlin and its proxies continue to amplify disinformation narratives about "U.S. military biolabs" in Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov said on December 7 the United States was "wiggling like snakes on a frying pan" to "avoid discussing its military biolabs in Ukraine." Duma Speaker Volodin further claimed Russian "specialists confirmed U.S. bioweapons activity in Ukraine," as Russian MPs sent a letter to the parliaments of the world calling "this activity" a global threat. MFA official Gonchar said "Moscow is increasing cooperation on this issue with the countries in the post-Soviet space." U.S.-sanctioned proxy site Tsargrad further alleged "American military virologists" work all over the post-Soviet space to create a "belt of biolabs around Russia and China." Separately, Russian proxies in the so-called "LPR" renewed a persistent narrative, claiming "black market transplant surgeons" who "had worked in U.S. biolabs in Luhansk" arrived on the frontline in Artemivsk to harvest organs of dead Ukrainian soldiers to send to the West.

Viktor Bout: The Birth of a Propagandist

Viktor Bout, a convicted Russian arms dealer released on December 8, is poised to play a role in Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem. Bout gave his first interview to state-funded propaganda outlet RT, stating he fully supported Putin's "special military operation" in Ukraine and recommended it should have started in 2014. "If I could, I would share the skills I have and I would readily volunteer," he added. Bout's interviewer was State Duma Deputy Maria Butina, who in 2018 pleaded guilty to "one count of conspiracy to act as a Russian agent in the U.S. without registering with the Justice Department." Butina and other Russian nationals released from U.S. prisons, such as Mira Terada and Konstantin Yaroshenko, have been spreading Kremlin-aligned disinformation and working with entities linked to Yevgeniy Prigozhin. Prigozhin called Bout an "ideal of steadfastness," while commenting on Bout's joining the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). Russian MFA's spokesperson Maria Zakharova called Bout a victim and "a symbol of the legal lawlessness" the U.S. government has "inflicted" on Russian citizens.

Tightening the Censorship Grip

The Kremlin is continuing its efforts to impose total propaganda on Russian society through censorship. In November, Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) issued a directive expanding the list of "military and technical information," which it said might be "used against Russia" if obtained by "foreign sources." Consisting of sixty items, the list appears aimed at censoring all reporting surrounding Russia's war in Ukraine that is not completely aligned with the Kremlin's propaganda narratives, according to political expert Stanislav Belkovsky. While information listed in the directive is not classified, individuals gathering and publishing it can be designated as "foreign agents." On December 1, an updated version of the "foreign agents" law came into effect, broadening the definition of a "foreign agent" to include not only those receiving financial support for political activities, but also anyone who is "under foreign influence." The FSB argued the new rules do not concern mass media and therefore do not violate the freedom of speech.

12/8/22

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SOWING AFRICA-UKRAINE DISCORD: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is amplifying claims aimed at discrediting Western lethal aid to Ukraine and sowing discord between Ukraine and Africa. Russian MFA magazine The International Affairs, the reportedly GRU-linked InfoBrics and Rezident, the U.S.-sanctioned Tsargrad, as well as the pro-Kremlin Telegram channels Rybar and Ulybayemsya & Mashem spread unsubstantiated remarks by Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari that the war in Ukraine serves as a "major source of weapons and fighters that bolster the ranks of the terrorists in the Lake Chad Region." The International Affairs appeared to have plagiarized content from a March article by DW to state on December 7th that "Ukraine recruits fighters from Africa." Pro-Kremlin website Modern Diplomacy republished The International Affairs' content. The MFA's attempt to resurrect the 9-months-old allegations about the recruitment of African fighters to fight in Ukraine coincides with recent reports alleging the Wagner Group engaged in this activity. Russia said it requested a UN Security Council meeting for December 9 to discuss Western weapons delivery to Ukraine. Russian Ambassador to the UN Nebenzya cited Buhari as a "confirmation" that the Western aid to Ukraine has become a "global problem."

DISINFORMATION OUTLETS DANCE IN THE RAIN: Russian state media is widely celebrating Latvia's December 6 decision to revoke the broadcast license of Russian exile media outlet Dozhd, also known as TV Rain. State disinformation outlet RT has published at least five articles since Dozhd was first fined on December 2 for showing a map with Crimea marked as part of Russia and again for the now-fired host calling Russian troops "our army" and implying Dozhd supported improving soldiers' conditions. Lithuania's ban of Dozhd on December 7 was also celebrated by Russian outlets. Sputnik Latvia speculated Riga's decision to shutter the outlet stemmed from alleged close ties with Latvia's "Progressives" party and claimed Dozhd was not "Russophobic" enough. Kremlin spokesperson Peskov stated Dozhd's ban should dispel any "illusions" of press freedom in the West. While condemning Dozhd's missteps, Riga-based NATO StratCom Center of Excellence director Jānis Sārts told Latvian TV3 that the Kremlin was "the biggest beneficiary" of the ban, speculating Russian security services could have infiltrated the Dozhd team to deliberately create chaos.

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GEC Report: Non-Affiliated Pro-Kremlin Sources Amplify MANPADS Disinfo

A new GEC report finds pro-Kremlin social media accounts not affiliated with the Russian government amplified a disinformation narrative claiming man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS) supplied by the United States and NATO to Ukraine were sold on the black market. However, the spikes in post volume by these accounts correlated with public statements from Kremlin officials. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's June 16 allegation that Western weapons given to Ukraine were circulating on black markets in Albania and Kosovo appeared to trigger a spike in the volume of posts on Twitter and VK. Another spike on Twitter, VK and Telegram followed President Putin's October 26 claim that the black market for weapons in Ukraine is a "serious security threat" to the region. GEC also observed a shift in this narrative in mid-June, from accusing the West of profiting from weapons supplies to "security concerns" about MANPADs' sales on the black market. Non-affiliated pro-Kremlin accounts also amplified false reports claiming Ukrainians sold MANPADS on the "dark net" and that German authorities detained Ukrainians for arms trafficking. Please contact info@geciq.com for U.S. government access to the report and info@geciqglobal.com for those outside the U.S. government.

Russia Sees Propaganda Opportunity in the "Non-Western World"

Russian senators recommend focusing the country's "information policy" on Asia, Latin America and Africa, where they believe the views on the war in Ukraine are more Kremlin-aligned. Russia's Federation Council conducted a roundtable on November 30 on the opportunities to expand Moscow's "informational presence" in "non-Western" countries. Senator Alexey Pushkov said these countries see the war in Ukraine as a "European war imposed by NATO," which has nothing to do with them. In this context, Pushkov asserted they would not want to damage political and trade relations with "such an important partner as Russia," and suggested using humanitarian issues related to the Ukraine war and affecting those countries to "activate our informational, political and ideological work." Senator Vladimir Dzhabarov urged to pay more attention to the information space in the post-Soviet countries. Director of the Institute of African Studies Irina Abramova proposed Russia finance African bloggers to reach the continent's young audiences.

12/6/22 #95

CBW DISINFO REMAINS IN VOGUE: Russia continues to spread disinformation and propaganda related to the alleged U.S. chemical and biological weapons. Russian Permanent Representative to the OPCW Shulgin alleged U.S. contractors specifically are helping to prepare chemical weapons provocations in Ukraine. Shulgin attempted to preempt dismissal of his claim by saying, "But the Americans dismiss all this, they say that this is disinformation from the Russian side...They say that these are honest and noble humanitarians." State Duma Deputy Hajiyev added biological weapons conspiracy theory to the mix, claiming the alleged deaths of thousands of seals off the coast of Dagestan were the result of U.S. military laboratories. Meanwhile, Russian media reported that Kyiv would stage "an explosion... on the roof of one of the ammonia storage facilities at the Odesa port plant" and that "Kyiv will try to pass it off as the result of a Russian missile attack."

DENIAL AND DISINFORMATION ABOUT HOLODOMOR: The Kremlin's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is responding with denials and indignation as Ukraine marked the 90th anniversary of the Holodomor. The Holodomor is the man-made famine manufactured by Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin in 1932-33 in order to rein in Ukraine's independent farmers and cultural elite, repressing its drive for independence. While the USSR confiscated and exported 4.27 million tons of Ukrainian grain, an estimated 3.5 million to 7 million Ukrainians died of starvation. Germany's parliament, noting the parallels with Russia's current weaponization of food, declared Holodomor a genocide on December 6. In response, Russian MFA claimed that "Holodomor is a politico-ideological myth invented by Ukrainian ultra-nationalists, Nazis, and Russophobes" and accused Berlin of "exploiting a terrible tragedy and attempting to rewrite its own history" during WWII. Deputy Chairman of the Security Council and former President Medvedev reacted with whataboutism, similarly claiming Germany has no right to "lecture on humanism" and "should remember its own history and what they did on our nation's territory." Russian state-funded media outlets and the Kremlin's propagandists amplified this narrative.

Kremlin Church, Kremlin Values

In light of recent counterintelligence investigations by Ukrainian authorities into dioceses of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), Moscow is claiming Ukraine is engaging in religious discrimination. As detailed in a previous GEC Snapshot, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) recently searched properties belonging to the UOC-MP and found pro-Kremlin propaganda and indoctrination materials, as well as evidence of broader activity by Russia's intelligence services. As a result, Kyiv imposed

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sanctions on several UOC-MP clergymen for their alleged collaboration with Moscow on December 1. Russia's security services have a history of infiltrating and influencing chapters of the Orthodox Church. As Russia denounces these investigations, the U.S. Department of State added Russia and the Yevgeniy Prigozhin-run Wagner Group to its list of Countries and Entities of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act. The Russian Embassy in Washington responded with a post denouncing the United States' "aggressive campaign to discredit traditional family and religious values" and its efforts to replace "centuries-old foundations" with "progressive ideas that are contrary to human nature itself."

Pro-Kremlin, Anti-Western Propaganda Films to Receive More Funding

The Kremlin is exploiting culture for propaganda in support of its aggression against Ukraine. Russia's Ministry of Culture (MOC) published on November 30 a list of 17 film themes it will prioritize for financing in 2023. Themes such as "falsification of history," glorification of Nazism, and the "liberation" mission of Soviet soldiers, all echo the talking points Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem has been disseminating to justify its war against Ukraine. The MOC will support films that "popularize heroism and self-sacrifice of Russian warriors in the course of the special military operation," and those which portray Ukraine's territories as historically Russian. To reflect the Kremlin's attempts to discredit the "collective West," the MOC will finance cinema about the so-called "neo-colonialist policies" of the "Anglo-Saxon world," "degradation of Europe," and the "formation of the multipolar world." Separately, the Kremlin recommends state-controlled television should feature "patriotic artists" in their coverage of the New Year's celebration.

12/1/22

DISINFORMATION ABOUT NATO: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem tried to discredit NATO, while the Allied foreign affairs ministers met in Bucharest on November 29-30. Russia's top diplomat Sergei Lavrov claimed the "global majority" understands the threats posed by NATO, blaming the Alliance for allegedly pushing Ukraine to continue a war "waged by the West against Russia." MFA spokesperson Maria Zakharova said the "West" is "pulling Moldova into an anti-Russian campaign," just like it allegedly did with Ukraine. The ecosystem amplified statements from Belarusian Minister of Defense Viktor Khrenin, who accused NATO of training "Ukrainian nationalists" to carry out a coup d'état in Minsk and planning other offensive military actions on Belarus' borders. The FSB-tasked News Front and state-run Sputnik both cited Chinese "experts" who argue that by pledging further aid to Ukraine, NATO is "pouring oil on fire." The SVR-directed Strategic Culture Foundation and Oriental Review warned that Ukraine will try to "drag NATO into a war within Ukraine's borders" and claimed to have proved that NATO provoked the conflict in Ukraine.

A HOLY CONTROVERSY: Russian government officials and propagandists reacted strongly to remarks Pope Francis made on November 28 about Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine. The Pontiff stated, "generally, the cruelest are perhaps those who are of Russia but are not of the Russian tradition, such as the Chechens, the Buryats, and so on. Certainly, the one who invades is the Russian state." Russian Ambassador to the Holy See Avdeyev filed a complaint expressing his "indignation," while MFA spokesperson Zakharova derided the comments as a "perversion." Head of Chechnya Kadyrov recalled the cruelty of the Inquisition and the Crusades, defended the "deeply religious" nature of his fighters, and claimed the Pope had become "a victim of the propaganda and persistence of foreign media." Head of Russian Republic of Buryatia Tsydenov and a

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Buddhist leader Ayusheyev defended the Russian soldiers as protectors of their motherland against "fascism." Framing the Pope's comments as "the East vs. West" conflict, Metropolitan Leonid of Klin stated, "the West, including the Roman Catholic Church, has long ceased to be a barometer of morality and decency." Similarly, Duma Deputy Medvedev ranted against the West and the Vatican, asserting the Pope's words were in line with Western "tradition and part of the current infowar."

Russia Tries To Sow Discord Between Ukraine and Poland

After a brief hiatus, Russia's security services are resurrecting their efforts to sow discord between Ukraine and Poland, weaponizing history for influence operations. Building on his previous claims that Poland planned to absorb parts of western Ukraine, Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Naryshkin said on November 30 that Warsaw is accelerating the annexation process. According to Naryshkin, Poland intends to conduct a referendum and is preparing an information campaign to justify the annexation of those regions. The alleged campaign will include a government-driven "grassroots" petition to seek restitution from Ukraine based on the 1943 events in Volyn and eastern Galicia. Polish media will purportedly incite the Polish population with coverage about the "necessity of gathering Polish lands." Similarly, on November 28, Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) published what it claimed were declassified archival documents describing "crimes against Ukrainian civilians" committed by the Polish Armia Krajowa during World War II. The FSB released a similar publication on November 10, claiming Armia Krajowa cooperated with the Nazis. Newsweek reported that the FSB previously used the "declassification" tactic to vilify Japan as Russia was supposedly planning an attack against the country.

Pro-Kremlin Telegram Channels in Ukraine

Texty.org.ua has identified 120 Telegram channels allegedly created by Russian information warfare troops to spread pro-war propaganda and disinformation in Russia-controlled areas of Ukraine. 10 of these channels were named by a captured Russian officer, while Texty uncovered the rest. Texty reports that 68 of the channels were created in the first two weeks of the full-scale invasion. As Russia retreated from Kyiv, new channels appeared only in southern Ukraine, a likely reflection of shifting strategic priorities. Narratives highlighted Russia's "humanitarian relief" efforts, the common history and bond between Russians and Ukrainians, perceived Russian military successes, and the bright future awaiting citizens under Russian rule. This "repost network" shared content from pro-Kremlin and other regional Telegram channels in a thinly veiled attempt to add authenticity. One network of 51 channels was created between March 5 and 7, had identical descriptions, the same number of fake subscribers, and identical posts. All 120 channels were managed from the same location. The number of operational channels has fallen to 80 and remains confined to Russia-occupied areas of Kherson and Zaporizhzhya.

11/29/22

"U.S. BIOLABS" AT THE BWC REVIEW CONFERENCE: The Kremlin is escalating disinformation alleging the United States is developing biological weapons in Ukraine. The uptick appears timed with the November 28 kickoff of the Ninth Review Conference (RevCon) of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). Russian state media amplified Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ryabkov's statement, saying "the Americans have something to hide in their military biological activities in Ukraine." The Russian MFA similarly claimed, "papers discovered in Ukrainian biolabs" provide evidence of "biological components being produced in close

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proximity to Russian borders." Russian diplomat Gatilov further alleged Russia has not received "a meaningful response" to the "evidence" of the "true nature of the interaction between the Pentagon and its contractors and the Ukrainian side." This charge echoes the claims that Russia's MOD obtained "new evidence" of U.S.-Ukraine joint military-biological activities in a form of a "345-page document" about the work of a Defense Threat Reduction Agency's contractor in Ukraine. Igor Kirillov, Chief of Russia's Nuclear, Chemical and Biological Protection Troops, further claimed biological weapons research was moved to the territories of "third countries including Ukraine and other states" due to "the high risk of accidents in U.S. biological laboratories." Against this disinformation backdrop, state media amplified Kirillov's statements detailing Russia's RevCon proposal calling for "negotiations on legally binding protocol of the BWC," which would "contain lists of viruses, poisons, and specialized equipment, take into account contemporary biological research and technology, and include an effective verification system."

"UNITED STATES BEHIND POW KILLINGS": Both Alyaksandr Lukashenka and Wagner Group chief Yevgeniy Prigozhin have claimed the United States was behind the alleged shooting of 10 Russian prisoners of war in Makiivka, Ukraine. Lukashenka believes Ukrainian forces killed the POWs at the behest of the United States, whereas Prigozhin claimed it was "an attempt by the Americans to ignite the conflict in Ukraine with renewed vigor." Russia alleges Ukraine "deliberately" and "methodically" executed the men, while Ukraine claims an 11th, non-captured soldier emerged from an outhouse and opened fire in an act of perfidy, prompting Ukrainian soldiers to respond.

SBU Claims Kremlin Using Moscow Patriarchate for Propaganda Purposes

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) said it found pro-Russian propaganda materials after searching 350 buildings belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine on November 22. Through their investigation, the SBU uncovered propaganda materials promoting the "Russian world" and identified an individual with ties to the pro-Russian news outlet Antvan. The SBU also discovered Russian citizens with passports dating back to the USSR or showing signs of forgery, and found large sums of cash in U.S. dollars, Ukrainian hryvnyas, and Russian rubles. A late October 2022 SBU investigation into elements of the Moscow Patriarchate's Kirovohrad Diocese in Ukraine uncovered significant amounts of "Russian-produced anti-Ukrainian materials" and pieces of correspondence between diocese representatives and Patriarch Kirill in Moscow that indicated criminal activity. Kremlin spokesperson Peskov denounced the searches as part of Ukraine's "war" with the Orthodox Church, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Zakharova called Ukrainian authorities "godless" and compared them to Bacchus, the Greek god of wine and insanity. Russia's security services have a history of infiltrating and controlling the Russian Orthodox Church.

Potemkin Mothers

The Kremlin is weaponizing mothers of Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine for propaganda in support of the war, while silencing dissent. President Putin met on November 25 with a group of mothers apparently handpicked for their pro-Kremlin views, including "United Russia" party officials, Kremlin-linked activists, and a "patriotic Christian Orthodox" filmmaker. Russian state media amplified the event where participants listened to Putin's disinformation about the "neo-Nazi regime in Ukraine" and Russia's "noble" defense of Donbas. The mothers praised Putin and reiterated the Kremlin's talking points about "patriotic education" and "foreign agents." At the same time, the Kremlin overlooks organizations advocating on behalf of women's issues, such

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as the "Council of Mothers and Wives" and the "Feminist Anti-war Resistance," which call for the end of the war. On November 26, VKontakte blocked the Council's page at the request of Russian authorities. Pro-Kremlin Telegram channels attempted to discredit women's organizations critical of the war as controlled by the CIA and Ukraine's security services.

11/22/22

DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES ABOUT MH17 VERDICT: The Kremlin attempted to paint itself as a victim following the November 17 verdict in the trial of Russia-backed proxies responsible for the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 (MH17). The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed the trial was a "political hit job," saying the court was "under pressure from politicians, prosecution, and media." Russian state media outlets widely amplified this statement. Russian politician Leonid Slutsky similarly questioned the credibility of the trial, claiming "there was no real evidence" and that the accusation was based on "the testimony of anonymous sources and conclusion of dubious experts." In comparison, pro-Kremlin Telegram channel Washington Obkom claimed the verdict "confirmed" Russia's 2014 invasion of Donbas was a "civil war between Ukrainians." Russian political expert Sergei Markov further speculated on his Telegram channel that the verdict will be used to accuse "Putin and the leading statesmen of Russia" and "imprison them for life if they make peace with the West."

UKRAINE IS "DESTROYING ITSELF": The Kremlin is again playing the blame game when it comes to the targeting of civilians in Ukraine. Russian government officials are capitalizing on the recent incident in Przewodów, Poland by alleging that Kyiv, not Moscow, is responsible for attacking residential buildings in Ukraine. Russian MOD spokesperson Konashenkov stated on November 15 that recent strikes on Kyiv were all "a direct consequence of the fall and self-destruction of anti-aircraft missiles fired by Ukrainian troops from Ukrainian and foreign air defense systems deployed within the city." Russian Permanent Representative to the UN Nebenzya also blamed Ukrainian air defense, saying it "has long had a stable notoriety" and citing the accidental downing of Siberia Airlines Flight 1812 in 2001. Pro-Kremlin Telegram users also spread this claim, with one widely viewed post listing incidents in which Ukraine was allegedly responsible for the destruction of NATO vehicles. The post concluded with, "Under the guise of war with Russia, Ukraine is waging a hybrid war against NATO!"

Dehumanizing Rhetoric

Russia's Deputy Chair of the Security Council and former president, Dmitri Medvedev, called Ukrainians "cockroaches" in a November 20 Telegram post. "Various cockroaches bred in the Kyiv insectarium constantly threaten to return Crimea to cheer up the hand-raised insects around," Medvedev wrote. This language echoes the dehumanizing rhetoric used to incite the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. According to a 2014 study by Harvard University, state-sponsored propaganda had a "significant impact on participation in killings by both militia groups and ordinary civilians." Russian state propagandists, such as Margarita Simonyan and Vladimir Solovyov, have repeatedly used dehumanizing language. Solovyov previously compared Ukrainians to "worms" being removed from a cat by a veterinarian in a "special operation," and on November 20 again called to "destroy" Kyiv and "wipe" Kharkiv "off the face of the earth."

Pranksters Most Fowl

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Russian pranksters known as Vovan and Lexus posted two videos this week, appearing to have misled the former President of Ukraine Poroshenko and President Duda of Poland. Poroshenko appears to have thought he was having a video conversation with Michael McFaul, former U.S. Ambassador to Russia. Duda appears to have mistakenly assumed he was talking to French President Macron. In their call with Duda, the pranksters primarily focused on getting him to state he had no evidence to suggest the missiles that struck Przewodów earlier that day originated from Russia. Pro-Kremlin media emphasized Poroshenko's alleged admission to the pranksters of Russia's military superiority, his request for more Western military aid, and his "complaints" about Ukraine's President Zelenskyy. Vovan and Lexus are suspected to have ties to Russian security services, have been hosted by the Russian MFA, and have spoken at state-linked events. Russia will likely continue to employ pranks as a tactic, requiring vigilance against their efforts.

11/17/22

NARRATIVES ABOUT MISSILE STRIKE IN POLAND: The Kremlin reacted to the November 15 missile strike near the Polish town of Przewodow with denials of responsibility and accusations of provocation by Ukraine, Poland, and the West. Russian MOD on November 15 accused Polish officials and media of "a provocation aimed at escalating the situation." Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov called the immediate reaction to the missile strike "hysterical Russophobia not based in real data" and accused "officials from different countries" of making "statements that could escalate the situation." Similarly, the Russian MFA claimed Kyiv is "using every opportunity to blame Russia and consolidate Western support, because the Zelenskyy regime has exhausted its patrons." In a tweet, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council Dmitry Medvedev accused the West of "waging a hybrid war against Russia" and "moving closer to the world war," while Russian Ambassador to the UN Nebenzya claimed Ukraine and Poland are trying to provoke a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO. Meanwhile, Tsargrad, a pro-Kremlin proxy outlet run by the U.S.-sanctioned and indicted oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev, claimed Poland wants to use the "premeditated" strike as the reason to "return western Ukrainian cities of Lviv and Ternopil to Poland." Pro-Kremlin Telegram channel WarGonzo went further to speculate that Poland will "inevitably be used," whether "as legionnaires of NATO or a victim" to allegedly stoke "an open conflict with the Russian Federation."

PUTIN BLAMES UKRAINE AND THE WEST FOR THE WAR: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is amplifying Russian President Vladimir Putin's November 15th speech at a meeting of the Pobeda (Victory) Organizing Committee. In his speech, Putin falsely contextualized Russia's war on Ukraine as a result of increasingly hostile foreign efforts to destabilize Ukraine by rewriting and reshaping world history and spreading "historical myths." Putin also said such alleged attempts aim to weaken Russia and "shake" its sovereignty, while also boasting about "resolute and timely measures to protect our interests and stave off similar sabotage." Drawing historical parallels to World War II, Putin accused Ukraine's government of betraying their people and trying to cover up this "betrayal" with pseudo-nationalist interests. "All these events fit very well within the Bandera process," Putin said.

Unmasking Rybar

Independent Russian media outlet The Bell said it identified one of the operators of Rybar, an anonymous Kremlin-aligned Telegram channel with over 1.1 million subscribers and a major source of propaganda and disinformation about the war in Ukraine. The Bell reports Rybar is run by four individuals including a 44-year-old software engineer Dennis Shukin. Shukin was reportedly charged with hacking and published articles in a journal of Russia's Ministry of Defense (MOD). The Bell says Shukin may have worked as an Arabic-language military translator in Syria and other countries in the Middle East. Rybar's disinformation about the war in Ukraine includes blaming Ukraine for Russia's military atrocities in Bucha, and the publication of a fake Ukrainian military document providing instructions on how to deal with alleged sexual violence within Ukraine's armed forces, specifically by "foreign mercenaries." Yet, The Bell notes the channel also puts out high-quality multi-lingual military analysis about the war in English, French, German, Spanish, and Italian, and

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has criticized Russia's MOD for its conduct of the war. Rybar used to be listed as a blogger for the Prigozhin-linked U.S-sanctioned Federal News Agency (RIA Fan), and according to The Bell, was financed by Prigozhin from June 2020 to August 2021. Rybar regularly publishes pro-Kremlin propaganda in support of the Kremlin's malign influence in Africa.

RT Balkan Launches & Spreads Ukraine Disinformation

Recently-launched RT Balkan, a Serbian-language version of the Russian state-funded international propaganda network RT, is actively spreading disinformation about Ukraine. RT announced the new platform on November 15, with Editor-in-Chief Margarita Simonyan saying, "Perhaps nowhere in the world were we more eagerly awaited, than here." In addition to its website, RT Balkan has a social media presence on Telegram in Serbian and Russian, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube (despite RT being banned on the platform). Several of these accounts were created before the formal launch of RT Balkan in a likely effort to start building an audience. As of November 17, most accounts were not labeled as being Russian government entities. RT Balkan is already spreading disinformation about Russia's war in Ukraine along with provoking existing regional tensions. Recent articles are filled with false claims and historical revisionism, such as those alleging NATO and the United States instigated the war or quoting Russia's ambassador to Serbia in amplifying the Kremlin's line regarding Russia's retreat from Kherson.

11/15/22 #90

DISINFO ABOUT UKRAINE'S "OCCUPATION" OF KHERSON: The Kremlin is trying to depict Ukraine as a "brutal occupier" of Kherson in the wake of Russia's withdrawal from the city. The FSB-tasked News Front claimed under Russian control there was no persecution, but after Ukraine's arrival "torture and bullying began immediately." State-sponsored media amplified videos allegedly showing "Ukrainian militants wearing Nazi paraphernalia" and a photo of "Russian collaborators" being extralegally "pilloried." Meduza debunked the latter claim, saying the image shows "looters tied to the poles." News Front also claimed "the Kyiv regime forbade the Western press to record human rights violations in the Kherson region" and amplified posts from the pro-Kremlin Telegram channel Rybar alleging Ukrainians have "already executed" over 20 Russian collaborators in Mykolayiv. Meanwhile, Kremlin spokesman Peskov refused to comment on President Zelenskyy's arrival in Kherson, stating, "You know that territory is part of the Russian Federation." Some state media commentators are not satisfied with the official Kremlin line. TV commentator Maxim Yusin derided those claiming Kherson will stay with Russia "forever" as "clowns" creating a "pretty fairytale."

DEFENDING WAGNER'S ATROCITIES: Pro-Kremlin actors amplify a propaganda video purporting to show an execution by sledgehammer of a former prisoner and Wagner Group fighter Yevgeniy Nuzhin. Nuzhin surrendered to Ukraine's military but ended up in Wagner custody. GREY ZONE, a Telegram channel reportedly linked to Wagner, posted the video on November 12, saying Nuzhin received a "traditional" Wagner "punishment." Kremlin spokesman Peskov's only comment on the video was to say it was not "our business." Wagner's founder Yevgeniy Prigozhin praised it as a "beautiful directorial job," publishing a request to Russia's Prosecutor General to investigate CIA's involvement in the execution. Prigozhin sarcastically claimed Nuzhin infiltrated Wagner by orchestrating his 27-year prison sentence after being recruited by the CIA, which had known in advance about the war in Ukraine. RT's editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan defended Wagner, urging people not to judge. Separately, Meduza reported Prigozhin intends to form his own "conservative patriotic movement" which may evolve into a political party.

Promoting Russia as Leader of Global "Anti-Colonialism"

Russia aims to promote itself as the leader of a global "anti-colonialist" movement against the backdrop of its colonialist war against Ukraine. Per Meduza reporting, the Kremlin intends to use its disinformation and propaganda ecosystem and "soft power" institutions to convince Africa, South America, Asia, and some southern European countries that it is a "leader of oppressed countries." This framing is in line with President Putin's September 30 speech in which he announced the "annexation" of four Ukrainian regions. He denounced the West and its so-called elites for their "neocolonialist plans," stating he was "proud that in the 20th century our country led the anti-colonial movement." In Africa, however, Kremlin-backed Wagner Group exploits natural resources, and threatens stability, good governance, and respect for human rights, as GEC previously exposed. The recently opened "Russia Houses" (aka Rossotrudnichestvo) in several African

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countries also create avenues for Moscow's malign influence. In Asia, Russia has increased its so-called "anti-colonialist" rhetoric. As the 2022 ASEAN Summit took place, pro-Kremlin media alleged Washington is "racing" to "arm Taiwan" like Ukraine, while Foreign Minister Lavrov accused the West of paying "lip service" to the role of ASEAN to push its own "confrontational mechanisms and instruments."

Not Your Mother's "Bot Farm"

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) uncovered and shut down on November 11 a "bot farm" of inauthentic social media accounts, which according to SBU was tasked and funded by the Russian security services. The SBU Said five individuals residing in Kyiv and the Vynnytsia region in Ukraine operated the "bot farm," activating over 500 inauthentic accounts per day using 6,000 SIM cards from various mobile carriers. SIM cards allow operators to provide unique phone numbers in order to establish social media accounts which would appear authentic and evade platform countermeasures. According to the SBU, bot accounts pretended to be Ukrainians living in the Russia-controlled territories of Ukraine and posted "disinformation about the situation on the frontline" and "justified Russia's military aggression." These bot accounts allegedly maintained presence on several online platforms and messengers. The SBU did not name the targeted social media platforms, only stating they included platforms "banned in Ukraine." In 2017, Ukraine sanctioned and banned Russian platforms VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, Mail.Ru, and Yandex.

11/10/22

RUSSIA'S VICTORIOUS RETREAT: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is framing Russia's withdrawal from Kherson as a strategic victory, despite past promises to stay in Kherson "forever." Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and General Sergei Surovikin stated the "difficult" move was to prioritize the "life and health of servicemen" and the local population. Both U.S.-sanctioned head of the mercenary Wagner Group Yevgeniy Prigozhin and Head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov similarly praised the withdrawal as a smart move by Surovikin. One propagandist who broke from the Kremlin's propaganda handbook (see the lower right of this snapshot) was Russian TV host Andrei Norkin, who refused to express an opinion on the retreat while on air – calling out the paradoxical nature of censorship laws. Norkin stated, "I'm not going to tell you anything...if I support the decision...then I'm publicly calling for Russia's territorial integrity to be violated. And if I don't support the decision...then I'm publicly discrediting the Armed Forces."

A CAR ACCIDENT IN KHERSON: Kirill Stremousov, Deputy Head of the Russian-installed authority in Kherson died in a car accident November 9. Stremousov, a politician who rose to prominence during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, repeatedly spread disinformation about alleged U.S. bio-labs in Ukraine related to Covid-19. In 2014, he was responsible for orchestrating anti-Maidan protests in Kherson. The late Kremlin-appointed official, a well-known conspiracy theorist, was a believer in the folkloric resurrectionary healing power of "Dead Water" who once swung his infant daughter around his head by her legs as her bones "popped." In October 2022, Stremousov produced a video poem in which he described how all the lands of Earth are Russian lands. Russian officials and media so far have declared Stremousov's death a tragic accident. However, some users on social media have speculated – without evidence – perhaps the Kremlin had Stremousov killed for not supporting the same-day retreat of Russian forces from Kherson. Others thought – again without evidence – perhaps "globalists" were responsible for the death. Regardless of whether an act of fate or a state-backed entity was behind Stremousov's death, President Putin posthumously awarded him the Order of Courage.

Propaganda as Official State Policy

President Putin signed a decree on November 9 turning the Kremlin's long-standing disinformation and propaganda concept of so-called "traditional values" into an official state policy. The list of "traditional values," according to the decree, includes Kremlin propaganda expressions such as "patriotism" and "service to the Fatherland." The activities of the United States, other "unfriendly" countries, and foreign NGOs – such as the supposed "ideological and psychological influence" operations cultivating "egoism," "non-traditional family," and the lack of belief in the "positive role of Russia in the world's history and culture" – are defined as threats. Putin has used calls to preserve and strengthen "traditional values" as one of many false pretexts to justify the February 24th full-scale invasion and the attempted annexations of Ukraine's territories, as well as to discredit the West. For example, he claimed Russia was saving the populations of the "annexed" territories

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from a "neo-Nazi" regime in Kyiv attack on their traditional values and accused the West of "pure Satanism," stating it engaged in the "overthrow of faith and traditional values." The goal of this state policy, according to RIA Novosti, is to create an international image of Russia as the main defender of "traditional values."

Following the Kremlin's Guides on the Retreat from Kherson

The Kremlin's propagandists are following the Putin administration's manuals on how to cover the Russian military's retreat from Kherson. One of the guides, which Meduza recently exposed, instructs communicators to "draw attention" to the words of historian Anatoly Torkunov, who recently described Peter the Great's retreat in the 1709 Battle of Poltava as a "turning point" that led to Russia's victory. Vladimir Solovyov, major propagandist on the state-owned television channel Rossiya 1, made an identical point on his Telegram channel. RT's editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan also referred to military history, comparing the situation in Kherson to Field Marshal of the Russian Empire Mikhail Kutuzov's surrender of Moscow to Napoleon in 1812. Simonyan implied the retreat would help save Russia's military. Similarly, Russian state-owned foreign disinformation outlet Sputnik argued the "pullout" was driven by a "broader interest" to win the war, noting Russian and Soviet military commanders pulled back forces during the Great Northern War against Sweden of 1700-1721 and the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, but "never lost sight of the strategic goal."

11/8/22

THE PRE-BATTLE OF KHERSON: The battle for Kherson has begun in the information environment. Russia and Ukraine continue to trade blame over claims of "terrorist attacks" and targeting of civilian infrastructure. For example, on November 8, Russia claimed it arrested nine "saboteurs" allegedly from the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) for plotting to carry out "terrorist attacks against high-ranking members of the military-civilian administration of Kherson Region." The day prior, Russia halted nearly all power to Kherson. Russian disinformation outlets claim a Ukrainian "terrorist attack" caused the outage, while it is possible Russia is responsible for this attack on civilian infrastructure. Similarly, Russian media alleged November 6 Ukraine used U.S-supplied HIMARS missiles to strike the Kakhova hydroelectric dam in the Kherson region. Zelenskyy warned. as early as October 21, Russia had already mined the Khakova dam and may be planning to detonate it to cause massive flooding. There is no evidence to suggest Ukraine would attempt to perform an attack on its own territory. Meanwhile, Serbia's President Vučić likened the looming "battle for Kherson" to the Battle of Stalingrad, one of WWII's bloodiest battles.

NATIONAL UNITY DAY DISINFORMATION: Pro-Kremlin media outlets are disseminating disinformation that emerged from Russia's November 4th "National Unity Day," which commemorated the 1612 "liberation" of Moscow from "foreign invaders." President Putin, for example, called Mariupol an ancient Russian city and attempted to discredit Ukrainian refugees in Europe. Speaking to state-linked "historians" and religious leaders, Putin said the war in Ukraine was fought "within one people" and accused the West of trying to dismember Russia. Putin went further to claim the West instilled "into the minds of millions [of Ukrainians]…pseudo-values that led to the creation of anti-Russia, sowing hatred, raping the people's minds, depriving them of their true history." Separately, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council Medvedev marked "National Unity Day" with a Telegram post arguing Russia's "sacred" goal was to "stop the supreme lord of hell, whatever name one gives him – Satan, Lucifer or Iblis."

GEC Bulletin: Prigozhin-linked Disinformation on Ukraine in Africa

A new GEC bulletin exposes several self-styled pan-African influencers who are linked to the U.S.-sanctioned oligarch Yevgeniy Prigozhin and call for greater Russian influence across the Sahel. The November 4 bulletin, entitled "Yevgeniy Prigozhin's Africa-Wide Disinformation Campaign," examines Prigozhin's network of influence across the Sahel. This network purports to support Pan-African ideals, such as greater brotherhood and collaboration among peoples of African descent, while furthering the unrestrained exploitation of African resources, such as gold, diamonds, and timber, by the Prigozhin-managed Wagner Group. The bulletin features two influencers who serve as vital nodes for the network: French-Beninese Kémi Séba and Swiss-Cameroonian Nathalie Yamb. These transmitters of disinformation routinely amplify pro-Kremlin narratives to African audiences on their popular YouTube channels, La Dame De Sochi ("The Lady of Sochi") and Kemi Seba officiel, garnering more than 28 million views combined. For instance, Yamb claimed "Russia has no colonial tradition," ignoring Russia's colonialism in Ukraine. Similarly, Séba has defended Russia's war on Ukraine and

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blamed the West for destroying the USSR and arming former Soviet republics to threaten Russia the way the West "destroyed and dismantled" Africa.

PMC Wagner As a Symbol of Russia's Unity

Prigozhin continues to embrace his new public presence, opening the "PMC Wagner Center" in St. Petersburg on November 4th. According to Prigozhin's company Concord, the Center's mission is to provide a "comfortable environment for generating new ideas to increase Russia's defense capabilities, including informational defense." The Center has Telegram and VK presence and a website taking proposals for engineering, military training, news, and social media projects. Prigozhin-linked Federal News Federal News Agency called the project a gathering point for "real Russian patriots." Dmitry Makhaev, head of the Prigozhin-linked troll factory Cyber Front Z, explained the Center will host "IT specialists and cyber researchers, including my organization" to focus on "questions of culture and support of the special military operation." Makhaev compared the Center to the Yeltsin Center, a liberal institution frequently targeted by pro-Kremlin propagandists, saying it will "broadcast certain specific ideas" to indoctrinate "our children." Prigozhin has been increasingly public in recent months. On September 26, he acknowledged founding Wagner after years of denials. On November 7, he claimed responsibility, albeit sarcastically, for interfering in U.S. elections.

11/3/22

OBSCURING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS: Russia announced on November 2 it was returning to the Black Sea Grain Initiative after suspending its participation on October 30. Russia explained the suspension as a response to what it described as Kyiv and London's attempts to use a "humanitarian corridor" for "terrorist attacks" on the Russian Navy in Sevastopol. Pro-Kremlin media continued spreading propaganda and disinformation to deflect attention from the Kremlin's responsibility for worsening global food insecurity by blaming sanctions, "the West," and Ukraine. Perhaps to target audiences in Africa, state-owned foreign-facing propaganda outlet Sputnik interviewed Nathalie Yamb, a Prigozhin-linked pan-African "activist." Yamb claimed global food insecurity resulted from attempts to "establish" Western "hegemony over the world." Other "experts" similarly tried to absolve the Kremlin of responsibility for global food insecurity claiming "famine and starvation in poorer countries was underway before the special military operation was launched."

MORE NORD STREAM FABRICATIONS: Moscow continues its attempts to use the attack on Nord Stream pipelines to discredit the West and undermine transatlantic unity. The Russian Ministry of Defense falsely claimed on October 29 the "British Navy took part in the planning, support and implementation of a terrorist act in the Baltic Sea." Kremlin spokesperson Peskov amplified these claims in his November 1 press briefing. Similarly, Russian MFA Spokeswoman Zakharova took to Telegram to spread the false conspiracy that Liz Truss texted Secretary Blinken, "it's done," immediately after the pipelines exploded. State-sponsored media outlets amplified the post, and the MFA demanded an official explanation from the UK. Russian Blogger Sergei Kolyasnikov also shared the post, adding, "condolences to Germany. It will be very difficult for them to investigate the terrorist attack, from under which the ears of the United States and Britain stick out." Citing alleged "inside information," the reportedly GRU-linked Legitimniy Telegram channel claimed, "the goal of the British is to take Germany out of the game, making it a 'puppet,' and to turn Poland into the "main gas hub in the EU."

Youth Propaganda Goes to University

"Russian ideology" will soon be a required subject at universities in Russia, according to Meduza. The curriculum, described by Meduza as "Studies in Russian Greatness," includes at least four modules: a main "historical" module, "Cultural Code," "Russia in the World," and "Envisioning a Future," each curated by an "expert" ally of the Kremlin. First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration Kiriyenko spoke of the plans at the multi-day, university-focused "DNA of Russia" conference in Sochi last week. This new mandatory program joins similar "patriotic" education initiatives meant for younger audiences, with the Kremlin's war in Ukraine as the driving factor for the introduction of such content in schools across Russia. In September, the Ministry of Education rolled out a series of modules called "Conversations about the important" for instructors to teach on a weekly basis. The infusion of state propaganda into Russian schools is not new, although the closest parallels go back to the USSR's approach. The Soviet government required all undergraduate students

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to study "Scientific Communism," a politicized course in socio-political history and philosophy designed to enshrine Marxist-Communist thought in overall Soviet life.

"No to Caspian Roach" Turns Into an Anti-War Slogan

A creative anti-Ukraine war protest act garnered a lot of traction on Russian social media, inspiring memes and songs that expose the Kremlin's disinformation. While the Kremlin's propagandists have largely stopped calling Moscow's war against Ukraine a "special military operation," the Russian government continues prosecuting war opponents. However, in a rare just decision by a Russian court, Alisa Klementova from Tyumen was found innocent of violating censorship laws, after she drew the phrase "Нет в***е" with chalk in a town square. The authorities identified the phrase as "Нет войне" (No to War), but Klementova proved she meant to say "Нет вобле" (No to Caspian roach) because she despises this kind of fish. Social media users have created numerous memes, poems, and songs substituting the word "war" with "Caspian roach," turning the fish into an anti-war symbol. Popular Russian comedian Semyon Slepakov sang about the Caspian roach being the "cause of all evil on the planet."

11/1/22

"BIOLABS" WITH A TWIST OF PAST "AMERICAN SABOTAGE": The Kremlin and its disinformation and propaganda ecosystem continue to allege the United States and Ukraine are in violation of the Biological Weapons Convention via U.S.-funded biolabs in Ukraine. Russia's delegation to the UN introduced a resolution on October 27 calling for a 15-member UNSC authorized commission to investigate the claims. PRC and Iranian state media continue to amplify Russia's disinformation on this issue. The labs, as the U.S. government has detailed repeatedly, are a part of the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program. Meanwhile, pro-Kremlin media outlet Life.ru published a disinformation-filled article on October 22 describing five alleged "acts of sabotage" carried out in the USSR. The first on the list is an alleged "terrorist attack" by the United States on a biological "research" lab in Sverdlovsk in which an anthrax leak led to the deaths of at least 64 people. Russia has consistently pushed these disinformation narratives about the U.S.-funded biolabs and so-called "bioweapons" over the 10 months of its full-scale war in Ukraine.

RUSSIA IS PREVENTING "APOCALYPTIC" HORRORS: According to an op-ed in the independent Novaya Gazeta, the Russian Orthodox Church presented on October 25 a new "concept" for the so-called Special Military Operation (SMO) during the World Russian People's Council at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. Speaking alongside Patriarch Kirill, the fascist philosopher Aleksander Dugin argued the SMO was a "war of heaven against hell. A war of angels' forces…against the devil," in which Russia is preventing "the horrors of the Apocalypse." Patriarch Kirill echoed Dugin, stating "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood," but against the "world rulers of darkness" and the "spirits of evil." Assistant Secretary of the Security Council Alexey Pavlov took matters a step further by decrying the alleged "besiegement" of Ukraine by certain Jewish-Ukrainian "oligarchs." Pavlov targeted Chabad Hasidic Jews claiming they consider themselves superior "over all nations and peoples" (Russia's Chief Rabbi denounced this statement). This antisemitic rhetoric and Kirill's preaching follow the Russian government's broader propaganda efforts to portray the SMO as a holy war.

Propaganda Guide Instructs Acolytes to Compare Martial Law, COVID

The Kremlin continues to direct state-controlled media on how to cover the war in Ukraine while investing in the long-term indoctrination of state propagandists. Independent media outlet Meduza said it obtained a Kremlin propaganda guide on how to cover martial law, imposed by President Putin on October 19 in the four Russia-controlled territories of Ukraine, including partial martial law in several Russian regions. The Telegram channel Mozhem Obyasnit (We Can Explain) published what it described as planning documents of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA) to create a new "journalism" program for "specialists" who will identify and counter "anti-Russian" content in compliance with "state information policy." The Kremlin's "martial law" guide instructs state-controlled media to "reassure the audience" that "nothing has changed" and "recommends" likening martial law to the fight against COVID-19. RANEPA plans to partner with the media wing of the Russkiy Mir Foundation, a state propaganda arm targeting Russian speakers abroad. The "specialists" will recognize the "priority" of state interests in journalism as they counter "extremist" content, including Russophobic and LGBTQ+ "propaganda," as well as the "cancelling" of Russian culture and the "discrediting" of Russia's armed forces. The Russkiy Mir Foundation

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is headed by Vyacheslav Nikonov, a Russian politician and TV propagandist, and its supervisory board includes the chief editor of RT, Margarita Simonyan.

Anti-LGBTQ+ Rhetoric as a Weapon in the War Against Ukraine

The Kremlin deploys homophobic rhetoric to justify its full-scale invasion of Ukraine and crackdowns on media freedom. On March 7, Patriarch Kirill said the invasion was protecting the so-called "LPR" and "DPR" from "Western demands to hold a gay pride parade" as "a test of loyalty." At the September 30 ceremony for the sham-annexation of four Ukrainian regions, Putin denounced LGBTQ+ identities in the West as a "perversion that leads to degradation and extinction." On October 27, the State Duma unanimously passed an expansion of Russia's anti-"gay propaganda" law extending Kremlin control over all film, theater, advertising, social media, and news content. U.S.-sanctioned Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev celebrated the law's passage in a post on Telegram, saying, "Russia is beginning to free itself from the satanic anti-values imposed by the West... our current battles in Ukraine and with Sodom are part of the same Holy War against the enemy of the human race."

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"DIRTY BOMB" DISINFORMATION CONTINUES: Russia continues pushing disinformation about Ukraine's alleged plans to use a "dirty bomb" in a false flag operation to frame Moscow. While MFA official Dmitry Polyansky claimed Ukraine was possibly shelving its plans after Russia "exposed" them, Russian Minister of Defense Shoigu called India and China to express "concern about a possible" Ukrainian dirty bomb provocation. President Putin repeated the false claim at the meeting of the Council of Heads of Security and Intelligence Agencies of CIS countries. Kremlin spokesman Peskov said Washington's dismissal of Russia's claims was "unacceptable," while state news agency RIA Novosti reported Ukraine has prepared a dummy rocket to be used in the supposed provocation. The Russian MFA tweeted a photo purporting to prove Ukraine's intentions to build the dirty bomb, but the Government of Slovenia said the photo was taken in 2010 and is the property of the Slovenian Agency for Radioactive Waste (ARAO). The FSB-tasked News Front further claimed the United Kingdom engineered a dirty bomb for Ukraine.

RETURN OF THE BIOLABS DISINFORMATION: Russian state-funded media outlets are amplifying the Kremlin's latest effort to escalate its "bioweapons labs" disinformation narrative to the level of the UN. Earlier this week, Russia's permanent mission to the UN requested a UN Security Council (UNSC) meeting and called for the creation of a commission to investigate Russia's accusations against the U.S. and Ukraine of violating the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) in "U.S. biolaboratories in Ukraine." President Putin echoed these claims on October 26 saying the U.S. turned Ukraine into a "testing site for military biological experiments," while Russia's Federation Council announced it will consider a call on parliaments around the world to strengthen the BWC. Separately, Russia's disinformation ecosystem resurrected the false claims of USAID-funded bioweapons research in Ukraine and twisted the recent preliminary discovery of a potent COVID-19 strain by Boston University researchers. MOD's outlet Zvezda falsely claimed scientists around the world criticized the "Frankenstein virus," while deputy speaker of the Duma Irina Yarovaya claimed this discovery proves the U.S. is developing bioweapons in Ukraine.

Reframing The Meaning of the SMO: From Denazification To Desatanization

The Kremlin's propagandists continue re-framing the meaning of Russia's "special military operation" (SMO) in Ukraine in an apparent attempt to explain war failures and increase support from the Russian public. Since President Putin launched the war on February 24 to "demilitarize and denazify Ukraine," the Kremlin has fabricated several alternative versions of the SMO's supposed objectives. The latest line appears to be the false claim of Russia fighting Western-cultivated satanism. For example, pro-Kremlin media recently amplified the Assistant Secretary of the Security Council Aleksey Pavlov's statements calling for "desatanization" of Ukraine. Pavlov argued the West is working to "reformat" Ukrainians' minds against the traditional values embodied by Russia through the promotion of satanic cults. Head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov disseminated similar claims, urging Russian men to take up arms and wage "jihad" against Ukrainian satanists and calling to "wipe out" Ukrainian cities "off the face of the earth." Kremlin's propagandists have demonized Ukrainians as satanists at least since April, possibly following reported guidelines from the Kremlin. However, President Putin's characterization of the West as "outright Satanism" in his September 30 speech made this accusation

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an official narrative. Russian officials have previously dehumanized Ukrainians, alleging U.S.-run experiments on Ukrainian soldiers "neutralized the last traces of human consciousness" and turned them "into the cruelest and deadliest monsters."

Dugin is Back in Business

Aleksandr Dugin, the U.S.-sanctioned fascist philosopher and one of the most ardent promoters of the Kremlin's war in Ukraine, appears to be raising his profile again in the Russian public sphere. Dugin looks to be back in the Kremlin's good graces, despite his previous criticism of the Russian government for not going far enough in Putin's 2014 invasion. Following his daughter Darya's assassination earlier this year, Dugin resurfaced on October 18 and met with Belarus's Lukashenko for over two hours, praising the leader's policies over the past three decades. Then, on October 25, he spoke alongside Patriarch Kirill and Putin's Deputy Chief of Staff Kiriyenko at the World Russian People's Council, stating "Armageddon and the Apocalypse are unfolding before our eyes" in Ukraine. The reemergence of Dugin at high-profile pro-Kremlin events suggests his ideology may once again have the unspoken support of the Russian state.

10/25/22

THE "DIRTY BOMB": Russian Minister of Defense Shoigu alleged Ukraine is plotting to detonate a "dirty bomb" on its own territory in order to frame Moscow. Shoigu initially made the false claims while on a call with U.S., British, French, and Turkish counterparts. Russian representative to the **UN N**ebenzia brought these claims to the UN Security Council on October 25, adding the Kremlin will regard the "Kyiv regime's" use of a "dirty bomb," formally referred to as a radiological dispersal device, as an act of "nuclear terrorism." Russian Ambassador to the United States Antonov echoed these claims, as did much of Russia's overall disinformation and propaganda machine. U.S. Secretary of State Blinken and the French and British foreign ministers called Russia's allegation "transparently false" in an October 23 joint statement. Ukraine has invited IAEA inspectors to help dismiss the "dirty bomb" disinformation.

THESE AREN'T THE DRONES YOU'RE LOOKING FOR: The Kremlin's disinformation ecosystem rushed to deny that Russia is using Iranian drones in Ukraine. Denials followed Defense Ministry expert Ruslan Pukhov's hot mic comments when he told RBK television hosts live on air, "We all know [the drones] are Iranian, but the authorities don't want to admit it." As his on-air slip-up circulated widely on social media, Pukhov scrambled to do damage control, telling the Podyom network, "I don't remember saying that, probably it is... a staged production. Probably it was, maybe it wasn't... It was a long time ago. After COVID, I've had trouble with my brain." Kremlin-controlled news outlets previously amplified Kremlin spokesman Peskov's claim that Russia only used Russian equipment with "Russian names" in the October 17 strikes on Kyiv. Even after Pukhov's on-air incident, MFA spokeswoman Maria Zakharova maintained the claims of Russia using Iranian drones are "nothing more than a set of unfounded conclusions and far-fetched assumptions." MFA official Konstantin Vorontsov, in his October 24 UN appearance, also claimed "unsubstantiated fabrications by Western countries regarding the alleged deliveries of Iranian UAVs to Russia," constituted a U.S. plot "to finally dismantle" the JCPOA.

A Brief History of False Flags, Pretext, and "Provocations"

The Kremlin has a pattern of spreading disinformation, accusing its opponents of false flag operations, as a tactic to create pretexts for war to cover up Moscow's own intentions. In the leadup to its February 24 invasion, Russia prepositioned saboteurs to attack its proxy forces in Donbas and blame Ukraine. As the United States exposed these plans, pro-Kremlin media and Russia-backed proxies alleged the U.S. was preparing chemical weapons "provocations" to force Russia's retaliation and claimed Kyiv was preparing an incursion into the so-called "D/LPR." On February 3, U.S. exposed Russia's plot to produce a graphic faked video "depicting corpses, actors pretending to be mourners, and images of destroyed locations" as a pretext to initiate military aggression against Ukraine. Russian media responded with what they claimed was footage of Ukrainian soldiers staging a provocation to discredit the "defenders of Donbas." It further alleged Ukraine was preparing false flag operations and accused Ukraine of genocide. On March 8, the Russian MFA alleged Ukrainian intelligence and Azov fighters had "rigged" a reactor near Kharkiv to accuse Russian forces of attacking the nuclear facility, while Russian state media alleged the U.S. transferred plutonium to Ukraine to

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help develop a "dirty bomb." Following the playbook Moscow used in April to cover up its atrocities in Bucha, in September the disinformation ecosystem again claimed the mass graves found in Izyum were staged by Ukraine as a provocation against Russia.

RT Director Suspended After Calling for the Murder of Ukrainian Children

Kremlin-funded outlet RT "stopped cooperation" with Anton Krasovsky, the director of its Russian-language broadcasting service, after he called for "drowning" and "burning" Ukrainian children who criticize Russia. RT's head Simonyan announced the suspension four days after the incident and called the comments "wild and disgusting." She also suggested they were caused by "temporary insanity." Krasovsky's "apology" followed a similar narrative claiming he got "carried away" during the broadcast because of stress from the war. Formerly considered a "liberal" journalist, Krasovsky has a history of violent rhetoric, including calls to "drown" Russian protestors in a river, "burn" Ukraine's constitution, and destroy Ukraine as a country. While Russia's Investigative Committee announced it ordered a report on Krasovsky's comments, some RT staffers and other pro-Kremlin pundits defended him as a "too-important-to-discard" war propaganda asset.

10/20/22

NEW HEAD OF WAR SPEAKS THE "TRUTH": New head of the "Special Military Operation" General Surovikin gave a disinformation-heavy interview to state media, following Putin's declaration of martial law in the four Russia-controlled regions of Ukraine. Surovikin spoke about the war as "unpleasant" and offered the "bitter truth," warning of "difficult decisions" regarding Kherson, and portrayed Kyiv as a "criminal regime that pushes Ukrainian citizens to their deaths." Surovikin claimed Russia only wants Ukraine "to be independent from the West and NATO" and a "friendly state for Russia." The General added Kyiv may be preparing "prohibited methods...of warfare" in the Kherson area, as well as strikes on the Kakhovka hydroelectric power station and indiscriminate, high-casualty shelling of the city. Russia's propagandists attempted to present Surovikin's claims as evidence of the military finally telling the hard truth to the Russian people. One prominent political scientist expanded these claims, alleging the West is preparing a "nuclear provocation" against Kherson to target Russian forces and blame Russia, "before the U.S. Congressional elections."

TWISTING THE BUDAPEST MEMORANDUM: The Kremlin is accusing the United States and Ukraine of violating the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. Konstantin Vorontsov, an MFA official, claimed on October 18 that "unrestrained advancement of NATO" and Kyiv's "support for nationalism in its radical forms" violates the memorandum. Russia's Mission to the UN further claimed on October 19 that Russia is fulfilling its commitment under the memorandum and "is not threatening Ukraine with nuclear weapons." Pro-Kremlin media outlets amplified these statements. Since 2014, Russia's propaganda and disinformation ecosystem has tried to redefine the memorandum, arguing the "West-induced coup d'état" in 2014 "made the memorandum obsolete." Kremlin-aligned influencers continue to amplify these narratives. The Kremlin falsely depicts Kyiv as a foreign-imposed regime, attempting to absolve Russia of its Budapest Memorandum commitments even as it threatens Ukraine with nuclear arms.

GEC Report: Russia's "Z" Campaign - A Concerted Effort Across Multiple Platforms

A new GEC analytical report finds Russia's "Z" campaign targeted audiences on Twitter, Telegram, VK, and TikTok to maximize reach and influence. The findings provide insight into the cross-platform tactics and techniques the Kremlin could leverage to amplify future disinformation campaigns. The messaging on VK, Telegram, and TikTok appeared to target Russian audiences with nationalistic and patriotic tropes. In contrast, on Twitter, a high volume of English-language content criticized the West's response to the war in Ukraine. "Z" campaign content was inorganically amplified across all four platforms, but predominantly on Twitter, where thousands of accounts in Nigeria and India amplified pro-Russian hashtags through likely inauthentic networks. On TikTok, inorganic amplification involved posting duplicate videos, potentially seeking to use TikTok's algorithm to boost their visibility. Across all four platforms, Kremlin-aligned accounts posted similar images and videos and frequently featured the letter "Z," the Russian flag, and the black-and-orange Ribbon of Saint George. State and non-state actors alike used imagery from World War II to promote the "de-Nazification" aspect of the "Z" campaign, likely aiming to justify Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Please contact

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info@geciq.com for U.S. government access to the report and info@geciqglobal.com for those outside the U.S. government.

Banning Truth About Ukraine And "Cancelling" Russian Literature

Moscow is expanding its efforts to censor information about the war in Ukraine just as it accuses the West of spreading propaganda and using "foreign agents" to influence the Russian population. These attempts now reportedly include silencing foreign media outlets and targeting pro-Kremlin actors. Roskomnadzor, the federal censorship agency, threatened to block several Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani websites in Russia if they refuse to remove certain content about the war. Russian law enforcement agencies have reportedly started monitoring Kremlin-aligned war bloggers, who criticized Russia's military setbacks in Ukraine, for instance "discrediting" and spreading "fakes" about Russia's armed forces. Former Minister of Culture Medinsky denounced on October 18 the "liberal bastards" from Moscow State University's Journalism Department who allowed the usage of an anti-war sentiment among students. Russian lawmakers also clamped down on "propaganda," as currently debated legislation prompts fears it would ban select works of classic Russian literature for "denial of family values."

10/18/22

DENYING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AS A WEAPON OF WAR: The Kremlin's disinformation ecosystem is dismissing the allegations of Russia using sexual violence as a weapon of war in Ukraine. Denials and dismissals are in response to comments from the **UN** Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten. She said in an October 13 interview that victims' testimonies about "being raped for days" by "Russian soldiers equipped with Viagra" and "what they said to the victims" indicate Moscow is using sexual violence as part of "a military strategy" and a "deliberate tactic to dehumanize the victims" in Ukraine. MFA spokeswoman Zakharova rebuffed Patten's comments as "impossible to take seriously" and going "beyond the reach of reason" to "the level of twisted imagination." She then accused the West of "deploying the same templates in its hybrid war," referring to the 2011 Reuters report about Muammar Gaddafi's forces using similar tactics. Russian state media outlets amplified Zakharova's remarks, while pro-Kremlin propagandists similarly dismissed the allegations. The Kremlin's denials run counter to mounting evidence, documented in the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe July 20 report and in the September 23 statement by UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, confirming Russia committed war crimes in areas it occupied in Ukraine.
TRAINING GROUND INCIDENT – DISCONTENT AND DISINFO: At least 11 soldiers were killed by two of their comrades during an October 15 shooting at a training ground in the Belgorod region of Russia. Per the Russian MOD, two citizens "of another CIS country" committed the "terrorist attack" by opening fire on trainees during exercises. Meduza reports some pro-Kremlin Telegram bloggers claimed the shooters were from Tajikistan, while others alleged they were from Uzbekistan. However, journalists with eyewitness sources have noted there was a third shooter, 22 people were killed, and the training ground had a significant number of discontented recruits from the Bryansk region who flatly refused to participate in the war. As this "alternative perspective" emerged on Telegram, the FSB-tasked SouthFront published an article alleging a group of Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar terrorists claimed responsibility for the attack.

War Indoctrination with Special "Agitation and Propaganda" Brigades

Since October, the Kremlin has used special "agitation and propaganda brigades" to provide "ideological support" for the newly mobilized Russian soldiers. Composed of volunteers, politicians, soldiers with combat experience, and artists, the brigades conduct motivational talks and concerts across Russia aiming to explain the purpose of the war in Ukraine, as well as raise the morale and the "military spirit" of the newly mobilized troops. This mission may prove challenging for the Kremlin due to reports of new recruits arriving to the front with poor equipment and minimal training. The "agitation and propaganda" concerts include children who recite "letters" about how the mobilized are loved and missed by their families. Russian Ministry of Defense and pro-Kremlin media said over twenty-five "performances" by these "brigades" have taken place across Russia. They feature known Kremlin-aligned artists-turned-war-propagandists such as the violinist Yuri Bashmet, the popular (and reportedly Putin's favorite) music band "Lyube," and singer Yuliya Checherina. "Agitation and propaganda" (agitprop) was a common Soviet practice during World War II, when similar

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tactics were used to mobilize "civilians to sacrifice for the war effort to feel a sense of loyalty to state and nation, and by extension to relevant elites."

Propaganda for Youth to be Overhauled and Financed by State

President Putin instructed PM Mishustin to ensure all films for children and teenagers be financed through the federal budget by the beginning of 2023. In addition to films, propaganda production must expand into new formats of popular digital content and multimedia with the goal of patriotic, spiritual and moral education for the youth. Putin approved the measures as part of a list of instructions on October 15 following an earlier meeting of the Council for the Implementation of State Policy in the Field of Family and Child Protection. Another order on the list is a mandate to harmonize the concepts of "spiritual and moral values" in all federal and regional strategic planning documents, especially those "regulating patriotic, spiritual and moral education." To support this "harmonization," all professional educational organizations will create the position of an Advisor to the Director for Education and Engagement with children's public associations to "form a unified educational environment" across Russia. Starting in 2023, **3.9 billion rubles** will be allocated annually to finance these propaganda efforts.

10/13/22

KREMLIN HOT AIR ABOUT GAS: On October 12, Putin opened Russian Energy Week 2022 with a disinformation-filled address amplified across state-controlled media. Putin made various claims that U.S. LNG is unreliable and "competitively inferior to Russian gas" and Europe could have avoided "more than 300 billion euros in losses... if they stuck to long-term oil-linked contracts" with Russia. The Kremlin's disinfomation ecosystem continues to falsely claim the United States sabotaged the Nord Stream gas pipelines. Putin furthered this claim saying the attack set an "extremely dangerous precedent," which facilitated the Kerch Strait Bridge bombing and alleged "sabotage attempts against TurkStream." In the leadup to Russian Energy Week, state-controlled media outlets on October 10 amplified Putin's claims that the FSB stopped Ukraine from sabotaging the TurkStream pipeline in late September. After Putin's October 13 meeting with Turkish President Erdogan, pro-Kremlin outlets released a flood of reports alleging arrests of the operatives planning to sabotage TurkStream.

WHATABOUTISM ON UNGA'S "REFERENDA" RESOLUTION: Russian propaganda reacted with accusations of hypocrisy and whataboutism to the United Nations General Assembly's resolution condemning the Kremlin-organized "attempted illegal annexation" of four Russia-occupied regions of Ukraine through sham referenda. Russian state media outlets spun the overwhelming 143-to-5 vote as a procedural conspiracy by the West, claiming the United States threatened nations to vote for "the western proposal." Foreign Minister Lavrov accused the United States of "cowardice" for opposing a secret vote, which Moscow argued would result in more countries siding with Russia. Separately, Russia's UN Ambassador Nebenzya charged "the West" with "double-standards," citing the recognition of Kosovo's statehood. State outlet RIA Novosti invoked a litany of historical examples of "the West accepting secessions," including "the 1836 Texas' secession from Mexico to join the U.S.," Slovenia's and Croatia's referendums to break with Yugoslavia, and the 1991 split of the former republics from the USSR. The Kremlin frequently falsely equates self-determination with "referenda" at gunpoint in Ukraine's Russia-occupied regions.

Solovyov's Change of Heart

Vladimir Solovyov, a leading face of Kremlin propaganda, has found himself in an awkward position after recently surfaced 2008 footage featuring him calling anyone who attempts to wage war against Ukraine a "criminal." On October 12, British tabloid Daily Express highlighted the footage, in which Solovyov starkly contradicts his current zealotry towards the war in Ukraine. In 2008, Solovyov told an audience, **"There will never be any war between Russia and Ukraine because any person who attempts in full seriousness to undertake such an act is a criminal. What's more, I cannot imagine a greater criminal. In Ukraine, there live people who are absolutely fraternal in spirit, blood, and common history, a war with whom would be the worst crime you could think of."** The propagandist routinely uses his 24-hour television and online channel, "Solovyov Live," and Telegram, to foment what he once condemned in 2008. For example, YouTube blocked Solovyov's channels in March 2022 for violating the company's "incitement to violence" rules because content

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"encouraged more bombings in Kyiv, including of civilian targets." Australia, Canada, European Union, and the United Kingdom have all sanctioned Solovyov for undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence of Ukraine.

Vovan and Lexus Prank Again – This Time Kuleba

Russian pranksters Vladimir Kuznetsov and Alexey Stolyarov, known as Vovan and Lexus, appear to have misled Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba into thinking he was having a video conversation with Michael McFaul, former U.S. Ambassador to Russia. RT and other Kremlin-aligned media reported Kuleba "admitted" Ukraine was behind the "sabotage operations in Russia," including "blowing up things in Crimea or Belgorod." Russian MFA spokeswoman Zakharova capitalized on the event to claim Kuleba "took responsibility" for "terrorist attacks." The prank plays into the narrative portraying Ukraine as a terrorist state, a charge the Kremlin continues to promote since the Nord Stream gas pipelines sabotage and the Kerch Strait Bridge explosion. Pro-Russia accounts amplified the prank on Twitter. Vovan and Lexus, suspected to have ties to Russian security services, have been hosted by the Russian MFA, and have spoken at state-linked events. Russia will likely continue to employ pranks as a tactic, requiring vigilance against their efforts.

10/11/22 #80

KERCH STRAIT "TERRORISM" CLAIMS AND COUNTER-ATTACKS: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem followed Putin's lead painting Ukraine as a terrorist state in the aftermath of the October 8 explosions on the Kerch Strait Bridge. The Russian President stated on October 10 that Ukraine is "on par with international terrorist groups," and listed other past actions he considered acts of terrorism allegedly perpetrated by Ukraine. Chairman of the State Duma Volodin compared President Zelenskyy to Osama Bin Laden, claimed the Ukrainian President's actions "have led to the suffering of the Ukrainian people… held hostage to his Nazi policies." He also stated that "politicians of Western countries supporting the Zelenskyy regime sponsor terrorism." State media TASS and RIA Novosti, as well as proxy disinformation outlets, widely amplified Volodin's comments. On October 10, as Russia conducted dozens of missile and drone strikes on civilians and civilian infrastructure targets in Ukraine, including on a children's playground, propagandists welcomed the attacks as an "absolutely fair" response.

PREDICTING A WEST-INSTIGATED "NUCLEAR ARMAGEDDON": Russia continues spreading propaganda and disinformation falsely claiming the "collective West" encourages a nuclear conflict. Deputy Chairman of Russia's Security Council Dmitri Medvedev, state-controlled television channels, and Kremlin propagandists said Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for preventive nuclear strikes on Russia. Zelenskyy urged the international community on October 6 to take "preventive action" in order to deter the potential use of nuclear weapons by Moscow, without mentioning the use of nuclear weapons. "You will never hear such calls from Ukraine," clarified the president's press secretary Sergii Nykyforov. On his weekly news analysis television program Dmitri Kiselyov, one of the Kremlin's chief disinformation purveyors, falsely charged the United States with engaging in "nuclear escalation." Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov argued that those who "speculate on the topic of [Russia-launched] nuclear war" should "recognize their responsibility" if such an event occurs. Other Russian Foreign Ministry officials continued denying Moscow's threats to use nuclear weapons in the war against Ukraine.

Kremlin Instructs State Media On Ukraine War Narratives and Emotions

The Kremlin appears to closely curate coverage of the war in Ukraine through regular propaganda "recommendations" to Russian state-controlled media outlets. Latvia-based Russian-language independent media outlet Meduza analyzed more than ten Kremlin propaganda guides circulated between April to October 2022. According to Meduza, Russia's Presidential Administration disseminates these guides nearly daily, which underscores the extent of its involvement in the production of state media. The guides outline the "main events" state-controlled media outlets must cover and the propaganda narratives they must promote. For example, October 4th instructions prescribe the following narratives: the "strengthening of Russia," "SMO [special military operation]," "the image of victory," and "the New World Order." Kremlin guides also feature a section entitled "emotional base," specifying the sentiments a certain piece of news should evoke in the audience. The annexation of Ukraine's territories should inspire feelings of "unity" and "rallying," while the

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portrayal of the "SMO"—sentiments of "confidence," "pride," and "hope." According to Meduza's source, the Presidential Directorate for Social Projects authors the guides under the leadership of its Chief, Sergei Novikov, and Deputy Chief, Aleksey Zharich, a former Russian defense industry executive and long-time propaganda operative. Meduza had previously written about Ukraine war propaganda guides for Russian politicians and state media produced by the Social Research Expert Institute (EISI), a think-tank reportedly affiliated with the Kremlin and funded by Rostec and Rosatom.

Russian Media Regulator Blocks EUvsDisinfo

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10/6/22

BLAME THE GENERALS, NOT THE TSAR!: Several prominent Russian politicians and propagandists are openly blaming Russia's generals for the country's recent setbacks in the war against Ukraine in a likely effort to deflect blame from President Putin. Gen. Kartapolov, head of the State Duma's Committee on Defense, stated on the primetime propaganda show "Solovyov Live" that the MOD needs to "stop lying," as citizens know the reality on the ground and may lose faith in the MOD when presented with an overly optimistic portrayal of events. Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov criticized Gen. Lapin, Commander of Russia's Central Military District, and the leadership of the General Staff in an October 1 Telegram post for the loss of Lyman in the Donetsk region. Despite his criticism, Kadyrov received a promotion to Colonel General, suggesting Putin himself now endorses accusations against his military top brass. Some of the most notable faces of Kremlin propaganda—Simonyan, Solovyov, and Skabeyeva—are also amplifying this new pivot in Russia's information war. Simonyan argued for certain commanders to be replaced for cowardice, citing a historical example in which a Soviet war hero was subsequently executed for "cowardice and inaction of power." Solovyov lamented battlefield losses and gave Kartapolov a platform, while Skabeyeva grilled an occupation commander on her show.

REACTING TO NYT ARTICLE ON DUGINA: Kremlin propaganda was quick to react to the October 5 NYT article entitled "U.S. Believes Ukrainians Were Behind an Assassination in Russia." While some disinformation outlets, such as RT, only amplified the article, other outlets and officials accused the United States of being the culprit behind the assassination of Russian propagandist Darya Dugina. Kremlin spokesman Peskov expressed hope that the United States is not trying "to absolve itself of responsibility for any preparations for future [Ukrainian] terrorist acts." MFA spokeswoman Zakharova said Dugina's killers were "monsters created by Washington" in a statement amplified by disinformation outlets. U.S.-sanctioned and indicted oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev suggested in two Telegram posts, the U.S. "loves to hide its crimes by hiding behind satellites" and may be doing so again.

Fueling Antisemitism to Silence Domestic War Critics

Moscow consistently resorts to antisemitism not only to vilify Ukraine, but also to silence Kremlin critics. It attacks Ukraine's Jewish president with disinformation aimed at delegitimizing his Jewishness and demonizes

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Jews as the worst Nazis. The Kremlin also encourages "state [sponsored] antisemitism" as it silences domestic opposition to the war, according to Kirill Martynov, the chief editor of the independent Novaya Gazeta Europe. In his article, Martynov highlights the case of Leonid Gozman, a long-time Putin critic and a target of the Kremlin's propaganda. Gozman has been persecuted for comparing Joseph Stalin to Adolph Hitler and for allegedly failing to inform Russian authorities of his Israeli citizenship on time. Martynov writes Kremlin propaganda regularly highlights Gozman's Jewish background, and in this way courts Russian ultra-nationalists, who view Gozman as a "Jew with evil plans to dismember Russia." In one example of antisemitic attacks on Gozman, Russian state television pundit Aleksandr Sosnovskiy accused him of betraying his fellow Jews, drawing associations between Gozman and Jews who cooperated with the Nazis during WWII. Other Jewish critics of Putin's war have faced similar treatment. For instance, Vladimir Solovyov used pictures with a Star of David to discredit Yekaterinburg's former mayor Yevgeniy Royzman. Critic of the war Gozman recently left Russia and stated antisemitism is thriving among Russia's diplomats and security services.

Poetry as Propaganda in Service of the War

The Kremlin is using poetry as a tactic to drum up support for the war in Ukraine. State propaganda outlet RT organized a war-themed poetry reading on October 5, dedicated to the "special military operation" and featured the RT-curated book of "frontline" poetry, "The Poems of Russian Summer." In his greeting to participants, President Putin again accused Ukraine of Neo-Nazism. RT's chief editor Margarita Simonyan called the book "extraordinary poetry about Donbas that must be heard by the Russian people," while nationalist writer and politician Zakhar Prilepin stressed the importance of "poetry about victories and losses" as a critical component of "future victory." Finally, MFA spokeswoman Maria Zakharova remarked Russia is "fighting for the past, which makes the present and future possible" and read Aleksandr Pushkin's 1831 poem "To the Slanderers of Russia," in which he called the Polish uprising against the Russian Empire a "dispute between Slavs" and warned European powers not to interfere. Despite the irony, Zakharova stressed Pushkin wrote the poem on order from the imperial authorities, a tactic the Kremlin appears to be dusting off again.

10/4/22

ANTI-WESTERN, EXTREME RHETORIC ESCALATES: Prominent Russian political figures along with Russia's overall disinformation and propaganda ecosystem are increasingly demonizing the West. In his September 30 speech announcing the attempted illegal annexation of four regions of Ukraine, President Putin attacked the West and its "dictatorship of Western elites" for "radical denial of moral norms, religion, and family," labeling it "outright Satanism." Putin also said the West and its leaders are "neocolonialist, racist, and lie like Nazi Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels," citing "examples" full of historic revisionism. In denouncing LGBTQ rights and gender diversity, Putin implied Western countries conduct "monstrous experiments" on children. The Russian leader closed his speech with a quote from Russian fascist philosopher Ivan Ilyin, stating "[Russia's] destiny is my destiny." Putin had quoted the "On Resistance to Evil by Force" author several times in the past. Putin is not alone in extreme remarks, Russian Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov claimed in an address to the State Duma on Monday that Russia faces a "Fourth European NATO Reich." RT amplified his statement.

NORD STREAM SABOTAGE DISINFORMATION CONTINUES: Russia continued accusing the United States of sabotaging the Nord Stream gas pipelines in an "Anglo-Saxon" conspiracy to undermine European sovereignty by making Europe dependent on U.S. LNG. Security Council Secretary Patrushev falsely claimed the United States attempted to interfere with the pipelines in the past, while Director of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Sergei Naryshkin cited "evidence" pointing to "the Western trace." The Russian Embassy in Washington claimed in a Telegram post amplified by Kremlin controlled media that National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's refusal to admit "the U.S. benefitted from the attack" amounted to "unfounded demonization" of Russia. In a Telegram post, MFA spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed that "Russia has never used energy as a weapon," and the U.S. orchestrated all past decreases in Russian gas flows to promote their own energy interests by pressuring Ukraine to set conditions on Russian gas "to the point of blackmail." State media outlets amplified her false claims.

The Kremlin (Again) Appeals to Common Sense

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The Kremlin is trying to conceal its potential involvement in the "deliberate act of sabotage" of the Nord Stream gas pipelines. Moscow argues it cannot be blamed because it is senseless to destroy its own energy infrastructure. In 1983, Soviet propagandist Vladimir Pozner used similar reasoning to deny the USSR's role in the downing of Korean Air Lines Fight 007. "Think about what is the rationale for Soviets just going out there and ruthlessly shooting down a passenger plane with no reason except to kill people. Why would they do it?" Pozner argued. From the downing of the Korean passenger plane to potential sabotage of the pipelines, the use of this technique persists. In February 2015, the Internet Research Agency's trolls were instructed to deploy the same argument to claim there was no rationale for Russian authorities to order the murder of the former Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov. In 2019, President Putin and others claimed Moscow had no motive to assassinate former Russian military intelligence officer Sergei Skripal. "Why would anyone be interested in him? He got punished. He was detained, arrested, sentenced, and then spent five years in prison," Putin said in an interview. A year later, Putin promoted the same notion regarding the poisoning attempt against Russian opposition figure Aleksey Navalny, explaining "if somebody had wanted to poison him, they would have finished him off." The Kremlin's calculated cynicism exploits ambiguity and the challenge ordinary Russians may face in rationalizing a state-ordered assassination of a political opponent or other atrocities linked to the Kremlin.

A Rally, A Holy War, and a 16th-Century Call to Arms

The Kremlin appears increasingly willing to use extremist and violent language to incite the Russian public against Ukraine and build support for its "special military operation." Eccentric actor, former priest, and ardent Putin supporter Ivan Okhlobystin screamed for "Holy War" during an October 1 rally on Red Square in support for Russia's attempted annexation of four regions of Ukraine. Apparently stunning some in the audience, Okhlobystin shouted "Goyda!" (Гойда), the old Russian war cry and a call for immediate and decisive action. The word was Ivan the Terrible's rally call to the oprichniki – members of the Tsar's secret police. Okhlobystin continued his dramatic warning, "Fear, old world! Deprived of true beauty! True faith! True wisdom! Operated by madmen, perverts, satanists! Be afraid, we are coming!"

9/29/22

BLAMING THE U.S. FOR NORD STREAM SABOTAGE: Russia is accusing the United States of sabotaging the Nord Stream gas pipelines ahead of the planned September 30 UN Security Council meeting to discuss the matter. In a Telegram post amplified by state-controlled Kommersant, TASS, RBC, RIA, and Rossiya 24, MFA spokeswoman Zakharova cited a now-deleted tweet from former Polish Foreign Minister Sikorski featuring a photo of the damaged pipeline with a caption "Thank You, USA." Zakharova implied Sikorski's post was an official admission of a U.S. "terror attack." Kremlin-aligned Telegram channels amplified the claims that the U.S. sabotaged the pipeline to increase LNG exports to Europe or distract Russia from its invasion of Ukraine. Kremlin spokesperson, Peskov denounced any suspicion of Russian involvement in the leak as "stupid and absurd," claiming U.S. LNG companies will secure "super-duper profits" with the pipelines out of service. The SVR-directed Strategic Culture Foundation and FSB-linked SouthFront echoed this narrative, attributing the attack to the CIA and "U.S. special services." On Russian state media shows Soloviev Live and 60 Minutes, Zakharova stressed the incident occurred in a "region closely controlled by U.S. intelligence services" and the U.S. seeks to "tear Europe apart."

NUCLEAR WEAPON THREATS AND DENIALS: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem continues messaging around the potential use of nuclear weapons by Russia or the West, a topic injected into the information environment by President Putin on September 21. In an op-ed published in a U.S. media outlet and amplified by the state-controlled RT, Kommersant, Lenta.Ru, and Gazeta.ru, Russia's Ambassador to the U.S. Antonov falsely blamed Washington for "testing" Moscow and "pushing the situation towards a direct confrontation" between "nuclear powers." Security Council Deputy Chairman Medvedev threatened to use nuclear weapons against the "Ukrainian regime" if it commits an "act of aggression" threatening the existence of Russia, also predicting NATO wouldn't intervene. Pro-Kremlin Telegram channel Nezygar cited "military experts" who alleged the U.S. blew up the Nord Stream pipelines to "deter" Russia's use of nuclear weapons against Ukraine.

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Pro-Kremlin Actors Amplify a Website From Meta's Takedown

Meta announced on September 27 it shut down a network of Russian accounts targeting Europe with disinformation about the war in Ukraine. Meta said this network was the "largest…the company disrupted since the war in Ukraine." The operation created a "sprawling network of over 60 websites impersonating legitimate news organizations," and then used social media and internet services to promote the content from these websites. On a few occasions, the operation's content was amplified by the Facebook Pages of Russian embassies in Europe and Asia. GEC identified several pro-Kremlin actors that have amplified content from one of the "brands" created by the network, the Reliable Recent News (RRN) website. For example, Alina Lipp, a pro-Kremlin German-born "journalist" residing in Donbas shared at least 20 RRN-related messages on her Telegram channel between July 9 and September 24. Lipp, who is frequently featured on Russian state media, referred to RRN's "journalists" as "colleagues" and appeared in an RRN-branded video urging "Western authorities" to "stop the killing of children of Donbas." The Prigozhin-linked CyberFront Z, state-owned Ukraina.ru, and other Kremlin-aligned channels shared Lipp's RRN video on Telegram. Kanzlerdaddy, a Germany-focused anonymous Telegram channel often promoted by Russian state media and Kremlin propagandists, also described RRN as his "comrades," and shared RRN's videos of German protests in support of Donbas, for "peace with Russia," and against NATO and the United States. Prigozhin-linked websites amplified RRN's report on a pro-Russian car rally in Germany.

Countering Nuclear Disinformation with Humor and Revelry

Ukrainians on social media are countering Russia's threats of nuclear strikes with dark humor and defiance. Memes, inspired by the story about organizing a doomsday party on Kyiv's historic Shchekavytsya hill, have gone viral on the Ukrainian segment of Twitter, with food retailer Silpo quipping: "If you are going to Shchekavytsya, we are located nearby." Some memes feature rap artist Drake drinking "nuclear kombucha" and make fun of Putin and Russia's outdated nuclear arsenal. Others joke Russia agreed to trade Putin ally Viktor Medvedchuk for hundreds of Mariupol defenders "to spare him from radiation." As Kyiv Post, a Ukrainian news outlet, put it: "Ukrainian humor is what keeps the country going." That and the viral videos of Ukraine's armed forces dancing to the news of continued U.S. support.

9/27/22

EVERYBODY "VOTES" TO JOIN RUSSIA: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is heavily amplifying the so-called referenda Russia conducted in the controlled Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine. With "preliminary results" showing approximately 98% of residents voting to join Russia, reports of people being handed ballots and instructed which box to check at gunpoint continue. As the lower right side of this snapshot details, "international observers" "verified" the votes, with the disinformation network amplifying their approval. For example, the FSB-tasked, Crimea-based News Front published at least three articles on the subject, while state disinformation outlets such as Channel One, TASS, RIA Novosti, Sputnik, RT, KUB, and others have applauded the integrity of the "vote" and the "observers."

DISINFORMATION ABOUT MOBILIZATION "DISINFORMATION": Kremlin propagandists are blaming Kyiv for the recent mobilization protests and the mass departure of Russian men fleeing to neighboring countries to avoid forced conscription. Russian state media outlet RIA Novosti quoted U.S.-sanctioned member of Russia's Civic Chamber Aleksandr Malkevich, who accused Ukraine of "continued attempts to destabilize our society with the fake waves about partial mobilization." He elaborated "old war photos" were used to depict mobilized Russians and rumors were being spread that mobilization notices are being sent over messaging applications. Separately, on his September 26 show, the Kremlin's propagandist Vladimir Solovyov claimed the protests in Dagestan against the "partial mobilization" are fomented by "foreign-sponsored" Telegram channels. Solovyov reiterated this claim on his Telegram channel, resharing a post from another pro-Kremlin Telegram channel, "Operation Z: Voenkory Russkoy Vesny," which claimed the Dagestan-focused Telegram channels calling for protests are run by Ukrainian psychological operations forces from Kyiv. These false claims are the latest in Kremlin's long list of disinformation narratives accusing the West and Ukraine of fomenting destabilization inside Russia.

Pro-Kremlin Propagandists Welcome Far-Right's Victory in Italy

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Pro-Kremlin propagandists celebrate the victory of Italy's far-right parties in the September 25 parliamentary election. Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev hailed the victory as the end of "Eurosodom" resulting from the Italians' disappointment with their former government's "active military support" of "Ukrainian Nazis." Malofeyev has reported ties to the leader of Italy's far-right Lega party Matteo Salvini. Leonid Slutsky, a Russian politician with a history of targeting the European far-right, warned the presence of Salvini and "formerly" pro-Kremlin politician Silvio Berlusconi in the winning coalition, does not automatically mean the new government will be less supportive of Ukraine. Pundits on state-controlled television station Channel One framed the victory as a manifestation of the Western failure to "crush" Russia for its "special military operation" in Ukraine. Russia's State Duma member Vyacheslav Nikonov praised Italy's likely new prime minister Giorgia Meloni's slogan "God, Family, Country" along with describing her as a "wise politician" whom the "European establishment" unjustifiably attacks as a fascist. Ilya Kiva, a defected and expelled Ukrainian MP who publicly supported Russia's war in Ukraine, said the slogan reflects the Russian values which the Kremlin is fighting for in Ukraine.

"Observers" Support the Russian-Held Referenda

The Kremlin is using the approval of so-called independent "international observers" to legitimize the referenda on joining Russia held in four Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine. Scholars have documented the Kremlin's extensive use of this tactic to manipulate international public opinion regarding Russia-organized "elections" and territorial annexations. At least four of the "observers" reportedly monitoring the ongoing referenda are propagandists working for the state-owned information agency Rossiya Segodnya or the state-funded "soft power" organizations Rossotrudnichestvo and Russkiy Mir. The "independent observer" from Mozambique, Jose Matemulane, is the President of the Association for Free Research and International Cooperation (AFRIC), a U.S.-sanctioned front company for Yevgeniy Prigozhin's influence operations in Africa.

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MOBILIZATION AND SHAM REFERENDA: President Putin delivered a disinformation-filled address on September 21 announcing a "partial mobilization." He spoke supportively of the planned sham referenda in four Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, the so-called "DPR/LPR," as well as the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions. Kremlin-aligned media was quick to amplify Putin's false claims that these measures are necessary to "protect the sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity of Russia and support the desire and will of our compatriots to choose their future independently." Minister of Defense Shoigu and Chairman of Russia's State Duma Volodin echoed Putin's assertion that the mobilization is needed because Russia is fighting Ukraine as well as NATO and the "collective West." The Kremlin's proxy outlets linked to Russian intelligence services, One World and Oriental Review, argued Putin's new measures were defensive steps to end the conflict. State-owned Sputnik amplified Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's statements that Ukraine's Russia-controlled regions are "entitled to use the right to self-determination in accordance with the UN Charter."

UNDERMINING THE UNITED STATES AT UNGA: The Kremlin attempted to discredit U.S. messaging at the United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York, focusing on President Biden's September 21 speech. State-controlled Rossiya 24, RT, TASS, and Vzglyad quoted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Maria Zakharova who accused President Biden of spreading disinformation about the nuclear threats made by President Putin. Zakharova, as well as the state-controlled Channel One, repeated the Kremlin's long-standing narrative questioning President Biden's mental capacity. RT's editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan and state-owned Sputnik engaged in typical "whataboutism," claiming it is the United States not Russia that is the main violator of UN rules and principles. Reacting to President Biden's proposal to increase the number of permanent members of the UN Security Council, Zakharova and popular pro-Kremlin Telegram account

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Karaulny, described the proposal as an illegitimate effort to place "U.S. puppets" on the Council at the expense of other, more deserving nations.

Did RAND Advise the U.S. to Destroy Germany's Economy?

Undermining Western unity in the face of Moscow's aggression against Ukraine is a key goal for the Kremlin's disinformation and propaganda apparatus. **Last week, pro-Kremlin media reported an allegedly secret document detailing U.S. plans to use the war in Ukraine to "destroy the European Union's economy."** Published by Swedish media outlet Nya Dagbladet, the document is a fabrication purporting to be the executive summary of a RAND Corporation report titled "Weakening Germany, Strengthening the U.S." The "executive summary" encourages the United States to use a "controlled crisis" to drag Russia and Ukraine into war to "guarantee Germany's rejection of Russian energy supplies." It suggests that this will "not only deliver a devastating blow to the German economy, but the entire EU economy will inevitably collapse." The conclusion argues the manufactured crisis will benefit Washington because it will weaken the Euro and will lead to "the exodus of skilled labor and well-educated young people" to the United States. This false story regurgitates the Kremlin's attempts to obfuscate responsibility for the war in Ukraine while claiming the conflict benefits the United States. Pro-Kremlin actors claimed the document supported their long-standing assertions regarding the malign role of the United States in Ukraine.

Increasing Propaganda on Telegram Supports Sham Referenda

Kremlin-aligned entities are ramping up propaganda and disinformation on Telegram to support the sham referenda scheduled for September 23-27. Numerous posts attempt to demonstrate a universal enthusiasm among the residents of four Kremlin-controlled regions in Ukraine for joining Russia. A video advertising the referendum called upon the residents of the Kremlin-controlled regions to "choose Russia" to ensure future "security," "development," "freedom," and "life." Another video targeting Russian citizens explained that by "returning" these "historical territories," Russia will gain natural resources. Propaganda slogans claiming the Kremlin-controlled territories are "returning to their home harbor" are identical to those used during Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

9/20/22

KYIV IS PREPARING FOR ANOTHER BUCHA: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is trying to deflect the Kremlin's responsibility for 440 mass graves recently discovered in Izyum. Following the playbook Moscow used in April to cover up its crimes in Bucha, the ecosystem falsely claims the atrocities in Izyum were staged by Ukraine and the West as a provocation against Russia. Several Kremlin-aligned outlets assert the graves in Izyum belong to Ukrainian soldiers killed by Russia. When Kyiv allegedly refused to collect the bodies, Russia elaborated that they buried them in a "humane and Christian" way. On Telegram, Kremlin propagandists amplified statements from French "journalist" Adrien Bocquet claiming a doctor acquaintance warned him about preparations of a "very serious provocation," since the doctor was allegedly asked to transport 50 bodies from a military hospital to Izyum. To further discredit Ukraine's allegations of Russia's war crimes in Izyum, state media and VKontakte accounts circulated a video purportedly showing Izyum residents cursing at President Zelenskyy during his visit to the town.

THE WEST "ADMITS" IT SEEKS RUSSIA'S DISINTEGRATION: During his September 16 press conference, Putin claimed Moscow launched its "special military operation" to counter the West's long-standing goal of bringing about the "dissolution" of Russia. As evidence, Putin cited "some figures in Great Britain during World War I" and even former U.S. National Security Advisor and political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski. Pro-Kremlin media amplified and expanded on Putin's assertions, referencing supposed statements from Western figures to argue "destroying" or "dismembering" Russia is official "Western" policy. State-owned television channel Rossiya 1 and others reported a former U.S. general said the world should be prepared for the possible disintegration of Russia. Vladimir Solovyov, who has a reputation for promoting articles on the West's aspirations to partition Russia, along with Kremlin-aligned media, provided further "proof" of the supposedly secret Western plot presented by political scientist Janusz Bugajski in a book titled "A Guide to Russia's

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Rupture." The Kremlin's long-standing conspiracy theory about the West's ambitions for Russia's territory is reportedly rooted in "information" obtained through KGB "mind reading sessions."

How a Russian Diplomat in South Africa Compared Ukraine to Mexico

Russia's Press Attaché in South Africa, Alexander Arefiev, published a "quiz" on September 4 in a local online newspaper, *Business Day,* presenting readers with the story of an 8-year "situation" between a "big northern country" and its "its neighbor to the south plunged into mass civil disorder" over an independence dispute with the southern country's northeastern territories. Arefiev lays out the alleged similarities, differences, and actions of each party, making clear allusions to Russia's war in Ukraine. The diplomat informs readers the assumption that his quiz is about the Russia-Ukraine relationship is incorrect and claims he actually describes the Mexican-American War. Arefiev distorts the United States' first war as one chiefly fought on foreign soil and describes the 1846-1848 war as an affair lasting eight years. Authors for *Business Day* penned at least four letters denouncing and discrediting Arefiev as "Putin's odious apparatchik" and a "spin doctor" for disingenuously spreading historical revisionism to justify Russia's illegal war against Ukraine. Arefiev, previously accused of having a "sketchy grasp on history," penned a rebuttal doubling down on the Kremlin's disinformation about the war in Ukraine, including conspiracy theories regarding U.S. military biolabs. When the Russian Embassy in South Africa tweeted Arefiev's initial article, Twitter users mostly trolled the Embassy in response.

Russia uses Disinfo in Latvia to Claim an Overall "Return to the Reich"

Kremlin propagandists are using fabrications and misinterpretation to suggest Russophobia against ethnic Russians is indicative of Russia's struggle against Nazism and justifies Putin's war in Ukraine. A fabricated sign purporting to be posted on a bus in Latvia saying, "Seats for Russian-speakers are only at the back of the bus" quickly spread on social media. An image of Riga-based NATO official Jānis Sārts' socks showing "Топчу русню," or "Trample Russkies" went viral. Sārts clarified the term is meant to describe the worldview of nationalistic and imperialistic Russians. Propagandist Solovyov used these incidents to claim there was a "Return to the Reich" targeting Russians. RT head Simonyan compared Sārts' socks to antisemitic and racist sentiments, while LDPR party leader Slutskiy called the fake bus sign an indication of "ordinary fascism."

9/15/22

ATTACKING UKRAINE'S SECURITY GUARANTEES PROPOSAL: The Kremlin-aligned propaganda and disinformation apparatus is attempting to discredit the recommendations on security guarantees for Ukraine presented by Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Andriy Yermak and former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen on September 13. Deputy Chairman of Russia's Security Council Dmitri Medvedev called the recommendations a "prologue to WWIII," threatening Western countries with "burning land and melting concrete." Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov also threatened to "double down on its military offensive in Ukraine." Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs representative Maria Zakharova described the recommendations as Washington's "diabolical plan" that will turn the West "into ashes." Other pro-Kremlin proxies claimed the West will not benefit from the plan, warning additional Kyiv-imposed entanglements will result in further conflict with Russia, and encouraging NATO to "act rationally and prioritize peace over its anti-Russian plans."

DISINFORMATION ON BIOLABS CONTINUES UNABATED: The conclusion of the Russia-initiated Biological Weapons Convention Article V Formal Consultative Meeting did not prevent Moscow from spreading claims

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accusing the United States of developing biological weapons on Russia's borders. Reiterating comments by the Secretary of the Security Council Nikolai Patrushev, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov asserted the United States is trying to conceal information about its military biological activities, which will continue. Director of Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Sergei Naryshkin blamed the CIA for producing cancer-causing "biological, chemical, and electronic" weapons to "get rid of" Latin American leaders. State television host Olga Skabeyeva tried to show international support for Russia by posting a video of an Iranian diplomat repeating the Kremlin's "bioweapons" lines. Cyber Front Z, a troll farm linked to Yvgeniy Prigozhin, hosted a "discussion club" with German "journalist" Thomas Repper about biological experiments on humans in Ukraine. Out of 89 nations participating in the meeting, only seven expressed support for Russian lies.

Disinfo Upsidedownism: "The Ukrainian Language is a Weapon Against Russia"

The Kremlin continues to complain about alleged discrimination against the Russian language in Ukraine. Russia's 2021 National Security Strategy claims persecution of the Russian language abroad, which the Kremlin seeks to fix by promoting Russian as part of its foreign humanitarian policy. Yet debating the language of education in Russia-controlled regions of Ukraine, Kremlin propagandists routinely deny Ukraine as a nation and Ukrainian as a language. Addressing teachers near Moscow, a pro-Kremlin filmmaker Nikita Mikhalkov called Ukrainian "an embodiment of Russophobia" and educating children in Ukrainian "a catastrophe, a planted mine into all of history." Pundits on the Kremlin-aligned NTV television channel recently argued there should be no instruction in Ukrainian, a language "artificially-created" as a "political attribute for signaling being anti-Russian." They also alleged while other ethnic minorities in Russia have "distinct cultures," Ukrainians "have fluid identities." These provocative statements echo news reports on the development of a textbook for "classical Ukrainian" as a step towards "de-nazifying" Ukraine. FSB-backed News Front reported Ukrainian is really a "Canadian dialect" imposed by Western-Ukrainian diaspora from North America, citing a pro-Kremlin Ukrainian writer Oles Buzina: "The carriers of this pseudo-Ukrainian neo-language demonstrate their enslavement to the West and disfigure the Ukrainian language."

Is Prigozhin Coming Out Of The Shadows?

On September 14, Russian opposition members and other channels published a video on Telegram in which **a man introduces himself as a representative of PMC Wagner to a large group of prisoners and promises to commute their sentences if they join the PMC fight in Ukraine.** The BBC verified the footage as showing Yevgeniy Prigozhin, Wagner's financier. Concord, which Prigozhin owns, stated the recruiter in the video looked "monstrously similar" to Prigozhin. Russian leaders have repeatedly denied any connection between Wagner and the Russian government, but now Kremlin-aligned propagandists cheer Prigozhin's efforts. Vladimir Solovyov, for example, described convicts as people with the appropriate skills and motivation, who deserve the chance to "die" for their "motherland." A Russian military blogger argued Russia is resurrecting Stalin's practices of recruiting prisoners to avoid general mobilization, which could lead to anti-Kremlin sentiment in Russian society. The GEC could not independently confirm the authenticity of the video.

9/13/22

RUSSIA'S ARMED FORCES "REGROUP" IN UKRAINE: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is attempting to spin Russia's military debacle in the Kharkiv region as positively as possible. Pro-Kremlin media

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amplified the Ministry of Defense's (MOD) statement on September 10 that to "achieve the declared goals of the special military operation" to "liberate" Donbas, Russia decided to "regroup" its forces in Izyum and Balakliya. The MOD provided the same explanation regarding its withdrawal from Kyiv and Chernihiv regions back in March. The "Vremya" weekly analysis television program on Russian state-controlled Channel One barely mentioned the Russian army's retreat, while its program equivalent on state-owned Rossiya 1 admitted that the past week had been "one of the most difficult" since the start of the war. RT featured a rare criticism of Russian authorities in an article about Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov's "dissatisfaction at the rapid withdrawal." To explain the retreat, Kremlin propagandists claim Russia is fighting Western mercenaries and the entire "Western military block," calling for a more aggressive military approach against Ukraine. Meanwhile, television hosts Skabeyeva and Solovyev gloated over Moscow's targeting of Ukraine's economic infrastructure, which "knocked out power and water to much of the Kharkiv region," praising it as a "turning point" in the war.

DISINFORMATION ABOUT GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY: The Kremlin appears to be energizing its disinformation and propaganda efforts on global food security. At the Eastern Economic Forum on September 7 and at the meeting with permanent members of Russia's Security Council on September 9, President Putin "accused" the West of deceiving poor nations with the Black Sea Grain Initiative. "All the grain exported from Ukraine, almost in its entirety, went to the European Union, not to the developing and poorest countries," Putin said while blaming "some European countries" for acting as "colonizers." Russian official social media accounts picked up Putin's claims. According to UN figures cited by the UK Ministry of Defense, around 30% of Ukraine's exported grain has been shipped to low and middle-income countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. The State Department said Ukraine's grain is reaching global markets and countries that desperately need it.

"Russian Exceptionalism," Anger, Patriotism, and Pessimism

"We Are Fighting on the Side of Good!" leading Kremlin propagandist Vladimir Solovyov exclaimed as he lectured a group of children on the meaning of life from the Russian perspective. Solovyov's televised September 1 talk included the usual Kremlin "cult of death" jingoisms as well as an added dose of "Russian exceptionalism" because Russian fathers, sons, and brothers are laying down their lives in Ukraine for a righteous cause. Yet, as Ukraine's counteroffensive continues to yield successes, some Russian state television pundits are turning pessimistic on-air, visibly angering their more militant counterparts. On an NTV weekend show, commentator Boris Nadezhdin criticized the strategy for the war in Ukraine, advising instead that, "We either call for a mobilization and go for a full-scale war, or we get out." He was quickly and caustically warned by a more hawkish panelist to watch his language. In response to pro-Russian military bloggers on Telegram agonizing with one another over Russia's retreat, head of RT Margarita Simonyan declared that she "can't stand tantrums," and responded, "Quietly, calmly, help where you can help, pray, quench your indignation … do everything you can for our inevitable, with God's grace, victory." Perhaps RT's chief purveyor of disinformation along with audiences in Russia should more carefully consider RT's slogan to "question more."

Kiriyenko's Talking Heads

Sergei Kiriyenko, Putin's First Deputy Chief of Staff reported to be his domestic policy curator, is overseeing training for a "new class of propagandists," according to Riddle. The political scientists newly minted as state propagandists will disseminate the Kremlin's perspectives on television as well as social and digital media. On

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August 11, Kiriyenko called on "representatives of civil society and the state" to counter Western attempts to "cancel Russian culture" and "rewrite Russian history." At the center of the new project is the Expert Institute for Social Research (EISI), a think-tank reportedly affiliated with the Kremlin and funded by Rostec and Rosatom. Meduza reported that EISI produced Kremlin guides for Russian politicians and state media on how to message on the war in Ukraine. Russian search engine Yandex confirmed the sale of its main media properties, News and Zen, to the VK Group headed by Kiriyenko's son Vladimir, providing additional avenues for the new "talking heads" to spread disinformation.

9/8/22

FALSEHOODS ABOUT UKRAINE FROM CHIEF PROPAGANDIST: Kremlin-aligned media amplified Putin's disinformation-ridden remarks at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok on September 7. Putin asserted Russia did not start any of the military activities in Ukraine and was only trying to stop the "genocide" allegedly perpetrated by the "Nazi" regime in Kyiv since 2014. He claimed Russia has not "lost anything" since the beginning of the war and predicted increasing its pace of economic development. In reality, international sanctions are having powerful impacts on the Russian economy, even according to Russian officials. As to human losses, the New York Times cites Western estimates that say "as many as 80,000 Russian soldiers have been killed or wounded" in the Ukraine war. Russia's propagandist-in-chief falsely claimed a "huge number" of Ukrainians "hate" the "regime" in Kyiv, calling for increased support for them to benefit future Russian-Ukrainian relations. Yet recent Ukrainian opinion polls show "very strong approval ratings" for President Zelenskyy and little affinity for Russia.

MASKS OFF ON ENERGY SECURITY: The Kremlin traditionally uses disinformation to cause confusion regarding energy security issues and is doing so again in an attempt to bully Europe into removing anti-Russia sanctions. This week, Kremlin Spokesman Peskov admitted the decision to keep the Nord Stream 1 pipeline closed was a response to Western sanctions. Gazprom initially claimed it shut down the pipeline for scheduled maintenance, but then offered an alternative excuse, stating an oil leak in a turbine forced the company to extend the closure. According to Siemens, the German company that maintains the allegedly faulty turbine, and independent energy experts, neither the maintenance work nor the oil leak should have stopped the Nord Stream 1 pipeline operations. Putin is openly using access to the pipeline and additional energy supplies as political and economic blackmail, threatening to cut off the supply of "gas, oil, coal or fuel oil," if the West caps prices of Russian exports. Pro-Kremlin media continued to sow discord in Western societies by highlighting energy-related European protests and government restrictions, and by predicting dire consequences to further anti-Russian measures.

Propaganda and Disinformation Disguised as "Humanitarian Policy"

On September 5, Putin authorized Russia's "Concept of Foreign Humanitarian Policy," a document allegedly outlining the country's humanitarian goals, but in reality, it likely establishes the direction of Moscow's future disinformation and propaganda efforts abroad. For example, one of the outlined goals is based on the Kremlin's long-standing false claim accusing the West of rewriting World War II history. The goal of forming an objective understanding of Russia and its role in world history completely misrepresents the nature of the Russian state. The authors of the document describe the desired image of Russia, among foreign audiences, as a country of cultural freedom, vibrant "pluralism of opinions" and an absence of censorship. Another goal is to

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"defend, preserve and promote traditions and ideals of the Russian world," an imperial, expansionist concept incompatible with humanitarianism, as it has provided the ideological justification for the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine. One of the policy's stated principles is non-interference in domestic affairs of other states, which directly contradicts the Kremlin's long record of election interference and other types of malign influence operations. Like other doctrinal documents, the "Concept of Foreign Humanitarian Policy" paints a world of perpetual information warfare, claiming Moscow is facing informational threats, in this case over "cultural influence."

Winter is Coming: Russian Trolling about Energy Security

Russia's propaganda and disinformation ecosystem is resorting to trolling to influence Russian and Western audiences on the issues of energy security. Two recently released videos threaten Europe with an upcoming "cold winter." A video from September 5, reportedly produced by a Russian state journalist, features a Gazprom employee turning off the gas as images of EU flags and European cities, along with a Russian song about a "big winter," play in the background. In July, Russian embassies amplified another video inviting foreigners to move to Russia that ended with a warning: "Don't delay... Winter is coming." The trolling represents another tactic in Russia's ongoing influence campaign to pressure the EU to lift sanctions in exchange for energy supply. Putin repeatedly jokes about freezing Europe citing a Russian fairy tale, saying again on September 7: "Freeze, freeze, wolf's tail." Meanwhile, pundits on Russian state TV suggest Gazprom will have more "maintenance issues" to avenge Europe's support for Ukraine.

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"**BIO WEAPONS" DISINFO TO INFLUENCE ARTICLE V MEETING**: Russia appears to be priming the information environment for this week's Moscow-requested formal consultative meeting under Article V of the Biological Weapons Convention. The Russian MOD said on September 3 "Moscow will show [at the meeting] proof of violations [of the Convention] by the United States and Ukraine," according to TASS. Pro-Kremlin media outlets quoted the MOD spokesperson's false claims the U.S. developed unmanned arial vehicles (UAV) to deliver insects infected with dangerous diseases. The spokesperson also cited unnamed "journalists" allegedly reporting on "increasing efforts" by the U.S. intelligence services to eliminate witnesses who can prove the Kremlin's case. Russian MFA and Kremlin-aligned Telegram channels attempted to discredit the Joint Statement on the Contribution of Cooperative Threat Reduction Partnerships to Global Health Security. The MFA called it part of a propaganda campaign aimed to cover up the Pentagon's future "military-biological research" as peaceful. The FSB-tasked News Front and state propagandists reported on the "newly-discovered" evidence showing the U.S. began its "military biological" activity in Ukraine long before the 2014 "coup."

ATTEMPTING TO DISCREDIT THE UNITED STATES: Russian state-controlled media, pro-Kremlin pundits, and websites linked to Russian intelligence services report, based on claims from a Russian "military-diplomatic" source, the U.S. "is recruiting former Afghan pilots" to fight in Ukraine. State-controlled Channel One attempted to connect the alleged deployment with broader U.S. military aid, naming the so-called U.S. military-industrial complex as the biggest beneficiary of this initiative. This narrative tracks with recent statements by the Russian MFA describing U.S. military aid for Ukraine and Afghanistan as huge failures and calling on Washington to acknowledge its defeat in the latter. The alleged "military-diplomatic" source also

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echoed the MFA's assertions, stating "all these hysterical attempts 'to plug holes' will only postpone the Kiev regime's military catastrophe and the political catastrophe of its 'sponsors' in Washington ... They won't impact the end result."

Brainwashing Future Generations

Kremlin propaganda went into overdrive on September 1, Russia's "Knowledge Day," as part of Moscow's long-term indoctrination efforts with young Russian students. President Putin travelled to Kaliningrad to participate in a "Conversations About What's Important" lesson, which is also the name of the new government curriculum designed to teach about patriotism and the war in Ukraine. While addressing students, Putin repeated his false claims that Moscow's war of aggression is a mission to defend Russia and the people of Donbas. Putin's spokesman Dmitri Peskov, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs representative Maria Zakharova, and state television host Vladimir Solovyev spoke at a parallel propaganda effort, the state-funded "Knowledge Marathon." In a lecture on how to identify disinformation, Solovyov equated the "West" with 1930s Nazi Germany, arguing it seeks to solve the "Russian question," a reference to the Holocaust and Hitler's "solution" to the "Jewish question." Echoing Putin, Solovyov said Russia was fighting on the side of "good" in Ukraine to protect Russia from the "anti-Russian enclave" created in Ukraine by the West. Convincing the Russian public about the utility of the curriculum appears to be challenging for the Kremlin. According to Meduza, Russian students view it as a "great excuse to sleep in," while some teachers are calling to boycott it.

Russian State Propaganda Attacks the DOS for Exposing the Head of RT

Over 40 Russian media reported on the Russian Embassy in Washington's reaction to the GEC's article focusing on RT Editor-In-Chief Margarita Simonyan. The Embassy said the GEC's article was "a manifestation of [the Department of State's] hard-to-disguise jealousy" about the success of the Russian press and urged the authors of such reports to "stop engaging in propaganda campaigns with a priori insignificant results." Appearing on NTV, Simonyan argued the GEC article was the Department of State's "legalization" of the death threats she had received from the Azov Regiment. "It is as if they [DOS] are saying [to Azov]: go ahead, let's go, that's the way to go," said Simonyan. "Every time Margarita receives a threat, the Department of State issues a statement," the program's host concluded.

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GORBACHEV'S DEATH AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE: Kremlin-aligned media and pundits spread contradictory narratives about Mikhail Gorbachev to justify Russia's war against Ukraine. Russian state media insinuated Gorbachev approved of the war, with Rossiya 1 and Russian RT featuring Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's claims that Gorbachev had considered eastern parts of Ukraine as lands belonging to Russia. "He [Gorbachev] said that in the interview. It was only as part of the Soviet Union that Ukraine obtained statehood," Lavrov added, implying Gorbachev's support for Moscow's attempts to delegitimize Ukraine's right for statehood. Some state propagandists, however, argued the war was the result of Gorbachev's actions. RT's editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan wrote "Gorbachev is dead. Time to collect [what was] scattered," mostly likely referring to Ukrainian territories. Moscow Duma Deputy Andrey Medvedev blamed Gorbachev for the collapse of the

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USSR, which "became the unconditional foundation of what is happening today in Ukraine." Blogger Kristina Potupchik said the "special military operation" in Ukraine was aimed at correcting Gorbachev's mistakes.

UNDERMINING IAEA VISIT TO THE ZAPORIZHZHIA NUCLEAR POWER PLANT (NPP): The Kremlin's disinformation and propaganda apparatus attempts to sow doubts about the objectivity of the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) inspections team and the utility of its visit to the NPP. State-controlled Channel One showed interviews with alleged residents of Enerhodar, where the NPP is located, all claiming they did not trust the inspectors who will likely repeat the "false accusations" of Russia "attacking itself" at the NPP. The interviewees also said they believed the inspectors' visit would not "stop Zelenskyy" from shelling the NPP. The head of the Russia-installed authority in Zaporizhzhia, Yevgeniy Balitskiy, told SolovyovLive he "had no illusions" about the IAEA, which was in the "American pocket." Pro-Kremlin "military expert" Igor Korotchenko said the IAEA team may include Western spies. It is likely, through this messaging, the Kremlin is preparing the information environment for a larger campaign to discredit the IAEA mission in case its findings are contrary to Moscow's perceived interests.

New GEC Publication: Faces of Kremlin Propaganda - Margarita Simonyan

On August 31, the GEC published the third installment of its Faces of Kremlin Propaganda series focusing on RT Editor-In-Chief Margarita Simonyan. The article highlights Simonyan's important role within Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem, and how she uses her position of power for financial gain. The piece first follows Simonyan's career from the Kremlin's presidential press pool to reporting on the Beslan school terrorist attack where she chose to not report the truth in favor of the Kremlin's priorities. This dedication to Putin earned her the role of head of the Kremlin's first English language media outlet, Russia Today, later called RT. The article also highlights how she and her husband, Tigran Keosayan, use their Kremlin connections to abuse public funds for their financial benefit. Simonyan uses state-funded RT studios to film her husband's television show, which the couple then sells to another state-funded outlet, earning a substantial profit. Simonyan and Keosayan also used Kremlin funds to make a film, Crimean Bridge, in which they, along with their extended family, earned 30% of the films overall budget. The GEC amplified the Simonyan Faces of Kremlin Propaganda report from its newly launched Twitter account @TheGEC. The piece is also available in Arabic, Chinese, French, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Ukrainian. The GEC kindly requests all partners to amplify as appropriate.

To the Kremlin, Everyone is a Nazi!

Kremlin propaganda systematically accuses other countries of Nazism. The Russian MFA published a report on August 31, alleging an increase in neo-Nazism in 42 countries around the world. On state television, propagandist Solovyov smears Western leaders who support Ukraine as Nazis on a daily basis. Solovyov launched into a series of tirades on his show equating German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to Adolph Hitler. His evidence was a recent event where Scholz climbed on top of a tank to show Germany's military aid to Ukraine. **Slinging the Nazi slur is a propaganda technique aimed at demonizing Ukraine and its supporters in the eyes of the Russian public and the world.** Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) specifically called for the promotion of the false claims that Ukraine is a Nazi state.

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DENYING THE EXISTENCE OF FILTRATION CAMPS: Russia is falsely denying the existence of filtration camps in response to an August 25 Conflict Observatory report that maps the filtration camp system in Donetsk province. The Russian Embassy in the U.S. and Russian MFA accused the State Department of "disseminating speculation about 'filtration camps' allegedly set up by us in the DPR as well as involvement of the Armed Forces of Russian Federation in the destruction of educational, medical, and cultural facilities in the LPR." Russian officials said these accusations are "another fake" aimed at discrediting the Russian "special military operation." Pro-Kremlin media and propagandists amplified these false claims accusing Reuters and "Western media giants" of "spreading fakes about concentration camps for refugees on Russian territory." The Conflict Observatory report documents the physical infrastructure of at least 21 facilities and the process used to register, interrogate, and detain Ukrainian civilians, prisoners of war, and others in areas Russia and its proxies occupy.

DUGINA'S DEATH AS BATTLE OF GOOD AND EVIL: Pro-Kremlin and state sources continue to cover the death of pro-war pundit Darya Dugina (aka Platonova), the daughter of prominent fascist Eurasianist philosopher Aleksandr Dugin. Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) announced August 29 it identified Ukrainian citizen Bogdan Tsyganenko as an accomplice of Natalia Vovk, the alleged perpetrator of the murder. State-controlled television channel Perviy Kanal (Channel One) cited Rezident, a Telegram channel the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) claims is linked to Russian intelligence, to speculate Kyiv is planning to get rid of Vovk and may have already assassinated her in Austria. Perviy Kanal also broadcasted a documentary featuring Dugina's parents, which glorified and portrayed her as a true Russian patriot and a warrior for Russia's "traditional values." Before his daughter's death, Dugin was essentially excluded from Russian state television, reportedly because of his criticism of the Kremlin's pre-war Ukraine policies. State-run weekly analysis program Vesti Nedeli said Dugina was a victim of "Ukrainian terrorism," and focused on demonizing Russian opposition figures for supposedly cheering Dugina's death.

Love Thy Motherland, Hate the Kyiv Regime: Patriotic Education Goes Zealous

Russia's schoolchildren will be studying a new subject at the beginning of the school year on September 1. "Important conversations" on patriotism and love for the Motherland are to be incorporated into school curriculum in phases by grade in the most recent iteration of President Putin's patriotic education initiative outlined in his 2021 national security strategy. The curriculum begins in grades 1-2 with students learning to appreciate Russia's natural landscape and culture along with reciting patriotic songs. Students in grades 3-4 are taught love of one's homeland is manifested "in courage and determination to defend the Motherland at a dangerous time for it," while students in grades 5-7 are educated on the "special military operation" and its goals, such as "protection of the population of Donbass from the Kiev regime" and "disarmament of Ukraine." The immediate goals are to convey to children the people of the so-called "DPR" and "LPR" are Russians and need defending, and that members of the Russian Armed Forces are heroes for their actions in Ukraine. By grade 8, students are ready for one of the culminating ideological objectives of the Kremlin: to be convinced "truly patriotic people are ready to defend their homeland with weapons in their hands." While it is true Putin seeks to bolster the number of troops at his disposal in the near-term, this form of indoctrination takes time and is ultimately meant to ensure the continuation of Putin's vision for Russia.

Russia's War: Destruction of Ukraine or Prevention of Word War 3?

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In the latest example of genocidal rhetoric targeting Ukraine, a video is circulating on Telegram of a performance with the speaker claiming to display a skull of a dead Ukrainian defender of Azovstal. The speaker, Igor Mantushev, is a Prigozhin-linked nationalist activist and a self-described founder of the private military company Enot. In the video, Mantushev mocks the alleged dead soldier and explains Russia's war against Ukraine is a war with the "idea of Ukraine as an anti-Russian state." Therefore "Ukraine must be de-Ukrainaized" and "all the carriers of this [Ukrainian] idea must be destroyed," Mantushev adds. In the meantime, Deputy Chairman of Russia's Security Council and former President Medvedev explained Russia's "special military operation" was launched to prevent World War 3, which he claimed would start if Ukraine joined NATO and then attacked Russia.

8/25/22

"CHAPLYNE STRIKE TARGETED MILITARY ECHELON": Russia's Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed August 25 its Iskander missile strike on the Chaplyne railway station in the Dnipro region destroyed an echelon of 200 Ukrainian reservists and ten units of military equipment, ignoring the 25 civilians – including two children – who perished in the strike. Given previous Russian false claims regarding the presence of Ukrainian military components at sites it has targeted, it is likely, although not guaranteed, the claims of Ukrainian military equipment at Chaplyne are also disinformation. This probability is supported by the fact that as Western media reported widely on the tragedy, Russian state and proxy media conveniently remained silent before eventually amplifying the MoD's official statement. Iranian state disinformation outlet Tasnim News Agency also amplified Russia's official line. The strike on Chaplyne occurred on Ukraine's Independence Day, shortly after President Zelenskyy stated his country would "fight to the end" and make "no compromises" with Russia. The EU condemned the attack and stated those responsible for "Russian rocket terror" would be held accountable.

CHEMICAL, BIOLOGICAL, AND NUCLEAR "TERRORI5M": Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem amplifies false claims accusing Ukraine of "nuclear terrorism" and chemical warfare, as well as, the long-standing unfounded allegations of so-called "U.S. biological military" laboratories. On August 20, Russia's MoD proclaimed it will share with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) evidence of Ukraine poisoning Russian soldiers in the Zaporizhzhia region with Botulinum toxin type B. Pro-Kremlin influencers speculated the alleged poisoning is linked to the laboratories in Ukraine and involves the use of U.S. weapons. They also warned about future "biological weapon" attacks. Russian government officials Patrushev and Shoigu, as well as Russian Senator Kosachev, circulated disinformation regarding potential Ukrainian "bacteriological weapons" for sabotage operations, and the supposed threat posed by "U.S. biological military" laboratories to the members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This messaging is taking place on the eve of the Russia-requested formal consultative meeting under Article V of the Biological Weapons Convention.

GEC Bulletin: "Russia's War on Ukraine: Six Months of Lies, Implemented"

On August 24, the GEC published a bulletin on the Disarming Disinformation website dedicated to Ukraine's 31st Independence Day. The bulletin examines how the Kremlin deployed disinformation narratives questioning Ukraine's statehood and denying its right to exist as a nation. First, the report examines how

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Russian President Putin's denial that Ukraine is a real nation translates into imperial revanchism to disguise Russia's desire to re-colonize Ukraine and manifest this through the weaponization of maps. Next, the bulletin shows how Russian historical and cultural propaganda tries to erase Ukrainian cultural identity and dehumanizes Ukrainians, comparing them to "worms being removed from a cat by a veterinarian in a 'special operation.'" Finally, the report analyzes the Kremlin's false claims that Ukrainians in the occupied areas are eager for Russian rule and want to be annexed by Russia through sham referenda. The bulletin debunks these disinformation narratives with multiple polls which show Ukrainians are united in their opposition to Russian aggression and in any free and fair referendum would vote overwhelmingly against joining Russia. @StateDept tweeted on the release and The Telegraph previewed the report in an August 24 article. The GEC amplified the report from its newly launched Twitter account, @TheGEC, which will help expose and counter disinformation, including Russia's propaganda and disinformation about its war in Ukraine.

A Return to Ukraine Coup Rhetoric?

Former Russian President and current Deputy Chair of the Security Council Dmitry Medvedev stated on August 25 he believed a Ukrainian military coup is the only alternative to the current Zelenskyy government changing its tune towards peace negotiations with Russia. Medvedev concluded, "Either way, Russia will get what it wants from Ukraine." Medvedev might have several reasons for raising the idea of a coup in Kyiv. The first and most straightforward is to sow fear in Ukrainian minds of possible dissent – legitimate or Kremlin-orchestrated – within Ukraine's Armed Forces. The second motive could be to forecast the Kremlin's intent to repeat the GRU coup/assassination attempts on the Zelenskyy government, which reportedly took place during their initial failed assault on Kyiv. Whatever the reason, Medvedev's comments are reminiscent of Putin's infamous February 24 speech in which he appealed to Ukrainian officers to refuse the "criminal orders" of "the junta" and lay down their arms.

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A DARYA DUGINA WHODUNNIT? UKRAINE, OF COURSE!: Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) accused the Ukrainian intelligence services of assassinating pro-war pundit Darya Dugina (aka Platonova), the daughter of prominent fascist Eurasianist philosopher Aleksandr Dugin. Ukraine denied the allegations. The alleged perpetrator of the murder is Natalia Vovk, a Ukrainian citizen and member of the "nationalist" Azov regiment, which Russia's Supreme Court declared a terrorist organization in early August. According to TASS sources in the FSB, Natalia Vovk, fled to Estonia. Estonia's Foreign Minister dismissed this as a "provocation." Subsequently, Russian state propagandist Margarita Simonyan threatened Estonia with a wave of assassinations in Tallinn if it refuses to cooperate. U.S.-sanctioned Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev proposed naming a Darya Dugina Street in Kyiv once it is occupied by Russia. RT called Dugina's assassination a "terrorist act" and one of "great symbolic and political significance." Meanwhile, alleged Russian partisans from the National Republican Army claimed responsibility for the attack on Dugina, announcing through former Russian lawmaker Ilya Ponomaryov their commitment to fight for a democratic Russia.

PATRUSHEV'S LITANY OF DISINFORMATION AT THE SCO: Secretary of Russia's Security Council Patrushev made a variety of propagandistic and false statements while speaking at the 17th annual meeting of the secretaries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on August 22. Patrushev stated the West "does

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not stop preparing" for an armed conflict with Russia as they "balance on the brink between hybrid actions and open armed conflict." He further claimed "Washington and London, as well as their allies will be responsible in the event of a disaster at the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant" in what is a continuation of the Kremlin's disinformation surrounding their occupation of and dangerous activity around the plant. Harkening back to 2020, Patrushev alleged the United States is trying to "hide its role in the development of [Covid-19]" and "divert attention from its activities to build up military-biological activity." This narrative aligns with the Kremlin's false claims of "U.S. biological weapons" labs operating in Ukraine and elsewhere.

GEC Fact Sheet: Kremlin Disinformation About International Sanctions

Since February 2022, the international community has imposed numerous sanctions on Russia in response to its war against Ukraine. In an attempt to undermine the sanctions, dismiss the international rejection of Russia's actions in Ukraine, and discourage future punitive actions, the Kremlin has spread disinformation about the effectiveness of sanctions. **The newly published GEC Fact Sheet debunks the Kremlin's false claims portraying the Russian economy as strong enough that international sanctions cannot significantly affect it, misrepresenting the ruble's performance, and downplaying the consequences of the sanctions for average Russians.** The Fact Sheet demonstrates the powerful effect of international sanctions on the Russian economy. Russia is struggling to find new suppliers and customers for goods it once bought and sold globally. The Kremlin has enacted severe measures in order to artificially increase the performance of the ruble, which harm Russian businesses and the general population. Average Russian citizens already see the effects of the Kremlin's war on Ukraine in their daily lives.

Who Was Darya Dugina? Like Father, Like Daughter

An ardent follower of her father's Eurasianist far-right ideology, Darya Dugina was also known by her pseudonym Platonova. She produced content for several networks within Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem. Dugina was a frequent contributor to Tsargrad TV, Katehon, and Geopolitica.ru, proliferators of disinformation affiliated with Aleksandr Dugin and the malign influence network led by Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev, all of which have been sanctioned by the United States. **Dugina was also involved in Project Lakhta, a media influence outlet owned by the Russian oligarch Yevgeniy Prigozhin.** She wrote a column for the Project Lakhta-affiliated Federal News Agency, also facing U.S. sanctions, and appeared on Afrique Média, dubbed by experts as "Prigozhin TV." In March 2022, the U.S. Department of the Treasury sanctioned Dugina as the chief editor of United World International (UWI), a website in English and Turkish languages that Project Lakhta developed in 2020. Dugina became a regular guest on state-funded and controlled television channels after the beginning of Moscow's "special military operation" in Ukraine.

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THE RAISON D'ÊTRE OF PUTIN'S ENVISIONED WORLD ORDER: President Putin delivered a propaganda-filled speech on August 16 at the 10th Moscow Conference on International Security in which he once again declared the end of the unipolar world and the coming of a multipolar order. Coupled with distorted attacks on the Western "neocolonial order," Putin's speech accused "Western globalist elites" of actions the Kremlin itself regularly engages in, such as fanning the flames of long-standing conflicts, grossly interfering in the

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internal affairs of sovereign states, and pressuring independent states to bend to its will. To illustrate his point, Putin delivered a diatribe on Ukraine, citing how Western alliances "destined the Ukrainian people" as "cannon fodder," "implemented the anti-Russia project," and "connived at the dissemination of the neo-Nazi ideology," all while pouring weapons into the country and looking the other way "when residents of Donbas were killed in their thousands." Putin claimed that for these reasons Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine is "in full conformity with the Charter of the United Nations." Putin closed his remarks by accusing the United States of "attempting to draw out this conflict" and "fomenting potential conflict" in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Specifically, he denounced the "U.S. escapade towards Taiwan" as "thoroughly planned" and purposely destabilizing. In his view, Western elites engage in such provocations and attacks on Russia and China to divert attention from their own socioeconomic problems. It is clear Putin shows no signs of evolving his mindset from establishing a new world order using the Kremlin's authoritarian disinformation playbook as a blueprint.

ATTACK ALL WHO PERSECUTE RUSSIANS – NAMELY LATVIA: Prominent outspoken Kremlin propagandist Vladimir Solovyov suggested on his show this week Russia should attack any country which oppresses Russian speakers – specifically citing Latvia. Rattling a tactical nuclear saber, he asks, "Will NATO countries hesitate? … America will be ready to go into battle for the Baltic countries who, in their Nazi frenzy, violate the rights of Russian speakers?!" This is a classic Kremlin tactic – call into question the resolve of NATO's Article 5.

Medieval Cages Await the Azovstal Defenders at Trial

Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is amplifying a video showing the installation of cages on stage at the Mariupol Philharmonic ahead of a "show-like trial" for Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) who defended Azovstal Steelworks. Russian state media outlet Zvezda publicized the video and quoted the head of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), Denis Pushilin, as saying "an international tribunal" may begin before the end of summer. Ukrainian Mayor of Mariupol Vadym Boychenko said, during an August 11 briefing, Russian occupation forces are considering several dates for the fake trial, but August 24, Ukraine's Independence Day, is the most likely due to its symbolism. The trial of Azovstal Steelworks defenders – a regiment of Ukraine's National Guard and protected as POWs – violates the Geneva Convention but is intended to demonstrate a "victory" to the Russian public. The imagery of cages is especially macabre, likely intended as a psychological operation to infuse terror into the Ukrainian public who opposed the surrender fearing the mistreatment of POWs.

Microsoft Shuts Down Russian Hacking Campaign Targeting NATO Countries

Microsoft disrupted a hacking campaign on August 15 by a Russian government-linked threat actor, dubbed "SEABORGIUM," targeting NATO countries for espionage and influence operations. This group's campaigns previously involved persistent phishing and credential theft leading to intrusions and data theft, but it has also been linked to hack-and-leak operations – using stolen and leaked data to shape narratives in targeted nations. Microsoft said since early 2022, SEABORGIUM engaged in targeting over 30 entities and persons of interest in defense, intelligence consulting, and NGOs in the U.S., UK, Baltics, Nordics, and Eastern European countries, as well as the government of Ukraine and entities supporting the war effort. The group used false social media personas on LinkedIn to connect with individuals of interest, engaged them in dialogue on a topic of the targets' expertise, and then sent phishing emails to steal credentials and data. This actor has been

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previously linked to an influence operation that used leaked emails allegedly stolen from Protonmail accounts of high-level Brexit proponents to "build a narrative participants were planning a coup" and to widely amplify it on social media. Cyber operations which initially appear espionage-related can quickly turn into cyber-enabled influence operations, a familiar tactic for Russian nation-state actors aiming to sway public opinion with disinformation campaigns, shape decision-making, and undermine unity of a potential allied response.

8/16/22

"DENAZIFICATION" IS OUT, "NATURAL RESOURCES" ARE IN: Russia's disinformation ecosystem is amplifying an emerging narrative that Ukraine's loss of lands rich with natural resources will benefit Russia's economy if Russia annexes the occupied Ukrainian territories. Olga Skabeyeva, host of "60 Minutes" on the state TV channel "Rossiya 1," appeared beaming "with pride" as she discussed an August 10 Washington Post report on the vast 8 million hectares of fertile agricultural land and $12.4 million worth of energy and precious metals deposits in Ukraine's Moscow-controlled east and south. Yury Afonin, a Russian State Duma member from the Communist Party, falsely claimed on the program that Ukraine's natural resources were "mercilessly exploited by Ukrainian oligarchs and orange leprosy represented by the Ukrainian authorities," referring to the 2004 "Orange Revolution." Afonin further claimed this "economic might" will boost Russia economically as "our brothers in Donbas, Zaporizhzhya, Kharkiv, Kherson regions hold referendums and join the Russian Federation," while Skabeyeva quipped: "You forgot Kyiv, Chernihiv, Lviv, Odesa." This narrative intends to sell this war as economically beneficial to Russian audiences, as sanctions make an impact and Russian forces struggle to attract recruits.

NUCLEAR BLACKMAIL AND ACCUSING U.S. OF ESCALATION: As Russia continues its campaign of what President Zelenskyy has called "nuclear blackmail" around the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant (NPP), Kremlin officials and Russia's disinformation ecosystem are flipping the script by accusing the United States of escalating nuclear tensions. The Russian Embassy in the United States claimed, on August 16, "the United States continues to act without regard to the security and interests of other countries, which contributes to increasing nuclear risks. American steps to further draw into a hybrid confrontation with Russia [in Ukraine] are fraught with unpredictable escalation and a direct military clash of nuclear powers." The Embassy tried to use the 77th anniversary of the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to depict the United States as an irresponsible nuclear actor. Iran's state Mehr News Agency also amplified this statement. Russia's claims on nuclear weapons serve as a form of whataboutism to distract from what the U.S. State Department has called the "height of irresponsibility" at the Zaporizhzhya NPP.

Pro-Kremlin Hacker Group Hits Latvian Parliament with DDoS Attack

Pro-Kremlin hacking group Killnet temporarily took down the site of Latvia's parliament (Saeima) on August 11 using a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack. The attack was likely in response to the Saeima's same-day declaration of Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism for its actions in Ukraine. While these types of cyber operations are common within Russia's hybrid arsenal, it is important to note, at times, these attacks can be predicted. **Monitoring the websites and channels of groups such as Killnet and other pro-Kremlin or Kremlin-backed entities can help anticipate and prevent such attacks,** since these groups have a pattern of publicizing their efforts immediately prior to and during their execution. Early detection of incoming DDoS attacks could be critical in averting an outage which can undermine public confidence and affect social order.

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Kremlin Stages Anti-Ukraine Protest in Ireland

Ireland's security services believe the Kremlin staged an August 6 anti-Ukraine protest by Russian nationalists, members of the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP), and other Irish republican groups outside the General Post Office in Dublin. Kremlin-controlled Channel One television sent a crew from London to ensure the protest received coverage in state media. In addition to filming interviews with Irish republicans, Channel One also spoke with Russia's Ambassador to Ireland and Russians living in Ireland, who claimed verbal abuse and threats by "Ukrainian sympathizers," a classic tactic from the Russian playbook. Pro-Kremlin protests with Russian flags and posters tend to appear even in the unlikeliest of places (see Central African Republic) and often garner state media coverage, even without clear links to the Russian government. A notable example of this tactic was during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, when Russian-backed Facebook accounts publicized and funded as many as 60 events and rallies in the United States.

8/11/22

GEARING UP FOR SO-CALLED REFERENDUMS: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem continues messaging on the "referendums" in the Russia-held territories of Ukraine for "reunification" with Russia. After "approving" the "referendum" on August 8, a Moscow-installed official in Zaporizhzhia declared, "The Zaporizhzhia region has set a course for reunification with Russia and there will be no turning back." Head of the Russia-installed regional "administration" Balitskiy said Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Donetsk, and Luhansk are discussing holding a joint "referendum" in September. Kremlin spokesman Peskov falsely claimed "these plans belong to the residents of the region." The ecosystem says there is widespread support for "reuniting" with Russia in Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, claiming to show reports of mass return of civilians to these regions from Kyiv-controlled territory. Perviy Kanal and others falsely asserted that "even the CNN" supports this narrative, misrepresenting a CNN report about an "odd day" during which people were crossing into Russia-controlled territories only to pick up their relatives and return to the territories held by Kyiv. According to Meduza, "classified" opinion polls showed that only 30 percent of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson residents support accession to Russia.

SVR CONTINUES DISINFORMATION ON POLAND: Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) is building upon previous claims it has made regarding alleged Polish plans to quietly absorb parts of Ukraine. This time, in addition to citing so-called Polish military measures, the SVR has asserted that Poland is working to economically capture Ukraine by arranging the purchase of Ukrainian goods at low prices in order to bankrupt and ultimately buy out Ukrainian companies, chiefly those in the agricultural sector. Russian media widely reported on this story, likely in an effort to get Western countries to pick it up. This narrative, even if it contains a kernel of truth, drives a wedge between Ukraine and Poland, the largest receiver of Ukrainian refugees. In reality, Poland is benefitting from the influx of potential workers, but does not intend to occupy Ukraine economically *or* militarily.

Kremlin Propaganda History Lessons

Latvia-based independent media outlet Meduza says it has obtained Kremlin guides instructing Russian politicians and state media on how to communicate about the war in Ukraine. The guides attempt to draw

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upon shared historical memory to increase Russian public support for the "special military operation" (SMO). One guide focuses on the 988 "baptism of Rus," when Kyivan Rus ruler Volodymyr the Great is said to have baptized the people of Kyiv after converting to Orthodox Christianity. It suggests portraying the SMO as a religious struggle against "godless" Ukrainian "satanists." The second guide instructs recipients to describe the SMO as a preemptive war just like the 1240 Battle of the Neva, when Prince Alexander of Novgorod is said to have defeated Swedish invaders on the banks of the Neva River. The third guide explains how to compare the war against Ukraine to World War I to argue that the "colonial West" forced Russia into both conflicts. Kremlin-linked sources told Meduza that "historical" media guides like these are produced by the Social Research Expert Institute (EISI), a think-tank reportedly affiliated with the Kremlin and funded by Rostec and Rosatom. EISI owns the disinformation media outlet Vzglyad.ru. According to Meduza's sources, State Duma deputy Oleg Matveychev directly oversees preparation of the guides. Meduza reported several instances when the state-aligned media appeared to have followed the Kremlin's instructions.

Russia's Almighty Inflatable Defenses

A recent clip from Ruptly intended to show how Russia's MOD delivered new anti-aircraft missile systems to Crimea, but the video contained a little too much hot air, even for Kremlin propaganda. As a Russian officer describes the systems, a gust of wind bends and sways the rocket silos, which are clearly not steel. It is unclear whether this was an oversight by Ruptly's video editors or an intentional "showing of the hand" by Russian forces to make Ukraine question its targets. **Regardless of the true intent, this physical piece of inflated propaganda is a component of Russia's *maskirovka* doctrine, which seeks to mix strategic and informational deception to manipulate an adversary's perception of the battleground reality.** For years, Russia has relied on RusBal, a company that makes hot air balloons and bouncy castles, to manufacture inflatable military equipment meant to deceive its adversaries. Generally speaking however, it is considered best not to show one's enemies that a given piece of equipment is fake.

8/9/22

RUSSIA'S DANGEROUS ZAPORIZHZHIYA GAME: Russia is playing a dangerous disinformation game as it continues to shell the Zaporizhzhiya nuclear power plant (NPP). Ukraine accused Russia on August 7 of shelling three radiation sensors and an area close to a storage facility containing spent nuclear fuel, an act President Zelenskyy denounced as "nuclear terror." The Kremlin, the Russian MOD, the Russia-installed authority in Zaporizhzhiya, and Russian Ambassador to the U.S. Antonov all claim Ukraine is behind the attacks and anything to the contrary is false and "Russophobic." However, based on the Russian MOD's reported statements, cited by Ukrainian nuclear authority Enerhoatom and Ukrainian intelligence, Russia turned the NPP into a booby trap and is likely shelling itself to incriminate Ukraine. Per the head of the NPP's Russian garrison, Russia has "mined all the important facilities" of the plant and is "not hiding it from the enemy." He continued, "The enemy knows that the plant will be either Russian or nobody's. We are ready for the consequences of such a step…And if the toughest order is given - we will have to follow it with honor." Ukraine has confirmed the plant is mined. The head of the IAEA warned last week "every principle of nuclear safety has been violated." Unfortunately, it is unlikely Russia will change course from its disinformation blame game against Ukraine, even if the worst happens at the NPP.

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RUSSIA SAYS USAID MAY HAVE CREATED COVID-19: In a new twist to the Kremlin's disinformation narrative about so-called "U.S. military biological laboratories" in Ukraine, the Russian MOD said on August 4 it was investigating the possible involvement of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in the creation of COVID-19. According to RT and the FSB-tasked News Front, MOD spokesperson Kirillov cited statements from a U.S. congressman and a scientist, supposedly implicating the United States, to explain why the MOD intends to "take a fresh look" at the pandemic's origins. Kremlin-aligned Russian-language media reported that USAID funded the Predict program since 2009, which studied new coronaviruses, and cited one project contractor, Metabiota, "known for its military biological activities on the territory of Ukraine." Russian Foreign Ministry amplified the MOD's falsehoods on Twitter.

Russia's Amnesty International Hypocrisy

Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is capitalizing on the controversial August 4 Amnesty International report claiming the Ukrainian military exposed civilians to Russian attacks by operating and basing themselves in populated areas. The Amnesty International report's claims proved to be immensely useful to the Kremlin's propagandists, who have accused Ukraine of using civilians as "human shields" since the outbreak of the war. This selective leveraging is interesting, especially given Russia's repeated efforts to discredit and hinder the work of Amnesty International for years, including in April 2022 when Russian authorities shut down the organization's office in Moscow. Yet, this is not an isolated incident of the Kremlin's disinformation apparatus citing an organization which it would generally otherwise characterize as unfriendly. Days after the rollout of the Amnesty report, CBS News released a documentary and published an article entitled "Why military aid in Ukraine may not always get to the front lines," which cited an assistance group CEO who, in April, estimated only "30-40%" of aid coming across the border reached its intended destination. Facing backlash, CBS updated its reporting to reflect a much-improved situation and a newly-arrived U.S. defense attaché in Kyiv for arms control and monitoring, though Kremlin disinformers took advantage of the earlier CBS News report (an outlet generally discredited by Russia as a Western source) to make the most of the situation.

Blaming the West for Russia's Wars

Russia used the 14-year anniversary of its invasion of Georgia on August 8 to spread disinformation and propaganda to blame the West for both the 2008 invasion and the current war in Ukraine. Deputy Chairman of Russia's Security Council and the country's president at the time of the 2008 invasion, Dmitri Medvedev, said the United States and "Anglo-Saxon" countries planned both conflicts, using Russia's neighbors to "shake up" the situation in Russia and even destroy it. "Just like in the case with Georgia," he added, "Americans have intentionally strengthened Kyiv's sense of impunity, pumping it with weapons, and condoning the killings of civilians in Donbas." Pro-Kremlin Telegram channels drew comparisons between President Zelenskyy and the former President of Georgia Saakahsvilli, describing both as "US puppets."

8/4/22

SPINNING WAR IN UKRAINE AS WAR AGAINST THE WEST: The Kremlin continues spreading false claims that it is fighting against the United States and NATO in Ukraine. Russian Foreign Affairs and Defense ministries attempted to manipulate the statements of Ukraine's Major General Vadym Skibitsky to accuse Washington of

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"direct involvement" in hostilities in Ukraine. In an interview with The Telegraph, Skibitsky said U.S. intelligence shares "real-time information" with Ukraine on the use of U.S.-provided HIMARS but does not provide direct targeting information. Skibitsky also suggested this information sharing "would allow Washington to stop any potential attacks if they were unhappy with the intended target." Russian MFA spokeswoman Zakharova argued the "U.S. performs the function of gunners in their purest form." The MOD said the Biden administration is "directly responsible" for all of Kyiv's missile attacks that allegedly led to "mass civilian casualties" in Donbas. To demonstrate Moscow's supposed successes in countering U.S. lethal aid to Ukraine, Minister of Defense Shoigu falsely claimed his forces had destroyed six HIMARS.

PLAYING WITH FIRE AND LYING ABOUT IT: Moscow disseminates disinformation and propaganda to hide its dangerous activities at the Russia-occupied Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant (NPP) and portray Ukraine as an irresponsible, dangerous actor. Ukrainian officials and civilians told The New York Times Russia has fired rockets from the cover of the NPP since mid-July, targeting Nikopol and other locations. The Kremlin knows Ukraine will not respond, but apparently attempts to provoke retaliation in an effort to discredit the government in Kyiv. U.S. Secretary of State Blinken said Russia's actions bring the "notion of having a human shield to an entirely different and horrific level." Rafael Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), warned that the NPP "is completely out of control," requesting to allow experts to inspect the plant. The Russian MFA said the Russian military's "protection" of the NPP does not threaten security but aims to prevent provocations by nationalist formations and mercenaries. The MFA spokeswoman blamed the UN Secretariat for preventing the IAEA's visit to the plant.

"We Were Hacked!" Is the Kremlin Sending Out Trial Balloons?

On August 1, a post predicting the "restoration" of the Russian empire appeared on the VK page of Dmitri Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council. The post claimed that "after the liberation of Kyiv and all of the territories of Little Russia...Rus will be unified once again," also arguing Georgia can only be united as part of a unified state with Russia. The post referred to Kazakhstan as an "artificial state" formed from "former Russian territories" and suggested it was committing what "can be classified as a genocide against Russians." Ten minutes after its publication, the post was deleted with Medvedev's aides saying it had been published by hackers. Some opposition commentators believe the publication was genuine, while **others presume the Kremlin was putting out controversial messages as "trial balloons" to gauge public reaction.** A similar event occurred in July when an article allegedly penned by Putin's aide Kiriyenko was published and soon thereafter deleted from the website of the pro-Kremlin Izvestiya, which also blamed hackers. That article attracted controversy for calling on Russians to "restore" Donbas at the expense of their living standards.

Taiwan as a Distraction

House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi's trip to Taiwan was a leading news item in the Russian press on August 3. **As detailed in the GEC's August 2 Snapshot, Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem seizes on hot button issues such as unrest in Kosovo to distract from the war in Ukraine. Amplifying Pelosi's trip to Taiwan serves a similar purpose – to show the United States is "stirring up trouble" in regions far from its backyard.** Russian embassies worldwide started sharing #WeStandWithChina and #ThereIsOnlyOneChina hashtags to express Russia's sympathies for "bullied" Beijing. Russian Federation Council Deputy Speaker Kosachev compared Speaker Pelosi's visit to Taiwan to U.S. Under Secretary for

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Political Affairs Victoria Nuland's 2014 visit to Ukraine during Ukraine's Euromaidan. By siding with Taiwan, Russia aims to characterize the United States as supporting separatism in eastern Asia but not in eastern Europe, specifically Ukraine (despite the latter being built upon Russian false pretenses). Russia's efforts to distract from Ukraine and cast blame towards the West are likely to continue as long as lethal aid to Ukraine keeps flowing.

8/2/22 #60

CLAIMING UKRAINIAN PROVOCATION IN OLENIVKA: Russia blames Ukraine and the United States for the July 29 killing of 53 Azov battalion prisoners of war at a prison in the Russian-occupied town of Olenivka. RIA Novosti initially reported Ukraine attacked the camp with 120-millimeter artillery shells, but then the disinformation ecosystem began amplifying Ministry of Defense (MOD) claims that Kyiv used U.S.-supplied high-mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS). The MOD's and "DNR's" spokesmen accused Kyiv of carrying out a "bloody provocation" to prevent Ukrainian "nationalists" from surrendering to Russia and revealing their alleged crimes. An RT op-ed argued "all signs on the ground point to a Ukrainian attack," citing pro-Kremlin Telegram channel Rybar and attempting to portray it as an independent "online observer." Ukraine said it intercepted conversations proving Russia attacked the prison to "cover up the torture and execution of prisoners," and pointed to the possible involvement of the Wagner Group. Based on statements from U.S. officials and satellite images, the Institute for the Study of War assessed Russian forces were responsible for the killing. The Red Cross has not had access to Olenivka despite Moscow's promise to allow an "objective investigation."

LOOK AT KOSOVO, NOT UKRAINE: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is promoting the false narrative that the United States is behind renewed unrest between Kosovo and Serbia because Washington is failing to achieve its goals in Ukraine. State disinformation outlets RT and Sputnik both claim the United States is once again using its "recipe for chaos" in Kosovo as a part of its "broader geopolitical war against Russia," while Chechen strongman Kadyrov blamed NATO using similar rhetoric. The FSB-tasked News Front took specific aim at the upcoming U.S. midterm elections, stating "Biden needs a win" in Kosovo to show victory, but Moscow will not let the United States take Belgrade "hostage." Given Russian media coverage – including comments from one Serbian MP who tweeted Serbia may have to "begin the denazification of the Balkans" – it is possible Russia is accusing the United States of doing what Russia itself is doing. Russia aims to escalate the situation in the Balkans to take both eyes and resources away from Ukraine.

SBU Uncovers Russia's Plan for Kherson Referendum

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) said September 1 that it exposed Kremlin plans to hold a "referendum" on the occupied Kherson region joining Russia. According to documents reportedly intercepted by the SBU, a pro-Kremlin movement "Волонтеры за Россию" (Volunteers for Russia) was assigned a key role in the process, including activities aimed at fabricating local support for Russia and staging "reports" for Russian television channels. Pro-Kremlin activists planned to form twenty "election commissions" and organize more than 140 simultaneous pro-Russian demonstrations, which would have been covered by Kremlin-controlled media and bloggers. The SBU said pro-Russian "collaborators" reported to their Russian handlers that the people of Kherson do not accept the idea of joining Russia and actively resist the occupation.

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U.S. Treasury Sanctions Two Kremlin Malign Influence Actors

On July 29, the U.S. Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on two malign influence actors working on behalf of the Kremlin to destabilize and manipulate the United States and its allies and partners. Since at least 2020, Aleksandr Ionov cooperated and coordinated with the FSB to identify socio-political points of contention within the United States and worked directly with Yevgeniy Prigozhin's Project Lakhta to influence U.S. elections. Ionov also runs two organizations meant to spread disinformation and host events and protests to support fringe groups in opposition to U.S. objectives: Anti-Globalization Movement of Russia (AGMR) and STOP-Imperialism. In addition to being sanctioned, the Department of Justice unsealed an indictment charging Ionov for his foreign malign influence activities against the United States. The second sanctioned individual is Natalya Burlinova, head of PICREADI (also known as "Creative Diplomacy"). Despite being described as "independent," Creative Diplomacy is directed and funded by Russia's intelligence services to bring together Western "aspiring leaders" for programs and events which take an alternative (pro-Kremlin) look at Russia's relations with the West. These programs included in-person and virtual meetings with major Russian political figures and government entities. In reality, Russian intelligence tracked the careers and activities of Creative Diplomacy alumni since at least 2017, likely for recruitment.

7/28/22

LAVROV'S UKRAINE DISINFORMATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: Russian propaganda outlets amplified Foreign Minister Lavrov's disinformation about Ukraine during his visits to Congo, Uganda, and Ethiopia. Lavrov penned an op-ed for local media in advance of his visit, praising Africa's refusal to join anti-Russian sanctions, condemning "Western and Ukrainian propaganda" for accusing Russia of "exporting hunger," and blaming the West for the global food crisis. Lavrov repeated these false claims throughout his tour. RT France covered his remarks in Addis Ababa, falsely charging Kyiv and the West with harboring neo-Nazi groups and claiming NATO was responsible for Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine. Sputnik France amplified Ugandan leader Museveni's criticism of the alleged Western pressure on Africa to "adopt an anti-Russian position." Highlighting Lavrov's alleged success in spreading Russian influence, Russian state media circulated a video of Congo's Foreign Minister Gakosso warmly recalling (in Russian) his days as a student in Leningrad and telling Russian reporters: "You know that we are with you." Russian propaganda outlets are boosting their regional presence with Sputnik renewing cooperation with the Congolese News Agency, Uganda's state broadcaster carrying RT news content, and RT opening a new bureau in South Africa.

RUSSIA SEIZES OPPORTUNITY TO DISCREDIT AN OLD FOE:
Pro-Kremlin media touts the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) operation that allegedly foiled a NATO-supported plot by Ukraine's military intelligence (GUR) to highjack Russian military jets. The FSB claimed July 26 that the GUR tried to bribe Russian pilots with money and guarantees of EU citizenship. The FSB also said Christo Grozev, the lead Russia researcher for investigative outlet Bellingcat, took part in the operation. Grozev admitted to filming a documentary film about the operation, but said the FSB used a "traditional mix of forged 'evidence' and loosely interpreted facts" to accuse him of direct involvement. Kremlin propaganda highlighted Grozev's "involvement" to buttress Moscow's long-standing allegation that he is a Western intelligence agent. Russia then designated Bellingcat and its partner, The Insider, as "undesirable

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organizations" on July 27 and opened a case against the latter's founder for "discrediting Russian armed forces."

GEC Report: Inauthentic Pro-Kremlin TikTok Commenters Rally for War

A new GEC analysis of 15 Russian state-affiliated TikTok accounts found that pro-Kremlin commenters responding to multiple videos from these accounts exhibited indicators of inauthenticity. This likely inauthentic activity tended to express approval for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, possibly attempting to rally domestic support for the war on TikTok. These TikTok commenters repeatedly posted identical comments and generally had many followers, despite posting none of their own original content. This inauthentic activity, however, is likely limited. Within the dataset, it was atypical for users to comment on multiple videos: only 54 of the 23,684 commenters commented on three or more videos. TikTok videos that featured coverage of either Ukrainian resistance or Russians protesting the war often received more comments relative to likes than other videos. The report assessed that anti-war content tended to provoke disinformation claims from pro-Kremlin commenters, likely to discredit protests and discourage the broader Russian public from participating in them. Please contact info@geciq.com for USG access to the report and info@geciqglobal.com for those outside the USG.

Imperial Redux and Weaponization of Maps

The Russian propaganda and disinformation ecosystem continues to use maps to question Ukraine's legitimacy as a state in order to disguise re-colonization as "denazification." In the latest display of this tactic, Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council and former president of Russia, stooped to propagandistic trolling in his July 27 post on Telegram: "In President Zelenskyy's drugged-out brain the picture of his nation's bright future may look like this [top right, Ukraine before the 2014 invasion], but western analysts think that in reality it will be this [bottom right]." Medvedev cites likely fictional "analysts" to telegraph colonial wishful thinking: to reduce Ukraine to the Kyiv region, while the remainder would be divided between Russia, Poland, Romania, and Hungary, evoking the imperial past. This narrative reflects President Putin's February speech questioning Ukraine's statehood, as Russian calls to expand the "special military operation" to reflect the imperial map intensify. The so-called "DPR head" Pushilin falsely claimed "Russian cities" Kyiv, Chernihiv, Poltava, Odesa, and Dnipro need to be "liberated from Nazism," while the Speaker of the Crimean Parliament Konstantinov added Mykolayiv and Kharkiv to the list.

7/26/22

LAVROV'S AFRICA MESSAGE CENTERS ON UKRAINE: Russia's propaganda ecosystem is publicizing Foreign Minister Lavrov's Africa tour to deflect the Kremlin's responsibility for the global food crisis. Russian state-funded Arabic-language outlets, RT and Sputnik, amplified Lavrov's July 24 press conference with Egyptian Foreign Minister Shoukry and his remarks to the Arab League falsely blaming the "COVID 19 pandemic," "illegal" Western sanctions, and Ukraine's "mining of the Black Sea" for the crisis. The outlets also covered Lavrov's accusations of the West "obstructing the negotiation process" between Moscow and Kyiv, "hindering Russia's support for African countries," and amplified his characterization of Ukraine as "Nazi" and "Russophobic." Egyptian Ahram Online English mentioned Lavrov's falsehoods on the alleged "U.S. military biolabs in Ukraine." Pro-Kremlin Russian-language media highlighted Lavrov's "promise" to "help the

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Ukrainian people get rid of the absolutely anti-people and anti-historical regime," and his assertion that Russia's July 23 attack on the Odesa Port did not violate the agreement to restart Ukrainian grain exports.

FIFTY SHADES OF SPIN ON ODESA PORT SHELLING: Russia's disinformation narratives regarding its attack on Odesa Port, which is critical to grain exports, shifted as quickly as its commitment to the UN-brokered deal signed a day earlier. Initially, Moscow distanced itself from the strike as the state-funded RT quoted the Turkish Defense Minister claiming Russian officials denied any connection to the attack. A day later, the Russian MoD reversed their earlier denials, claiming it destroyed a Ukrainian warship and a warehouse of U.S.-supplied Harpoon missiles. State media outlets circulated these claims. Kremlin spokesman Peskov maintained the strike did not target grain infrastructure, but Ukrainian authorities refuted the claim saying Russia attacked the staging area for grain exports. Russian MFA Spokesperson Zakharova mocked President Zelenskyy's characterization of the attack as barbarism, saying cynically, "Russian Kalibr rockets sent Ukrainian warship to the Kyiv regime's favorite address," referring to the Ukrainian forces' refusal on February 25 to surrender Snake Island.

Annexation Rhetoric Grows

Russia escalates its efforts to annex southern Ukraine using its 2014 Crimea playbook. In a July 20 interview, Foreign Minister Lavrov clearly telegraphed Moscow's long-term intentions saying "geography has changed" since its March negotiations with Kyiv: "Now we are not just talking about Donetsk and Luhansk provinces. It's Kherson, Zaporizhzhya, and other territories." Russian occupation authorities and their proxies in Kherson and Zaporizhzhya echoed these claims, announcing an election commission to hold a referendum on joining Russia on September 11. Meanwhile, Russian occupation authorities are integrating Moscow "specialists" into the security services of the occupied Ukrainian territories and advocating for the establishment of permanent Russian troop bases in the Zaporizhzhya province. Russia is further advancing its passportization policy by requiring Ukrainian business owners to re-register their businesses with Russian passports. Finally, in a popular social media post, Russian proxies circulated a video announcing the creation of the "Odesa Brigade," claiming Odesa and Mykolayiv are the next targets of Russian "liberation." These efforts are possibly intended to counter Kyiv's announced offensive to retake Kherson and Zaporizhzhya.

Russian Artists in Service of Kremlin Propaganda

Russian propaganda weaponizes Russian celebrities in support of the Kremlin's political goals, which has become more apparent since the launch of the full-scale war against Ukraine on February 24. While Russian government censorship laws and criminal persecution have led to the departure of many Russian artists who oppose the war, the Kremlin has successfully deployed pro-Kremlin celebrities to bolster public support for the war. On July 21, the European Union curbed the influence of pro-war Russian cultural figures by sanctioning two actors, Sergey Bezrukov and Vladimir Mazhkov, who actively spread pro-war propaganda. This week, Russian state media and propagandists praised the pop icon Filipp Kirkorov for inviting the "heroes" of the "special military operation" to his concerts in the occupied Crimea. In 2017, Kirkorov praised President Putin while receiving a state award, but his views on the war were previously unknown. Curiously, Russia's "patriotic community" criticized Kirkorov in May after he challenged Margarita Simonyan, the chief editor of RT, for publicly accusing entertainer Maxim Galkin, who opposes the war and moved to

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Israel, of being gay. Independent journalists from the exiled "Novaya Gazeta" suggested Kirkorov "flipflopped" out of fear of being "canceled" in Russia.

7/21/22

SPINNING THE ATTACK ON THE ZAPORIZHZHYA PLANT: The Institute for the Study of War reported that Ukrainian partisans attacked Russian occupation forces July 19 at the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant (NPP), killing and injuring several. The Kremlin capitalized quickly, claiming Kyiv and Washington had orchestrated the attack and portraying Ukraine as an irresponsible, dangerous actor. Russian MFA spokeswoman Maria Zakharova argued "Kiev is attempting to provoke a nuclear catastrophe in Europe." The state-controlled Channel One described the operation as a "terrorist attack," while the FSB-linked SouthFront said "Ukrainian attacks on the plant threaten the safety of the entire country and all of its neighbors." Komsomolskaya Pravda, supposedly President Putin's favorite newspaper, speculated that Kyiv risked a "nuclear Armageddon" and a "second Chernobyl" to conceal its own nuclear weapons development from the International Atomic Energy Agency. As Moscow continues its attempts to flip the script after much of the world condemned Russia's dangerous March assault on Zaporizhzhya, Russian forces hold staff hostage and plan to store military equipment at the facility.

U.S. BIOLABS AND UKRAINIAN SUPER SOLDIERS: Russia's state media and proxy outlets are taking "U.S.-run biolabs" disinformation to the realm of science fiction. Konstantin Kosachev, deputy speaker of Russia's Federation Council and co-chair of the commission to investigate "U.S. biolaboratories in Ukraine" claimed July 18 that blood tests of captured Ukrainian soldiers showed they were experimented on with "extremely dangerous diseases atypical for … Ukraine." Commission co-chair Irina Yarovaya charged the experiments "neutralized the last traces of human consciousness and turned them into the cruelest and deadliest monsters" and a controllable "cruel machine administered by the U.S." FSB-linked SouthFront alleged reports reveal a funding "network of cooperation between the Pentagon, the Open Society Foundation, Pfizer and Moderna, and family members of U.S. public figures." The absurd claims seek to stoke conspiracy theorizing while excusing Russian forces' poor performance.

Genocidal Rhetoric Plus Denials and Threats

Russian propagandists and officials are using increasingly dehumanizing language when talking about Russia's war in Ukraine. On his primetime propaganda program "Solovyov Live," Solovyov employed a metaphor comparing Ukrainians to worms being removed from a cat by a veterinarian in a "special operation." His guest and RT head Margarita Simonyan asserted that Ukraine cannot and will not exist any longer. On the equally propagandistic "60 Minutes," host Olga Skabeyeva stated that Ukraine is a "nonexistent country," while one of her guests characterized the conflict as a "holy war" and described Ukrainian Defense Minister Reznikov as "the last bug in line that we still have to put in his place." Belarusian dictator Lukashenko said July 21 that the issue of whether Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kherson are part of Ukraine "is no longer being discussed." MFA spokeswoman Zakharova denied Secretary Blinken's July 13 statement denouncing Russia's systematic filtration camps and forced deportation of at least 1.6 million Ukrainians, stating "This is a lie." Both Chechen strongman Kadyrov and the U.S.-sanctioned, SVR-directed New Eastern Outlook recently claimed that Poland is next on the list for Russia's "demilitarization" of NATO.

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The Return of Organ Trafficking Disinformation

Since at least 2014 Russian media have spread false claims that Ukrainian state entities extracted organs from wounded Ukrainian soldiers for sale in Western Europe. This false charge is reminiscent of a child organ trafficking "urban legend" popularized in the 1980s and 1990s. Organ trafficking disinformation often resonates because it encapsulates, in story form, widespread anxieties about modern life. This week, Andrey Marochko, an officer of the so-called "LPR People's Militia," resurfaced these allegations on Russian state media. Marochko claimed that "black [as in 'black market'] transplant surgeons," including foreigners, used to run a massive clandestine organ harvesting operation at the so-called "U.S. military biolabs" in the Luhansk region before Russia's "special military operation," and continue to do so in western Ukraine and Poland. The operation allegedly involves harvesting organs of wounded Ukrainian soldiers and also "pro-Russian" Ukrainians, he alleged. A pro-Kremlin Telegram channel ChVK Media suggested that a month after Russia launched its "special military operation," Ukraine changed the law and welcomed the "Doctors Without Borders" organization to help expand the trafficking operation.

7/19/22

DISINFORMATION PURVEYORS TARGET LETHAL AID: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem has turned its firehose of falsehoods on U.S. and Western lethal aid to Ukraine in an effort to decrease trust and diminish the West's effective military support. Russian state media claim that Western weapons bound for Ukraine have not only ended up on the black market, but also were used to shell civilians. The widely followed Legitimnyy Telegram channel, which Ukraine's SBU believes is Russia-directed, claimed July 17 that recently ousted SBU chief Bakanov and other SBU officers are suspected of trading Western weapons. State Duma Chairman Volodin argued Ukrainian forces' "unprofessionalism" could cause Washington's and Brussels' missiles to "fly back to their owners," implying continued Western lethal aid to Kyiv would backfire. Ukrainian Defense Minister Reznikov recently rebutted many of the Kremlin's charges, including arms trafficking.

DISINFORMERS CLAIM U.S. EMBASSY IN KYIV CLOSES: Russian state media and pro-Kremlin actors on Telegram capitalized on a July 14 U.S. embassy security alert for U.S. citizens in Ukraine to falsely claim the embassy had closed. Most sources cited Sputnik Belarus' reporting from "witnesses" on the ground that the mission had shuttered. The FSB-tasked disinformation outlet News Front falsely stated the non-existent U.S. Consulate in Odesa had also closed, speculating Americans "evacuated" because they "must have known something." Appearing on the state propaganda television show "60 Minutes," the so-called "LPR ambassador" to Russia also spread lies about an alleged evacuation. Military "expert" Shurigin said Americans were reacting to recent statements by Russia's Minister of Defense Shoigu ordering Russian forces to step up Ukraine operations. The Prigozhin-linked Telegram channel Cyber Front Z posted links to Embassy Kyiv's social media platforms and urged followers to "bid farewell" to U.S. diplomats. This disinformation campaign seeks to drive a wedge between the United States and Ukraine by portraying a fabricated embassy closure as a supposed sign of U.S. abandonment of an ally.

Rhetoric for Referendum: "Zaporizhzhya Will Not Be Like Kosovo"

Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is working to show that people living in occupied Ukraine are eager for Russian rule. State propaganda outlets, such as Sputnik, depict allegedly long lines of Melitopol

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residents seeking Russian passports who offer reporters conveniently pro-Kremlin statements such as "Now there will be free education and free medical care here, everything that we had before [in Soviet times] and that we were deprived of." Russian state media widely reported outgoing head of Zaporizhzhya's occupying military-civilian administration Yevgeny Balitsky's July 14 statement that a referendum on whether "to join Russia or not" will take place in the first half of September. Balitsky added, "we will not be a second Kosovo," claiming NATO had split the former Yugoslavia apart without a referendum. While Balitsky and other Kremlin appointed officials continue spreading "denazification" rhetoric and Zaporizhzhya's occupying governor Anton Koltsov forms a government, efforts to also impose a new educational system on occupied Ukraine continue. The Washington Post reported Moscow is offering teachers in Russia lucrative salaries to move to Zaporizhzhya and Kherson to "correct" what children there have been wrongfully taught in the past.

Exploiting Homophobia to Demonize Ukraine and the West

Kremlin propagandists often play on contentious and divisive social issues, which has proven to be an effective disinformation tactic. Russian disinformation purveyors targeting domestic audiences often demonize the LGBTQ community to paint the West, and now Ukraine, as "morally corrupt." The disinformation then contrasts that corruption with Russia's "traditional values." This week, as Russian lawmakers consider a law banning "propaganda" of "nontraditional sexual relations," pro-Kremlin media widely reported President Zelenskyy would consider an alleged Ukrainian petition to replace an Odesa statue of Russian Empress Yekaterina II with one of a gay pornography actor. Russian MFA spokeswoman Zakharova separately alleged Zelenskyy's use of his Jewish background to claim Ukraine was not antisemitic was "a case of frightening logic" which "begs the question: is there homophobia in Ukraine? If the Kiev regime's answer is 'no,' is it then connected with the current president?" On state television a Chechen military commander proclaimed Russia is fighting a holy war in Ukraine against the "army of the Antichrist" and "satanic LGBT values."

7/14/22 #55

TARGETING POLAND TO DRIVE WEDGES: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is escalating its rhetoric against Poland about the war in Ukraine. Head of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Naryshkin expounded on his previous claims that Poland was planning to quietly regain control of western Ukraine, adding a July 13 charge that the SVR is aware that Warsaw is now "nervous" after having its plot exposed. Naryshkin also commented that Hungary and Romania were ready to cooperate with Poland in the plot. In an article for the FSB-tasked News Front, "military expert" Yuriy Podolyaka took Naryshkin's claims a step further, musing that should Poland decide to take more than Ukraine's western regions, a military clash with the "denazifying" Russian military was likely. News Front cited another "expert" attempting to embitter relationships between Poland, the United States, NATO, and the EU who offered that an "arrogant Warsaw should not build illusions about assistance from the United States" given it is "the main battlefield in the EU." Meanwhile, on Russia's much-watched evening propaganda platform "60 Minutes" host Olga Skabeeva exclaimed that "If, God forbid, Americans deliver missiles that can travel 300 kilometers, then we simply can't stop. We'll go all the way to Warsaw." These claims aim to drive wedges and sow mistrust between Ukraine, its neighbors, and international partners.

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RUSSIAN MoD RELEASES NEW TROVE OF BIOLAB DISINFO: The Russian MoD released its "Final Report on DTRA Activities from 2005 to 2016" last week, which claims to further demonstrate U.S. "military biological" activity in Ukraine. Among the claims is the allegation that the Pentagon, a private U.S. company, and the Mechnikov Institute worked in violation of regulations and safety precautions to study several dangerous pathogens, including Ebola, in Odesa. Russian state media seized on the Ebola aspect of the reporting, emphasizing the alleged suspicious nature of the activity. Some of these disinformation outlets continue linking the U.S. company in question to the son of a prominent U.S. political figure.

The Puppetry of Annexation: "Kharkiv People's Republic" 2.0

Kremlin state media outlets are falsely alleging that Ukraine's Kharkiv region wants to join Russia. Vitaly Ganchev, appointed by the Russian occupying forces as the "head of provisional civil administration of Kharkiv province," claimed in a July 6 TASS interview that residents of the "liberated" (occupied by Russia) Kharkiv region "aim to join Russia." "People hear that there is a power vertical, we are enacting laws, the introduction of the ruble fills a key economic niche, and they are reorienting to accept the new reality," he said. Kremlin disinformation outlets immediately amplified these false claims. Ganchev was accused in April by the Kharkiv regional prosecutor's office of high treason for collaborating with Russian occupying forces and attempting to organize a "referendum" to declare a "Kharkiv People's Republic," again. His tactics appear aimed at laying the groundwork for Russia's annexation of the occupied areas, which constitute 30% of the overall Kharkiv region, and appear timed as Russia steps up passportization and the Duma prepares to hold an extraordinary session July 15. Ganchev's claims also deflect blame from indiscriminate shelling, massive looting, and war crimes by Russia.

How Kremlin Propaganda Responds to GEC Exposure

The GEC Bulletin debunking the Kremlin's false claim that Russia is pursuing the "denazification" of Ukraine was the top story July 12 on Russia's state-funded "Evening with Vladimir Solovyov" television program. Solovyov and his guests' responses to the Bulletin illuminate several Kremlin propaganda techniques. Understanding that debunking facts from the Bulletin would be challenging, the program's participants sought to damage the credibility of the messenger. For example, they targeted State Department leaders, accusing them of corruption and support for Nazism in Ukraine. They also called it a "political hit job" to "accuse Russia of all sins" or a product produced to "please" Israel, as President Biden visited the Middle East. Lastly, **the Kremlin propagandists resorted to the exact disinformation techniques identified in the Bulletin** - trying to "prove" that Ukraine is a Nazi state despite being led by a Jewish president, they attempted to delegitimize Zelenskyy's Jewishness, sought to downplay the role of antisemitism in Nazi ideology, and tried to portray Jews as the worst Nazis.

7/12/22

"DENAZIFICATION" DISINFORMATION AT THE UN: Pro-Kremlin media are amplifying false claims made during a July 11 Russia-organized informal UN Security Council meeting on "Neo-Nazism and Radical Nationalism" in Ukraine. Pravda and Ukraina.ru reported that diplomats from Russia's UN mission presented "irrefutable evidence of Nazism in Ukraine" which they falsely depicted as a "root cause" of the war. TASS quoted Deputy Ambassador Dmitry Polyanskiy's promise Russia would "complete the denazification of Ukraine" in honor of

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WWII veterans and future generations. Other Kremlin-aligned outlets amplified the testimony of Maxim Grigoryev, a Russian disinformer and member of Russia's state-linked Civic Chamber, who leads the so-called International Public Tribunal on Ukraine. Grigoryev falsely accused Ukraine of staging false flag operations and intentionally killing civilians to "create a picture" for the Western media to blame Russia for the atrocities. The Kremlin's long record of trying to use the UNSC and other multilateral bodies to spread disinformation has increased rapidly since February 24. Over 40 countries condemned Moscow's "continued efforts" in this latest bogus meeting to falsely accuse Ukraine of Nazism to justify its unprovoked war.

DENYING CIVILIAN DEATHS, AGAIN: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is again obfuscating the cause of civilian casualties in Ukraine caused by Russian strikes. Despite the Kremlin's alleged pause in its war march, it has in fact stepped up indiscriminate shelling across eastern Ukraine, resulting in civilian and military deaths. Most notably, Russia killed 34 civilians in a July 9 missile strike on a five-story apartment building in Chasiv Yar in the Donetsk region. Russian state media reported the Russian Armed Forces carried out strikes on Chasiv Yar, killing 300 "nationalists" of the Ukrainian 118th Brigade. Other pro-Kremlin influencers and media, including an outlet linked to U.S.-sanctioned oligarch Yevgeniy Prigozhin, falsely claimed the apartment building housed Ukrainian soldiers and disputed claims the building was residential as fake.

GEC Bulletin: "To Vilify Ukraine, The Kremlin Resorts to Antisemitism"

One of Russia's most common disinformation narratives to justify its devastating war against the people of Ukraine is the lie that Russia is pursuing the "denazification" of its neighbor. The GEC published a Bulletin July 11 debunking this false claim and enumerating the Kremlin's disinformation techniques behind this campaign. By evoking Nazism and drawing false parallels between Moscow's aggression against Ukraine and the Soviet fight against Nazi Germany, the Kremlin aims to demonize and delegitimize Ukraine, and attempts to manipulate domestic and international public opinion. The Bulletin demonstrates the Kremlin's use of antisemitic rants and Holocaust distortions to sell the fabricated "denazification" pretext for its war on Ukraine. To "prove" that Ukraine – a nation led by a democratically elected Jewish president with family members killed by the Nazis – is a Nazi state, the Kremlin's propagandists and officials questioned President Zelenskyy's Jewishness, downplayed the role of antisemitism in Nazi ideology, and aimed to portray Jews as the worst Nazis. Infusing multiple contradictory narratives to obscure facts is a familiar Kremlin tactic.

The Kremlin's French Disinformers in Donbas

The Kremlin is using a network of Donbas-based, French-speaking content creators to manipulate French opinion of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Most prominent of these self-proclaimed "independent journalists" is Anne-Laure Bonnel, director of the documentaries "Donbass" and "Silence in Nagorno-Karabakh." In a March 1 interview, Bonnel accused Ukraine of shelling its own citizens in Donbas. Two days later, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov cited Bonnel's work as proof of Ukraine's war crimes. A Russian UN official invited Bonnel in May to brief the UNSC on Ukraine's alleged war crimes in Donbas. The other prominent disinformer, Christelle Néant, is the founder of the French language outlet Donbass Insider (DI). Among DI's headlines are Néant's claims Washington has turned Ukraine into a "biological testing ground" and dismissal of Alexei Navalny's poisoning as a "sordid farce." Pro-Kremlin outlets Inosmi and News Front amplified these claims. She also accused the Ukrainian Army of killing children and shelling residential areas while denying

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Russia's role in the Bucha massacre. Both actors are still actively promoting pro-Kremlin narratives on their sites and on French media, such as Agoravox, SudRadio and Investig' Action, as well as through the Kremlin-linked Russian House of Science and Culture and the pro-Kremlin think tank Franco-Russian dialogue.

7/7/22

TAKING AIM AT WESTERN LETHAL AID: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem continues to make false claims regarding Western military aid to Ukraine. Russian disinformers are circulating two previously used narratives that take aim at Western aid. The first alleges that the CIA is recruiting Daesh militants to fight in Ukraine, a false claim that Russia leveraged in the past and that Iran recently amplified. The second claims that Western lethal aid to Ukraine is being sold on the black market. Russian Defense Minister Shoigu stated on July 5 "some of the foreign weapons supplied by the West to Ukraine are spreading throughout the Middle East region and also end up on the black market" and RT recently conducted an "investigation" in which RT employees posed as interested arms buyers on the dark web to negotiate for U.S.-made weaponry. Russian state and proxy media, as well as conspiracy websites, amplified this unverified claim. Separately, the Russian MoD released footage July 6 claiming to show the destruction of two U.S.-provided High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS). Ukraine quickly dismissed the claims as disinformation, stating that the Kremlin's lie was simply "wishful thinking" given the systems' ability to inflict heavy losses on Russian forces.

SHOIGU, YANUKOVYCH PLAY THE BLAME GAME: Russian Defense Minister Shoigu and ousted former Ukrainian President Yanukovych are blaming the West and the Ukrainian government respectively for prolonging the "special military operation" in Ukraine. Shoigu said July 5 the "special military operation will continue until the tasks set by the Supreme Commander-in-Chief are fully fulfilled" and accused "the collective West" of prolonging the conflict by providing lethal aid. Yanukovych blamed President Zelenskyy, appealing to Ukrainians to "make a choice – should they fight 'until the last Ukrainian,' or save what is left?" in an interview with RT. The pro-Kremlin former president took aim at what RT characterized as "inexperienced, opportunistic, and untrustworthy" Ukrainian authorities whom "Ukrainians do not trust... because they have been deceived by both their leaders and their Western allies."

Empire is Back: Dusting Off Russia's Colonialist Construct with Tavriya

Russian occupation authorities in Kherson are preparing for a supposed referendum by resurrecting the regional identity of Tavriya (Taurida), a historic Russian Empire province that preceded the USSR and included parts of Kherson, Zaporizhzya, and Crimea. Deputy Head of the "military civilian administration" Stremousov announced in May on Russian state media the formation of the "Tavriya" broadcasting company to fight "on the information front." Russian disinformers on Telegram are promoting videos about Kherson's history in the Russian Empire featuring Catherine II and Governor Potemkin and amplifying the @Tauride_Republic channel. Head of Kherson's occupation authority Saldo reminded audiences on Kremlin propaganda shows of the Russian Empire's colonialist 18th Century efforts to "resettle Ukrainians, Russians, Greeks, Jews, Armenians, and Crimean Tatars" into the area. This historical revisionism echoes the Kremlin's failed 2014 efforts to promote the imperial construct of "Novorossiya" in eastern Ukraine. Saldo also announced the formation on July 5 of "Kherson government" led by "Russian professionals" based on the model of "subjects of the Russian

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Federation" to help expedite "reintegration" despite the pretense of choice through a referendum. Both tactics aim to deny Ukraine's statehood and legitimize Russia's colonialism.

United Russia's Propaganda Guide on the War in Ukraine

Russia's ruling United Russia party put up billboards in Kherson in May depicting Aleksandr Pushkin and historical commander Aleksandr Suvorov to paint a common cultural history. As the September municipal elections in Russia approach, the party is ramping up propaganda targeting domestic voters. Meduza has acquired talking points about the war in Ukraine prepared by United Russia's Moscow branch for its candidates. The talking points reflect President Putin's false claims about Ukraine, amplified on Russian state media, demonstrating how various pillars within Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem coordinate their messaging. The campaign guide suggests candidates portray Ukraine as "Russian border territory," focus on the alleged "restoration of peaceful life" in the "liberated" territories, and highlight the party's alleged humanitarian aid efforts. The guide also claims Washington worked to turn Ukraine into a tool for destroying Russia. Lastly, it recommends calling Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine as "Z" heroes fighting Nazism, drawing parallels to the Soviet victory over the Nazis in WWII.

7/5/22

MORE DISINFO TARGETS "U.S. BIO LABS": Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is amplifying a five-week-old statement from economist Jeffrey Sachs suggesting the Covid-19 virus may have originated from a U.S. laboratory. RT appears to have resurrected this story on July 1. It was then picked up by many pro-Kremlin media outlets and influencers, as well as by Chinese diplomats. The resurfacing of the story is likely an attempt to attract attention and add credibility to the Kremlin's false claims about the so-called U.S. bioweapons labs in Ukraine. For example, a news segment from the state-controlled Channel One featured Sachs's supposed allegations along with the claims that Georgian "scientists" demand an investigation of the "Pentagon-run" Lugar Center. According to the segment, the demands come on the heels of the Russian discovery of the "dangerous [U.S.] biological weapons experiments in Ukraine," and the fact that the Lugar Center is "known to have created the African swine fever" and, just like the "U.S. labs" in Ukraine, "conducted experiments on soldiers and mental patients." PolitNavigator, a website linked to Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), wrote about the "Biological Threats and Our Future" conference, which announced the creation of an NGO named "Antilab-Georgia."

OSCE MONITORS SLANDERED AS SPIES: Russia is spreading disinformation accusing the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) of spying for Ukraine's intelligence services. The state-owned RIA Novosti and Rossiya 24 alleged "new evidence" was discovered by Russia's National Guard (Rosgvardia) during a raid of a house in Kherson belonging to a Ukrainian intelligence officer who allegedly "curated" the SMM monitors. Channel One claimed SMM's reporting has always been biased in Ukraine's favor and that SMM monitors provided Ukraine with information about the locations of Russian armed forces in Crimea and Russia. Several sources within Russian propaganda apparatus amplified this false charge, including the Russian intelligence-linked U.S.-sanctioned proxy sites News Front and SouthFront, the Russian embassy in Spain, as well as the multilingual versions RT and Sputnik.

Spinning the Failure to Defend Belgorod

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The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) accused Kyiv on July 3 of intentionally targeting the civilians in Russian towns of Belgorod and Kursk with Tochka-U missiles and drones. The attack reportedly killed five people. Fearing a potential backlash, the Kremlin spin doctors appear to be using familiar disinformation tactics, polluting the information environment with a barrage of false claims aimed at distracting the public from the Kremlin's responsibility. For example, several pro-Kremlin "experts" ruminated on Kyiv's motivations for the attack, arguing it struck because it was desperate to avenge the "liberation" of the "Luhansk People's Republic" or that it wanted to "prove itself" to the West. In a typical fashion, the Kremlin's propagandists found the "hand of the West," blaming the U.S. for "instructing" Ukraine to attack and accusing a U.S. company of providing Ukraine with satellite images of Belgorod. A Russian deputy urged to designate the U.S. as a terror-sponsoring state. Lastly, the propagandists used the attacks to issue threats and call for a more aggressive approach towards Ukraine, such as attacking the so-called "centers of the decision making" and forgoing any "gestures of good will." A popular VKontakte post featured photos of Russian artillery shell with a writing "For Belgorod!"

"Reunification" Propaganda: Re-education, Profsoyuz, and Erasing Ukraine

Russian occupying authorities are stepping up the "reunification" propaganda through efforts to erase Ukrainian culture in Kherson and Zaporizhzhya regions. Kherson occupation administration head Sal'do claimed June 28 that Russia will send 104 thousand books in Russian to the libraries and schools in the occupied areas to "return adults and children to true values embedded in Russian literature." In his interview on the Kremlin propagandist show Solovyov Live, he said: "Everything [Russia] is doing gives us a sense that we are one family in a big country." Russian radio stations are replacing the Ukrainian ones. Efforts to reeducate the educators are underway. Head of Crimea occupation administration Aksyonov recently shared the "Crimean experience in reintegration" in a seminar to Kherson and Melitopol educators. The occupation authorities are even bringing back the Soviet-era profsoyuz, professional unions that served as tools of propaganda. The occupation authorities will likely accelerate "russification" efforts, fearing Ukrainian resistance and a potential counter-attack to reclaim the region.

6/30/22

FOOD INSECURITY DISINFO: Russia continues to disseminate disinformation attempting to deflect its responsibility for global food insecurity. During his June 30 meeting with Indonesian president Widodo, Russian President Putin falsely diminished Ukraine's role as a grain exporter and claimed Russia was ensuring a secure export of grain from the war zone. The Russian Ministry of Defense tried to portray the announced retreat of Russian forces from Snake Island as a "goodwill" humanitarian act that will help to increase export of food from Ukraine. Russian officials Maria Zakharova and Dmitri Medvedev accused German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock of lying and whitewashing her country's past Nazi crimes, including the blockade of Leningrad. As reported by Russian state media, Baerbock had said Moscow was using hunger as a weapon. Zakharova replied by claiming Germany was buying excessive amounts of food without any regard for potential world hunger. She also blamed the West for hoarding food just like it allegedly did with the COVID-19 vaccines during the height of the pandemic. Russia's disinformation about food insecurity takes place in the context of growing evidence that Moscow exports stolen Ukrainian grain through Crimea to Turkey and Syria.

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FROM ONE "PROVOCATION" TO ANOTHER: The Russian Ministry of Defense announced June 28 Kyiv was concocting a provocation in the Odesa region to blame Russia for using chemical weapons against civilians. MoD officials also accused Ukraine of preparing a missile strike from the residential areas of Kryvyi Rih at the district hospital in the Russia-occupied Vysokopillia (Kherson region) to "provoke a return fire, after which they [Ukraine] accuse the Russian Armed Forces of indiscriminate strikes on civilian infrastructure facilities and the destruction of the Ukrainian civilian population." Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Maria Zakharova claimed Ukrainian special services were planning "horrible" provocations against Russian journalists. These false claims likely aim to distract the public attention from Russia's June 27 missile strike on a shopping mall in Kremenchuk, also described by Russian propagandists as a Ukrainian provocation.

Russian Cyberattacks as a Tactic of Discord and Disinformation

Russian "patriotic" state-linked hackers frequently use cyber operations as a tool to destabilize government, media, financial, and civil society institutions, spread propaganda, and disrupt what they perceive as adversarial media. This week, a wave of cyberattacks and bomb threats hit Lithuania's state railway, airports, media companies and government ministries in what is likely a retaliation by the Kremlin for Lithuania's restrictions on Russian cargo traffic to Kaliningrad. The government of Norway similarly announced June 29 it had been the victim of a series of distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks that disabled public and private websites. These activities hinder the governments' abilities to operate at full capacity and communicate effectively with their citizens, aiming to undermine the faith of societies in their governments' defenses and open the door to disinformation. The Security Service of Ukraine announced this week it had disrupted attempts by online actors to "gain access to live video streams, live news feed and computers belonging to Ukrainians working with news content for Ukrainian channels" in a likely effort to interrupt Ukrainian broadcasts with Russian disinformation and propaganda. These hybrid attacks can be especially degrading to overall societal order when they accompany kinetic operations, as Russia did when it launched massive cyberattacks in the months before and during the start of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Russia's Propaganda Manual: "Putin Defends Us Against the West"

The Security Service of Ukraine **has published a Kremlin propaganda** manual **intercepted from Russia's Federal Security Service featuring "must follow" talking points for government officials and public figures, including artists and athletes, about Russia's war in Ukraine.** The manual appears aimed at selling the war to Russian audiences, instructing officials above all to praise "President Putin as the man with courage to defend us all" against "the West that aims to put Russians on their knees." The pamphlet falsely alleges the "special operation" sought to prevent "a March 2022 Ukraine-led full-scale aggression against Russia" and the "threat of Ukraine using nuclear and biological weapons," capabilities Ukraine does not possess. It also calls Western sanctions "a special operation against Russia," alleging that the "epidemic of hate" and "the attempts to cancel Russian culture," and not Russian government's ban on Facebook and Instagram, are leading young Russians to leave these platforms.

6/28/22 #50

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THE KREMLIN SPINS STRIKES ON CIVILIAN TARGETS: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem disseminated false claims to obfuscate Kremlin responsibility for the June 26 missile strike on a nine-story apartment building in Kyiv and the June 27 airstrike on a shopping mall in Kremenchuk. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and pro-Kremlin "experts" alternated between claiming Moscow was targeting an arms depot nearby and blaming a Ukrainian missile defense system for hitting the residential building in Kyiv. The ecosystem swiftly reacted to the breaking news about Kremenchuk with similarly false motifs. Russian deputy ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanski, the FSB-tasked News Front, and others described the attack as a "Bucha-style Ukrainian provocation" intended to keep the attention of the West on Ukraine. Pro-Kremlin influencers spread disinformation "proving" that the attack was staged. The MoD announced it targeted a "stockpile of Western weapons," which caused an explosion that damaged a "nearby non-functioning shopping mall." Foreign Minister Lavrov further amplified the debunked claim that the shopping center was empty.

G7 PROPAGANDA AND A PUSH FOR EXPANDED BRICS ALTERNATIVE: Russia sent a loud message to the G7 leaders as the June 26 Summit kicked off in Germany by striking Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Kremenchuk, including a shopping center filled with civilians. Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem also lodged attacks on the G7, claiming that "the G7 is shackled by fear of Putin" and that ultimately, the West will have to accept that it cannot defeat him. The Kremlin bolstered this line of messaging with a June 27 announcement that Putin will attend the G20 Summit in Indonesia in November. The Kremlin rhetoric surrounding the G7 and G20 Summits aims to accomplish two Russian objectives: communicate to the world that Russia will not be isolated by the West due to its war in Ukraine and advance the ideology of a "multipolar world" in which countries such as those in BRICS have a greater say in the world order. It is likely no coincidence the Kremlin announced that Iran and Argentina applied to join BRICS as the G7 Summit was underway.

GEC Report: Global Food Insecurity Narratives and Russia's War in Ukraine

A new GEC report has found that worldwide digital media and Twitter content attributed global food shortages and price increases primarily to Russia's war in Ukraine. U.S. and Western sanctions on Russia or the COVID-19 pandemic were blamed less frequently. This balance varied across regions. In Sub-Saharan Africa, both digital media outlets and Twitter accounts primarily blamed Russia's invasion of Ukraine. However, tweets were more likely to also blame Western sanctions against Russia, while digital media articles tended to place secondary blame on the pandemic. In the Western Hemisphere, both digital media outlets and Twitter accounts aligned with the Maduro regime in Venezuela were uniquely active in amplifying narratives favorable to Russia, particularly around blaming sanctions. Official Russian messaging blamed Ukraine, the United States and its allies for the food crisis, often with contradictory messages. Some claimed that Ukrainian troops had obstructed grain exports and U.S. sanctions had provoked the food crisis, while others alleged that Russia could in fact export grain, despite the previous two claims. More content about the topics emerged from Europe and Eurasia than any other region, but across all regions, there were more digital media articles than tweets. Please contact info@geciq.com for USG access to the report, and info@geciqglobal.com for those outside the USG.

Russia Creates Fake Auschwitz Vandalism

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The Auschwitz-Birkenau museum announced June 24 that it was the target of "primitive" propaganda spread by the Russian state on social media. Official Russian social media accounts shared fabricated images claiming to show anti-Russian stickers placed around the site of the memorial at the former death camp. Some of the posts claimed the stickers were placed on June 22, the anniversary of "Hitler's betrayal" and invasion of the Soviet Union. Others alleged the stickers were placed by Ukrainian refugees or that Poland was "showing its true colors" as a "Nazi" state. The Auschwitz museum said staff found no such stickers at the places depicted in the images and added that, **"The use of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial for propaganda that lends credence to alleged Russophobia and strengthens theories about the need for denazification of Ukraine should be opposed by all thinking people worldwide."**

6/23/22

DISCREDITING THE WAR CRIMES ACCOUNTABILITY EFFORT: Russia is aiming disinformation at the U.S. Department of Justice's recently announced effort to "help identify, apprehend, and prosecute individuals involved in war crimes and atrocities" in Ukraine. In a Facebook commentary, Russia's embassy in Washington said it "agreed" with DOJ about the "importance of punishing those involved in the 'atrocities' committed" in Ukraine, but then immediately repeated false Kremlin claims of alleged Ukrainian Nazis carrying out genocide against the Russian-speaking population. In response to the DOJ team's arrival in Ukraine, Sputnik complained about Western media's "whitewashing" of Ukrainian "neo-Nazis" and its "allegations" of Russian war crimes which "alternative media" had already "worked to systematically debunk." On Telegram, Kremlin-aligned accounts dismissed the DOJ's investigation as conducted by the "organizers and the ordering customers" of those crimes, claiming any actual prosecution of war criminals is already taking place in the "DPR" and "LPR." An "expert" told the Prigozhin-linked Federal News Agency that the investigating team's real purpose was to destroy any remaining "kompromat" in Ukraine on President Biden and his administration officials.

PROPAGANDA AND DISINFORMATION TARGETING POLAND: Pro-Kremlin media continue issuing false narratives targeting Poland following the Foreign Intelligence Service's (SVR's) June 22 statement. According to TASS, the SVR has "evidence" that the "central organ of the Catholic Church in Poland is discussing taking over the Lviv Archdiocese of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine." This is the latest addition to the Kremlin's persistent disinformation campaigns asserting Poland's intention to occupy parts of Ukraine. The Polish government's Security Center exposed a forged document spreading on Telegram, allegedly from Ukraine's Foreign Ministry, asking Poland to return 18- to 60-year-old Ukrainian male refugees. This fabrication appears intended to support the false charge that Ukraine plans to use these refugees as part of a general mobilization.

GEC Bulletin: Russia Cannot Hide its Responsibility for the Global Food Crisis

A new GEC bulletin on the Disarming Disinformation website shows how **Russia's government officials, Russian state-funded media, and Kremlin-aligned proxy disinformation actors are attempting to deflect attention from Russia's responsibility for worsening global food insecurity by blaming sanctions, "the West," and Ukraine.** Food insecurity was not caused, as the Kremlin claims, by sanctions that the United States and many other countries have imposed in response to Russia's horrific aggression against Ukraine. The Kremlin its proxies' are targeting the most heavily impacted regions - the Middle East and Africa - to hide Russia's culpability and persuade leaders to support an end to sanctions designed to stop Russia's brutal

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war. Kremlin-controlled state outlets such as RT Arabic and RT en Francais, as well as the People's Republic of China (PRC) state media, are amplifying these false narratives. To read the full GEC bulletin click here. Click here to read Axios's coverage of the bulletin.

Countering Bogus Claims with "This is a Warning"

This week the Department of State published **"This is a Warning," a visual** story **countering the Kremlin's false narrative, most recently deployed via a pamphlet to African representatives to the UN mission in Geneva, blaming Ukraine for the Donbas's humanitarian crisis and painting Russia as a magnanimous humanitarian actor.** The visual story debunks narratives such as the claim that the 2014 Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine was a fascist coup, as well as accusations that Ukrainian Armed Forces shelled healthcare facilities, mistreated Russian service members, and perpetrated war crimes. "This is a Warning" pushes back on the Kremlin's cynical attempts to again blame Ukraine for the humanitarian catastrophe and continued atrocities in Ukraine that Russia is responsible for.

6/21/22

RUSSIA SUPPORTING ETHNIC RUSSIANS IN A CIVIL WAR: RT head Margarita Simonyan provided a disinformation and propaganda blitz as moderator of the June 15-18 St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) and during her June 19 appearance on notorious propagandist Vladimir Solovyov's program. During the latter, Simonyan resurrected a prominent disinformation narrative from earlier in the war that Ukraine is "simply" having a civil war. Simonyan denied that Russia was waging war or even conducting a special military operation inside sovereign Ukraine, instead claiming Russia had taken the side of ethnic Russians in Ukraine's "civil war." Simonyan also advocated to Solovyov that resisting Ukrainians should be killed and argued that the "civil war" is the result of Ukrainians "who are Russophobes" and "anti-Russian in the same sense fascists were antisemitic - absolutely the same way - destroying another part of its own people." Simonyan's burst of quotable disinformation and new twists on false narratives appears to be the product of her private meetings with Putin on SPIEF's margins.

SIMONYAN ALSO JOKES ABOUT WEAPONIZED FAMINE: During her moderation of a June 18 SPIEF session with President Putin, Simonyan made explicit Russia's weaponization of global food security. "All our hope is for the famine," she quipped, retelling a cynical joke allegedly spreading among Russians. Her statement brought to light the Russian government's unstated strategic hope that as food security worsens "the world will have no choice but to be friends with Russia" and lift sanctions. Her comment comes as Russia's brutal war on Ukraine exacerbates food insecurity in the Global South. In his June 20 address to the African Union, President Zelenskyy highlighted how Russia is "holding the people of Africa hostage" by blocking Ukraine's food exports and shelling Ukrainian farmers "to exert pressure on the democracies that imposed sanctions." Simonyan's flippant remarks and Russia's food weaponization are terrifying reminders of Josef Stalin's 1930s policy of Holodomor, the Kremlin-manufactured famine resulting in at least four million Ukrainian deaths.

Russian Propaganda Exploits U.S. Captives

Staged "forced confession" videos of captured Ukrainian soldiers or foreign "mercenaries" disavowing support for Kyiv and repeating conventional pro-Russian, anti-Ukrainian talking points have become a key

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Russian state propaganda tactic since the February 24 all-out invasion. Russia employed this tactic again June 16 with two captured "U.S. mercenaries." Russian state media published videos of the captives addressing their families and stating, in English and Russian, their supposed opposition to the war. In what appeared to be a heavily edited video dubbed into Russian, one captive blamed "Western propaganda" for deceiving and inciting him to join the fight in Ukraine. Pro-Kremlin Telegram channels compared the captives to ISIS terrorists and amplified disinformation claiming one of the captives was a "U.S. instructor" training Ukraine's Armed Forces on how to conduct "chemical weapons provocations." Izvestiya showed the "mercenaries" stating their anger and disappointment with the "disorganized," "incompetent," and "corrupt" Ukrainian military. In another video, one of the captives said he feared receiving the death penalty, which Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov described as a real possibility. Pro-Kremlin outlets also cited U.S. media reports of anonymous "U.S. mercenaries" warning others to not underestimate Russian military might and discouraging any travel to Ukraine.

Russia Turns Its "Black Mirror" Towards Kharkiv

The head of Russia's National Defense Management Center Mikhail Mizintsev claimed June 20 that the Ukrainian Armed Forces had deployed an artillery battery in the Kharkiv region to organize a "provocation" by shelling residential areas. The claim garnered coverage across Russian state and proxy media, including the FSB-tasked News Front. Russia launched a series of missile strikes on June 20 and 21 against Kharkiv, killing several people including one child. Russia once again demonstrated its tendency to use this sort of "black mirroring" to precede its own attacks. In this instance, by claiming Ukraine is planning to stage a "provocation" by striking its own civilians, Russia gets the first word in a false pre-bunking effort intended to hide its own attacks on civilians. **While it is unlikely that this tactic works on Ukrainians, the deception could be effective when messaging to Russian audiences for wartime propaganda purposes.**

6/16/22

"BIOWEAPONS" DISINFO RETURNS: Russia has resumed its "U.S.-supported bioweapons labs" disinformation campaign. Moscow is likely reacting to the Pentagon's June 9 fact sheet detailing U.S. efforts to reduce nuclear, chemical, and biological threats in the former Soviet Union and stated its intentions to "request consultations with BTWC countries on U.S. biolaboratories." Russia's MOD, MFA, and several Russian parliamentarians tried to discredit the fact sheet, describing it as disinformation, an attempted cover-up, or a U.S. admission of bioweapons development. Based on the MOD's June 16 briefing, pro-Kremlin media claimed the United States was conducting experiments on psychiatric patients and may have attacked Cuba with bioweapon-infested mosquitos. The MOD linked the activities of the alleged U.S. biolabs in Ukraine with supposed outbreaks of tularemia in Donbas. Izvestiya published a fabricated "secret document from Ukraine's Ministry of Defense" alleging President Zelenskyy had issued a directive to "destroy" the personal data of all Ukrainians who cooperated with "U.S.-supported bioweapons labs."

DISINFORMATION AGAINST POLAND: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem continues to attack Poland with ridiculous disinformation claims. Russian MFA spokeswoman Maria Zakharova accused a Polish member of the European Parliament Radoslaw Sikorski of inciting hatred and "threatening the planet," after

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he reportedly stated that the West has the right to give Ukraine nuclear weapons to defend itself against Russia. "Sikorski provokes a nuclear conflict in the center of Europe… If his proposals are implemented, these countries will disappear, as well as Europe," wrote the Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin. These accusations come on the heels of recent, similar statements from Foreign Minister Lavrov, Security Council Secretary Patrushev, and Director of Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Naryshkin, all baselessly claiming that Poland intends to annex parts of Ukraine with the consent of President Zelenskyy.

False Flags Are Back? Russians Spread Disinfo About Shelling of Donetsk

Russia's propaganda machine went into overdrive in blaming Ukrainian forces for artillery strikes on civilian targets in Donetsk City, including the June 13 shelling of a maternity hospital. Russia's U.S. Ambassador Anatoly Antonov accused the United States June 15 of ignoring "the massacre by nationalists against residents of Donetsk with Western artillery" while MFA spokesperson Maria Zakharova also blamed Western-supplied weapons for the "ongoing tragedy in Donbas." Yet, Donetsk residents and even one "DPR" official were skeptical that Ukrainian forces were responsible as the noise of nearby artillery launches likely indicated the shelling had come from inside Donetsk City. Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council's Center for Countering Disinformation debunked the Russian officials' claims, citing Ukrainian intelligence sources that the shelling originated in the Makyivka, Chervonogvardiyskiy, and Kuybyshyvskiy suburbs of Donetsk and fired towards central Donetsk City. This likely false-flag operation is a recurring tactic of "DPR" forces seeking to increase anti-Ukrainian sentiment, undermine Western governments' support, and bolster requests to the Kremlin for Iskander missiles while also encouraging mobilization among locals resisting conscription and keeping Russian audiences' attention on the conflict instead of the new knockoff McDonald's grand opening.

Babushka Z: Unwitting Propaganda Icon of the War

When Anna Ivanova approached two soldiers outside her village home in Velyka Danylivka near Kharkiv in early April, she carried a Soviet flag and believed them to be Russian. The Ukrainian soldiers gave her food but trampled her flag prompting Ivanova to say, "My parents died for that flag in World War Two." Within days the Kremlin's propaganda machine amplified video of the exchange, heralding Ivanova's love of homeland and denouncing the Ukrainian soldiers' actions. Murals, postcards, and statues of Ivanova appeared across Russia and occupied Ukraine, with one in Mariupol shown at right. Ivanova became a Kremlin symbol of a "Mother Russia," mourning the lost USSR while welcoming Russian forces as "liberators." In a BBC interview Ivanova denied supporting the war: **"How can I support my people dying? My grandchildren and great-grandchildren were forced to go to Poland. We live in fear and terror."**

6/14/22

PROPAGANDISTS CHEER PUTIN'S PETER THE GREAT MOMENT: Pundits on Russian state-controlled television channels have enthusiastically supported President Putin's comparison of himself to Peter the Great and applauded his call to similarly recapture Russia's "lost" territories. Addressing young Russian entrepreneurs on June 9 (Peter's 350th birthday anniversary), Putin argued Peter the Great was not "taking away anything" from Sweden during the 18th century Great Northern War but was merely "returning and reinforcing" alleged Russian territory. "Clearly, it fell to our lot to return and reinforce as well," Putin said, alluding to the conflict in Ukraine. Political talk show hosts Olga Skabeyeva and Vladimir Solovyov quickly declared "returning and

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reinforcing" lands as Putin's newly formulated plan for Russia's future. Solovyov's guests described Russia as the "Empire of Kindness" while they also issued nuclear and occupation threats to eastern Europe and the Baltic states. U.S.-sanctioned Rossiya 1 echoed Putin's historical comparisons concluding that "Russophobic hysteria" in the Western press accompanied Peter's Great Northern War as it has over all of Russia's "foreign conflicts."

DISINFO SPREADS ABOUT KHERSON REFERENDUM: Russian media and propagandists widely amplified the Kherson occupation authorities' announcement of plans to hold a "reunification with Russia" referendum before the end of 2022. Deputy head of the military-civilian administration Kirill Stremousov claimed that thousands of Ukrainians had requested Russian passports while administration chief Vladimir Sal'do alleged local polling showed broad support for integration with Russia among Kherson's residents. The occupiers' disinformation narrative was not, however, reflected by events on the ground. Only 23 people received Russian passports during a sparsely celebrated "Russia Day" in Kherson as many residents preferred to display Ukraine's colors and play Ukraine's national anthem. Many locals have also refused to join the occupation police or show their passports to receive Russian humanitarian support, fearing their passport data will be used to falsify their votes in the so-called "reunification" referendum.

The Continuing Horrors of Mariupol

Russian forces are following their extended siege and destruction of Mariupol with new horrors and twisted propaganda during occupation. Evidence continues to emerge from Mariupol of the FSB's vast network of "filtration camps" in occupied Ukraine and Russia where Russian forces reportedly interrogate, strip-search, beat, torture with electric shock, and murder internees as they determine who should be sent to Russia, who should remain, and who should disappear. President Zelenskyy has compared the camps to "Nazi concentration camps." In Mariupol itself, corpses remain in the streets or are "buried" in the city dump, contributing to an increased risk of a cholera outbreak. Only Russian forces have access to anti-cholera drugs while residents work for their occupiers in exchange for water. Amid these terrors, the new pro-Kremlin administrators pursue their propaganda efforts, instructing children and teachers to sing the Russian Federation and so-called "DPR" and "LPR" anthems for recorded videos to express their "joy" over Mariupol's new reality. If teachers refused, they risked arrest or their families' exclusion from humanitarian aid distribution lists. On the outskirts of the demolished city, occupying forces repainted the large "MARIUPOL" sign to the colors of the Russian Federation's flag and changed its spelling to Russian (see second image below).

Kremlin Imposes "Russia Day" on Occupied Ukraine

On June 12, Russia celebrated its 30th "Russia Day," the holiday that commemorates when the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic declared independence from the USSR in 1990. This year, however, the Kremlin exported its holiday (and accompanying propaganda) to occupied cities in Ukraine. While festivities were well attended inside Russia, imposed commemorations in Ukraine were not as warmly received. In occupied Kherson, for example, the turnout was only a few dozen, with independent Belarusian media outlet NEXTA reporting that those in attendance were bussed in from other locations. Occupying officials arranged for several days of ongoing events, including concerts and museum exhibitions heralding "Kherson - a city with Russian history."

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6/9/22 #45

"DPR" SENTENCES THREE FOREIGN FIGHTERS TO DEATH: The Kremlin has exploited the "foreign mercenaries" in Ukraine narrative to the point of framing the conflict as Russia against Western-sponsored "global forces of evil." Russian MFA spokesperson Zakharova falsely stated June 8 that U.S. and UK "private military companies" had helped their respective governments expel extremists by sending unwanted Afghan refugees and Syrian ISIS terrorists to Ukraine. The MFA also amplified Prigozhin-affiliated bloggers' efforts to publicize personal information of alleged pro-Kyiv mercenaries. Pro-Kremlin actors widely covered the "DPR's" death sentence announcement for three alleged mercenaries - two British and one Moroccan - for "trying to seize power by force," presenting the sentence as a signal to mercenaries to go home.

DISINFO CLAIMING UKRAINE IS DECEIVING THE U.S.: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is amplifying content seeking to sow U.S.-Ukraine division while also portraying Ukraine's armed forces as weak. The ecosystem has actively referred to a June 8 New York Times article to falsely claim, however, that Kyiv is lying to Washington about its military failures. At the same time, the FSB-guided website News Front and state-funded RT publish articles asserting the United States is running out of weapons for Ukraine while the West has tired of helping Kyiv because its armed forces have allegedly suffered "colossal losses at the front."

LATEST CW DISINFORMATION FROM RUSSIAN MOD: The Russian MoD alleged June 9 that the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), with support from OPCW specialists, is preparing a "chemical provocation" using "toxic substances" in the Sumy region to ultimately blame Russia for the incident. The claim was echoed by Zakharova and widely reported in Russian domestic and international state media, with many outlets also echoing the MoD's (false) assertion that Russia has destroyed all its CW.

Pro-Kremlin Disinformation Actors Doxing U.S. Soldiers

Pro-Kremlin Telegram channels disseminated the personally identifiable information (PII) of U.S. military members, including cell phone numbers, home addresses, emails, spousal information, and phone numbers, accusing **the identified personnel of "participating in the genocide of the Russian people" in Ukraine.** Military analyst Yuri Kotyonok's Telegram channel Voyenkor Kotyonok Z (Военкор Котенок Z) appears to be the channel (307,000 subscribers) that posted the PII on May 31, claiming U.S. soldiers were teaching Ukrainians how to use civilians as human shields. On June 7, the channel targeted members of the California National Guard, including a major general whose work with the Ukrainian forces had caught the attention of pro-Kremlin actors on May 25 and June 4, following stories about him in U.S. media. Several accounts on VKontakte amplified Voyenkor Kotyonok Z's post, often copying his original language. Disinformation surrounding the PII leak was also reported by the U.S.-sanctioned media outlet Tsargrad. Kotyonok, who also runs the segodnya.ru website, is often quoted in media outlets linked to Yevgeniy Prigozhin and Russian intelligence services.

Putin's Youth: The Return of the Pioneers

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In continuation of what could be a return of the Soviet system of "political information" (*politinformatsiya*) education, Russia is resurrecting the "Young Pioneers" organization in the form of its spiritual successor, "Bol'shaya Peremena" **(Большая Перемена),** a reference to Russian schools' main recess period and a phrase that also implies "a big change." Many expect President Putin will serve as the head of the group's supervisory board and that both the historical memory of the Pioneers and a system of mentors will be instrumental in the organization's operations. While participation is voluntary for children, the goals of "Bol'shaya Peremena" are supposedly "to provide all children and adolescents in the Russian Federation with equal access to development opportunities" and might include the "development of children's tourism, volunteer activities, creative projects and **children's media with the participation of leading journalistic groups, where children themselves create content for their peers."**

6/7/22

PUTIN, ECON AIDE DENY RESPONSIBILITY FOR FOOD CRISIS: Blaming "U.S. financial policies during the Covid-19 pandemic and Europe's over-reliance on renewables and short-term gas contracts," Putin recently claimed Russia is not to blame for global food insecurity. Putin economic aide Maksim Oreshkin blamed additional factors, stating wryly of the United States that, "They're printing the money, they're taking all the food, and of course they are taking the food from those who cannot afford it." Meanwhile, disinformation outlets linked to Russian intelligence are combining otherwise unrelated narratives with those pertaining to food security *and* Ukraine, such as the GRU-affiliated OneWorld's Ethiopia-focused "UN Aid Shipments Are Being Exploited To Secretly Resupply The TPLF." Russian Ambassador to the UN Nebenzia walked out of a June 6 UNSC session after European officials formally blamed Russia for weaponizing food supplies, and Secretary of State Blinken has said there are "credible reports" Russia is stealing Ukraine's grain and reselling it.

JAVELIN CLAIMS AIM TO PAINT UKRAINE AS CORRUPT, U.S. AS IRRESPONSIBLE: Reports on so-called dark web forums of alleged sales of U.S. weapons given to Ukraine have appeared on social media in recent weeks. One early source and many of the immediate amplifiers of the allegation are pro-Russian social media accounts or Russian state-owned media, although the GEC cannot determine whether this indicates Russian government backing. The Javelin claim appears to trace back to a June 2 post by the pro-Russia УКРОПСКИЙ ФРЕШ Telegram channel, which Russian state-owned media outlet Ukraina.ru and the Telegram channel ASB Military News, a pro-Kremlin outlet Twitter recently suspended from its platform, subsequently amplified. ASB Military News served as the sole citation for several articles in the international media environment, causing the claim to make its way into the mainstream. These debunked allegations play into larger Russian narratives that the United States and West are irresponsibly spending taxpayer dollars, and that the Ukrainian government is rife with corrupt officials.

Ukrainian Intel Publishes FSB's War Propaganda Instructions

One of the best ways to understand Russian propaganda and disinformation is to "peek behind the curtain" and see what goes on inside the apparatus. The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) published June 5 what it claimed was an FSB report recommending measures to improve the "informational-propagandistic support" of the Kremlin's "special military operation" in Ukraine. The report outlines key themes Russia should promote to target audiences in Ukraine's temporarily occupied territories, as well as in Russia, the post-Soviet space, and

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Europe. For example, to buttress Moscow's false narrative about the need to denazify Ukraine, the FSB suggests establishing "anti-fascist" front groups and organizing related conferences in the former USSR. In Europe, the FSB urges the beginning of a "massive" campaign to instigate "domestic public pressure on the governments and the political elite of Western countries" to end their support for Ukraine. This campaign's overarching narrative will portray life in the EU as worsening because of its support for Ukrainian "Nazis," emphasizing the alleged burden on the European taxpayers and energy issues, as well as discrediting Ukrainian refugees. Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem has already been pushing many of the themes described by the FSB.

Russians Project a Disinformation Slideshow onto U.S. Embassy Moscow

Russian disinformation actors projected a slideshow featuring two dozen children **allegedly killed in eastern Ukraine onto the walls of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow June 1, blaming their deaths on "Ukrainian Nazis" and the U.S. military.** The projection appeared to be timed with International Children's Day and called the United States "warmongers with the blood of Donbas children on their hands." The Kremlin likely supports this tactic to deflect blame from the violence Moscow has inflicted on children with its further invasion of Ukraine. Hundreds of Ukrainian children have died or sustained injuries since February 24. In his June 1 address, President Zelenskyy accused Russia of forcibly deporting 200,000 children, aiming "not just to steal people, but to make them forget about Ukraine, unable to return."

6/2/22

DISINFO TARGETS U.S. ADVANCED WEAPONS PLEDGE Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is portraying President Biden's decision to provide Ukraine with advanced weaponry, including HIMARS with battlefield munitions, as a provocation that increases the risk of a direct clash between the United States and Russia. Vzglyad, a media outlet affiliated with the Kremlin, claimed Biden's decision to equip Ukraine with these weapons could replicate the conditions behind the Cuban Missile Crisis. In typical fashion, Russia's Ministry of Defense said Ukraine was planning to use HIMARS to shell civilian areas inside Russia, forcing Russian retaliation that Ukrainian and foreign journalists will use as part of a disinformation campaign to accuse Russia of brutal measures against Ukraine. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov, state-linked journalists, as well as Russian intelligence-linked outlets InfoBRICS and SouthFront dismissed Ukraine's assurances to President Biden not to target Russian territory with the newly acquired weapons, claiming Kyiv "cannot be trusted."

"RUSSOPHOBIA" AND THE "CANCELING" OF RUSSIA: Kremlin propaganda has used the term "Russophobia" mainly to discredit critics of its malign actions and depict itself as a victim of unjust discrimination. As Russia attempts to destroy Ukraine's cultural heritage and impose its own culture, Kremlin propaganda now falsely asserts that it is Russians and Russian culture which are under attack from the West. The Russian MFA, for example, released a June 1 disinformation-filled report purporting that the U.S. government "imposes" Russophobia on the American public while some European countries want to completely "cancel" Russian culture. A melodramatic video posted by the Russian Mission to UNESCO on Twitter, under the #StopHatingRussians hashtag, showed various versions of the Joker character unsuccessfully trying to "cancel" famed Russian authors. These narratives echoed the May 31 statement by Deputy Chairman of the Security

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Council Medvedev accusing the West of "irrational" hatred of all Russian people, their culture, and their religion.

Kremlin Propagandists' Rhetoric Turns Nuclear, Again

Russian state TV propagandists have escalated their anti-Western rhetoric with nuclear war references, likely in response to U.S. and UK plans to supply advanced weaponry to Ukraine. On U.S.-sanctioned Rossiya-1, Olga Skabeeva declared the end of the "special operation in Ukraine" and the beginning of World War III, adding the need to demilitarize Ukraine was now a "need to demilitarize NATO." Vladimir Solovyov said he agreed with President Biden that Russia would not use tactical nuclear weapons against Ukraine, but added Biden should worry about strategic nuclear weapons against the United States. Escalatory nuclear rhetoric is a recurring Russian disinformation tactic intended for multiple audiences. Inside Russia it serves to remind domestic audiences of the nation's "superpower" status while deflecting from nearly 100 days of war in Ukraine. Nuclear doomsayers also hope to capture Western media attention, raise public fear, and induce governments to reduce Ukraine support. For instance, Rossiya 1 featured CBS reporting that 70 percent of U.S. adults worry about Russia's use of nuclear weapons, while a Russian lawmaker speculated it would take four Sarmat rockets to destroy the United States. Publicizing U.S. intelligence assessments that Russia would only use nuclear weapons in case of an existential threat could counter such extreme rhetorical tactics.

Russia Takes Orwellian Approach to Mariupol, Other Occupied Lands

Mobile propaganda vans, **formally called "mobile information complexes" by the Kremlin, are rolling through occupied Mariupol, with screens playing Russian state propaganda TV to convince residents that "Russia is here to help" while Kyiv, NATO, and the West are the parties responsible for citizens' anguish.** Russian officials have also returned statues of Lenin to occupied Ukrainian towns that had previously removed them and even raised the Soviet flag in some locations as a likely gesture of erstwhile Soviet hegemony. These resurrections of Ukrainian-rejected historic symbols have coincided with Russian forces' destruction of Ukrainian cultural sites.

5/31/22

RUSSIA ADDS MONKEYPOX TO ITS BIOLAB DISINFORMATION: Russian CBRN defense head Kirillov insinuated May 27 that four U.S.-funded biological research labs affiliated with the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) in Nigeria could be responsible for the global outbreak of the monkeypox virus and called for the WHO to investigate. Kirillov attempted to connect this latest addition to Russia's biolab disinformation narrative with its previous claims about U.S.-funded biolabs in Ukraine by accusing the United States of training Ukrainian biologists with dangerous smallpox samples. Russian media widely reported Kirillov's comments and they also gained coverage in Iranian, Venezuelan, and Belarusian state media, as well as at least one PRC MFA-supported African media outlet. Kirillov added additional conspiratorial spin by claiming that a 2021 Munich Security Conference scenario detailed plans to counter a new strain of monkeypox. The U.S. Embassy in Nigeria published a May 30 statement debunking Russia's claims, clarifying the beneficial role of U.S.-supported, Nigeria-operated labs.

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LAVROV TARGETS MIDDLE EAST WITH DISINFO: Following a disinformation-filled May 25 speech to African ambassadors in Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov moved next to Middle East audiences in an effort to paint Russia as the Global South's ally. Lavrov portrayed Russia as a partner in an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist struggle, while ignoring Russia's past. In a May 26 interview with RT Arabic, Lavrov alleged that the "colonial habits of Western colleagues haven't disappeared," accusing the "Anglo-Saxon alliance" of "impudence that knows no limits" in "blackmailing and threatening the nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America to join sanctions against Russia." Lavrov's remarks ignored Russia's flouting of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity through its expanded war and President Putin's claims that Russians and Ukrainians are "one people," Russian forces' systematic efforts to destroy Ukrainian cultural monuments, russify Ukraine and rewrite Ukrainian history in the school curricula in occupied regions.

SBU Claims to Thwart FSB Operation to Discredit OSCE

Ukraine's security services (SBU) announced May 30 it had disrupted a Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) operation to discredit the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which has provided objective monitoring of the situation in Ukraine since 2014. UNIAN reported the FSB planned to carry out a disinformation campaign, including staging media stories and filming forced confessions, to portray OSCE monitors working in the temporarily occupied areas of southern and eastern Ukraine as SBU spies. In Kherson, for example, FSB operatives broke into the homes of OSCE staff, in one instance filming an OSCE member's alleged forced confession of an "agreement on covert cooperation" with the SBU. Kremlin propagandists' occasional accusations of OSCE spying in Ukraine increased after the so-called "DPR" and "LPR" arrested OSCE employees in April for alleged U.S.-backed spying and for helping Ukraine target "DPR" forces. Pro-Kremlin media also claimed the OSCE collaborated with a "nationalist" from the Azov regiment and the Right Sector.

Russian Historical and Cultural Propaganda Comes to Kherson

As Russia looks poised to illegally absorb Ukraine's Kherson region, the Kremlin is using innovative ways to control and influence the information environment in the region. In addition to accelerated forced "passportization" for Kherson citizens to receive Russian citizenship, an alleged May 31 full currency switch to the ruble, and severed Ukrainian telecommunications, the Russian government, specifically the ruling United Russia party, is putting up billboards in Kherson depicting famed Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin and historical commander Aleksandr Suvorov alongside the tagline "Kherson - A City with Russian History" and patriotic quotes. The billboards likely serve two purposes: to paint a common cultural history and respond to Ukraine's removal of several Pushkin statues across the country. As one commentator described them, the billboards are the culmination of Russia's "bloody" establishment of control through "Tanks - war - death - occupation – Pushkin."

5/26/22

CELEBRATING "AFRICA DAY" WITH DISINFORMATION: Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's May 25 Africa Day speech to assembled African ambassadors in Moscow was filled with a litany of false claims about Ukraine under the pretense of anti-colonial solidarity. Lavrov's remarks also likely foreshadow Russia's messaging strategy on Ukraine-related subjects to African audiences. In his disinformation-filled speech, Lavrov

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attempted to portray Russia as a victim of an "all-out hybrid war" where Ukraine is "used as a bargaining chip" by a "small group of U.S.-led Western countries," or a "club of the chosen," working together to achieve a unipolar world order that seeks to subjugate everyone else, including Russia and Africa. Lavrov also urged the ambassadors to demand the removal of "illegal, anti-Russian" sanctions in order to strengthen food security. He promised Russia would, despite Western-manufactured challenges, continue fulfilling its obligations to Africa. OneWorld, a website with ties to Russia's military intelligence, echoed Lavrov's claims from his address to African envoys, accusing President Zelenskyy of supporting a U.S.-led "global food cartel" that will wield control over global food supply as a "new hybrid weapon" against the Global South.

SVR - LATIN AMERICA DOES NOT SUPPORT U.S. ON UKRAINE : Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) issued a May 23 statement claiming it had obtained information showing most Latin American countries refuse to submit to U.S. demands to condemn Moscow's "special military operation" in Ukraine. The statement implies the United States has been "pushing" Latin American nations too hard to speak out against Russia over Ukraine, which has led to a "backlash" from Mexico, Argentina, and Bolivia. Reporting on the SVR statement, RIA Novosti said the alleged backlash might lead to the cancellation of June's "Summit of the Americas" in Los Angeles. RT separately published an op-ed on the issue, also alleging the United States is facing summit boycotts from its "Latin neighbors."

Russian MFA and a GONGO Target Foreigners With Disinfo on Ukraine

Russia's MFA-linked Rossotrudnichestvo agency will disseminate digitally and in hard copy through its Russia Houses two brochures targeting foreign audiences – "Civil War in Ukraine: 2014-2022" and "Mass War Crimes of Ukraine's Armed Forces and Nazi Battalions in Mariupol and Volnovakha." As their titles suggest, the brochures are filled with disinformation falsely blaming Ukraine for the Kremlin's unprovoked aggression against Russia's neighbor. Russian government-organized NGO the Foundation for the Study of Democracy (FSD), a known disinformation actor, co-produced the brochures. Official Russian social media accounts are promoting video testimonies of alleged Ukrainian atrocities filmed by FSD head Maxim Grigoryev, who is also a member of Russia's state-linked Civic Chamber and leads the co-called International Public Tribunal on Ukraine. Grigoryev operates Russian- (21,000 subscribers) and English-language (8,000 subscribers) Telegram channels, where he publishes his videos of the alleged testimonies. Rossotrudnichestvo recently announced it was moving some of its Europe-based employees to Asia and Africa, a possible indication of where the agency will focus its Ukraine-related disinformation efforts.

Russia Opens Museum Exhibits on NATO "Cruelty," Historical Revisionism

As Russia increasingly characterizes its war against Ukraine as a conflict against the West and NATO, it has enlisted its cultural institutions to increase propaganda and disinformation targeting both. Exhibitions on the "cruelty" of NATO and the West are opening at museums across Russia, including one entitled "NATO: A chronicle of cruelty," which just concluded at Moscow's Museum of Contemporary Russian History. At this and similar exhibits from western to eastern Russia, visitors are greeted by the sounds of bombs and approaching planes as they encounter "informative" posters detailing NATO's alleged warmongering and atrocities committed by Allies. The exhibit also features objects from the war in Ukraine and comparisons between Nazi Germany and modern Ukraine, further highlighting Russia's false justifications for the war.

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GEC-RUS Snapshot Narrative Tracker

5/24/22 #40

CELEBRATING AZOV'S "CAPITULATION": Pro-Kremlin media are portraying the "surrender" of the Azov battalion and the capture of Mariupol as a momentous victory for Russia. State television, in particular, has dedicated extensive reporting to the Azov POWs, arguing Azov fighters' nationalist and Nazi-associated tattoos justify Russia's "denazification" of Ukraine. Russia's MFA and state media also disseminated testimonies on Twitter from the battalion's alleged victims. Disinformation purveyors claimed Azov's "surrender" was a "total shock" to Kyiv, alleging Ukrainian officials planned to kill Azov POWs to keep them silent.

PREPARING RUSSIANS FOR A PROLONGED CONFLICT: Facing fierce Ukrainian resistance and repeated military failures, the Kremlin has begun to offer explanations to the Russian public for the slow progress of its "special military operation." Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu falsely claimed May 24 any slowdown was intentional and the result of Russia's determination to "avoid harming civilians." Secretary of Russia's Security Council Nikolai Patrushev said Russia was not "chasing deadlines," implying Russia's so-called "denazification" of Ukraine could take time. Officials' acknowledgement of delays in Ukraine may reflect a Kremlin directive to prepare Russians for an extended conflict.

DRIVING A WEDGE BETWEEN UKRAINE AND POLAND: Adding to the Kremlin disinformation targeting Ukraine's relationship with Poland, Russian MFA spokesperson Maria Zakharova falsely claimed May 23 that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's proposal to grant Polish citizens in Ukraine the same rights Ukrainian refugees have received in Poland was tantamount to "legalizing the de facto [Polish] seizure of…[his] country." On the same day, while meeting with Putin, Belarusian leader Aleksandr Lukashenka said Poland would seek to "dismember Ukraine" through any deployment of Polish "peacekeeping forces" to the country.

Russia's "Z" Campaign on Twitter Benefits From Coordinated Activity

According to GEC analysis, on Twitter, the "Z" campaign, which aims to rally support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, appears to benefit from coordinated and likely inauthentic amplification. Three distinct pro-Russia clusters promote the "Z" campaign: a Russian-language cluster aimed at Russian and Ukrainian audiences; an English-language cluster aimed at an Indian audience; and another English-language cluster aimed at an African audience. The India- and Africa-focused clusters appeared highly coordinated, given their recent creation dates and frequent messaging on Russia. The overall reach of this pro-Russia amplification, however, is likely limited, with tweets receiving fewer than 5-10 likes and rarely any comments or retweets. Conversely, a pro-Ukraine cluster of accounts also acts in a coordinated manner to amplify messaging denouncing Russia's invasion. Likely targeting Russian and Ukrainian audiences, this cluster largely highlights the Russian army's war losses. This report is now available on GEC-IQ. Please contact info@geciq.com for access. If you are outside the USG, please contact info@geciqglobal.com.

Russia's Health Ministry Disinfo about Ukraine at the UN in Geneva

A pamphlet purportedly from Russia's Health Ministry is circulating on WhatsApp messaging groups among African delegations to the United Nations in Geneva. Among its disinformation claims, the pamphlet blames Ukraine for causing the humanitarian crisis in the so-called DPR/LPR and accuses the Ukrainian Armed Forces

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of mistreating Russian prisoners of war, perpetrating war crimes, and placing weapons systems in healthcare facilities. The pamphlet appears to be an attempt to deflect the blame for humanitarian crisis and war crimes onto the victim – Ukraine, while portraying Russia as a magnanimous humanitarian actor. The pamphlet's design even mimics a World Health Organization campaign to combat health misinformation, a likely attempt to coopt international legitimacy.

5/19/22

RUSSIA FAULTS SANCTIONS FOR FOOD INSECURITY: Russian embassies' social media accounts and state media have echoed Russian President Putin and other officials' statements blaming Western sanctions for food insecurity. Russia's UN ambassador Vasiliy Nebenzya, during a May 19 UN Security Council meeting on conflict and food security, blamed Western sanctions for preventing Russia and Belarus from exporting agricultural products. Nebenzya also accused Europe of hoarding Ukrainian grain and engaging in "grain for weapons" exchanges with Ukraine. Russia's embassy in Egypt blamed "illegal unilateral sanctions" for the crisis. RT Arabic, RT en Español, and Russia's embassy in Peru alternately depicted Western sanctions as the cause of rising wheat prices in Latin America and the Middle East, violent protests in Iran, a threat to Egypt's national security, and the reason for food shortages in refugee camps in Iraq. To influence African audiences, Russia's Zimbabwe embassy blamed "Western interference" in the Global South for increasing food prices.

RUSSIA CLAIMS U.S. RECRUITS ISIS TO FIGHT IN UKRAINE: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem amplified a May 17 statement by Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) falsely claiming the U.S. recruits and trains ISIS terrorists at the Al-Tanf military base in Southeast Syria to fight Russia's armed forces in Ukraine. The SVR made similar claims in March and April. Russia has employed the Al-Tanf base and its alleged activities as disinformation fodder since 2018. Along with the latest ISIS charge, pro-Kremlin influencers disseminated disinformation portraying Ukraine's security services and the Azov regiment as terrorists "worse than ISIS." Russia's propagandists capitalized on the false narrative's spread, charging the West with hypocrisy for "supporting terrorists and Nazis" when it suits its interests.

Telegram Channels Impersonating Ukrainians Push Russia's Propaganda and Disinfo

Detektor Media, a Ukrainian investigative reporting outlet, found **88 Telegram channels amplifying Russia's propaganda and masquerading as authentic Ukrainians**. Registered in the first days of Russia's February 24 further invasion of Ukraine, channels appeared pretending to originate from local Ukrainians and local administrators along the path of Russia's planned occupation in the south, east, and north of Ukraine. This inauthentic network shows signs of automated creation, donning handles that follow a pattern. Some channels, such as @Melitopoladmin, act as overt mouthpieces of occupation officials, echoing Russia's propaganda about "liberating Ukrainians" through summer camps for children, restoring garbage collection, and renewing economic ties with Russia. Others, opportunistically named "Zaporozh'ye People's Republic" and "Kherson People's Republic," betray Russia's intent to create proxy statelets. Yet others masquerade as locals decrying life in urban combat and demonizing the Armed Forces of Ukraine. While Telegram shut down some channels, Our Kharkov continues to push anti-Ukrainian narratives to 96,000 subscribers.

Russian Domestic Media Blame Sanctions For Global Food Crisis

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Just as Russia's officials and foreign-facing state media spread disinformation on food security to audiences abroad, **Russia's domestic media publish disinformation locally blaming Western policies for a "global food crisis."** GEC has tracked a noticeable increase in the use of this narrative in Russian digital media since March. The first notable spike in the narrative's appearance began March 30, when Russia's UN Ambassador Nebenzya first blamed Western sanctions for a potential "world food market crisis." The most recent spike likely stems from coverage of new statements this week by Nebenzya and other Russian officials such as Putin aide Maksim Oreshkin, who hyped the potential for global food shortages caused by Washington's economic stimulus policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

5/12/22

MORE "BIOWEAPONS" DISINFO: After a short hiatus, Russian state propaganda has resumed an emphasis on its "U.S.-supported bioweapons labs" disinformation campaign. On May 11, Russia's MoD "exposed" a supposed Democratic Party scheme to turn Ukraine into a "polygon" for research of "controlled epidemics." MoD's statement also claimed this "scheme" involved Pfizer, Moderna, and Merck, U.S. pharmaceutical companies that Russia heavily targeted with COVID-19 vaccine disinformation in 2021. RT reported this "project" funded the Democratic Party's election campaigns. The MoD further claimed the United States was testing "dangerous biological substances" on psychiatric hospital patients and "revealed" that in 2020, tuberculosis-infected fake cash bills were intentionally disseminated among children in the "LPR." The "biolabs" disinformation aims not only to delegitimize the West, but also provide another justification for Russia's war in Ukraine. The Kremlin also uses these false narratives to claim Russia's military interventions are preventing the proliferation of biological weapons and stopping illegal experiments on humans.

SVR ACCUSES U.S. OF NAZI PROPAGANDA: Pro-Kremlin media and propagandists amplified the May 11 statement by Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Naryshkin falsely accusing the State Department of conducting a "Goebbels-like" disinformation campaign to discredit the Kremlin's "special military operation" in Ukraine. Naryshkin accused the Department of ordering its "controlled" NGOs to spread "primitive, but alarmist" messages on Telegram about an imminent Kremlin defeat to sow panic and instigate protests in Russia. The alleged State tasking, according to Naryshkin, calls for the use of profane language, insults and "vulgar images" to dehumanize Russia's political and military leaders in the eyes of the Russian public. This disinformation reflects the Kremlin's malign effort to demonize the West as seeking to divide the Russian people and discredit anyone opposing Putin's policies as Western-backed "national traitors." In reality, SVR's statement is a likely projection of Russia's own approach to disinformation and foreign interference.

The Kremlin's Chemical Weapons Disinformation Campaigns

The Kremlin's spreading of unfounded allegations that the United States is conducting chemical and biological weapons activities in Ukraine is part of a well-established Russian disinformation tactic. **GEC analyzed this tactic in a newly published report on the Kremlin's chemical weapons disinformation campaigns.** The report shows how Russia developed and amplified disinformation to cover up the repeated use of chemical weapons by its ally, the Assad regime in Syria, as well as to deny its own responsibility for the 2018 Novichok poisonings of Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia, and the 2020 Novichok poisoning of Russian opposition

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politician Aleksey Navalny. Each time, the Kremlin used its seat in multilateral organizations as a platform to spread disinformation and obstruct international responses.

Russia Adapts New Disinformation Tactics in Latin America

Kremlin-backed media are attempting to rebuild and grow **their audiences using alternative social media platforms** following YouTube's March 1 decision to block RT and Sputnik's channels due to their violations of guidelines related to the coverage of Russia's war against Ukraine. RT and Sputnik, together with other like-minded disinformation actors, are now increasing their use of platforms such as VKontakte, Odysee and Telegram to reach international audiences. Additionally, the Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) has documented what appears to be an effort to **revive the blocked YouTube channels under slightly different names**. Some 50 YouTube channels have republished videos from RT en Español and Ahí Les Va! ("There it goes"), an RT-affiliated channel, using similar account names and branding. For instance, channels mimicking Ahí Les Va! used alternative spellings (Ahi Les Va...RT!, Ahi Les VA, Ahi Les Va, and Ahi Les va) to evade YouTube detection. Analysis of the impersonating channel "Ahí Les Va" shows that it has amassed over 17,000 subscribers and uploaded 28 videos mostly belonging to Inna Afinogenova, RT's leading propagandist in Latin America and Ahí Les Va!'s original presenter with more than a million subscribers and tens of millions of views. Incidentally, Afinogenova posted a May 3 video announcing her resignation from RT over her opposition to the Ukraine war, yet her comments remained laced with pro-Kremlin propaganda against NATO, Ukraine, and the United States. Her "resignation" video has also amassed more than 300,000 views.

5/10/22

PUTIN'5 VICTORY DAY PROPAGANDA: Russian President Putin's May 9 Victory Day speeches on Red Square have consistently included disinformation and propaganda, often distorting history to justify Moscow's current actions. This year, in the midst of his unprovoked war against Ukraine, Putin invoked history to justify his brutal war and raise morale in the face of heavy losses and setbacks. Putin falsely claimed his war of choice was a "pre-emptive strike" and a "sacred" and "patriotic" act akin to the Soviet fight against Nazi Germany or any war in which Russia "defended itself." Repeating his standard propaganda talking points, Putin accused the West of "canceling" traditional values, falsifying history, and promoting Russophobia. Additionally, Putin falsely blamed NATO and the United States for refusing to negotiate security issues with Moscow while secretly supporting the alleged plans of Ukraine's "neo-Nazis and Banderites" to attack Donbas and Crimea.

"WE CAN REPEAT" VS. "NEVER AGAIN": Russian state-owned news agency RIA Novosti celebrated the May 9 Victory Day with an op-ed titled "Пришло время повторить" or "It is Time to Repeat." The title references a militaristic Russian phrase "можем повторить" or "we can repeat," a popular slogan among pro-Kremlin "patriots" often used as a threat to imply that Russia can once again defeat any opponent just as the Soviets did during WWII. The op-ed alleges that not only Ukraine, but also Europe as a whole has once again become "an aggressive Nazi nest" bent on colonizing Slavs and destroying Russia. The article claims Russia's "polite Western partners" have lost their humanity and revealed their true Nazi essence as the "descendants of European fascists." According to Meduza, "we can repeat" is based on a writing left by a Soviet soldier on the Reichstag's wall in 1945 and is frequently juxtaposed with the pro-peace slogan "never again." Addressing the Ukrainian people on May 8, President Zelensky said that by launching a war against Ukraine, Russia "killed 'Never again.'"

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Putin's WWII Historical Revisionism

For decades, Russian President Putin has attempted to appropriate and exploit history to further his geopolitical aims. Owning and controlling Russia's collective memory of World War II is one of Putin's greatest obsessions. Nowhere is this more visible than Putin's May 9 disinformation-filled victory parade speeches and related efforts. To mark the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II in 2020, for example, Putin published a lengthy article attempting to absolve the Soviet Union of blame for its collaboration with Nazi Germany under the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. For more information on Putin's twisting of history, and how various actors within Russia's disinformation ecosystem amplify his ahistorical claims, read the **GEC's full report** here.

Middle East-Based Terror Groups and Media Amplify Kremlin On Ukraine

Transnational terrorist organizations have used Russia's war against Ukraine to propagate anti-U.S. rhetoric, allege U.S. hypocrisy and unreliability, and galvanize their own bases. Iran-backed Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah claimed March 8 that the West abandoned Ukraine after pushing it "into the mouth of the dragon," which RT Arabic amplified. Nasrallah also criticized a Lebanese Foreign Ministry statement condemning the invasion, claiming it "was written at the American embassy." Hamas political bureau member Mousa Abu Marzouq tweeted that one lesson of the Russia-Ukraine war is that the era of "U.S. unipolar domination" has ended and that the United States was not in a position to declare war on Russia. Al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri claimed "U.S. weakness" was the reason that Ukraine became "prey" to Russia's predation. Meanwhile, the Islamic State called on its supporters to take advantage of the invasion to resume attacks in Europe.

The Lebanon-based and pro-Hezbollah/pro-Assad al-Mayadeen TV often gives a platform to pro-Russian propagandists such as the Bulgarian "journalist" Dilyana Gaytandzhieva, a key disseminator of biolab disinformation, and U.S.-sanctioned Alexander Dugin, who has claimed that Russia's goal is to create a multipolar world and liberate the Middle East from "the American hegemon."

S/S/22

AS SWEDEN AND FINLAND'S NATO DECISIONS NEAR, RUSSIA RAMPS UP DISINFORMATION: Russia is increasingly targeting Sweden and Finland with disinformation, a trend likely to intensify throughout May, when the two countries will make crucial decisions regarding joining NATO. Russian organization "Our Victory" has reportedly sponsored posters, including in the vicinity of the Swedish Embassy in Moscow, falsely depicting famous Swedes as Nazi supporters. Several pro-Kremlin Telegram channels described their placement as a response to allegedly anti-Russian posters near the Russian Embassy in Stockholm. Following Russian MFA spokesperson Maria Zakharova's false claims that Western media prohibit interviews with Russian officials, Prigozhin troll factory's Telegram channel Cyber Front Z identified social media accounts of Finnish media outlets and journalists, encouraging its followers to flood them with Kremlin-aligned commentary on Ukraine. Russia will likely recycle recent false narratives to dissuade the countries' accession to NATO, simultaneously threatening and depicting them as threats to Russia and portraying NATO as a threat to them both. Russia will also likely qualify a decision to join as undemocratic, anti-Russian adventurism, a

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corrupt PR stunt forced by the United States amid European opposition, that will lead to a loss of sovereignty and independence.

POPE FRANCIS CRITICIZES PATRIARCH KIRILL'S WAR PROPAGANDA: In a May 3 interview with an Italian newspaper, Pope Francis detailed Patriarch Kirill's recitation of war justifications during their March 16 video conference, commenting that the Patriarch cannot "become Putin's altar boy." The Pope said he told him, "Brother, **we are not state clerics**, we cannot use the language of politics … we must seek avenues of peace, to put an end to the firing of weapons." These comments prompted a widely reported response from the Russian Orthodox Church that the Pope "chose the wrong tone to convey the content of the conversation" and that such statements "are unlikely to contribute to … constructive dialogue" between the churches. The Patriarch continues to spread Kremlin propaganda, claiming in a May 3 sermon that Russia "has never attacked anyone" and "doesn't want to fight" — a direct echo of Kremlin spokesperson Peskov's statements prior to the war.

PRC Efforts to Amplify the Kremlin's Voice on Ukraine

Government officials and state and party media from the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) routinely amplify Kremlin propaganda, conspiracy theories, and disinformation. This amplification rationalizes President Putin's unjustified and unprovoked war against Ukraine while undermining trust in the United States and other countries, democratic institutions, and independent media. Using social media platforms banned within the PRC, PRC and CCP media and PRC "wolf warrior" diplomats convey Kremlin talking points to audiences in multiple languages and regions across the world. Within the PRC, CCP and state-backed entities censor credible reporting on Russia's atrocities in Ukraine while blaming NATO and the United States for Putin's brutal war of choice. To read more from this GEC analysis, click here.

War Against Ukraine vs. NATO, U.S., the West

Kremlin disinformation has attempted to portray the United States, NATO and the West as a party to and even the cause of the war against Ukraine. Russia has described the goals of its "special military operation" as "demilitarization" and "denazification" of Ukraine, as a protection of the so-called "DPR/LNR" republics, or self-defense against an alleged threat from NATO. **Anecdotal and data-based evidence suggests a possible trend of Russia increasingly attempting to portray the war as one against NATO/the West, as opposed to war against Ukraine**. For example, based on the number of negative quotations from Russian officials in Russian print media **since late February**, sentiment negative to Ukraine has declined while **the frequency of sentiment negative to NATO/West has at times overtaken negative Ukraine sentiment**. This possible shift may indicate a propaganda effort to continue selling the war to the Russian people, who reportedly have not fully accepted the Kremlin's fabricated "denazification" pretext.

S/3/22 #3S

RUSSIA STICKS TO ANTI-SEMITIC CLAIMS DESPITE BACKLASH: Defending the Kremlin's invasion pretext to "denazify" Ukraine has been tough for Russian propagandists, especially when critics point out President Zelenskyy's Jewish background. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov attempted May 1 to counter an Italian journalist's question about Zelenskyy's heritage with a conspiratorial rant, speculating that Adolf Hitler "had Jewish blood too," adding that the "wise Jewish people say that the most ardent anti-Semites are usually

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Jews." Israeli officials immediately demanded an apology for Lavrov's "unforgivable," "outrageous" remarks and "lies…meant to blame the Jews themselves" for the Holocaust. Instead of apologizing, Russia doubled down, accusing Israel of "anti-historical statements" and support for a "neo-Nazi regime in Kyiv." Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem sought to buoy officials' absurd narratives by attacking Zelenskyy, purporting Hitler's alleged Jewish origins, and attempting to discredit Israeli leaders. Nationalist writer Zakhar Prilepin dismissed any controversy in Lavrov's comments, hinting Lavrov was Jewish and therefore "cannot be" an anti-Semite. GRU-linked One World described Lavrov's critics as "Hitler-like" racists for suggesting that "one's ethno-religious identity at birth" predetermines one's political views. Even before Lavrov's remarks, RIS-linked outlets and Kremlin propagandists disseminated disinformation and propaganda targeting Zelenskyy's Jewishness and Ukraine's relations with Israel.

INFORMATION OCCUPATION OF KHERSON: Russian forces are attempting to also bring Kherson Oblast into Russia's (dis)information orbit as the Kremlin looks to assert political control, as it has in neighboring Crimea, through either a sham referendum or force. All mobile and internet connectivity in Kherson ceased April 30, with only very limited mobile access from May 3. Internet connectivity from Ukraine's Khersontelecom was restored May 1 but re-routed through Russia's Rostelecom. Despite an apparent April 27 strike by Ukrainian forces on the city's TV tower, Russian propaganda channels resumed broadcasting after first appearing in mid-April. Attempts to control the information space were accompanied by reported kidnappings of local officials and a May 1 switch of Kherson's currency to the ruble.

SVR's Naryshkin Claims Poland, U.S. Plotting to Take Parts of Ukraine

SVR Director Sergey Naryshkin recently alleged that Warsaw and Washington are plotting for Poland to take control of parts of western Ukraine that "historically belong" to Poland. Building upon a recurring disinformation claim **meant to drive a wedge between Ukraine and Poland**, Naryshkin said this alleged scheme would begin with Polish forces entering Ukraine as "peacekeepers" who would then begin to seize facilities from the Ukrainian National Guard.

Twisting history to his advantage, Naryshkin explains how this plan would lead to splitting Ukraine apart. **Poland has officially** denied **the claims as an "information operation."** RT, the FSB-tasked SouthFront, and others amplified the claim, with RT juxtaposing the alleged plot with the Defender Europe and Swift Response military exercises, which run May 1-27 and partially take place in Poland.

UK Outs Pro-War Russian Troll Farm

The UK announced May 1 its funded research had revealed **a large-scale disinformation operation by a new St. Petersburg-based troll farm with suspected links to Yevgeniy Prigozhin,** sanctioned Russian oligarch and Internet Research Agency (IRA) financier. **The socalled "Cyber Front Z" operation**, designed to "manipulate international public opinion" and increase support for Russia's war against Ukraine, spans eight social media platforms including Telegram, Twitter, Facebook and TikTok. Prigozhin-linked trolls advised their subscribers to use VPNs to target Western social media accounts of Kremlin critics, including prominent politicians and world leaders, and dominate comment sections of popular international websites in the UK, South Africa and India. By focusing on posting comments, rather than authoring original content, the trolls likely sought to

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decrease their detection risk on social media platforms for engaging in coordinated inauthentic behavior, the UK government concluded.

4/28/22

TRANSNISTRIA DISINFO IGNITES FEARS OF EXPANDED WAR: Kremlin disinformation appears to set the stage for potential Russian action in Moldova's Transnistria region. Russian MFA Spokesperson Zakharova claimed April 28 that recent blasts at a state security building and two broadcasting towers were "acts of terrorism aimed at destabilizing the region," following Kremlin and disinformation outlets' accusations that Ukrainian forces were behind the attacks. The remarks follow Russia's Central Military District commander's statement that "control over the south of Ukraine is another way out to Trans-Dniester" and alleged—much like prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine—that there was "evidence" of oppression of ethnic Russians there. Rybar, a Telegram channel linked to sanctioned oligarch Yevgeniy Prigozhin, claimed Poland had created a strike group in Romania for deployment to Moldova. Meanwhile, text messages in Russian have reportedly been sent to Transnistrians claiming to be from the Ukrainian SBU warning of their imminent attack, recommending civilians evacuate to "safer regions," and declaring any remaining civilians "will be ... liquidated without warning." Ukraine has denied the messages and said Russian intelligence services are responsible. Russia sent similarly intimidating messages to Ukrainians prior to February 24's renewed invasion and generally uses texting as a tactic of psychological warfare.

PORTRAYING UKRAINIAN REFUGEES AS A THREAT: Russian disinformation is demonizing Ukrainian refugees to undermine European support for Ukraine. Secretary of Russia's Security Council Nikolai Patrushev blamed Ukrainian refugees April 26 for an upcoming "deep political and economic crisis" in Europe. Patrushev described Ukrainian refugees as lazy and ungrateful, and likely to spread Nazi ideology, infectious disease, and drug, child and organ trafficking across Europe. Pro-Kremlin media and influencers have promoted the same false narratives, highlighting problems allegedly caused by Ukrainian refugees in Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Italy in the same way Russia tried to weaponize Syrian migrants against Europe and Germany in particular (e.g. the "Lisa case). Regional experts point out that disinformation targeting Ukrainian refugees is gaining traction in Eastern Europe.

Russian False Flag Tactics as Precedent

Ukraine's Ministry of Defense and some experts believe the recent attacks in Transnistria may be a Russian false flag operation to provide the Kremlin pretext to launch an additional front in the conflict against Ukraine and destabilize Moldova. Russia planned false flag operations to fabricate a pretext for invading Ukraine and had developed a "specialty" in "false flag invasions." American historian David Satter and longstanding Putin critics have claimed Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) carried out the 1999 apartment bombings in Russia as a false flag operation to incite public support for a new Chechen war and lift Putin to victory in a presidential election. According to Satter, after FSB operatives were caught placing a bomb in the basement of a building in Ryazan, Nikolai Patrushev (then FSB director) claimed the discovered FSB personnel were participating in an exercise involving a fake bomb.

New Multilingual RT Project Spreads Ukraine Disinformation Videos

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RT's Margarita Simonyan announced this week that **RT has launched a new Telegram channel called "Videos in Different Languages"** (@video_languages), to distribute and amplify disinformation videos on the Ukraine war in 17 different languages, including Chinese, Arabic, French, Spanish, English, and other major and localized world languages. The site's bio states, "With you, we will break through the information blockade around the events in Ukraine. The whole truth is in the most important videos from Ukraine in 17 foreign languages." It is likely that this project will bring about a new wave of video messaging from Russian embassies and officials on social media for global distribution and audiences given the inclusion of languages from every region of the world. The channel has garnered 37.3K subscribers since it launched on April 21. Dozens of disinformation-filled videos on the war in Ukraine have already been shared and translated.

4/26/22

RUSSIAN UN DIPLOMAT, CBRN HEAD, & EMBASSIES MAKE WMD CLAIMS: Russia's Deputy UN Ambassador Dmitry Polyanskiy made a series of false claims April 25 adding to Kremlin disinformation narratives that Kyiv and Washington are preparing "staged provocations in order to accuse the Russian Armed Forces of using chemical, biological or tactical nuclear weapons." Polyanskiy claimed that on April 21, Russian forces countered an attempt to smuggle "dangerous cargo" to the Zaporizhzhya NPP and added that Ukrainian forces are considering a strike on the now-defunct Prydniprovsky Chemical Plant—home to massive amounts of radioactive waste storage partially adjacent to the Dnieper River. Polyanskiy and CBRN head Kirillov also claimed the United States is planning a chemical "Syria scenario," alleging the presence of Syrian civil defense group White Helmets in Ukraine. Kirillov also claimed a "container" of chemical ampules had been dropped on Russian troops April 21. Russian ambassadors and missions around the world shared these same bogus claims on social media and in email messages to counterparts from other governments.

KREMLIN (PREDICTABLY) BLAMES THE WEST FOR ALLEGED PLOT AGAINST STATE PROPAGANDISTS: President Putin announced April 25 that the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) foiled a terrorist plan to assassinate a prominent Russian television journalist, claiming Western intelligence services, specifically the CIA, served as the "curators" of the alleged operation. FSB Director Aleksandr Bortnikov explained that members of a neo-Nazi terrorist organization "National Socialism/White Power" intended to kill Vladimir Solovyov at the direction of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU). Addressing the event on his nightly political talk show, Solovyov blamed EU sanctions for marking him as a target for the "neo-Nazis" who, he claimed, also planned to kill other EU-sanctioned Russian state propagandists Margarita Simonyan, Tigran Keosayan, Olga Skabeyeva, and Yevgeniy Popov. Solovyov also said his employer, the state-owned television channel Rossiya 1, had in the past refused to hire President Zelenskyy, implying the assassination plot may have been Zelenskyy's act of revenge.

Kemi Séba: Prolific Disinformation Purveyor in Africa

Pan-Africanist Kémi Séba is a prominent French-Beninese purveyor of Russian disinformation and propaganda targeting Francophone Africa with ties to U.S.-sanctioned Russian oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin. Séba is a savvy social media communicator who routinely weaves pro-Russian propaganda into his pan-Africanist rhetoric, promoting Russia's image and defending its actions in Ukraine including in an exclusive interview with Prigozhin's RIA FAN. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Séba posted a video (over 1.5 million views) on Facebook defending Russia's actions while blaming the West and NATO for destroying the USSR, encircling

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Russia, and arming former Soviet republics to threaten Russia the same way the West "destroyed and dismantled" Africa. Séba visited Moscow March 7 where he met Russian officials such as Mikhail Bogdanov and gave an interview to RT France in which he claimed that Ukraine was "instrumentalized" by the West to threaten Russia, which U.S.-sanctioned ultranationalist Alexander Dugin amplified. In his March 24 interview with Dugin's anti-liberal, recently sanctioned Geopolitica.ru, Séba depicted Russia's war against Ukraine as a confrontation between those who want to "westernize" humanity and those who want to protect their own identity.

Potemkin Village Press Tours of the Donbas

The Russian government often organizes so-called "press tours" for "independent Western journalists" as a disinformation tactic. In reality, the Kremlin selects marginal pro-Russian activists who regurgitate Russian disinformation and propaganda. Such tours have taken place in Crimea and Syria, and this week in Ukraine. On April 24, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov announced a fourth round of the international "За правду" (For Truth) "press tour" of Donbas, claiming the participation of about 20 journalists from Russia, "DPR," the United States, China, Turkey, Italy, Portugal, and Saudi Arabia. Russian state-controlled media have promoted similar MoD-organized tours. Independent investigators quickly exposed the tour participants as pro-Kremlin stooges. For example, Icelandic "journalist" Haukur Hauksson works for the Yevgeniy Prigozhin-linked Federal News Agency. Germany's Thomas Röper runs the blog Anti-Spiegel and promotes Covid-19 vaccine conspiracy theories. Sonja Vandenende from the Netherlands writes for One World, a GRU-linked website.

4/21/22

DISINFORMATION TARGETING FORMER STATE OFFICIAL SPREADSIN RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE INFORMATION SPACE: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem began disseminating false claims in April targeting a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Nonproliferation Programs. Disinformation narratives targeting this official originated from the Russian Ministry of Defense which falsely accused him and other U.S. persons of being involved in the implementation of the so-called "military-biological program" in Ukraine. The MoD either mistakenly or intentionally misidentified the official as a current State employee although his time in the role ended March 31. As of April 18, over 200 Russian-language media outlets had published disinformation mentioning the former U.S. official. These entities ranged from Russian state media and major pro-Kremlin outlets to the SVR-directed Strategic Culture Foundation, Prigozhin-linked Federal News Agency and recently sanctioned pseudo think-tank Katehon. The false story also appeared on disinformation outlets targeting Central Asia and Georgia. The Kremlin often targets specific individuals in disinformation narratives to send a warning to Kremlin critics they too could be subjected to online harassment.

PRO-WAR PROPAGANDA GETS TRACTION ON VK: Pro-Kremlin actors are using disinformation and propaganda online and on the ground to instill pro-war "patriotic" sentiment in the Russian population. A GEC analysis of the top VK posts from 104 pro-Kremlin influential accounts published April 18-20 shows a clear emphasis on content that aims to demonstrate the alleged heroism of Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine, as well as the superiority of Russian forces and Russian weaponry. This content consistently draws parallels between the war in Ukraine and the Soviet fight against Nazi Germany, hoping to evoke an emotional response among Russians and demonize Ukraine. The examined posts also attempted to show widespread support for the war among both Russian and Ukrainian populations, including children, and highlighted Kremlin claims the war is justified to "save" both Russian and Ukrainian lives

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Russia's "Z" Campaign Receives Coordinated Amplification on VK

GEC analysis shows that on VK, the "Z" campaign, which aims to rally support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine under the auspices of "denazification," appears to benefit from coordinated and likely inauthentic amplification. Eight clusters of accounts consistently co-posted identical content, a strong indication of coordination and possibly co-management by a single actor. Several of these account clusters exhibited an affiliation with the United Russia political party, which closely supports Russian President Vladimir Putin. The overall reach of this amplification, however, appears to be limited, as engagement with co-posted content rarely garnered over 100 views and 15 likes, with few comments. The GEC analyzed more than 390,000 VK posts, comments, and replies published between February 20 and March 30that contained keywords related to Russia's "Z" campaign and other pro-Kremlin narratives. This report is now available on GEC-IQ. Please contact info@geciq.com for access. If you are outside the USG, please contact info@geciqglobal.com.

Soviet-Style Youth Indoctrination Returns to Russia

A modern echo of Soviet "political information" education (politinformatsiya) is growing louder in Russia as the Kremlin tries to retain public support for its aggressive war against Ukraine. As the USSR once pivoted its education system to indoctrinate children before and after WWII, Russia has once again introduced "patriotic education" in its schools. Russia's Education Minister recently said schools are central to the Kremlin's fight to "win the information and psychological war" against the West. Education officials recently announced that lessons in history would begin in first grade. At a three-day "anti-fascist conference" for students titled "Strength is in Truth," officials taught students how to recognize "fakes" and evaluate information in response to the surge of Nazism in Europe. Last week, a senior Russian official attending the first All-Russian School Historical Forum spoke of the Soviet Union's, and now Russia's, role in the eternal fight against Nazism at home and abroad. In early March, the Ministry of Education distributed a video for use in schools that pushed historical revisionism and claimed Ukraine never existed as a country. Some students, in a style reminiscent of the Soviet "Great Terror," have begun denouncing their teachers for opposing the war.

4/19/22

BIOLABS –ANEW TWIST TO AN OLD LIE: In the latest iteration of an ongoing Kremlin disinformation campaign, Russian MFA spokeswoman Maria Zakharova falsely asserted April 16 that Germany is cooperating with the United States in the development of biological weapons in Ukraine. Zakharova said the German Biosecurity Program (GBP), which she claimed involves several German scientific institutions including those linked to Germany's military, allegedly develops bioweapons under the guise of countering the "potential threat of biological terrorism." Indicating the potential of this latest German-centric version of the biolab narrative to continue, Zakharova did not rule out the chance that further evidence of "Germany's bio-military activities in Ukraine" will be discovered by the Russian military. The false accusations against Germany may extend beyond its alleged involvement in Ukraine. For example, on April 11, pro-Kremlin Izvestiya and Prigozhin-linked Federal News Agency reported that the United States and Germany are planning to research deadly viruses targeting Asiatic peoples in Mongolia.

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FRANCE –RUSSIAN STATE MEDIA AMPLIFIES FAVORABLE LE PEN POSITIONS ON UKRAINE: The RT Français coverage of the French presidential election betrays a clear Kremlin preference for EU-and NATO-skeptic Marine Le Pen in the likely hope her electoral victory may undermine European and Euro-Atlantic cohesion on Ukraine. RT depicts the far-right Le Pen as a candidate of "national unity" who calls for a "strategic rapprochement between NATO and Russia" and for financial compensation from countries that support bans on Russian energy in response to the Kremlin's brutal war against Ukraine. RT Français also amplified a narrative promoted by Le Pen claiming the EU timed the negotiations on the phased import ban of Russian oil to favor President Macron and undermine her candidacy. RT Français used this narrative to sow doubt among French audiences about the benefits of the Ukraine-related sanctions, claiming potential negative and disruptive impacts on Europe's energy security and everyday life in countries dependent upon Russian energy. Russia previously and unsuccessfully interfered in France's 2017 election (when Macron and Le Pen faced off the first time) with its hack and release operation, dubbed "Macron Leaks," of gigabytes of data taken from his campaign and released just days before voting took place

Faces of Kremlin Propaganda: Dmitri Peskov

Dmitri Peskov has served as Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesperson since 2008, playing a key role in propaganda and disinformation campaigns to cover up the Kremlin's crimes. Before Putin launched his brutal war against Ukraine, Peskov repeatedly denied Russia had any intentions to invade its neighbor. He falsely asserted Russia did not pose a threat to Ukraine, that Russia had never attacked any other nation, and Russia would be the "last country in Europe" to think about starting a war. Peskov attempted to discredit Western media reports exposing the Kremlin's invasion preparations as "provocations," "unfounded fomenting of tension," "Western hysteria," "irresponsible fakes," and "maniacal information insanity." The Kremlin's February 24 launch of its further invasion validated media reports and removed any lingering shred of Peskov's credibility. Serving Putin has, however, been lucrative for Peskov. Though a civil servant his entire career, he and his family are now multimillionaires. **To read more click here.**

An (Un)Holy War Against Satanists

The head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, has provided many of the ideological underpinnings for Putin's unjust war in Ukraine. As one of the architects of the **pan-Slavic "Russkiy mir"** (Russian world) concept, Patriarch Kirill has preached that Russia is fighting in Ukraine for the "true independence" of the last bastion against the immoral West, has "God's truth" on its side, and is holding back the "antichrist" against the "bogeyman" world power which opposes the Russian people. A longstanding and staunch Putin ally, his foray into geopolitics and endorsement of the war has deeply divided the church.
Russian state propaganda outlets also portray Putin's war on Ukraine as a holy one, while Tsargrad and the FSB-tasked News Front have used dehumanizing language to describe Ukrainians as "Satanists." By leveraging religion, the Kremlin can add "holy crusade" to its list of false justifications for waging a brutal war and committing atrocities against the Ukrainian people. Check www.state.gov/disarming-disinformationfor the la test State Department public releases on countering Russia's disinformation on Ukraine

4/14/22 #30

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STATE MEDIA CONTINUES COUNTERACCUSATIONS AND EXTREMIST RHETORIC: In the aftermath of exposed atrocities in Bucha and deadly attacks on civilians in Kramatorsk, Russian state media continues to deny Russian forces' responsibility, claim Ukrainian or foreign staging, or allege Ukrainian forces' responsibility. The playbook also includes claims of Ukrainian forces' equivalent civilian targeting. RIA Novosti reported April 14 the Belgorod governor's claim that Ukrainian helicopters "intruded into Russian airspace" to conduct "six airstrikes on residential buildings" in Klimovo village, injuring 10 civilians including a child. The article also quoted an MoD official stating April 13 that if the "sabotage" continued, the army will be forced to strike at "decision-making centers, including inside Kyiv." Meanwhile international reporting continued to uncover disinformation purveyors' extreme and inciting rhetoric for Russian audiences. The Washington Post cited RT Editor-in-Chief Margarita Simonyan's declaration on NTV's program "Svoya Pravda" in response to testimonies of alleged Ukrainian crimes: "What makes you a Nazi is your bestial nature, your bestial hatred and your bestial willingness to tear out the eyes of children on the basis of nationality."

WARNINGS FOR A PAIR OF POSSIBLE NATO ASPIRANTS: Several weeks into the conduct of Putin's brutal war on Ukraine, Sweden and Finland announced their intention to consider NATO accession. Russian authorities responded quickly. Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, said in the event of Swedish and Finnish NATO membership Russia would have to strengthen its forces and end any talk of a "nuclear free Baltic," implying potential deployment of warheads to Kaliningrad. Russian lawmaker Vladimir Dzhabarov added that if Finland joined NATO it would result in the "destruction of their country." MFA Spokeswoman Zakharova insisted April 13 it was wrong to conclude "Russia [is] threatening Sweden and Finland in any way" and such claims were "propaganda and provocations." Despite Zakharova's protestations, Russian officials' threatening rhetoric likely foreshadows the Kremlin disinformation ecosystem's committed efforts to sow division and doubt in Sweden and Finland's national debates about NATO.

Censor Locally, Disinfor m Globally

The Kremlin's criminalization of public opposition to or independent news reporting about Putin's war on Ukraine is not enough for Simonyan, chief editor of three Kremlin disinformation media outlets. While participating in a talk-show for Rossiya 1, she suggested that Russia should remove the phrase "censorship is forbidden" from the constitution because Russia has always "been more stable" under concerted censorship. Simonyan's calls for greater state control over Russia's information space followed months of Kremlin augmentation of its ability to disrupt information spaces everywhere with a significant budget increase for its main vector of disinformation and propaganda —state-controlled media. From January to March of this year, the Russian government allocated 17.4 billion rubles for the budget's "mass media" category -3.2 times greater than the same period a year earlier. (During the same three months, the Russian military's budget onlyincreased11%.) 11.9 billion rubles of the media total were allocated in March alone, in the month following the war's February 24 launch.

Claims of Potential Chemical Weapons "Provocations"

Foreign facing state media outlet RT reported April 13 Russian forces discovered "three UAVs" at an "abandoned Ukrainian base" they alleged were configured for potential chemical weapons attacks. A masked Russian service member alleged the drones' remote controls contained coordinates of "locations of Russian...forces" and "residential neighborhoods" that were "marked for spraying." RT's companion disinformation outlet Sputnik also reported April 13 that Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Syromolotov had told them the "threat of chemical terrorism by fascist nationalists" controlled by the "Kiev regime" and

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Ukrainian military was "very real." Syromolotov added the probability was high because U.S.-and NATO-supported extremist groups had previously conducted "chemical provocations" during the Syrian conflict. The deputy FM said he also "did not rule" out transport of nuclear material into Ukraine "from third countries."

4/12/22

STATE MEDIA PAVES THE WAY FOR SYSTEMATIC ATROCITIES: Building upon the April 3 RIA Novosti article "What Russia Should Do With Ukraine," pundits on Russian state media continue advocating for alarming actions against Ukraine and Ukrainians. These include calls to maintain Russian forces in Ukraine for 30-40 years in order to "pull this disease out by the roots" and denazify "the cancer" by "knocking heads off" all the way to the Polish border. Pundits' and lawmakers' stated goals include the elimination of "Ukrainian national symbols" and replacing them with the "flying of Russian flags." These examples constitute a small sample of the extreme statements encapsulated in this excellent and subtitled compilation shared on Twitter which we encourage readers to watch. This persistent use of vitriolic and dehumanizing rhetoric on Russian state media to advocate for a policy of systematic elimination of the Ukrainian identity could incite further atrocities and prolong the war.

CLAIMING THEN DENYING THE KRAMATORSKSTATION STRIKE: Immediately following the April 8 Russian strike on the civilian-filled Kramatorsk railway station which killed at least 57 people—including five children—and wounded 109 people, the Kremlin denied all responsibility. However, now-deleted or edited Russian MoD and pro-Kremlin Telegram channels tell a different story. The night before the strike, a pro-Kremlin Telegram channel warned civilians not to evacuate by rail. Just after the strike, the Russian MoD stated it had launched missiles at railway stations in three towns near Kramatorsk but refrained from saying anything about Kramatorsk itself. Other pro-Kremlin Telegram channels initially claimed that a Russian missile had been fired into "a crowd of Ukrainian militants at the Kramatorsk railway station." Once the devastation and horrific scope of the attack became clear, these posts were either edited or deleted. The Russian MoD then alternately denied the claims altogether, blamed Ukraine, or falsely claimed its forces do not operate Tochka-U guided missile systems. The now-infamous missile fired at Kramatorsk had the words "For the children" ("За детей") written on it.

Censor Locally, Disinform Globally

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4/7/22

AFTER BUCHA COMES BORODYANKA: Anticipating the exposure of more atrocities committed by Russian forces in Ukraine, the Russian Federation's MOD and its Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov claimed April 6 that Kyiv is preparing more "Bucha-like provocations" in the Ukrainian town of Borodyanka and other previously Russian-occupied areas. MOD spokesperson Mikhail Mizintsev claimed Ukraine is paying $25 to every civilian who will participate in staging and filming fabricated Russian crimes. Mizintsev also asserted that Ukrainian "nationalists" shelled civilian areas in the Kharkiv region, alleging that Ukraine's military and Western media cooperated on filming the destruction to present it as a Russian attack. State-owned RIA Novosti separately issued false reports that Ukraine was planning another "provocation involving civilian deaths" in the Kherson region.

ORGAN TRAFFICKING DISINFORMATION AND UKRAINE: Despite the narrative's seemingly niche audience, Russian media have disseminated since 2014 versions of a 1980s and 1990s disinformation favorite, child organ trafficking with claims that Ukrainian state entities extracted organs from wounded Ukrainian soldiers for sale in Western Europe. The narrative has continued and recently expanded during the war. Russian state media and Kremlin propagandists amplified MFA spokeswoman Maria Zakharova's inclusion of "organ trafficking in Kosovo" among her April 4 litany of alleged U.S. war crimes across history. Zakharova had previously claimed that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was connected to Hashim Thaci, the former President of Kosovo, who, according to Zakharova, trafficked the organs of Serbs killed by NATO's 1999 operations in Serbia. On March 15, Russian Communist Party chief Gennady Zyuganov accused Ukraine of adopting "Kosovar Albanian trafficking techniques" by selling organs of both Russian and Ukrainian casualties from the current fighting. Tsargrad TV quoted a "former Ukrainian soldier" who also claimed Ukraine sold organs to the ex-wife of Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvilli. Despite the disinformation ecosystem's heightened interest in this subject, experts thoroughly debunked the narrative in a 2019 Polygraph.info report -"Russian TV Digs Up Fabricated Organ Harvesting Claim."

Russia Invites Conspiracy Theorists to the UN

In a desperate attempt to continue presenting its false U.S. biological weapons development narrative in a multilateral setting, Russia organized an April 6 Arria-Formula meeting at the United Nations entitled "Threats to international peace and security emanating from military biological activities in regions across the globe." The sparsely attended three-hour meeting provided a UN forum for conspiracy theorists, Russian state media,

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and Kremlin-aligned journalists. Russian state TV presenter Arkadi Mamontov presented false claims about alleged U.S. plans to infect foreign leaders with diseases such as cancer. Bulgarian "independent" journalist Dilyana Gaytandzieva repeated her previously published "findings" of alleged U.S. biological experiments on Georgian soldiers. Russia's use of its permanent Security Council seat to organize a UN meeting of Kremlin shills and pseudo experts shows the lengths Moscow is willing to go to promote its disinformation campaigns about Ukraine.

Russian Disinformation Alleges NATO Commander Captured

Russian disinformation outlets and pro-Kremlin users on social media created and amplified a false story alleging Lt. General Roger Cloutier, Commander of NATO Allied Land Command, had been captured by Russian forces in Mariupol while with the extremist Azov regiment. The false claim appears to have started April 3 via a Twitter post by the "Formosa Club Russia Office" account. Subsequent pro-Russian Twitter accounts and blogger shares, including by Iranian state media, spread it widely on social media and to the FSB-affiliated website PolitNavigator. Independent factcheckers verified, and U.S. European Command confirmed separately to the GEC, that the story was untrue. The falsehoods did not, however, stop the Vice Minister of Education and Sports for Laos from sharing the story in a post (since taken down) and a popular pro-Russian Thai Facebook account sharing it April 5 with high levels of engagement. This cross-regional spread demonstrates that **even easily disprovable narratives can go viral, especially in media environments where Russian disinformation goes largely unchecked.**

4/5/22

THE KREMLIN DISINFO PLAYBOOK TAKES ON BUCHA: Moscow has followed its standard disinformation playbook in its massive reaction to global outcry following allegations its forces committed war crimes in the city of Bucha—first denying their involvement in the massacre and then putting out several false narratives to hide the truth. The Russian MoD claimed April 3 that "the photos and video footage from Bucha are another hoax, a staged production and provocation by the Kyiv regime for the Western media." The next day, Foreign Minister Lavrov stated that there were "signs of video fakes and other forgeries." Russian embassies and outlets have promoted easily debunked conspiracies, including claims Ukraine used fake corpseswhich "reanimated" after the cameras stopped rolling. Despite ample evidence from the New York Times, Bellingcat, and the BBC disproving Russia's claims and demonstrating the country's involvement, the Kremlin's disinformation machine continues to try (and fail) to hide the truth. On April 4, Russia's Investigative Committee (Sledkom) announced investigators would legally pursue those who disseminate "knowingly false information" about the role of Russian Armed Forces in Bucha.

"WHAT RUSSIA SHOULD DO WITH UKRAINE" -A ROADMAP FOR ATROCITIES: Russian state media outlet RIA Novosti published a disturbing April 3 article titled "**What** Russia Should Do with Ukraine" that argues it is not just Ukraine's leadership that needs "denazifying" but the majority of Ukraine's population. Stating that all who have taken up arms for Ukraine must "be eliminated" because of their role in committing a (non-existent) genocide against Russians, the author declares that Ukrainian Nazism is "more dangerous" than Hitler's Nazism. The article goes on to call for "de-Ukrainization" and "a rejection of the large-scale artificial inflating of the ethnic component" of what is known as Ukraine. The author then prescribes a list of measures to fully "liberate" the "denazified" lands—measures that would likely constitute additional war crimes or crimes against humanity.

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Russia's Bucha Disinformation by the Numbers

In 28% of articles mentioning Bucha, **Russian state digital media cynically claimed atrocities documented** following Russian forces' withdrawal **were a "fake," a "forgery," or a "well-directed theatrical show."** Russian digital media's most predominant Bucha disinformation narratives (67% of articles) claimed the "staged" war crimes were a U.S. and Ukrainian "provocation" intended to disrupt peace talks between Ukraine and Russia, to ban Russia from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or to simply slander Russia and Russian forces. Despite the flurry of official Kremlin denials in response to the world's outrage over likely war crimes in Bucha, **state and Kremlin-aligned media outlets** did not exclusively rely on official rejections of the claims but often **directly challenged the veracity of Western reporting.**

Russian Embassies Run Amok Globally on Social Media

The Kremlin is increasingly leveraging the Facebook and Twitter accounts of Russian Federation embassies worldwide to disseminate disinformation by reposting official statements, linking to articles from state-funded outlets like RT or TASS, or promoting Telegram channels that parrot Kremlin propaganda. Many of these posts are written in local languages to simultaneously reach target audiences and hamper efforts by international factcheckers or social media platforms to monitor malign and false content. Since documentation of Bucha's horrors first appeared, numerous Russian embassy accounts quickly amplified official denials, repeated state media claims that they were a U.S. and Ukrainian fabrication, or invented additional narratives to obfuscate Russian forces' culpability.

3/31/22

IMPOSING RUSSIAN EDUCATION AS PART OF "DENAZIFICATION": The Kremlin's propaganda and disinformation apparatus has recently reported on Ukrainian school textbooks, allegedly confiscated from the "liberated" territories, in support of the false narrative depicting Ukraine as an "anti-Russia" Nazi state. Russia's Ministry of Education said it analyzed more than 300 supposedly U.S.-funded Ukrainian textbooks concluding they created "fake history," deliberately incited hatred of Russia, and essentially prepared students for a war with Russia. Duma member Artyom Turov claimed the textbooks portrayed all the residents of "DPR/LPR" as terrorists and subhuman. Russia's Investigative Committee announced a related investigation, while the United Russia party called for a speedy implementation of Russia's education standards in the "liberated" parts of Ukraine. Recent reporting suggests it was Russia that increased anti-Ukraine propaganda in its schools, imposing "patriotic lessons," preparing its children for a war, and inviting Kremlin propagandists Maria Zakharova and Margarita Simonyan to indoctrinate teachers in Moscow.

RUSSIA PRESENTS "EVIDENCE" OF UKRAINE'S BIOWEAPONS: Russia's Ministry of Defense continues spreading false claims accusing Ukraine and the United States of developing biological weapons. MoD purports to have identified specific Pentagon officials who allegedly took part in the creation of components of biological weapons, while also drawing attention to "journalistic investigations in the Western press," supposedly connecting notable U.S. companies and persons to the development of bioweapons. The MoD spokesperson pointed to alleged communications between the Ukrainian company Motor Sich with the Turkish manufacturer of Bayraktar drones as evidence of Kyiv's intention to acquire "equipment for the delivery and employment of biological weapons, with the possibility of their use against the Russian Federation." In the meantime, Science Magazine debunked Kremlin disinformation, demonstrating how

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Russian officials distorted "very basic epidemiological research" on bat parasites in Ukraine to falsely portray it as bioweapons research.

GEC Counter-Disinformation Dispatch #14: Ukraine and the Power of "We"

The GEC's latest Counter Disinformation Dispatch analyzes the consequence of Russia's war against Ukraine through the lens of principles of social influence. One of the most powerful factors in building a sense of community is shared suffering. The Kremlin's unprovoked war is uniting Ukrainians and anti-Russian feelings as never before. Due to widespread media coverage of the war, people around the world are learning the names of Ukrainian leaders and cities, as well as the names of Russian missiles and tanks. In line with these principles, people are much more likely to identify with, and therefore be influenced by Ukraine, which has helped build resistance to Russian disinformation. Read more here.

"Denazification" and "Demilitarization" Terms Endure in Kremlin Media

Financial Times reported March 28 that Russia apparently no longer seeks the so-called "denazification" and "demilitarization" of Ukraine, which were among the Kremlin's stated aims in February, as part of ceasefire negotiations. BBC Russian reported that Moscow officials have decreased their use of these terms in recent days. A GEC analysis of Russian-language digital media shows that the use of "denazification" and "demilitarization" decreased beginning in early March and then plateaued. It seems Russian media outlets have continued to include quotations from Russian officials' late-February remarks that used these terms in their current coverage. This dynamic could mean the "denazification" and "demilitarization" terms remain the core public justifications for the Kremlin's war against Ukraine separate from Russia's negotiating position.

3/29/22 #25

BIOLOGICAL LABS & FALSE WEAPON5 NARRATIVE5 STRIKE 5ENSITIVE CHORDS: Russia's disinformation ecosystem has recently overwhelmingly covered and added spin to narratives alleging notable U.S. companies and persons, as well as the Ukraine-based Burisma Holdings, funded biological research laboratories in Ukraine. Even if these companies and persons engaged in the partial funding of non-military bio-safety labs, the Kremlin, MoD, MFA, Rospotrebnadzor (consumer watchdog), Sputnik, RT, and Russian proxy sites linked to the SVR, FSB, and GRU have all falsely alleged that the specific entities aided previously-debunked "military biological laboratories" in Ukraine. Russian MFA Spokeswoman Zakharova used the term "BioBiden" in her lengthy Telegram post featuring the narratives. Western media outlets have covered and fact-checked these claims. In addition to this new narrative on bio-labs, Secretary of Russia's Security Council Nikolay Patrushev made yet another sensitive false claim: that the U.S. biological program is continuing the "tradition of the Third Reich."

EVERYBODY BUT RUSSIA TO BLAME FOR REPORTED POISONING: In reaction to the reports that Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich and Ukrainian negotiators may have been poisoned in Kyiv earlier this month by "hard-liners in Moscow" to sabotage peace talks, pro-Kremlin channels and influencers on Telegram resorted to a well-tested Kremlin tactic: dissemination of various versions of what could have happened to deflect the blame from Russia, even though the Kremlin's role in this alleged poisoning has not been confirmed. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov issued denials, calling the reports an "informational diversion." Russian state television channel Rossiya 24 denied the poisoning took place and at the same time claimed it was possibly organized by the CIA. Pro-Kremlin news aggregator Telegram channel Karaulny blamed Ukraine's alleged effort

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to disrupt the negotiations. Yuliya Vityazeva, who writes for the FSB-tasked News Front, suggested President Zelenskyy was behind the disinformation about the poisoning in order to test Western reaction to possible Russian use of chemical weapons in Ukraine.

Russia's Fusing of Disinformation with Local Wedge Issues

Russia frequently fuses its propaganda and disinformation with **local polarizing "wedge" issues** to garner the attention of a given target audience. For example, on March 27, the Russian Mission to Canada and Russian MFA shared a tweet denouncing Canada's decision to ban RT's French-and English-language services, falsely equivocating the disinformation outlet with the CBC and Radio-Canada. Then, using the phrase "liberal dictatorship," Russia aims to engage audiences already riled up over the recent "Freedom Convoy" using familiar language. The U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence thoroughly documented how Russia targeted the American public with such tactics during the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Russian Digital Media Increases Coverage of Alleged Ukrainian Violence

Russian digital media mentions of "torture" or "cruel treatment" of Russian forces spiked significantly following the initial March 27 appearance on social media of unconfirmed video depicting alleged Ukrainian violence against Russian POWs. This sudden increase represents the highest spike in Russia's coverage of torture claims since Russia launched its further invasion of Ukraine on February 24. The U.S. government assessed on March 23 that, based on the information available, Russia has committed war crimes against civilians in Ukraine.

3/24/22

BLAMING WESTERN "PROVOCATION" FOR RUSSIA'S POTENTIAL USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS: As NATO leaders prepared for a March 24Brussels meeting, the Russian space agency director boasted March 23 of Russia's capability to destroy any aggressor in a matter of minutes. Russia's deputy UN ambassador also told Sky News that Moscow has the right to use nuclear weapons if it is "attacked" or "provoked" by NATO. Before Russia launched its war against Ukraine last month, Russia's disinformation ecosystem falsely portrayed NATO and U.S. warnings of the Kremlin's war plans as attempts to "provoke" a war between Russia and Ukraine. Deploying the same tactic, Russian officials and pro-Kremlin influencers frame NATO's concerns of Moscow's potential use of CBRN weapons in Ukraine as an effort to push Russia to use such weapons or as alleged evidence of its own intentions to deploy nuclear weapons against Russia. ZvezdaWeekly, a publication affiliated with Russia's armed forces, directly accuses the United States and UK of preparing a nuclear attack against Russia. Kremlin propagandist Vladimir Solovyov repeated President Putin's 2018 claim that in the case of a nuclear war Russians will go to heaven as martyrs, while their opponents will simply die.

CHECHEN FIGHTERS IN UKRAINE: In a likely effort to counter negative information about Chechen fighters who have joined Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Kremlin propaganda is now covering those Chechen forces in a positive light. On March 21 Russia's most-watched evening news program "Vremya" on state-controlled Channel One included a five-minute segment about Chechen participation in the war, including in the fight around Mariupol. The focus of the story, however, was not fighting but the delivery of humanitarian aid from the Akhmat Kadyrov Foundation. On March 23 and 24, Telegram posts from Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov's channel glorifying Chechens were among the top 10 posts based on engagement among 20 influential pro-Kremlin channels.

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Disinformation and Propaganda Surrounding President Biden's NATO Meeting

Preliminary findings indicate that as of March 24 **the most prominent disinformation and propaganda narrative surrounding President Biden's Brussels visit in Russian-language traditional media attempts to negatively associate his NATO engagement with the23rd anniversary of the Alliance's military operations in Yugoslavia.** Approximately 50% of the related coverage referred to the anniversary, depicting President Biden as a strong supporter of NATO's 1999 decision to carry out an aerial bombing campaign.Russian officials and pro-Kremlin influencers are actively disseminating this narrative on Telegram.

Spotlight: Russian Embassy Messaging in the Middle East

To offset the removal of RT and Sputnik's Arabic-language channels, **Russia is weaponizing its diplomatic missions' platforms across the MENA region to deflect and obfuscate its atrocities in Ukraine.** At the forefront of these diplomatic accounts is the Russian Embassy in Egypt. Since the beginning of the invasion, the embassy has shared content mostly depicting Ukraine as the aggressor and justifying Moscow's so-called "special military operation." The embassy has also amplified Kremlin narratives alleging the Azov Battalion bombed the Mariupol theater and killed children in Donetsk and accused the United States of funding biological weapons programs in Ukraine. Concurrently, Russian embassies in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Lebanon shared content purportedly showing their audiences how to spot so-called Ukrainian disinformation, "exposing" disinformation targeting the Russian military, demonstrating U.S. involvement in Ukraine's alleged bio-weapons, and detailing what it calls the hypocrisy of Western media coverage of Ukraine compared to other conflict zones such as Syria.

3/22/22

MENACING CHEM AND BIO WEAPONS NARRATIVES CONTINUE: Building upon previous Russian claims that the United States used Biological Threat Reduction Program laboratories in Ukraine to develop biological weapons meant to target ethnic Slavs, one Russian official claimed March 21 that such weapons were meant to "affect both the reproductive function of women of a certain nationality, and in general the immune system of a particular ethnic group." On chemical weapons, the head of the so-called "LPR" Special Commission for Recording Crimes of the Military-Political Leadership of Ukraine alleged March 20 that "LPR" forces had found "chemically hazardous substances" near a gas station in Ukrainian territory allegedly held by "LPR" forces. These latest claims add to Russian officials' and proxies' ongoing false CBRN narratives in advance of what the White House has warned may be Russia's introduction of chemical or biological weapons into its ongoing war against Ukraine.

TARGETING POLAND AND THE VISEGRAD GROUP: Overt and proxy Russian disinformation outlets have recently taken aim at Poland as Russia continues its general campaign to drive wedges among Western allies on Ukraine. Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev penned a lengthy incendiary Telegram post denouncing Poland's "de-Russification," "Russophobia," and "incompetent politicians and their puppeteers from across the ocean." The GRU-controlled OneWorld.press amplified Medvedev's sentiments and published two additional articles with the clear goal of maligning Poland and working to denigrate the Visegrad Group: "Poland's 'De-Russification' Proposal For Europe Is Purely Self-Serving" and "Sharp Polish-Hungarian Differences Over Russia Threaten The Visegrad Group's Unity."

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Spotlight: The Kremlin's Pranksters -Vovan & Lexus

Vladimir Kuznetsov and Alexey Stolyarov, Russian pranksters known as Vovan and Lexus with suspected ties to Russia's security services, appear to be behind the reported video call between UK Defense Secretary Ben Wallace and an imposter claiming to be Ukrainian PM Denys Shmyhal. Vovan and Lexus have regularly impersonated officials and public figures in order to speak with Kremlin opponents, celebrities, and world leaders. Vovan and Lexus posted YouTube videos March 21 and 22 of their alleged call with Wallace. One video attempts to imply UK support for Ukraine's alleged development of a nuclear weapon, in line with a Kremlin disinformation narrative that Russia's unprovoked military action in Ukraine was justified to thwart Kyiv's nuclear ambitions. Another video attempts to sow discord between Ukraine and its Western allies by falsely portraying the West as incompetent and its military aid to Ukraine as ineffective. Vovan and Lexus, as well as other Kremlin proxies, will likely continue to employ such tactics in their attempts to embarrass Ukraine and Ukraine's allies and promote Kremlin disinformation and propaganda, necessitating the need for vigilance against their efforts.

A Questionable Partnership?: TASS & Reuters

A recent POLITICO article describes internal concerns at Reuters over the 2020 partnership signed between Reuters and Russian state propaganda and disinformation outlet TASS (formerly theTelegraph Agency of the Soviet Union). The Reuters employees are justified in their concerns. In the lead-up to and during Russia's ongoing further invasion of Ukraine, TASS repeatedly amplified Kremlin talking points claiming Ukraine was killing civilians in the Donbas and plotting offensives against the so-called "DPR" and "LPR," as well as Foreign Minister Lavrov's absurd claims about U.S. "bio-military" labs in Ukraine and his denials of Russian attacks on civilians. Despite being one of the world's most prominent news services in the 1950s, TASS has always been, at a minimum, a Kremlin propaganda outlet, but is better characterized as Russia's premier state media outlet the Kremlin leverages to spread disinformation as it sees fit. Russia's intelligence services have traditionally woven themselves into the TASS fabric, with both Soviet and, as recently as 2017, Russian intelligence officers having participated in the outlet's activities.

3/17/22

DISINFORMER-IN-CHIEF ATTEMPTS TO JUSTIFY HIS WAR: President Putin's disinformation and propaganda-filled March 16 speech aimed at justifying Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine, received wide coverage from pro-Kremlin media and influencers. Portraying the war as a historic event, Putin said it will end the so-called global domination of the collective West, which he claimed wanted to destroy a sovereign Russia, and used Moscow's "special operation" in Ukraine as a pretext for imposing anti-Russian sanctions. Repeating one of the most prominent current disinformation narratives, Putin accused Ukraine and the Pentagon of developing biological weapons near Russia's borders, and blamed "fascist" Kyiv for refusing to withdraw troops from Donbas and avoiding bloodshed by not engaging in hostilities. Finally, Putin signaled rising repercussions for Russians opposing the war, claiming that the West is betting on a so-called fifth column or "national traitors," whom Russia must cleanse itself from. Kremlin-aligned disinformation outlets will likely continue amplifying Putin's talking points and use them as a base for their own disinformation campaigns.

BLAMING AZOV FOR THE MARIUPOL THEATER BOMBING: To shift the blame for the March 16 bombing of the Mariupol theater that hosted several hundred refugees, Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem accuses its favorite target, the Ukrainian "nationalists" from the Azov Battalion. The emerging false

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narrative denies Russian involvement and claims the Azov Battalion carried out a "bloody provocation." According to this false narrative, the battalion established a headquarters at the theater, held the civilians hostage, and then blew up the building after rigging it with explosives to frame Russia and give the United States the pretext to send its military to Ukraine. RIA Novosti quoted a "DPR" spokesman who claimed the Azov forces fired at the theater from tanks. On Telegram, pro-Kremlin accounts asserted they had evidence of Azov planningthe provocation for four days and cited an alleged refugee from the theater who said all civilians were allowed to leave the building before the explosion.

Slovakia Charges Russian Intelligence-linked Purveyor of Disinformation

The Slovak and Czech governments' recent steps to counter Russian disinformation and its purveyors show vigor and resilience to Kremlin malign influence operations in Central Europe in the wake of Russia's further invasion of Ukraine. Bratislava authorities charged two Slovak nationals March 15 with spying for Russia, including Bohus Garbar, a frequent author under various pseudonyms for Slovakian pro-Kremlin disinformation outlets Hlavne Spravy (shut down by the Slovak National Security Office on March 2) and Armadneho magazine. A video posted March 15 showed the Russian Embassy's acting defense attaché offering Garbar money to recruit Slovaks with pro-Russian views and access to confidential information related to NATO and the EU. In connection with the arrests, Slovakia announced it would also expel three Russian "diplomats." The Garbar case draws a clear connection between Russia's intelligence services and pro-Kremlin disinformation operations in Slovakia, and possibly other countries in the region. Prague has also cracked down on pro-Kremlin disinformation operations since Moscow's February 24 renewed invasion, blocking eight websites on February 25 and launching the "Kremlin Trumpets" campaign to name and shame the most prominent purveyors of Kremlin disinformation in the Czech Republic.

Opposition to the War Among Russian State Media Employees

Reports suggest the Kremlin's relentless disinformation and propaganda campaign to justify its war has become too much even for some direct participants in its dissemination. Marina Ovsyannikova, an employee of Russian state-funded Channel One, interrupted a March 14 live news broadcast, shouting anti-war slogans and holding a sign urging audiences not to believe state media. She was convicted March 15 of a misdemeanor for "inciting unpermitted protests" and released. According to Meduza, Ovsyannikova's objection to the war against Ukraine is "not uncommon" among state media employees. BBC reports the war has caused "a quiet but steady stream of resignations from Russia's tightly controlled state-run TV," including staff from Channel One Europe, NTV, RT', and RT sister agency Ruptly. Journalist Roman Super said many employees were also resigning from Vesti, a news division of the state-owned Rossiya 1.

3/15/22

"ATROCITIES? YOU MEAN THE UKRAINIAN ONES?": As Russia continues to refer to its war in Ukraine as a "special military operation" to "de-Nazify" the country, it has upped its level of brutality against civilian populations. Despite overwhelming evidence that Russia has committed atrocities such as the use of cluster munitions and the bombing of residential areas, schools, and hospitals across the country, the Kremlin continues to try to hide its actions with denials and disinformation. An absurd and rapid sequence of disinformation claims emerged after Russia first denied it bombed a maternity hospital in Mariupol on March 9, then claimed it had bombed the hospital as a justifiable target because Ukrainian military elements had sheltered there, and finally argued that the "the Azov Battalion and other radicals" had captured the hospital

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prior to the bombing. The Kremlin continues to deny Russian forces' atrocities, frequently "flipping the script" and accusing Ukrainian troops and neo-Nazis of allegedly using civilians as "human shields," holding cities hostage, and gunning down Ukrainian civilians.

ILL OMENS -STATE MEDIA PORTENDS WHAT MOSCOW SEES AS THE FATE OF UKRAINIAN LEADERSHIP:
Rhetoric and imagery on Russian state television indicates that the Kremlin may be attempting to prepare the Russian populace for escalation of violence in Ukraine and retribution against Ukrainian political figures and resistance leaders. As some Russian political pundits call for application of the death penalty in Ukraine once Russia establishes dominance, leading Kremlin propagandist Dmitriy Kiselyov's program aired a video depicting the 1946 public hangings of Nazis on Maidan Square (then Kalinin Square). The pro-Kremlin tabloid Moskovsky Komsomolets, as early as February 25, published an article in which a lawyer suggests that an international tribunal to try Ukrainian leadership could be set up in Russia, or even in Beijing, with the charges potentially being "genocide," "mercenarism," and the "rehabilitation of Nazism." Juxtaposed with the recent kidnappings of Ukrainian mayors and the U.S. assessment that Russia may be creating "kill lists" of influential Ukrainians and officials in the Zelensky government, this particularly violent strain of propaganda directed at Russian audiences portends continued extreme messaging from Moscow.

A Nuclear "Fake False Flag" Exposed
Ukrainian security services announced March 6 that Russian forces had shelled the Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology, the site of a nuclear research facility that produced radioisotopes for medical and industrial applications. In its reply, the Russian Defense Ministry alleged Ukrainian intelligence and Azov Battalion militants had rigged a reactor to explode in a staged provocation Ukraine would then attribute to a Russian missile attack. Russian forces again shelled the now-de-energized facility March 10, causing documented superficial damages and a fire at a nearby hostel. This time, Kremlin-funded disinformation outlet Sputnik told an altogether different story. Per the Sputnik report the following day, a Russian official said "Ukrainian nationalists blew up one of the buildings ...in order to conceal evidence of the nuclear research conducted there." Sputnik added that "as many as 50 employees of the institute could be trapped under the rubble," all tragic victims of Ukraine's alleged desire for nuclear weapons. **The State Department confirmed March 11 with Ukrainian scientific and military contacts on the ground no building was destroyed.**

Russian State Media Significantly Degraded on Social Media
In the past two weeks, **several U.S.-based social media companies took significant actions to degrade the ability of Russian disinformation and propaganda to reach global audiences.** YouTube (owned by Google) announced March 11 it was blocking global access to channels "associated with Russian state-funded media," which, per YouTube, led to the removal of "more than 1,000 channels and over 15,000 videos" including Russian state television content and the RT media apparatus. Meta restricted access to RT and Sputnik across the EU, UK, and Ukraine, and labeled additional Russian state media outlets. Twitter banned RT and Sputnik in Europe and launched a "Tor-friendly" version of its site to allow Russian users to access its platform. Reddit even quarantined the flagrantly pro-Kremlin subreddit r/Russia due to misinformation, making it hidden from searches and recommendations

3/10/22 #20

Beyond Europe:

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KREMLIN ALLIES BLAME NATO AND U.S. IMPERIALISM (Latin America): Most government leaders and citizens in the Western Hemisphere support Ukraine and condemn Russia's invasion. Pro-Kremlin disinformation is, however, circulating on social media, particularly on Telegram and RT's Spanish-language accounts. In Guatemala, for example, far-right Twitter accounts promote a variety of pro-Kremlin narratives. Among former and current officials, Bolivia's ex-President Evo Morales and the Maduro regime pushed the false narrative blaming the invasion on NATO. Government-linked actors in El Salvador also amplified disinformation painting Russia as the victim. Popular acceptance of officials' statements was not certain. In Cuba, opposition members widely criticized the government's statement accusing Washington of forcing Russia to invade.

"JIHADISTS HEADING TO UKRAINE" (Middle East): In an effort to discredit Ukrainians' fierce resistance to Russian aggression, Russian state-funded Arabic-language outlets disseminated claims that the United States recruits and trains ISIS fighters to fight in Ukraine in Al-Tanf, a U.S. military base in southeast Syria that has been the target of Russian disinformation at least since 2018. Pro-Kremlin Middle-East facing outlet The Cradle, as well as pro-Hizballah Al-Mayadeen, pro-Iran Al-Alam, and Iranian News Agency FARS, echoed these false claims.

"EXPOSING" BIOLABS AND BLAMING NGOS (Central Asia): Russia's official social media accounts in the region spread disinformation about Ukraine's alleged attempts to destroy evidence of U.S.-funded biological weapons activity, a familiar narrative for many given the Kremlin's similar long-standing claims against biosecurity laboratories in Kazakhstan. Other recurring narratives appearing in local pro-Kremlin outlets charge the West with "Russophobia," blame NATO's provocations for the war, amplify other Kremlin biolab disinformation, and accuse Western NGOs, such as the National Endowment for Democracy, for inciting the war in Ukraine and ignoring the plight of the people of Donbas. One new claim stated that Russia discovered documents outlining secret Ukrainian plans to attack Donbas in March.

China Funds Pro-Kremlin Disinformation and Propaganda About Ukraine

The PRC may be helping the Kremlin circumvent last week's ban by Facebook on ads from Russian state media. According to AXIOS, state-controlled broadcaster China Global TV Network (CGTN) placed at least 21 ads this month on Facebook, targeting users in Hong Kong, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan with pro-Kremlin narratives about Russia's war against Ukraine. Many of the ads, which are largely clips of CGTN newscasts, "sprinkle in pro-Russia, anti-NATO talking points and downplay Russia's actions in launching an unprovoked invasion of its neighbor," AXIOS reported. CGTN has nearly 118 million followers on Facebook and 2.4 million on Instagram. CGTN's Russian-language page on Facebook features interviews with the head of the "DPR," as well as with Igor Nikulin, a Russian disinformation operative who consistently spreads false claims about the so-called U.S. biological laboratories.

Tech Companies (Inadvertently) Curb Independent Russian Journalism

Since the launch of Russia's further invasion of Ukraine last month, U.S.-based technology companies have limited the reach of Russian disinformation and propaganda on their platforms. For example, Alphabet (Google, YouTube) removed Russian state media sites from Google News, stopped Russian media from monetizing ads on YouTube, and blocked over 50 YouTube channels connected to RT, Sputnik, and other Russian state-sponsored outlets across the EU. Meta (Facebook) restricted access to RT and Sputnik across the

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EU, the UK, and Ukraine, barred Russian state media ads and down-ranked their content on Facebook and Instagram feeds. Twitter stopped Russians from creating new accounts, blocked ads in Ukraine and Russia, and banned RT and Sputnik accounts in Europe. One possible unintended consequence of some of these measures is the impact on independent Russian journalism. For example, prominent influencer Ilya Varlamoov has said YouTube restrictions make it almost impossible for Russian bloggers to continue producing high-quality content for the platform. This dynamic may pose difficulties for balancing the actions taken against disinformation sources with the desire to protect access for Russians to fact-based content.

3/8/22

BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS LABS DISINFORMATION ESCALATES: Russia has recently increased its disinformation on alleged biological laboratories and weapons. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov claimed March 3 that Ukraine's public and animal health facilities were "biological military laboratories." Then, on March 6, Russian MoD Spokesman Maj. Gen. Konashenkov alleged Russia had proof the U.S. Biological Threat Reduction Program labs in Ukraine were developing biological weapons and employees of those labs had destroyed "pathogens of plague, anthrax, tularemia, cholera and other deadly diseases" on February 24. Later, the head of Russia's CBRN defense forces presented "evidence" on March 7 that as many as 30 U.S. military biological labs across Ukraine had worked on several deadly pathogens; that their operations had coincided with a spike in infectious diseases in the region; and that serum samples taken from patients of "Slavic ethnicity" under the pretext of testing COVID-19 treatment methods had been sent back to the United States. Russian state and proxy media outlets have widely covered these disinformation claims, and today, PRC Foreign Ministry Spokesman Zhao Lijian and Chinese state media echoed them. Kremlin-linked outlets have amplified Zhao's remarks. In reality, the U.S. Cooperative Threat Reduction Program has helped partners fight COVID-19, dispose of chemical weapons in Syria and Libya, and reduce the threat of state and non-state actors acquiring or developing biological weapons.

RADIOLOGICAL AND NUCLEAR DISINFORMATION INTENSIFIES: A new Russian false narrative that the United States transferred plutonium to Ukraine to help Kyiv develop a "dirty" nuclear weapon has spread widely across Russian state media and outlets linked to U.S.-sanctioned Yevgeniy Prigozhin (TASS, RIA Novosti, Zvezda, Polit Rossiya). The Russian MFA also alleged March 8 that Ukrainian intelligence and Azov Battalion militants had "rigged" a reactor near Kharkiv to stage a provocation and accuse Russian forces of attacking the nuclear facility. This claim also received widespread coverage in Russian media. Russia falsely claims Kyiv intended to develop nuclear weapons capacity with Western help and uses this disinformation as one of the false justifications for further invading Ukraine.

New Sanctions on Russian Disinformation Entities

The U.S. Department of the Treasury sanctioned26 Russia-and Ukraine-based individuals and seven Russian entities March 3 in connection with Russia's efforts to disseminate disinformation targeting Ukraine. The sanctioned individuals included leaders and operatives of Russian intelligence-directed outlets Strategic Culture Foundation (SCF) (SVR-linked), InfoRos (GRU), News Front (FSB), and SouthFront (FSB). Treasury also sanctioned Odna Rodyna, Rhythm of Eurasia, and Journal Kamerton, outlets created by and affiliated with the SCF. Additionally, Treasury designated the Prigozhin-linked websites United World International (UWI), its chief editor Darya Dugina, and Geopolitica.ru, a website directed by Darya's father Aleksander Dugin. Russian intelligence services direct and control outlets that falsely purport to be independent media, but publish

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disinformation and propaganda created by these services. **These outlets target Ukrainian and Russian citizens with false claims attempting to portray Ukraine as the aggressor and to manipulate and weaken perceived adversaries.**

Disinformation Spotlight: Serbia

Support for Moscow runs deep in Serbia, and local media are no exception. Serbian President Vučić has said 85 percent of his countrymen will "always side with Russia whatever may happen," a sentiment echoed in many recent local headlines. Indeed, the information environment in Serbia actively reinforces Kremlin narratives that glorify Russia's military, denounce sanctions, and support Russia's purported "de-Nazification of Ukraine," even as some outlets' reporting acknowledges the potential for the conflict to destabilize the wider region. According to one Serbian public policy advocacy group, only three local media outlets reported on Serbia's vote for the March 2 UNGA resolution condemning Russia's invasion. Instead, outlets condemned the West for sanctions and opined that those sanctions will impose economic hardship for Serbia as well.

3/3/22

"UKRAINIANS ARE ATTACKING THEMSELVES WHILE RUSSIA PROTECTS CIVILIANS": Pro-Kremlin media are responding to mounting international coverage of a slower-than-expected Russian military advance and Russian atrocities against civilians. In response to Russia's March 1 missile attack against a government building in Kharkiv, resulting in significant civilian casualties, pro-Kremlin media claimed a Ukrainian strike was to blame. In response to evidence of Russian missile strikes hitting civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, outlets charged the Ukrainian military with using human shields. Kremlin-aligned outlets frame the slow Russian advance not as a logistical failure or indication of fierce and impactful Ukrainian resistance, but as evidence of Russian moral superiority and a desire to protect human lives. Propagandists explain that, unlike the United States, Russia is deeply committed to preventing civilian casualties and the use of barbaric tactics like carpet bombing.

PRO-RUSSIAN NARRATIVES ON UKRAINE IN AFRICA: Some prominent African officials, despite the African Union's calls for a ceasefire, have made pro-Russian statements on Ukraine. The president of the Central African Republic told Russian state media Moscow's recognition of the "LPR and DPR" will "save lives and prevent a lot of violence." The vice president of Equatorial Guinea blamed the West for the Russia-Ukraine crisis and for provoking the 2014 conflict. Muhoozi Kainerugaba, son of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, expressed support for Putin's invasion, stating that the "majority of mankind (that are not white) support Russia's stand in Ukraine." These expressions of support for Russia's actions in Ukraine follow months of Yevgeni Prigozhin-linked disinformation efforts in Africa, which themselves often coincided with African deployments by Prigozhin's private military company, Wagner Group.

SLOVAK DISINFORMERSSPARK MIGRATION FEARS OVER AFRICAN STUDENTS LEAVING UKRAINE: GEC partners in Slovakia have shared analysis that pro-Kremlin Slovakian disinformation outlets are claiming Ukrainian refugees are disproportionately from African countries and using the crisis to "flood" Slovakia. The partners' analysis suspects these outlets are attempting to spoil the generally pro-Ukraine mainstream media coverage in Slovakia.

Racism Charges: Disinfo More Effective When Based on "Grains of Truth"

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GEC-RUS Snapshot Narrative Tracker

To support the Kremlin's false narrative depicting Ukraine as a Nazi state, Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem quickly capitalized on reports of harassment and discrimination against non-white refugees departing Ukraine. From February 27-March 1, state-funded RT and Sputnik, and the FSB-tasked SouthFront published at least 10 articles on the mistreatment of African and Indian refugees by Ukrainian border officers. Kremlin-owned Ukraina.Ru alleged Chinese citizens in Ukraine faced aggression over China's refusal to criticize the Russian invasion. In an example of how Russian propagandists combine factual information and false claims in support of a broader disinformation campaign, Russia's Defense Ministry spokesperson claimed Ukraine was holding a group of Indian students hostage to use them as human shields. President Putin repeated this allegation in his March 2 conversation with Indian Prime Minister Modi, offering Moscow's help. Following reports of Polish extremists' harassment of non-white refugees from Ukraine, this subject will likely provide continued fodder for future Russian disinformation and propaganda efforts worldwide.

Assault on Ukraine And Assault on Truth

Moscow's aggression against Ukraine is accompanied by a full assault on media freedom and truth in Russia. Russia's Prosecutor General directed the communications authority RosKomNadzorMarch 1 to block independent media outlets Radio Ekho Moskvy and Dozhd TV. Authorities accused the outlets of "calling for extremist activity and violence" and sharing "deliberately false information" about the Russian military in Ukraine. Echo Moskvy announced March 3 the liquidation of the outlet's website and radio channel. Russia's government is blocking other outlets and also slowing down, or "throttling," Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Russia's parliament is considering a bill to make "unofficial" reporting on the invasion punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

3/1/22

The GEC has observed a concerning increase in disinformation on alleged or potential chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons (CBRN) and laboratories in Ukraine.

BIOLAB DISINFORMATION AMIDST RUSSIA'S INVASION: In the past week, there has been a flurry of disinformation posted to the blogging site Cont.ws alleging that Russia's further invasion of Ukraine coincided with the opening of U.S. biological laboratories in Kyiv and Odessa. The claims also cite an alleged Defense Threat Reduction Agency document demonstrating the opening of the labs and another story claiming the U.5. Embassy in Kyiv removed information from its website about biological labs in Ukraine, covered by several Russian media outlets including those linked to U.S.-sanctioned Yevgeniy Prigozhin. Many of the Cont.ws posts cite the now-removed Twitter account @WarClandestine, the British conspiracy site Daily Expose, and the pro-Russian, pro-"DPR/LPR" site NewsUA.ru. Many of these outlets allege that the U.S. laboratories are developing biological weapons specifically for targeting ethnic Russians.

With headlines such as "Zelensky Received a Large Bribe for the Placement of Western Biological Laboratories in Ukraine," "Why America Hides Traces of Planned Biodiversion in Advance," "Connection Between Russia's Special Operation and American Biological Laboratories in Ukraine" and "BIO-danger: American Biological Laboratories in Ukraine," Cont.ws serves as a narrative laundering platform for the Kremlin's false claims of illicit U.S. CBRN activity in Ukraine. As noted on the right side of this slide, Russian government influence actors use Cont.ws for disinformation purposes despite the site's more benign content from authors looking to freely publish their work.

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CHEMICAL, RADIOLOGICAL, AND NUCLEAR DISINFORMATION: Both before and after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Russian disinformation claimed Ukraine had nearly acquired a "dirty nuclear bomb," that Ukraine is preparing a "chemical disaster" in Donbas, and that the United States or Ukraine may conduct an intentional strike on the Zaporizhiya nuclear power plant as a "provocation."

Websites Leveraged by Russian Government Entities

Russian government-backed online influence actors are probably using the following websites and blogs to promote Kremlin interests and produce and amplify disinformation targeting Ukraine, NATO, the European Union, and the United States: topwar.ru; army-news.ru; e-news.su; medium-info.ru; pan.bg; politikus.ru (dormant); pravdoryb.info; rusonline.org; and westvoices.ru.

The Russian government-backed actors also use the Russian social media platforms **Cont.ws**; VKontakte(vk.com); and Odnoklassniki(ok.ru) to produce, amplify, and launder disinformation and propaganda on the previously mentioned subjects, especially Ukraine.

Russia's False Debunking

In response to increasing media exposure of potential war crimes committed by the Russian military in Ukraine, **Moscow is attempting to cover up its malign actions through "debunking" efforts.** One example is the apparently state-linked "Война с фейками" or "War with Fakes" website and its affiliated Telegram channel which appeared February 24, the start of Russia's further invasion of Ukraine. The site and channel present and describe all incriminating videos as "fakes." As of March 1, "War with Fakes" Telegram channel has garnered 470,891 subscribers, while also running a back-up channel with 47,952 subscribers, and regionally focused affiliated channels in Rostov (10,480 subscribers), Belgorod (8,128 subscribers), Crimea and Sevastopol (8,676 subscribers), Voronezh (5,050 subscribers), and Kalmykia (735 subscribers). The fact that various channels within Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem –state-controlled media (RIA Novosti, NTV, Vesti, Sputnik, RT, Lenta.ru), pro-Kremlin and state-linked influencers (Prilepin, Solovyev, Babayan, Poddubniy, Simonyan), Prigozhin-linked (RIA FAN, ColonelCassad, Ionov, Malkevich) and FSB-linked News Front–heavily amplify "War with Fakes" indicates that that the project is very likely closely aligned with the Kremlin.

2/24/22

"RUSSIA IS FIGHTING FOR ITS EXISTENCE": In a fiery February 24 address, reportedly recorded February 21, President Putin announced a "special military operation" to "demilitarize and de-Nazify" Ukraine and push back against supposed existential threats to Russia. Calling the United States "an empire of lies," Putin accused Washington of seeking to dominate the world and destroy Russia's "traditional values." To rally Russian people around his decision to go to war against their neighbor, Putin compared the current situation to 1941, when, he claimed, the Soviet Union was unprepared to defend itself from Nazi Germany. NATO's expansion and involvement in Ukraine "is the red line which we have spoken about on numerous occasions. They have crossed it," said Putin.

"DE-NAZIFYING UKRAINE": Echoing Putin's comments, Kremlin officials, pro-Kremlin media, and influencers promote the false narrative depicting Russia's invasion as a humanitarian effort to rid the country of Nazis. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov, for example, explained that Moscow seeks to "liberate Ukraine, to purge

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it from Nazis, pro-Nazi people and ideology." State-owned RIA Novosti compared Russia's alleged mission in Ukraine to the de-Nazification of Germany. Several pro-Kremlin propagandists posted and amplified propaganda denying Russia was at war with Ukraine and describing the invasion as "peace-enforcement operation," a term Russia has used to describe its 2008 invasion of Georgia. Considering the great sensitivity of the Russian population to any associations with Nazism, this has potential to resonate among some of Russia's domestic audiences.

"UKRAINIAN MILITARY SURRENDERS AS LOCALS WELCOME RUSSIANS": Russia's disinformation and propaganda outlets are also attempting to demoralize the Ukrainian military and deceive the Russian population into thinking that the invasion is supported by some Ukrainians. The ecosystem pushes images alleging Ukrainian soldiers are surrendering to "DPR/LNR" forces. The invaders, in turn, are depicted as honorable soldiers who treat prisoners with respect, and as liberators welcomed by the local population. Ukraine's military has denied some of the Russian claims, while reports indicate that Ukrainian armed forces are resisting the invaders despite the vast power differences.

Documenting Russian Fabrications

Investigative organization Bellingcat has announced the creation of a public database tracking "questionable videos and claims" targeting Ukraine that appear on social media and in Russian media outlets. The purpose of the new project is to provide counter-disinformation practitioners with a "quick and easy point of reference" to examples of false claims that "have been verified, debunked or if claims contained within videos or images are inconsistent with other open-source evidence or contextual data." So far, the database includes several debunked cases of alleged Ukrainian provocations and attacks against Russia and the so-called "DPR/LNR."

Debunking Challenge: "Civilian Casualties"

"RUSSIA DOES NOTATTACK UKRAINIAN CIVILIANS": As independent media cover Russian missile attacks on major Ukrainian cities, including Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odessa, and Mariupol, Russia falsely denies the attacks or misrepresents its actions as humanitarian. State-owned TASS and RIA Novosti cited the Russian Defense Ministry's false claims that Russia does not conduct artillery or missile attacks on Ukrainian cities, and does not threaten civilians. To distract from its military aggression and shift blame onto Ukraine, Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem reports about alleged malign activities of the Ukrainian army such as an attack on civilian Russian ships, and planned "White Helmets-style" provocations, which implies the use of chemical weapons. **We encourage government partners to closely document and share visual evidence of Russia's targeting of civilians in order to expose the lie that Russia is engaged in a humanitarian operation.**

2/22/22 #1S

President Putin's February 21 televised address**,** recognizing the so-called "Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DPR/LPR)" as independent states, appeared designed to justify further military aggression against Ukraine. Following the recognition, Russia ordered troops to deploy into the "DPR/LPR" for so-called "peacekeeping" functions, while Russia's Federation Council approved Putin's request to use Russian Armed Forces abroad. **Putin's speech was laden with disinformation and propaganda demonizing Ukraine** and attacking its sovereignty and independence. Below are examples of Putin's false claims, and on the right side of this slide, are examples of how counter-disinformation practitioners have debunked some of these

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narratives.

- **Ukrainian Military Strategy:** To portray Ukraine as an aggressor, Putin said Kyiv poses both an immediate military threat to the Donbas and a long-term military threat to Russia. While claiming Ukraine is preparing a "blitzkrieg" against the Donbas, Putin also described Ukraine's 2021 Military Strategy as almost exclusively dedicated to confronting Russia.
- **Ukraine as a Nuclear Power?:** Echoing earlier remarks by Defense Minister Shoigu, Putin said Ukraine intends and can easily develop nuclear weapons, including with the assistance of foreign states.
- **Genocide:** To demonize Ukraine in the eyes of the Russian public and to create further pretext for the alleged necessity to recognize the so-called "DPR/LPR," Putin claimed Ukraine is committing genocide against almost 4 million people in the Donbas and discriminating against the Russian-speaking population in the government-controlled areas.
- **Ukrainian Sovereignty:** Repeating the Kremlin's long-standing disinformation theme aimed at de-legitimizing Ukraine's statehood and government, Putin claimed Ukraine's democratic institutions like the judiciary and the anti-corruption bodies are controlled by the United States. Additionally, Putin asserted that Ukraine has a corruption problem "beyond the usual," which "permeated and corroded Ukrainian statehood, the entire system, and all branches of power."

Debunking in Action

Independent media and counter-disinformation practitioners have published many high-quality materials to debunk recurring false narratives such as those found in Putin's February 21 address. As a general practice, the GEC recommends governments and civil society partners amplify each other's most effective fact-checking messages and counter-narratives.

BBC's fact-checking team points out that while there is an ongoing military conflict in eastern Ukraine, "there is no evidence of genocide," which the United Nations Genocide Convention, ratified by 152 countries, including Russia, defines as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, national, ethnic, racial or religious group."

Polygraph.info describes how Putin and other Russian officials "have loosely used the term genocide" against Georgia during the 2008 war. Pointing out historical parallels and the repeated use of identical narratives can help discredit this claim.

Polygraph.info also offers a way to go on the offensive against Russia's false claims. It writes that "perhaps the closest incident [to genocide] was in 2014 by Russian occupation forces in Slovyansk, where Ukrainian forces who recaptured the city found a mass grave containing 20 bodies." EUvsDisinfo cites reports issued by the Council of Europe, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the OSCE showing **"there is no evidence that either ethnic Russians or Russian speakers are facing persecution** at the hands of the Ukrainian authorities."

VoxUkraine looked at Putin's disinformation regarding Ukraine's Military Strategy, finding that, **"the only thing Putin did not lie about is the date"** the government adopted the strategy, March 25, 2021. VoxUkraine's fact-checkers demonstrated how the Strategy is purely defensive and, in contrast to Putin's claims, does not indicate the alleged organization "of what can be described as a terrorist underground movement in Russia's Crimea and in Donbas" or any other preparations for "hostilities" against Russia.

2/21/22

Information released by the United States and other governments earlier this month predicted the Kremlin would use disinformation and propaganda to create and amplify false flag narratives to justify military action against Ukraine. The GEC has seen these tactics increase since at least February 11, when Kremlin-aligned outlets and Russian officials began amplifying statements from the head of the so-called "Donetsk People's

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Republic" alleging the discovery of mass graves in the Donbas. Since then, Russian officials, Kremlin media, and proxy outlets have amplified other supposed reports of provocations by Ukraine and Western governments. Putin's recognition of the "DPR" and "LPR" as independent furthers this false pretext.

"GENOCIDE & MASS GRAVES": Putin, other government officials, and Russia's entire disinformation and propaganda ecosystem have accused Ukraine of genocide, pointing to alleged mass graves recently found in the Donbas. There is no genuine evidence to suggest that a genocide against Russian-speakers is taking place. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that mass graves were previously created in the Donbas by "DPR/LPR" forces.

"UKRAINIAN AGGRESSION" & "DPR/LPR" EVACUATIONS:
Russia continues to falsely allege Ukraine is attacking "DPR/LPR" areas and will launch an offensive against the region. Russian and "DPR/LPR" sources attributed the February 17 shelling of a kindergarten near "LPR"-held territory to Ukraine, however OSINT reporting by Belling cat and others demonstrated the shelling came from the direction of "LPR" forces. Upon realizing the school was in Ukrainian-held territory, Russian media then claimed Ukraine had conducted the attack as a false flag. Videos purportedly produced by "DPR/LPR" leaders on February 18 contained metadata proving they were filmed two days prior.

"UKRAINIAN TERRORIST ATTACKS": In the last week, Kremlin-aligned outlets have falsely alleged Ukrainian forces have conducted terrorist attacks, including a conveniently filmed alleged bomb found in a Luhansk square, a car bomb allegedly targeting the "DPR" militia leader detonated on a "switched" vehicle, a proven false "foiled plot" by saboteurs to attack a chlorine plant, and an alleged "terrorist attack" on a gas pipeline.

The Power of Unified Debunking
Debunking claims rapidly and with mutual support from allies and partners across governments, civil society, and independent media bolsters consensus against Russia's false pretexts.
The GEC recommends emulating and amplifying effective examples of debunking, such as EUvsDisinfo's recent article breaking down Russia's provocation narratives in Ukraine. The analysis succinctly and comprehensively disproves Russia's pretext claims using fact-based reporting from reliable sources such as the OSCE's SMM, DFRLab, and statements from the Ukrainian government, and shows how the Kremlin has been recycling the same false narratives on Ukraine since 2014.

The Next False Narrative: What Happens After Putin's Speech?
Following Putin's hour-long February 21 disinformation-filled address in which he recognized the "DPR" and "LPR" as independent, the Russian leader ordered so-called "peacekeeping" forces into the regions. **This action likely sets the stage for new and continued disinformation narratives to fuel further pretexts.** Given earlier falsified narratives, Russian forces could orchestrate a false flag attack or claim Ukrainian forces have fired on Russian positions. It is also possible the heads of the so-called "DPR" and "LPR" could allege Ukraine has launched or will conduct an offensive against the Kremlin-recognized "independent" regions and invite Russian forces to assist in the defense of the "DPR" and "LPR" against Ukraine. Any of these potential claims could serve as the cause for a major escalation between Russia and Ukraine.

2/17/22

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EXPLOITING PRIMAL FEARS: Pro-Kremlin media and influencers, covertly controlled Kremlin proxy sites, and the so-called "DPR/LPR" continue spreading false claims about allegedly ongoing or upcoming "provocations" from Ukraine, the United States and NATO. Shaping disinformation stories around nightmare scenarios, Moscow "exploits primal fears" and works towards building a pretext for potential military action. Echoing previous statements from Russian Defense Minister Shoigu, the FSB-tasked News Front published an article February 16 alleging Ukraine is preparing a "chemical disaster" in the Donbas, and on the same day another one claiming the United States or Ukraine could conduct a "crushing strike" on the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant. The latter disinformation originally started on the Soloviev LIVE YouTube channel, run by one of Kremlin's most prominent propagandists. Another FSB-linked website, Antifashist, and TV Zvezda, an outlet operated by the Russian military, amplified claims from "DPR"- and RT-affiliated Telegram channels accusing Ukraine and NATO of using banned ultrasonic/acoustic weapons in the Donbas. TV Zvezda also suggested Ukraine is going to attack the Donbas with a "dirty bomb." Other disinformation outlets also promoted claims accusing the Pentagon of conducting biological experiments on Ukrainian and Georgian soldiers.

CLAIMS OF GENOCIDE IN DONBAS: Following President Putin's February 15 statement that genocide is taking place in the Donbas, Russia's Investigative Committee opened a criminal case related to the allegations of "mass burials of civilians" in the Donbas. According to the Committee, the remains of at least 295 civilians were exhumed from five mass graves in 2021. The head of the so-called "DPR" Denis Pushilin claimed more than 130 mass graves have been discovered in the Donbas. The Wall Street Journal reports that Russia will bring the allegations of "genocide of the Russian-speaking population of Donbas" to the UN. The Kremlin's disinformation and propaganda apparatus is likely to continue promoting false narratives accusing Ukraine of war crimes and genocide including through the "Tragedy of Donbas" website, which according to the Washington Post, is run by Russia's military intelligence.

Proxy Spotlight

On February 15, CNN quoted U.S. officials stating that **five Russian-language media outlets have cooperated with Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) and Foreign Intelligence Ser vice (SVR)** to build "public support for a renewed Russian invasion of Ukraine." In addition to known RIS-linked U.S.-sanctioned News Front, U.S. officials identified Antifashist and PolitNavigator as fronts for the FSB, and Fondsk and Odnya Rodina as fronts for the SVR. Fondsk is a Russian-language branch of the U.S.-sanctioned SVR-directed Stategic Culture Foundation (SCF). The FSB-and SVR-affiliated outlets have websites in multiple languages to extend the global reach of their disinformation efforts, as do outlets previously attributed to Russia's military intelligence directorate (GRU): InfoRos, InfoBRICS, and OneWorld.press.

RESIST 2 Counter Disinformation Toolkit

The GEC has partnered with the UK government in a pilot program to **provide direct training for government communicators to counter disinformation and propaganda.** The RESIST Toolkit and platform created by the UK is a notable gold-standard training tool for government communicators looking to counter disinformation and propaganda. The training tool consists of Recognize, Early Warning, Situational Insight, Impact Analysis, Strategic Communications, and Tracking Effectiveness modules that provide education on how to best recognize and counter hostile information campaigns at a strategic level. This includes **proactive techniques like "Counter-Branding,"** which seeks to impose reputational costs on actors that repeatedly spread false information by exposing negative behaviors and contradictions in identity and values and misleading narratives. The toolkit is available online here.

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2/15/22

Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem continues to work towards fabricating a false pretext that could be used to justify a further Russian invasion of Ukraine.

PUTIN LABELS SITUATION IN THE DONBAS "GENOCIDE": "What is now happening in Donbas is genocide," President Putin stated in a press conference alongside German Chancellor Scholz on February 15. This high-level disinformation could itself serve as a Russian justification for war, amplified by other disinformation outlets. Sputnik has already published an article not only reporting on Putin's comments, but also adding broader disinformation claims that Ukraine is oppressing Russian speakers in the Donbas.

"LPR" PREVENTS ALLEGED UKRAINIAN "TERRORIST ATTACK": In what could be an attempted "false flag" operation, the Ministry of State Security of the so-called "LPR" alleged February 15 that it had prevented a terrorist attack possibly carried out by Ukrainian intelligence. "LPR" officials claim a resident reported a bomb spotted in a trash can located in Friendship of Peoples Square, where a remembrance rally was to be held later the same day in honor of soldiers who served outside their homeland. A seemingly staged video of "LPR" security personnel allegedly finding and securing the device is circulating on social media (note the service dog alerting to the trash can right on cue).

POTENTIAL RECOGNITION OF THE SO-CALLED "DPR" AND "LPR": Shortly before Russia's State Duma decided in a 351-16 vote to ask President Putin to formally recognize the so-called "DPR" and "LPR," Russia's Permanent Representative to the EU, Vladimir Chizhov, said Russia "will not invade Ukraine unless we are provoked to do that. If the Ukrainians launch an attack against Russia, you shouldn't be surprised if we counterattack. Or, if they start blatantly killing Russian citizens anywhere - Donbas or wherever." These actions and rhetoric further long-standing Kremlin disinformation efforts to paint Ukraine as an aggressor and claim there is an imminent threat to Russian citizens living in the Donbas. It is worth recalling that in 2014, the so-called Autonomous Republic of Crimea declared its independence before voting in an illegal referendum to join Russia.

The Kremlin-"DPR/LPR" Messaging Nexus

The Russian government is actively using senior officials of the so-called "Donetsk" and "Luhansk People's Republics" (DPR and LPR) as proxy megaphones to spread disinformation targeting the Ukrainian population. For example, according to U.S. government analysis, Russian officials are pre-coordinating and providing language used in "DPR" and "LPR" press releases and public statements. Specifically, the topics and talking points provided by the Russian government are designed for so-called "DPR" and "LPR" representatives to claim that the Ukrainian Armed Forces are experiencing low morale and to falsely accuse them of repeatedly violating the Minsk Agreements and obstructing the work of the Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The Power of Ukrainian Patriotism: "Slava Ukraini!"

The call-and-response slogan "Slava Ukraini! Geroyam Slava!" became popular during the Ukrainian War of Independence (1917-1921) and remains so today. Stepan Bandera's Nazi-allied OUN-B used this slogan during the 1940s, a historical fact that Kremlin propagandists leverage to try to undermine Ukrainian patriots. However, in the late 1980s and 1990s, the slogan found renewed broad-based popularity as Ukraine rallied for

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and ultimately regained its independence, with even President Bill Clinton declaring "Slava Ukraini!" following "God Bless America" in a 1996 speech in Kyiv. Today, the slogan is a patriotic rallying cry for Ukrainians resisting Russian aggression. Several current and former MEPs, European diplomats, and numerous Ukrainians have used the phrase on social media.

2/10/22

Russian state-controlled television continues to demonize Ukraine and the United States, preparing the Russian population for a potential military action against its neighbor in order to defend supposed Russian national interests.

"U.S. AND UKRAINE PREPARING A WAR": Kremlin state television claims that Ukraine is planning to attack the Donbas, including sending tanks to the line of conflict. Building its coverage around President Putin's February 8 remarks, Perviy Kanal depicts Ukraine as a cause of a possible future war between Russia and NATO. Based on documents supposedly obtained by the "Ukrainian hacker group" Beregini, both channels claim that the West "pumps" Ukraine with large amounts of offensive weapons, pushing and inspiring Kyiv to go to war against Donbas.

"WESTERN MEDIA FINALLY TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT DONBAS": To add credibility to its messaging, the Kremlin propaganda and disinformation apparatus often exploits Western media. In the past few days, Perviy Kanal and Rossiya 24 cited a report by French television channel TF, which they claimed showed a "real situation" in the Donbas. The French report featured interviews with the residents of the non-government-controlled areas of the Donbas, who claimed Kyiv started the war in 2014 and said they were preparing for an imminent attack from Ukraine. One resident showed her family's Russian passports, explaining that she has always felt culturally Russian, and hoped that the Donbas would become a part of Russia.

ACCUSE THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT WHICH YOU ARE GUILTY: Following the February 3 U.S. statement that the Russian government has considered producing a faked video as a pretext to initiate and potentially justify military aggression against Ukraine, state-controlled Russian television channels have accused Ukraine of engaging in the same activity. The channels showed what they claimed was footage of Ukrainian soldiers staging a provocation to discredit the "defenders of Donbas" by filming a video where they pretended to be shot by a sniper and stepping on a landmine.

Measuring the Effectiveness of Kremlin-controlled Television

Russian state-controlled television remains arguably the most influential tool of Kremlin disinformation and propaganda apparatus targeting domestic audiences, even as some studies show the medium is steadily declining in popularity relative to other forms of media. According to a 2021 Levada Center study, 62 percent of polled Russians named television as their main source of news, down from 90 percent five years ago, but still the largest category. Some 46 percent called television the most trusted source of news, which is a larger percentage than those who said they trusted digital media or social networks.

Evidence suggests **Kremlin-backed television outlets' daily bombardment of their audiences with aggressive anti-Western narratives has successfully convinced the majority of Russians of the likelihood of war with**

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Ukraine. Levada Center Director Leonid Volkov wrote that Russians who feared a "big war" (62 percent in Spring 2021), explained their fears as based on claims from prominent Kremlin TV propagandists, such as Olga Skabeyeva and Vladimir Solovyev. In December 2021, the Kremlin's false claims blaming the West and Ukraine for escalating tensions in the region (see the left side of this slide) were accepted by 50 percent of Russians (blaming U.S and NATO) and 16 percent (blaming Ukraine), with only 4 percent placing the responsibility on Russia.

2/8/22 #10

LPR -KYIV PLANNING TERRORISTATTACK AGAINST KHARKIV, DONETSK, OR LUHANSK OBLASTS:
In a new iteration of Russia's overall effort to fabricate a pretext for a potential Russian offensive against Ukraine, the so-called Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) warned on February 8 via its representative, Ivan Filiponenko, that the Ukrainian Special Services are planning to carry out a "staged high-profile" terrorist act "with numerous civilian casualties" on territory under their own control to justify alleged upcoming "large-scale military operations against the defenders of Donbas." The U.S.-sanctioned, Prigozhin-linked RIA FAN was among the disinformation outlets that covered the Filiponenko statement.

"UKRAINE DOES NOT RESPECT ITS ETHNIC MINORITIES": For years, the Russian government and its disinformation and propaganda ecosystem have regularly claimed that Kyiv does not respect the rights of ethnic minorities in Ukraine, especially ethnic Russians. President Putin echoed these claims in his recent press conference with French President Macron in Moscow. Additionally, disinformation outlets, such as the FSB-tasked News Front, have recently been promoting narratives alleging that Kyiv does not respect the rights of ethnic Hungarians, Moldovans, Romanians, and Poles in Ukraine. By infusing other classic Russian disinformation narratives alleging that the Ukrainian government is a nationalist, fascist regime into their claims, these outlets are likely working to promote separatist sentiments to further destabilize Ukraine.

"DO YOU WANT A WAR WITH RUSSIA?": In addition to President Putin's bellicose response to a French journalist in his press conference alongside President Macron, Russian officials and the Kremlin's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem are engaging in fearmongering that aims to simultaneously spread fear and instill threats of catastrophic war. Reporting on Putin's statements, state-funded RT and the FSB-guided News Front warned Ukraine's membership in NATO could lead to a nuclear war. RT also cited U.S. media to point out that Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley had allegedly "cautioned [U.S.] lawmakers about Moscow's potential might."

Proxy Spotlight: RIA FAN
The U.S.-sanctioned **Federal News Agency (RIA FAN)**, featured on the left side of this slide, is part of the Prigozhin-led Patriot Media Group. Patriot Media Group regularly creates and amplifies disinformation and propaganda targeting Ukraine with false and distorted claims that the United States may stage a coup to destroy Ukraine. Other RIA FAN content has alleged the United States sends Polish mercenaries to Ukraine under the guise of instructors, or that Ukraine is preparing false flag operations against the Donbas.

Exposure Leads to Results
Public exposure of Russian disinformation actors and channels is one of the most effective counter-disinformation strategies. On February 4, Radio Svoboda reported that YouTube suspended the accounts of

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Ukraine-based pro-Russian television channels First Independent and UkrLive. The suspension followed the Department of Treasury's January 20 sanctions against Taras Kozak, current Ukrainian Member of Parliament who controls the channels. Kozak and three other current and former Ukrainian government officials were designated for acting at the direction of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). YouTube also reportedly suspended several channels affiliated with the so-called "DNR" and "LNR.

2/3/22

UKRAINIANS ARE U.S. "LAB RATS": Russia has consistently spread the false claim that laboratories established by the United States under the Cooperative Threat Reduction's program to safeguard against biological threats are actually biological warfare facilities. On January 27, Deputy Chairman of Russia's Security Council Dmitri Medvedev repeated this disinformation in an interview with Russian media. Pro-Kremlin media and influencers, as well as covertly controlled Kremlin proxy sites, further spread this claim as part of ongoing Russian influence operations intended to demoralize Ukraine, discredit the United States, and create fissures in U.S.-Ukraine relations. For example, a January 24 article by Bulgarian "independent journalist" Dilyana Gaytandzhieva accused the Pentagon of conducting "biological experiments on 4,400 soldiers in Ukraine and 1,000 soldiers in Georgia." Gaytandzhieva asserted that the same project will begin in March in Bulgaria and later in Romania, Poland, and Latvia. Various channels and actors in Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem repeated Gaytandzhieva's claims. These included state-owned media outlets Rossiya 24 and TV Zvezda; FSB-linked News Front and SVR-linked Strategic Culture Foundation; state-linked propagandists Andrei Medvedev, Evgeniy Poddubny, Alexander Kots and Yevgeniy Primakov; the Yevgeniy Prigozhin-linked Federal News Agency, Colonelcassad and Rybar, and the Konstantin Malofeyev-owned Tsargrad.

SO-CALLED DPR/LPR ARE "VICTIMS" OF KYIV'S "AGGRESSION": Moscow attempts to depict its proxies, the so-called DPR/LPR, as the "victims" of Kyiv's alleged aggressions and provocations. To this end, Russian state media amplify separatist allegations and grievances, which range from accusing Kyiv of plotting false flag operations to deploying military hardware and shelling innocent civilians. Employing a classic disinformation tactic, these outlets also accuse Ukrainian special services, with Western support, of mounting their own disinformation campaign, code-named "Crushing Sword," as a pretext for a Ukrainian attack. The campaign would allegedly involve Ukrainian state TV broadcasting a "staged video" depicting the "alleged beginning of military actions against Ukraine" by Russia

Disinformation Operative Spotlight: Dilyana Gaytandzhieva

Dilyana Gaytandzhieva is a known purveyor of anti-Western disinformation and propaganda focused on alleged Western development and supposed use of biological weapons. Her articles on websites dilyana.bg and armswatch.com falsely accuse the United States of trafficking human blood and pathogens for secret military programs, arming Al Qaida terrorists in Syria, and Ukraine-based U.S. laboratories poisoning Ukrainian children.

Recognize and Address the Threat

EXPLOITING PRIMAL FEARS: One way to make a disinformation story go viral is to shape it around **what people fear most.** One of the most powerful primal fears is of biological weapons and the worry they might cause a deadly outbreak of contagious disease. To counter exaggerated threats, communicators should point out how propagandists distort things to make them "sound like" they are threatening, such as labs that **reduce**

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biological threats. Those spreading disinformation can distort narratives to press fear-based "hot buttons" in people's brains. Knowing the facts, and the tricks unscrupulous propagandists use, enables us to see through exaggerated dangers. For more information, see GEC Counter-Disinformation Dispatch #13: Exploiting Primal Fears.

2/1/22

WESTERN MERCENARIES "ARRIVE" IN UKRAINE: "There are increasing numbers of mercenaries in southeastern Ukraine (Donbass), who arrive there under the guise of military instructors," the leader of the so-called Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) told Sputnik. The press secretary of the so-called "DPR" Military Command has echoed similar unverified claims alleging that Western mercenaries are training alongside far-right militias in eastern Ukraine. Combined with false claims that the United States and/or Ukraine are plotting attacks in the eastern part of the country, this narrative feeds into Russia's overall disinformation campaign portraying the West as the aggressor in fabricating a pretext for a potential invasion.

NEO-NAZIS GET "CARTE BLANCHE" IN UKRAINE: Similar to the above narrative and in language well-aligned with Russian Ambassador to the UN Vasily Nebenzia's commentsduring a January 31 UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine, the Russian Embassy in Washington recently claimed neo-Nazis have received "carte blanche" from Washington to carry out "provocations" and military action in the Donbas. RT and TASS amplified the Russian Embassy's allegations. In mid-January, RT also accused the CIA of providing training to Ukrainian far-right groups.

ALLEGED SPLIT BETWEEN UKRAINE AND WEST: Disinformation outlets linked to Russia's FSB, GRU, and SVR are exacerbating the differences in tone between Ukraine and the United States, NATO, and the "U.S.-led Western Mainstream Media" regarding the potential for a Russian military offensive against Ukraine. With articles like "Western hysteria around Russian invasion in Ukraine pushes Kiev regime to the brink of a financial abyss [FSB-linked]," "Zelensky's Pushback Against Mainstream Media Panic Confirms US-Ukrainian Divisions [SVR-linked]," and others [GRU-linked], Russia is attempting to paint the United States as dragging Ukraine into war. Citing hesitant and lukewarm sentiments from some NATO member states towards the provision of military aid to Ukraine, these outlets are also promoting the idea that NATO is "bursting at the seams" and losing support from Eastern European members

Tool Spotlight: Content Authentication Apps

"Content authentication" technology is showing promise as a tool for proving the origins of digital content. New content authentication apps allow users to record videos and images, easily store the new content to a blockchain, and assure a clear chain of custody of the content. This technology can prevent the later mischaracterization of videos and images by malign actors. A video recorded using a content authentication app -showing a human rights violation, for example -would include unique metadata (a digital "fingerprint") that verifies its authenticity for viewers. Multiple content authentication apps are currently available online. The GEC is initiating tests of these apps, including Serelay and Truepic. Both are purpose-built for recording and sharing video and still images and are available for use today.

If you are interested in participating in the GEC's test efforts, contact us at gecincubator@state.gov. For more information about the content authentication technical process, watch a video and read more here.

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Recognize and Address the Threat

Exposing "Cheap Shot" Propaganda and Disinformation: Western media, which is free, open, and widely critical of governments, provides an unending treasure trove of raw material for Russian propagandists to twist and distort –or simply to repeat unfavorable items –in their non-stop efforts to discredit and divide adversaries. Showing clear "before" and "after" examples contrasts information that has been distorted, exposing such unscrupulous techniques and damaging their "brand." For more information, see GEC Counter-Disinformation Dispatch #2, Three Ways to Counter Disinformation.

1/28/22

MORE "RUSSIA IS NOT THE AGGRESSOR" DISINFO: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem accuses the United States and NATO of pushing Ukraine into a war with Russia and amplifies disinformation from the so-called "LPR" and "DPR" that Kyiv is preparing a military attack on the Donbas. The Russian government seeks to downplay Western concerns about a potential Russian invasion by enlisting the ecosystem to frame the ongoing negotiations as focused on alleged threats posed to Russia by NATO's expansion and portray the United States and NATO as the principal causes of the current crisis.

THE KREMLIN AND ITS PROXIES SPEAK IN ONE VOICE: From January 24-26, the Kremlin and its eastern Ukrainian proxies accused Kyiv of preparing an imminent military incursion into the Donbas. Primetime Russian state-controlled TV news programs Vremya and Vesti, as well as foreign-facing RT, promoted narratives during the same period blaming the United States for provocations, escalating the conflict, and forcing Ukraine into repeating Western claims about an alleged Russian invasion. These accusations included the claim that Washington is "pumping" Ukrainian "Nazis" and "nationalists" with lethal weapons into the region, emboldening the Ukrainian leadership's "warmongering" to attack the Donbas. Several pro-Kremlin media outlets amplified "LPR/DPR" representatives' claims that Ukraine is massing troops and military equipment on the Donbas' front lines, arming and training nationalist battalions, and preparing military hospitals in advance of an imminent attack. Pro-Kremlin media also widely quoted "DPR" leader Denis Pushilin's description of the departure of some U.S. embassy personnel and family members from Ukraine as an "intentional provocation." They also amplified Pushilin's claim that Ukraine plans to conduct false flag operations in the Don bas using chemical weapons and promoted the "DPR's" potential to launch a counterattack.

THREATENING RESPONSE: Pro-Kremlin media reported that in response to the alleged U.S. escalation, Russia's main political party United Russia requested the Kremlin to approve the supply of Russian weapons to the "LPR/DPR." The Russian Communist Party (KPRF) called for Russia to recognize the two self-proclaimed republics. Pushilin was quoted as welcoming Russia's military support. Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov falsely asserted Moscow has not previously supplied weapons to the region. Newly-elected Duma member Yevgeniy Popov, who also co-hosts a popular Russian political talk show on state-owned television channel Rossiya 1, suggested that arming and recognizing the so-called "LPR/DPR" could serve as Russia's response to the U.S. refusal to address Moscow's concerns about the "expansion" of NATO

Whole-of-Society Responses to Disinformation

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In a **whole-of-society approach to countering disinformation**, governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector work together to share information and adaptable countermeasures to false narratives targeting their society.

Current events in Ukraine show how **information sharing between the government and knowledgeable civil society organizations** can underscore successful counter-disinformation campaigns. The Government of Ukraine works with fact-checking organizations like VoxUkraine to identify false narratives and develop counter measures to emergent disinformation campaigns. Disinformation identified under this program includes false claims targeting eastern Ukraine, COVID-19, and historical narratives.

The GEC has also helped support a project partnering Ukrainian military academies with civil society organizations to develop programs that increase awareness of disinformation campaigns targeting the military and youth. **The GEC has sponsored the development of a whole-of-society approach in more than 20 countries** across Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Africa with approximately $10 million in funded programs, and **encourages the adoption of the approach by other allies and partners as a best practice**.

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1/25/22

Using Exposures to Counter Russia's Destabilization Effort in Ukraine

Last week, the United States and the United Kingdom exposed several individuals who engage in influence activities at the direction of Russian intelligence services to destabilize Ukraine.

TARGETING PURVEYORS OF KREMLIN DISINFORMATION: On January 20, the U.S. Department of the Treasury sanctioned four current and former Ukrainian government officials acting at the direction of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). The sanctioned individuals included:

- Taras Kozak and Oleh Voloshyn, two current Ukrainian Members of Parliament from the party led by Victor Medvedchuk, who is already subject to U.S. sanctions for his role in undermining Ukrainian sovereignty in 2014.
- Volodymyr Oliynyk, a pro-Russian former Ukrainian official who fled Ukraine and currently resides in Moscow.
- Vladimir Sivkovich, a former Deputy Secretary of the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council who worked with Russian intelligence actors to build support for Ukraine to officially cede Crimea to Russia in exchange for a drawdown of Russian-backed forces in the Donbas.

EXPOSING KREMLIN PLAN TO INSTALL PRO-RUSSIAN LEADERSHIP IN UKRAINE: On January 22, UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss announced that the Russian Government is looking to install a pro-Russian leader in Kyiv as it considers whether to invade and occupy Ukraine. The UK statement also noted that Russia was considering former Ukrainian MP Yevhen Murayevas a potential candidate for that role. Foreign Secretary Truss also identified four former Ukrainian politicians, including Sivkovich (mentioned above), as maintaining links with Russian intelligence officers currently involved in the planning for an attack on Ukraine.

KREMLIN DISINFORMATION NETWORK IN UKRAINE: In February 2021, Ukraine sanctioned outlets controlled by Kozak (another of the individuals listed above): News One, ZIK, and 112. In December 2021, Ukraine also sanctioned outlets First Independent and UkrLive, which replaced News One, ZIK, and 112. While banned from the Ukrainian airwaves, the Kozak-controlled media outlets continue pushing Kremlin disinformation in Ukrainian, Russian, and English through their websites and social media. Murayevis the owner of the pro-Kremlin television channel "Nash." The sanctioned individuals Voloshin and Oliynyk often spread anti-Ukrainian disinformation in Russian state media.

Proxy Spotlight

Following UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss's statement last week regarding Murayev, the pro-Kremlin Ukrainian outlet ZIK republished three articles, all on January 25, from Ukraina.ru, a website of the Russian state-owned international news agency Rossiya Segodnya. The articles called the Truss's allegations a "British fake" meant to scare Ukrainians and inflame anti-Russian hysteria.

Exposure as a Counter-Disinformation Strategy

Public exposure of Russian disinformation actors and channels is one of the most effective counter-disinformation strategies. It helps to discredit the purveyors of disinformation and sends them a message that they will be accountable for their malign actions.

Attributing the sources of disinformation to Russian intelligence ser vices demonstrates unequivocally that Russia pursues a systematic policy aimed at manipulating and weakening perceived adversaries using amoral methods. It is crucial that the United States and like-minded partners continue educating the public via exposures and other public messaging about false narratives and discredit those who spread them.

1/20/22 #S

Exposing Disinformation from RT and Sputnik

Over the preceding weeks, the GEC has seen Russia's military and intelligence entities push out disinformation and propaganda designed to build public support for a further Russian invasion of Ukraine. For example, Russia's Federal Security Service, or FSB, directly tasks and influences proxy media outlets to publish content that denigrates Ukraine and falsely depicts it as an aggressor. Articles that appear on these proxy outlets as a result have made their way not only to official Russian state-funded media outlets like RIA Novosti, RT (formerly Russia Today), and Sputnik, but to other outlets as well.

Recently, RT and Sputnik have published articles amplifying the Kremlin's talking points on Ukraine and given a platform to people like Eduard Basurin, spokesperson for the unrecognized separatist Donetsk People's Republic, who alleged this week that Ukraine was planning a false flag attack against eastern parts of the country.

Today, the GEC announced the release of a new special report, "Kremlin-Funded Media: RT and Sputnik's Role in the Russian Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem" In this report, the GEC demonstrates how Russian outlets RT and Sputnik function as primary conduits for the Kremlin's disinformation and propaganda operations, while attempting to masquerade as publicly funded, transparent, and editorially independent

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media organizations. The report provides the public with factual information to counter the disinformation narratives created and amplified by the Russian government via RT and Sputnik, and to understand the central role these outlets play in the Kremlin's disinformation operations.

The report is posted on the State Department's new Disarming Disinformation website. Disarming Disinformation also features the GEC's Counter Disinformation Dispatches, which summarize lessons learned about disinformation and how to counter it based on the experiences of frontline counter-disinformation practitioners, for the benefit of those newly engaged in this issue. Additional counter-disinformation resources include fact sheets Russian Disinformation on Ukraineand Russia's Top Five Persistent Disinformation Narratives.

The GEC encourages readers to share the "Kremlin-Funded Media: RT and Sputnik's Role in the Russian Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem" report further, as well as other materials available on the Disarming Disinformation website.

1/18/22

U.S. SPREADS DISINFORMATION, SPREADS "PROVOKATIONS": The Russian Embassy in Washington rejected U.S. claims January 15 accusing Russia of preparing a false-flag operation to be used as a pretext for invading Ukraine. Foreign Minister Lavrov and pro-Kremlin influencers dismissedthe charges as "disinformation." Pro-Kremlin media and influencers, as well as Russia-backed proxies in Donbas, again accused the U.S. of preparing chemical weapons "provocations" to force a Russian response, provide Ukraine with a casus belli for war, and impose more sanctions on Russia. "Experts" told RT that U.S. "propaganda" is projecting its own military plans onto Russia and uses Ukraine as a source of constant tensions on Russia's borders.

UKRAINE IS GEARING UP FOR WAR: Russia falsely portrays Ukraine as an aggressor preparing for military action against Donbas. The Russian MFA has alleged since late last year that Kyiv send "half of its military personnel" to Donbas, according to state agency RIA Novosti article which also included allegations that Ukraine is mobilizing "former members of nationalists battalions." RIA Novosti also claimed Kyiv has increased its attacks on the so-called DNR and LNR with the approval of Ukraine's U.S. and European allies. Pro-Kremlin "military correspondent" Semyon Pegov and pro-Kremlin Telegram channels purport that Ukraine is arming its "Nazi territorial battalions," predicting an upcoming "slaughter" in Donbas, and "bloody" clampdowns on uprisings in Ukraine. The FSB-tasked, U.S.-sanctioned disinformation outlet News Front reported that Ukraine is deploying "Lithuania-trained" snipers to carry out provocations. Commentators on state TV speculate about Ukraine's potential attack on Belarus.

POROSHENKO'S RETURN SIGNALS ANOTHER U.S.-ORANIZED MAIDAN: Pro-Kremlin media are spreading disinformation about the January 17 return of Ukriane's former president Petr Poroshenko to Kyiv, where he faces treason charges. The goal of this disinformation is to undermine Ukraine's government, sow discord in Ukrainian society, and malign the United States. State-owned Ukraina.ru, commentators on state TV, as well as Prigozhin-affiliated Nation News and the Federal News Agency disseminate disinformation claiming Poroshenko returned to Ukraine with the permission of the United States to organize the next "Maidan."

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Sergei Naryshikin, head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) criticized what he called a "dirty internal campaign inside Ukraine," which hurts the reputation of the "Ukrainian regime."

Proxy Spotlight

Konstantin Malofeyev is a Russian oligarch sanctioned by the United States in 2014 for funding Russia-backed separatist activities in Ukraine. Malofeyev is the owner of **Tsargrad Media** and leads a multi-lingual disinformation outlet **Katehon**. Tsargrad Media is also the founder of the Russian-language information agency "Novorossiya" (novorosinform.org) or "New Russia" in English.

Pre-empting Russian Disinformation Threats

UKRAINE'S MILITARY INTELLIGENCE REPORTS ON POTENTIAL RUSSIAN FALSE-FLAG OPERATIONS: On January 14, Ukrainian military intelligence reported that Russia is preparing a false-flag operation against Russian servicemen in Moldova's Transnistria region, which Moscow will blame on Ukraine, according to the Ukrainian independent information news agency UNIAN. On January 15, Hromadske, an independent Ukrainian media outlet, reported that Ukrainian military intelligence said Russia-backed proxies in the occupied city of Horlivka released toxic ammonia, which was delivered by the Russian military, warning that Russia may use the ammonia release to falsely accuse Ukraine of deploying chemical weapons.

1/13/22

VK AND TELEGRAM POSTS AMPLIFY FALSE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CLAIM: Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu falsely claimed December 21, 2021 that the United States was planning a chemical weapons attack on Ukraine. The GEC analyzed posts about this narrative published on VK and Telegram between December 15-27. On both platforms, many posts simply reiterated Shoigu's false claims, as well as the so-called "Head" of Russian controlled Donetsk oblast, Denis Pushilin's, "confirmations" that they were true. However, other posts attempted to further embellish this disinformation, likely to provide additional "legitimacy." Interestingly, prior to Shoigu's statement, one VK post falsely insinuated there was a chemical weapons presence in Ukraine; however, this post received limited engagement.

DEMORALIZE THE ADVERSARY: One of the Kremlin's long-standing disinformation narratives aims to portray Ukraine as a helpess pawn of the United States in a geopolitical game between Russian and the so-called collective West. Pro-Kremlin media and influencers disseminate this false narrative in the context of the ongoing security negotiations between Russia, the United States, NATO, and OSCE to weaken and demoralize Ukraine, distort U.S. negotiations positions, and undermine Kyiv's trust in the U.S. support. For example, the state information agency RIA Novosti and several pro-Kremlin outlets quoted a Kremlin-aligned Ukrainian political scientist's claim that Ukraine is afraid of being "sold out" to Russia by the United States. RIA Novosti affiliate Ukraina.ru described Ukraine as a "battlefield" and a "bargaining chip" of world powers. State-funded foreign-facing propaganda outlet RT cited a pro-Kremlin Ukrainian politician arguing that the United States and Russia have already agreed to block Ukraine's NATO membership. The initial pro-Kremlin reporting about the January 12 NATO-Russia Council meeting alleged that Washington deceived Ukraine because it broke its commitment not to discuss "Ukraine without Ukraine," and framed the statements of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg as an alleged admission that Ukraine cannot count on NATO's support. RIA Novosti and the U.S.-sanctioned, Yevgeniy Prigozhin-linked Federal News Agency published misleading headlines suggesting

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that the German parliament supported Russia's right to block Ukraine's membership in NATO. In their articles, both outlets only cited a statement by a single German parliamentarian from the far-right Kremlin-aligned party "Alternative for Germany."

Proxy Spotlight

Between December 15-27, 2021, Telegram account Vzgalyd.ru (36K subscribers) posted frequently about the false claim accusing the United States of planning a chemical attack in Ukraine. Vzglyad.ru is owned by the Expert Institute for Social Research, a Russian think-tank reportedly affiliated with the Russian Presidential Administration and funded by Rostec and Rosatom.

Recognize and Address the Threat

Changing the frame: One way to discredit Shoigu's false claim that the United States is preparing a chemical weapons attack in Ukraine can be to point out similar baseless claims the Russian military spread against the "White Helmets" Syrian humanitarian organization. EUvsDisinfo and Bellingcat have documented these cases extensively. It is also important to point out Russia's past uses of chemical weapons and the disinformation campaigns it launched to cover them up. This counter-disinformation approach seeks to make the misdeeds of the disinformation actor the central topic of discussion, changing the conversation to make this new storyline the "frame" of debate, rather than the false claims. This places the disinformation purveyor, not the victims of disinformation, on the defensive. This is critical. As University of California Professor Emeritus George Lakoff, an expert on cognitive science and linguistics, writes, "whoever frames the debate tends to win the debate."

To learn more, read GEC Counter-Disinformation Dispatch #2, Three Ways to Counter Disinformation.

1/11/22

NEGOTIATE WITH ONE FACE, SPREAD FEAR WITH THE OTHER: Even as negotiations between Russia and the United States are underway, **Russian disinformation outlets are publishing articles that promote the power of Russia's military – including its nuclear capabilities** – and provide pessimistic "what if" assessments of what a war between the United States and Russia would look like. Outlets like the SVR-directed, U.S. sanctioned *Strategic Culture Faundation* detail the well-prepared "overwhelming supremacy" Russia has in its ability to accomplish the "destruction of Ukraine's Army" and the forces of any NATO member that decides to build up forces on Russia's border following a Russian invasion of Ukraine. Citing the success of the United States in the Gulf War, the author states that Russia has "taken to heart the lessons of that conflict" in its ability to simultaneously wage "an air campaign designed to degrade the economic function of the targeted nation and a ground campaign designed to annihilate the ability to wage war" before the United States or NATO could even accumulate sufficient military power. This is just one example of an ongoing Russian effort to portray the West as wading into Moscow's dangerous, nuclear-capable waters, even as both sides seek a diplomatic solution.

DRIVING A WEDGE BETWEEN U.S. AND EUROPE: "European Elites Humiliated by the USA," states the headline from the FSB-linked *News Front*. The message being pushed by Kremlin and Kremlin-aligned outlets is that western, southern, and northern **European elites should be willing to make compromises and even concessions to Moscow** instead of holding onto a Cold War mentality as U.S. and eastern European elites

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advocate. On the ongoing negotiations, State Duma deputy Oleg Morozov stated, "IF you ask nine out of 10 NATO countries if they want to see Ukraine and Georgia in their ranks, they will wave their hands and ask to be freed from this scourge." Such statements play into the false claim that the United States is pursuing its own interests and not those of Ukraine or Europe in the U.S.-Russia negotiations. RIA FAN, an outlet owned by U.S.- and EU-sanctioned Yevgeniy Prigozhin, publishes articles describing NATO member states with smaller populations along Russia's border as "liability countries" that do not add benefit to the Alliance and instead increase the risk of a war which the United States will not defend them from anyway.

Proxy Spotlight

The *Strategic Culture Foundatian* is an SVR-directed pseudo-academic online journal that propagates a variety of Kremlin disinformation narratives. The Treasury Department sanctioned SCF in April 2021 for "creating false and unsubstantiated narratives concerning U.S. officials involved in the 2020 U.S. presidential election."

Russian Tactics at Play

One effective way to counter Russian disinformation is to expose adversarial tactics and objectives as they relate to current events, including:

Discredit: Discrediting adversaries was daily, constant work for the KGB and Soviet-bloc intelligence agencies, and likely remains so today for Russia's intelligence services. This week, the SVR-directed *Oriental Review* published an article that includes a slew of false claims about Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland to include labeling her as a "figure of the U.S. deep state" and as being responsible for "the colorful Maidan revolution in 2014 to overthrow Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych and replace him with Nazis." Such attacks against the faces behind U.S. policy are likely to increase as the situation progresses.

Divide: Today, as before, the Kremlin seeks to weaken others by exacerbating divisions within international organizations like NATO or the EU, while seeking to weaken individual countries by fomenting conflicts within them. Messaging should continue to emphasize unity between the United States and allies.

To learn more, read GEC Counter-Disinformation Dispatch #11, The Goals and Main Tactics of Russia's Disinformation

1/7/22 #1

CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS REDUX? Kremlin officials, state media, and covert proxy outlets are again warning of a new Cuban Missile Crisis. Recently, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov reintroduced the false historical comparison, and President Putin has expresseda subsequent need to have a reciprocal response to U.S. weapons systems on Russia's doorstep in his own statements. Russian state disinformation and propaganda outlets RT and Sputnik, the SVR-directed Strategic Culture Foundation and Oriental Review, the FSB-linked News Front, and the GRU-directed InfoRos all repeated versions of the narrative.

This narrative plays well into the Kremlin disinformation effort that attempts to paint Ukraine as the first sacrifice in a war that the United States seeks to start in order to justify positioning strike weapons closer to Russia. With false Russian claims that the United States will not defend Ukraine or NATO Allies with a military presence in the event of war, outlets like the SVR-directed Oriental Review write, "How many American soldiers will die in the battle for Luhansk?"

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UPDATE: FALSE CLAIMS CONNECTING UKRAINE AND KAZAKHSTAN UNREST: Pro-Kremlin sources continue to draw false parallels between Kazakhstan and Ukriane. Russian officials and Kremlin propagandists insinuate that the United States has orchestrated a "color revolution" in Kazakhstan just like it did in Ukraine in 2014. An emerging disinformation narrative claims that the United States ignited a conflict in Kazakhstan to pressure Russia before the start of Russian-American negotiations on Ukraine and portrays Ukraine as a Western puppet that opposes Russia's "rightful" decision to send troops to Kazakhstan.

Framing Pretexts: RT highlighted that, in the past, Russia has described unrest in Kyrgyzstan and Armenia as internal matters but now has adjusted its intervention policy to "proactively" address "a threat to the national security of the country in question and its neighbors." One GRU-directed outlet published a similar article. This framing could emerge as a justification for a Russian offensive against Ukraine.

Proxy Spotlight

Oriental Review is an SVR-directed pseudo-academic online journal that propagates a variety of Kremlin disinformation, including on COVID vaccines.

Recognize and Address the Threat

- **Pointing Out Repetition of Baseless Claims and the Absurd:** One effective tactic in addressing the UKR-KZ false narratives could be to point out that Russia repeatedly blamed protests and "color revolutions" on the U.S./West without evidence. Russia has historically made such claims around protests in Ukraine, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and within Russia itself, all without legitimate proof. One absurd example of this was in 2019, when the Russian MFA and state media alleged Embassy Moscow had fueled protests in Moscow by warning American citizens of the protests a day in advance by publishing a map of the planned protest sites. Such a practice is, of course, standard diplomatic procedure.
- **"Provokatsiya" -A KGB Tactic to Recognize:** Kremlin disinformation operatives have used this to create false pretexts for Russian actions. Soviet defector Vasily Mitrokhin wrote in his "KGB Lexicon" that the KGB used provokatsiya to create "circumstances and incriminating evidence which compromise targeted individuals" and secretly target individuals to commit compromising transgressions which would then be used to detain them or achieve a desired goal.

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From:	FoxNews.com <foxnews@inbox.foxnews.com>
To:	(b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject:	Senate Homeland Security Committee investigating Hunter Biden emails after hard-drive report emerges
Date:	Wed, 14 Oct 2020 08:55:49 -0700

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Senate Homeland Security Committee investigating Hunter Biden emails after hard-drive report emerges

The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee is investigating newly released emails which suggested that Hunter Biden introduced his father, former Vice President Joe Biden, to a top executive at Ukrainian natural gas firm Burisma Holdings in 2015 at Hunter's request.

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From: (b)(6) state.gov>
To: (b)(6) state.gov>
Subject: RE: Disinfo report - press version
Date: Fri, 30 Oct 2020 16:33:48 +0000

I saw – very interesting.

From (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Friday, October 30, 2020 9:45 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Disinfo report - press version

(b)(5)

https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/security/how-fake-persona-laid-groundwork-hunter-biden-conspiracy-deluge-n1245387

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>

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From: Claire from EU DisinfoLab <info@disinfo.eu>
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Disinfo Update - Not Your Average Hack-and-Leak
Date: Tue, 20 Oct 2020 06:39:31 +0000

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Hey readers! We're still testing out our new format! This week, we're trying to bring you more updates related to the EU in particular. How's this working for you? Write to us!

Disinfo News and Updates

- '*Misogyny on TV*'. Visegrad Insight looks at how Belarusian and Russian TV channels seek to discredit Svetlana Tikhanovskaya (Belarusian human rights activist and opposition candidate in the 2020 election), and portray her as a dependent protegé of "Western puppeteers".
- *Norway attributes cyber-attack*. Norway has accused Russia of a cyber-attack that took place in August on the Norwegian parliament's email system. Russia has denied the accusations. Incidentally Microsoft's September Digital Defense Report found that Russia accounts for over half of the world's nation-state cyber-attacks.
- *National Black Cultural Information Trust*. In the U.S., the newly formed National Black Cultural Information Trust seeks to counter dis- and misinformation targeting Black voters..
- *Youtube policy update*. YouTube announced it will ban misinformation related to Covid-19 vaccines. They will also be banning QAnon conspiracy videos that target a person or group.
- *Regulating 'big tech'*. Japan will join the US and Europe in efforts to reign in 'big tech'. Meanwhile the U.S. House of Representative released a majorreport on competition.
- *Resource for advertisers*. The Global Disinformation Index has assembled a primer for brands and advertisers to help them understand and adapt their role in the disinformation ecosystem.

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EU Policy Monitor

In Member States

- *5G conspiracies.* Yesterday, 15 EU member states called on the EU executive to address the dangerous anti-5G conspiracy theories which have led to arson attacks against telecommunications masts. The letter was led by Poland.
- *Joint DSA position by France and Netherlands.* In a common position released last week, France and the Netherlands called for preventive measures targeting so-called 'structuring platforms'. The agreement sends a strong signal between two countries that normally clash head-on during EU negotiations on digital policy (notoriously on the EU's digital tax).
- *Hate speech in France.* The French audiovisual regulator, the CSA, has decided on four working groups for its observatory of online hate.
- *Copyright in Germany.* A draft of the German copyright bill allows for upload filters, even though the government promised otherwise.
- *Media plurality in Poland.* Poland's culture minister has called for state-run companies to buy up media outlets "wherever it is possible".

In the European Parliament

- *MEPs Call for a Multi-Million Euro Funding Project for News Media.* A joint letter signed by leading MEPs and Europe's MediaLab (part of Fondation EURACTIV), calls on Commissioners Thierry Breton and Vera Jourova to bundle the EU's projects on media literacy, media ownership, and fact-checking, into a new programme called NEWS ("News in Europe Working Sustainably"), potentially benefitting from equity funding from

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InvestEU, the EU's €75bn flagship investment programme for 2021-2027. The MEPs want Commissioner Breton to use the upcoming Media and Audiovisual Action Plan (MAAP), expected to be released on December 2, the same day as the EDAP and DSA, as a tool to move in this direction.

- *Foreign interference Special Committee (INGE).* This coming monday (Oct 26) at 9am, the Special Committee on Foreign Interference including Disinformation (INGE) will hold its next meeting. According to the Special Committee's Chair, Raphaël Glucksmann, the session will focus exclusively on examples of interference in the European public debate directed from outside the EU. During its previous meeting on Oct 3, EU DisinfoLab was invited as the first external organisation to give evidence. Three representatives from EU DisinfoLab presented the "InfoRos" case to Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), in which two information portals, "ObservateurContinental.fr" and "OneWorld.press" were connected to a Russian news organisation with links to Russian military intelligence (GRU). MEPs from the five main political groups (EPP, S&D, Greens, Renew, ECR) welcomed the results of the investigation and asked the EU DisinfoLab how the European Parliament can better help fund organisations countering disinformation in Europe. See here to watch the session.

- *The Greens on notice-and-action mechanisms.* The Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament is drafting a text to provide a basis for a currently lacking EU notice and action mechanism. You can give your feedback before November 1st.

- *Plenary Session.* With the European Parliament (exceptionally) taking place in Brussels this week, MEPs will vote to adopt the institution's positions on the Digital Services Act andArtificial Intelligence rules. In two separate reports, MEPs are calling for the European Commission to introduce binding "notice-and-action mechanisms" to tackle

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illegal content online, and on AI, the MEPs call for an EU approach founded on human rights, with safeguards against bias and a right of redress for users.

Research & Studies

- *COVID-19 and journalism*. Led by Julie Posetti, Emily Bell, and Pete Brown, The Journalism and the Pandemic Project published a large-scale survey mapping the impacts of COVID-19 on journalism worldwide, which also seeks to inform responses to the crisis.
- *Trust in Media*. Ipsos and The Trust Project have released "Trust Misplaced?", a report on the key factors influencing the future of trust and truth in the media, from nationalist and populist sentiment, to quality news access, to technological developments, to disinformation.
- *Correcting Conspiracies*. Africa Check, Chequeado and Full Fact have produced new research briefings exploring two major issues for fact checkers globally: conspiracy theories and communicating uncertainty.
- *Media monitoring in Kyrgyzstan*. Memo98 released theirmonitoring report mapping coverage of the disputed Kyrgyz parliamentary elections on Facebook and Instagram.
- *Disinformation in Nagorno-Karabakh*. Bellingcat examines two videos that circulated on Azerbaijani Telegram channels on October 15, which have since been removed,and which the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defence maintains were staged.

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- *Chinese InfoOps*. The last installment of TeamT5's Information Operation White Paper looks at Chinese Information Operations directed to global audiences. Team5G is a Taiwan-based cybersecurity company focusing on cyber threat research.
- *Russian InfoOps*. Bloomberg's Alberto Nardelli cites EU DisinfoLab's InfoRos study in a recent article "Russian Information Attacks Keep Hitting the EU's Weak Spots" (Oct 19).
- *QAnon in the USA*. An investigation by Logically reveals that many QAnon communications are being hosted and channeled under the control of 8chan message board operator Jim Watkins, through the US-based company VanwaTech (Vancouver, Washington State).

Eye on Encryption

The "Five Eyes" intelligence alliance (The United States, Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand), joined by India and Japan, demanded in a statement last Sunday that tech companies insert "backdoors" in encrypted apps for law enforcement agencies. Meanwhile, a document circulated by the German Presidency of the Council of the EU on 18 September, declared the weakening of encryption undesirable, and asks to find "legal and technical solutions" and to build a common EU polisiton, through dialogue with service providers, experts, and member states. Considering that closed messaging networks will soon become one of the world's most used

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communications tool, strong encryption will be more important than ever to safeguard the data and privacy of internet users.

Not Your Average Hack-and-Leak

The *New York Post* hack-and-leak story about Hunter Biden snowballed last week. This now inescapable story is at once a lesson in propaganda reporting, in the politics of content moderation, and in the velocity and chaos of the media landscape. While the story is still rolling, here's a timeline of the main events:

Wednesday 14 October.

- The *New York Post* published a story making allegations about the Democratic candidate Joe Biden's son, Hunter Biden. The origins of the material for the story are unclear, allegedly obtained from a hard drive of a computer used by Hunter Biden which was dropped at a repair shop in Delaware last April.

  , Rupert Murdoch), as well as on Facebook and Twitter.*Post*story was promoted by Trump and media outlets like Fox News (under the same ownership as the *Post* The
- That same day, Twitter and Facebook restricted the story according to respective company policies. Facebook applied its viral misinformation policy. Twitter blocked the story much more aggressively, preventing users from sharing links to it in tweets and direct messages in an (albeit very strong) interpretation of their hacked materials policy, though the choice was also justified by dubious sources and unredacted personal information.

Thursday 15 October.

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- The US Senate Judiciary Committee threatened to subpoena Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey testify on the decision. (The CEOS of Facebook, Twitter, and Google are already scheduled to testify before the committee on October 28th).

Friday 16 October.

- Accused of "censoring journalists" and of radical left-wing bias, Twitter shifted gears dramatically. They again allowed sharing of the article and announced an update to their hacked materials policy.

Lots to say about this, and certainly more to come. First, It's worth noting *the Post* continued to publish stories relying on the unverified archive; it seems criticism of this journalistic responsibility has not been nearly as loud as outrage at the platforms for enforcing their policies - even if we can blame the platforms for a 'Streisand Effect'. Meanwhile, the US media ecosystem may be particularly susceptible to this kind of problem: Emily Bazelon makes the comparison to the "Macron Leaks" during the French election in 2017, which did not result in major media attention because of a lack of tabloids to run the story. Finally, Thomas Rid recalls that this remains, in part, a story about possible foreign interference, an angle which federal investigators are examining.

Events and Announcements

- Between Nov-Dec and again between Jan-Feb, Tactical Tech is organising a three-week online workshop for civil society investigators across the European Union, "Exposing the Invisible Investigative Institute" (Deadline Nov 1st). See the call for applications here.
- This year's 15th Internet Governance Forum (IGF) will take place virtually. Register here before 26 Oct.

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- 14 Jan. Data & Society will host a workshop titled Against Platform Determinism which seeks to "acknowledges but does not fetishize the power platforms possess". Apply before 21 Oct. More info here.
- Participation is still open for the UNESCO/UNDP consultation dedicated to disinformation, "Forging a Path for a Better Information Ecosystem". Info here.

Jobs

- Coda Story is hiring a Senior Reporter
- Global Disinformation Index is looking for a strategy intern (Remote, EU preferred)
- Max Planck Institute for SoftwareSystems is hiring a Postdoctoral Researcher, Digital Harm group
- European Partnership for Democracy is hiring a Digital Policy Officer.

Check out EU DisinfoLab's calendar

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GEC Russian Disinformation Snapshot on Ukraine

May 26, 2022

Check www.state.gov/disarming-disinformation for the latest State Department public releases on countering Russia's disinformation on Ukraine

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Disinformation Overview

CELEBRATING "AFRICA DAY" WITH DISINFORMATION: Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's May 25 Africa Day speech to assembled African ambassadors in Moscow was filled with a litany of false claims about Ukraine under the pretense of anti-colonial solidarity. Lavrov's remarks also likely foreshadow Russia's messaging strategy on Ukraine-related subjects to African audiences. In his disinformation-filled speech, Lavrov attempted to portray Russia as a victim of an "all-out hybrid war" where Ukraine is "used as a bargaining chip" by a "small group of U.S.-led Western countries," or a "club of the chosen," working together to achieve a unipolar world order that seeks to subjugate everyone else, including Russia and Africa. Lavrov also urged the ambassadors to demand the removal of "illegal, anti-Russian" sanctions in order to strengthen food security. He promised Russia would, despite Western-manufactured challenges, continue fulfilling its obligations to Africa. OneWorld, a website with ties to Russia's military intelligence, echoed Lavrov's claims from his address to African envoys, accusing President Zelenskyy of supporting a U.S.-led "global food cartel" that will wield control over global food supply as a "new hybrid weapon" against the Global South.

SVR - LATIN AMERICA DOES NOT SUPPORT U.S. ON UKRAINE : Russia's Foreigu Intelligence Service (SVR) issued a May 23 statement claiming it had obtained information showing most Latin American countries refuse to submit to U.S. demands to condemn Moscow's "special military operation" in Ukraine. The statement implies the United States has been "pushing" Latin American nations too hard to speak out against Russia over Ukraine, which has led to a "backlash" from Mexico, Argentina, and Bolivia. Reporting on the SVR statement, RIA Novosti said the alleged backlash might lead to the cancellation of June's "Summit of the Americas" in Los Angeles. RT separately published an op-ed on the issue, also alleging the United States is facing summit boycotts from its "Latin neighbors."

Russian MFA and a GONGO Target Foreigners With Disinfo on Ukraine

Russia's MFA-linked Rossotrudnichestvo agency will disseminate digitally and in hard copy through its Russia Houses two brochures targeting foreign audiences – "Civil War in Ukraine: 2014-2022" and "Mass War Crimes of Ukraine's Armed Forces and Nazi Battalions in Mariupol and Volnovakha." As their titles suggest, the brochures are filled with disinformation falsely blaming Ukraine for the Kremlin's unprovoked aggression against Russia's neighbor. Russian government-organized NGO the Foundation for the Study of Democracy (FSD), a known disinformation actor, co-produced the brochures. Official Russian social media accounts are promoting video testimonies of alleged Ukrainian atrocities filmed by FSD head Maxim Grigoryev, who is also a member of Russia's state-linked Civic Chamber and leads the so-called International Public Tribunal on Ukraine. Grigoryev operates Russian- (21,000 subscribers) and English-language (8,000 subscribers) Telegram channels, where he publishes his videos of the alleged testimonies. Rossotrudnichestvo recently announced it was moving some of its Europe-based employees to Asia and Africa, a possible indication of where the agency will focus its Ukraine-related disinformation efforts.

Russia Opens Museum Exhibits on NATO "Cruelty," Historical Revisionism

As Russia increasingly characterizes its war against Ukraine as a conflict against the West and NATO, it has enlisted its cultural institutions to increase propaganda and disinformation targeting both. Exhibitions on the "cruelty" of NATO and the West are opening at museums across Russia, including one entitled "NATO: A chronicle of cruelty," which just concluded at Moscow's Museum of Contemporary Russian History. At this and similar exhibits from western to eastern Russia, visitors are greeted by the sounds of bombs and approaching planes as they encounter "informative" posters detailing NATO's alleged warmongering and atrocities committed by Allies. The exhibit also features objects from the war in Ukraine and comparisons between Nazi Germany and modern Ukraine, further highlighting Russia's false justifications for the war.

GEC Russian Disinformation Snapshot on Ukrain

February 2, 2024

Check www.state.gov/disarming-disinformation for the latest State Department public releases on countering Russia's disinformation on Ukraine

OBTAINED BY AMERICAN OVERSIGHT FOUNDATION

Disinformation Overview

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DRIVING A WEDGE BETWEEN UKRAINE AND POLAND: Adding to the Kremlin disinformation targeting Ukraine's relationship with Poland, Russian MFA spokesperson Maria Zakharova falsely claimed May 23 that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's proposal to grant Polish citizens in Ukraine the same rights Ukrainian refugees have received in Poland was tantamount to "legalizing the de facto [Polish] seizure of…[his] country." On the same day, while meeting with Putin, Belarusian leader Aleksandr Lukashenka said Poland would seek to "dismember Ukraine" through any deployment of Polish "peacekeeping

Russia's "Z" Campaign on Twitter Benefits From Coordinated Activity

According to GEC analysis, on Twitter, the "Z" campaign, which aims to rally support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, appears to benefit from coordinated and likely inauthentic amplification. Three distinct pro-Russia clusters promote the "Z" campaign: a Russian-language cluster aimed at Russian and Ukrainian audiences; an English-language cluster aimed at an Indian audience; and another English-language cluster aimed at an African audience. The India- and Africa-focused clusters appeared highly coordinated, given their recent creation dates and frequent messaging on Russia. The overall reach of this pro-Russia amplification, however, is likely limited, with tweets receiving fewer than 5-10 likes and rarely any comments or retweets. Conversely, a pro-Ukraine cluster of accounts also acts in a coordinated manner to amplify messaging denouncing Russia's invasion. Likely targeting Russian and Ukrainian audiences, this cluster largely highlights the Russian army's war losses. This report is now available on GEC-IQ. Please contact info@geciq.com for access. If you are outside the USG, please contact info@gecicglobal.com.

Russia's Health Ministry Disinfo about Ukraine at the UN in Geneva

A pamphlet purportedly from Russia's Health Ministry is circulating on WhatsApp messaging groups among African delegations to the United Nations in Geneva. Among its disinformation claims, the pamphlet blames Ukraine for causing the humanitarian crisis in the so-called DPR/LPR and accuses the Ukrainian Armed Forces of mistreating Russian prisoners of war, perpetrating war crimes, and placing weapons systems in healthcare facilities. The pamphlet appears to be an attempt to deflect the blame for humanitarian crisis and war crimes onto the victim – Ukraine, while portraying Russia as a magnanimous humanitarian actor. The pamphlet's design even mimics a World Health Organization campaign to combat health misinformation, a likely attempt to

Image from a WHO-organized campaign (left) and the purported Russian Health Ministry pamphlet (right)

GEC Russian Disinformation Snapshot on Ukraine

May 24, 2022

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OBTAINED BY EMERGENT FREEDOM FOUNDATION

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GEC

Russian Disinformation Trends on Ukraine

March 24, 2022

Check www.state.gov/disarming-disinformation for the latest State Department public releases on countering Russia's disinformation on Ukraine

OBTAINED BY AMERICA FIRST LEGAL FOUNDATION

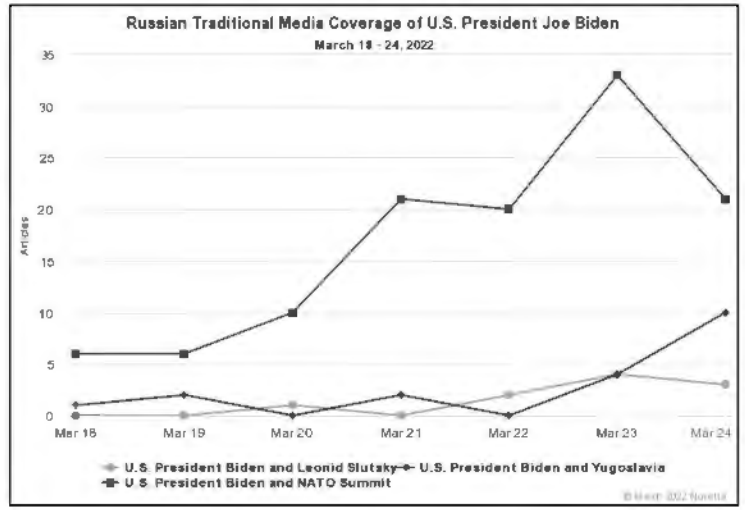
Disinformation Overview

BLAMING WESTERN "PROVOCATION" FOR RUSSIA'S POTENTIAL USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS: As NATO leaders prepared for a March 24 Brussels meeting, the Russian space agency director boasted March 23 of Russia's capability to destroy any aggressor in a matter of minutes. Russia's deputy UN ambassador also told Sky News that Moscow has the right to use nuclear weapons if it is "attacked" or "provoked" by NATO. Before Russia launched its war against Ukraine last month, Russia's disinformation ecosystem falsely portrayed NATO and U.S. warnings of the Kremlin's war plans as attempts to "provoke" a war between Russia and Ukraine. Deploying the same tactic, Russian officials and pro-Kremlin influencers frame NATO's concerns of Moscow's potential use of CBRN weapons in Ukraine as an effort to push Russia to use such weapons or as alleged evidence of its own intentions to deploy nuclear weapons against Russia. ZvezdaWeekly, a publication affiliated with Russia's armed forces, directly accuses the United States and UK of preparing a nuclear attack against Russia. Kremlin propagandist Vladimir Solovyov repeated President Putin's 2018 claim that in the case of a nuclear war Russians will go to heaven as martyrs, while their opponents will simply die.

CHECHEN FIGHTERS IN UKRAINE: In a likely effort to counter negative information about Chechen fighters who have joined Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Kremlin propaganda is now covering those Chechen forces in a positive light. On March 21, Russia's most-watched evening news program "Vremya" on state-controlled Channel One included a five-minute segment about Chechen participation in the war, including in the fight around Mariupol. The focus of the story, however, was not fighting but the delivery of humanitarian aid from the Akhmat Kadyrov Foundation. On March 23 and 24, Telegram posts from Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov's channel glorifying Chechens were among the top 10 posts based on engagement among 20 influential pro-Kremlin channels.

Disinformation and Propaganda Surrounding President Biden's NATO Meeting

Preliminary findings indicate that as of March 24 **the most prominent disinformation and propaganda narrative surrounding President Biden's Brussels visit in Russian-language traditional media attempts to negatively associate his NATO engagement with the 23rd anniversary of the Alliance's military operations in Yugoslavia.** Approximately 50% of the related coverage referred to the anniversary, depicting President Biden as a strong supporter of NATO's 1999 decision to carry out an aerial bombing campaign. Russian officials and pro-Kremlin influencers are actively disseminating this narrative on Telegram.



Spotlight: Russian Embassy Messaging in the Middle East

To offset the removal of RT and Sputnik's Arabic-language channels, **Russia is weaponizing its diplomatic missions' platforms across the MENA region to deflect and obfuscate its atrocities in Ukraine**. At the forefront of these diplomatic accounts is the Russian Embassy in Egypt. Since the beginning of the invasion, the embassy has shared content mostly depicting Ukraine as the aggressor and justifying Moscow's so-called "special military operation." The embassy has also amplified Kremlin narratives alleging the Azov Battalion bombed the Mariupol theater and killed children in Donetsk, and accused the United States of funding biological weapons programs in Ukraine. Concurrently, Russian embassies in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Lebanon shared content purportedly showing their audiences how to spot so-called Ukrainian disinformation, "exposing" disinformation targeting the Russian military, demonstrating U.S. involvement in Ukraine's alleged bio-weapons, and detailing what it calls the hypocrisy of Western media coverage of Ukraine compared to other conflict zones such as Syria.

GEC Russian Disinformation Trends on Ukraine

February 2, 2024

Check www.state.gov/disarming-disinformation for the latest State Department public releases on countering Russia's disinformation on Ukraine

OBTAINED BY AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

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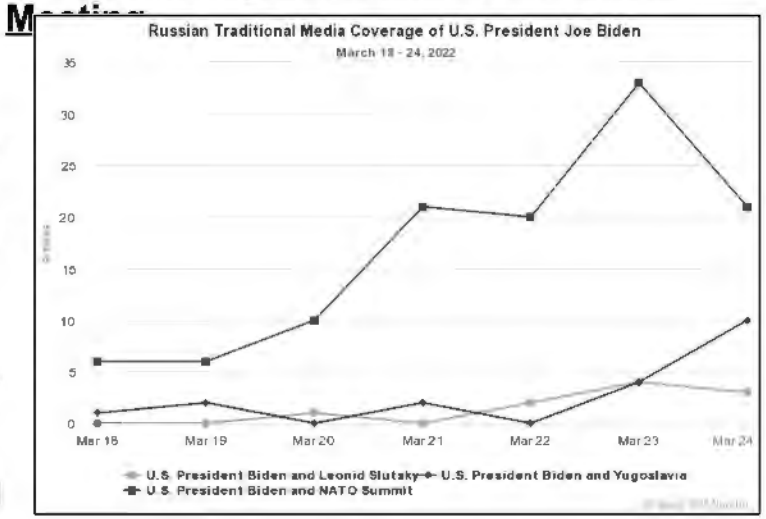

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GEC Russian Disinformation Snapshot on Ukraine

September 20, 2022

Check www.state.gov/disarming-disinformation for the latest State Department public releases on countering Russia's disinformation on Ukraine

OBTAINED BY AMERICA FIRST LEGAL FOUNDATION

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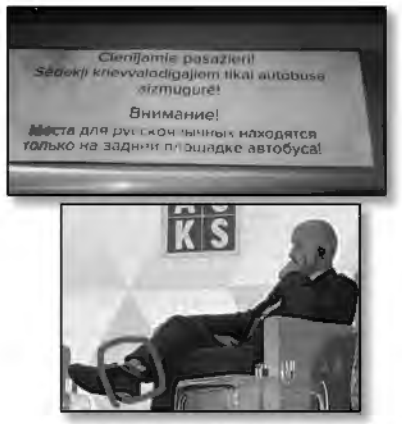
THE WEST "ADMITS" IT SEEKS RUSSIA'S DISINTEGRATION: During his September 16 press conference, Putin claimed Moscow launched its "special military operation" to counter the West's long-standing goal of bringing about the "dissolution" of Russia. As evidence, Putin cited "some figures in Great Britain during World War I" and even former U.S. National Security Advisor and political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski. Pro-Kremlin media amplified and expanded on Putin's assertions, referencing supposed statements from Western figures to argue "destroying" or "dismembering" Russia is official "Western" policy. State-owned television channel Rossiya 1 and others reported a former U.S. general said the world should be prepared for the possible disintegration of Russia. Vladimir Solovyov, who has a reputation for promoting articles on the West's aspirations to partition Russia, along with Kremlin-aligned media, provided further "proof" of the supposedly secret Western plot presented by political scientist Janusz Bugajski in a book titled "A Guide to Russia's Rupture." The Kremlin's long-standing conspiracy theory about the West's ambitions for Russia's territory is reportedly rooted in "information" obtained through KGB "mind reading sessions."

How a Russian Diplomat in South Africa Compared Ukraine to Mexico

Russia's Press Attaché in South Africa, Alexander Arefiev, published a "quiz" on September 4 in a local online newspaper, *Business Day*, presenting readers with the story of an 8-year "situation" between a "big northern country" and its "its neighbor to the south plunged into mass civil disorder" over an independence dispute with the southern country's northeastern territories. Arefiev lays out the alleged similarities, differences, and actions of each party, making clear allusions to Russia's war in Ukraine. The diplomat informs readers the assumption that his quiz is about the Russia-Ukraine relationship is incorrect and claims he actually describes the Mexican-American War. Arefiev distorts the United States' first war as one chiefly fought on foreign soil and describes the 1846-1848 war as an affair lasting eight years. Authors for *Business Day* penned at least four letters denouncing and discrediting Arefiev as "Putin's odious apparatchik" and a "spin doctor" for disingenuously spreading historical revisionism to justify Russia's illegal war against Ukraine. Arefiev, previously accused of having a "sketchy grasp on history," penned a rebuttal doubling down on the Kremlin's disinformation about the war in Ukraine, including conspiracy theories regarding U.S. military biolabs. When the Russian Embassy in South Africa tweeted Arefiev's initial article, Twitter users mostly trolled the Embassy in response.

Russia Uses Disinfo in Latvia to Claim an Overall "Return to the Reich"

Kremlin propagandists are using fabrications and misinterpretation to suggest Russophobia against ethnic Russians is indicative of Russia's struggle against Nazism and justifies Putin's war in Ukraine. A fabricated sign purporting to be posted on a bus in Latvia saying, "Seats for Russian-speakers are only at the back of the bus" quickly spread on social media. An image of Riga-based NATO official Jānis Sārts' socks showing "Топчу русню," or "Trample Russkies" went viral. Sārts clarified the term is meant to describe the worldview of nationalistic and imperialistic Russians. Propagandist Solovyov used these incidents to claim there was a "Return to the Reich" targeting Russians. RT head Simonyan compared Sārts' socks to antisemitic and racist sentiments, while LDPR party leader Slutskiy called the fake bus sign an indication of "ordinary fascism."



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GEC Russian Disinformation Snapshot on Ukrain

February 2, 2024

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Wagner Group, Yevgeniy Prigozhin, and Russia's Disinformation in Africa

"We are following the extremely disturbing accounts of large numbers of people killed earlier this week in the village of Mourah in the Mopti region of central Mali … We are concerned that many reports suggest that the perpetrators were unaccountable forces from the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group." Spokesperson Ned Price. April 3, 2022

Russia deploys disinformation across different continents for varied objectives, often working through tested proxies to support Kremlin foreign policy objectives indirectly, which provides a level of deniability. In some parts of Africa – including, most recently, Mali – Kremlin-linked proxies exploit instability to gain influence, particularly through disinformation and the deployment of the Wagner Group forces.

The Wagner Group and Yevgeniy Prigozhin

The Kremlin-backed Wagner Group exploits insecurity to expand its presence in Africa, threatening stability, good governance, and respect for human rights. Yevgeniy Prigozhin, known as "Putin's chef" due to his catering contracts with the Kremlin, is a Russian oligarch and Wagner's manager and financier. Although Russian officials refuse to accept links to the Wagner Group, the Russian government is at least aware of or has used the Wagner Group and other Prigozhin-owned entities as proxies to disperse disinformation and carry out covert, armed operations abroad, including in Mali, the Central African Republic, Libya, Syria, and Ukraine. The United States, EU, and UK have sanctioned Prigozhin, including by imposing sanctions targeting his network of malign influence in Africa.

Wagner Arrives in Mali Amid Disinformation

In late-2021, reports emerged of Wagner Group forces' likely deployment to Mali, a country that had experienced two military seizures of power in less than one year and continued to fight a growing terrorist threat that exploited marginalized populations and a history of poor governance. Pitching themselves as able to counter the terrorist threat, Wagner Group forces deployed to Mali in December 2021 amid a barrage of targeted disinformation to hide its arrival and activities.

Digital Forensic Research Lab's February 2022 report found that in the months leading up to Wagner's deployment, a coordinated network of Facebook pages in Mali promoted Russia as a "viable partner" and "alternative to the West," encouraged postponement of democratic elections, and attempted to create local support for Wagner. Local news outlets often mirrored these narratives by publishing interviews with Russian officials, who extolled Wagner "advisors," while claiming the group was the "unfair victim" of an "information war" because of its role in "destroying the neo-colonial system." Maxim Shugaley, president of the Prigozhin-linked, U.S.-sanctioned Russian think-tank Foundation for National Values Protection (FZNC), criticized the United Nations peacekeeping mission (MINUSMA) in Mali (deployed since 2013 to support implementation of a peace agreement, protect civilians, and facilitate humanitarian aid) falsely claiming the UN "creates terrorist organizations."

OBTAINED BY AMERICA FIRST LEGAL FOUNDATION

President Putin has admitted private Russian military organizations operate in Mali, but denied his government has any role in their activities. In May 2022, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also admitted that Wagner was in Mali but on a purely "commercial basis." Despite these admissions, the ruling Malian transition government, headed by the August 2020 coup leaders, continues to deny the presence of Wagner forces.

Wagner Implicated in Mali Atrocities

Amid mounting reporting that the Wagner Group has committed atrocities in Mali since its arrival in 2021, Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem continues to deploy false narratives to deflect attention and avoid responsibility.

- **Mourah**: Reports emerged in late-March 2022 of a massacre of at least 300 civilians in the central Mali village of Mourah. Witnesses reported that Malian forces and approximately 100 Russian-speaking men lined up victims in rows of 15-20, told them to kneel, and executed them. The NGO Human Rights Watch has called the Mourah killings Mali's worst atrocity in over a decade. The Malian transition government denied its army's involvement and claimed the troops were participating in counterterror operations in the area. Russian state media's foreign facing disinformation outlet RT repeated this false narrative.
- **Gossi**: Just outside the Malian village of Gossi, French forces withdrew April 19 from a military base from which they had conducted joint operations with Malian counterparts for several years. Days after French forces' withdrawal a Twitter account named "Dia Diarra" posted pixelated images of corpses allegedly unearthed near the base and asserted French troops were to blame. French military officials responded that the Dia Diarra Twitter account was "a fake … created by Wagner" and part of a "disinformation stunt." France then introduced videos showing a dozen individuals, most likely Wagner members, and Malian troops near the Gossi base as the white soldiers covered bodies with sand. FZNC President Shugaley attempted to deflect with an accusation France had "concocted video evidence" to frame Wagner so French forces could "get away with massacres." One regional security analyst said France's video had "stymied this Russian disinformation effort."

Prigozhin-linked Disinformation Across Africa

Prigozhin-led disinformation efforts extend beyond Mali and across parts of Africa in support of the Kremlin's objectives or Prigozhin's own interests. Through companies that exploit Africa's natural resources, political operatives who undermine democratic actors, front companies posing as NGOs, and social media manipulation, Prigozhin spreads disinformation to influence African politics in Russia's favor.

Prigozhin is best known for financing the Internet Research Agency (IRA), a troll farm most often recognized for repeatedly attempting to interfere in U.S. elections, but also involved in and spreading disinformation worldwide, including in Africa. Social media companies' responses to Prighozin's disinformation activities in Africa show the extent of his efforts:

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- A Facebook/Meta takedown in January 2022 exposed IRA-linked entities targeting African journalists primarily in **Nigeria, Cameroon, The Gambia, Zimbabwe**, and **Congo** to trick journalists to publish articles on the IRA's behalf.
- A Twitter takedown in **Central African Republic (CAR)** in December 2021 exposed a mix of inauthentic and real accounts linked to the IRA that aimed to introduce a pro-Russian viewpoint in CAR political discourse.
- A Russian operation targeting **CAR** and, to a lesser extent**, Madagascar, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique, South Africa, and CAR's diaspora community in France** was part of a Facebook/Meta takedown in December 2020 which exposed IRA-linked fake and compromised accounts that worked to solicit stories by local journalists, influence the upcoming CAR elections, positively discuss Russia's presence in Sub-Saharan Africa, and criticize French foreign policy. A key goal in this operation was to undermine democratic elections.

Conclusion

Russia's intensified application of disinformation and the use of the Wagner Group across Africa has spread a trail of lies and human rights abuses. Despite U.S., EU, and UK sanctions and exposure of Prigozhin-linked entities that spread disinformation, these actors continue operating in Africa, exploiting turbulent situations through disinformation to sway public support for the Russian government to expand its influence.

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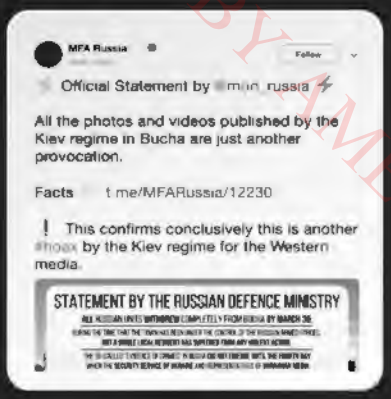
PRC AMPLIFIES RUSSIA'S NARRATIVES WHILE CLAIMING NEUTRALITY

OBTAINED BY AMERICA FIRST LEGAL FOUNDATION

April 3, 2022

Russian MFA asserts "footage from Bucha [is]... a staged provocation by the [Kyiv] regime."



April 5, 2022

CCP-owned tabloid Global Times echoes Russian conspiracies that the United States and Ukraine fabricated evidence of Bucha war crimes.

April 7, 2022

PRC MFA Spokesperson advocates "neutrality" with calls for probe into Bucha atrocities asking for "all sides" to refrain from "unfounded accusations."

GEC
Global Engagement Center

FL-2023-00013 A-00000748626 "UNCLASSIFIED" 10/31/2024

GEC Russian Disinformation Snapshot on Ukraine

May 19, 2022

Check www.state.gov/disarming-disinformation for the latest State Department public releases on countering Russia's disinformation on Ukraine

OBTAINED BY AMERICA FIRST LEGAL FOUNDATION

Disinformation Overview

RUSSIA FAULTS SANCTIONS FOR FOOD INSECURITY: Russian embassies' social media accounts and state media have echoed Russian President Putin and other officials' statements blaming Western sanctions for food insecurity. Russia's UN ambassador Vasiliy Nebenzya, during a May 19 UN Security Council meeting on conflict and food security, blamed Western sanctions for preventing Russia and Belarus from exporting agricultural products. Nebenzya also accused Europe of hoarding Ukrainian grain and engaging in "grain for weapons" exchanges with Ukraine. Russia's embassy in Egypt blamed "illegal unilateral sanctions" for the crisis. RT Arabic, RT en Español, and Russia's embassy in Peru alternately depicted Western sanctions as the cause of rising wheat prices in Latin America and the Middle East, violent protests in Iran, a threat to Egypt's national security, and the reason for food shortages in refugee camps in Iraq. To influence African audiences, Russia's Zimbabwe embassy blamed "Western interference" in the Global South for increasing food prices.

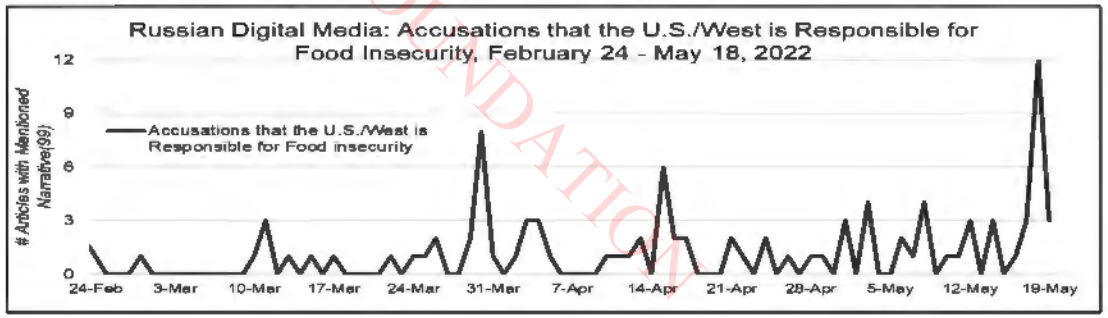
RUSSIA CLAIMS U.S. RECRUITS ISIS TO FIGHT IN UKRAINE: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem amplified a May 17 statement by Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) falsely claiming the U.S. recruits and trains ISIS terrorists at the Al-Tanf military base in Southeast Syria to fight Russia's armed forces in Ukraine. The SVR made similar claims in March and April. Russia has employed the Al-Tanf base and its alleged activities as disinformation fodder since 2018. Along with the latest ISIS charge, pro-Kremlin influencers disseminated disinformation portraying Ukraine's security services and the Azov regiment as terrorists "worse than ISIS." Russia's propagandists capitalized on the false narrative's spread, charging the West with hypocrisy for "supporting terrorists and Nazis" when it suits its interests.

Telegram Channels Impersonating Ukrainians Push Russia's Propaganda and Disinfo

Detektor Media, a Ukrainian investigative reporting outlet, found **88 Telegram channels amplifying Russia's propaganda and masquerading as authentic Ukrainians**. Registered in the first days of Russia's February 24 further invasion of Ukraine, channels appeared pretending to originate from local Ukrainians and local administrators along the path of Russia's planned occupation in the south, east, and north of Ukraine. This inauthentic network shows signs of automated creation, donning handles that follow a pattern. Some channels, such as @Melitopoladmin, act as overt mouthpieces of occupation officials, echoing Russia's propaganda about "liberating Ukrainians" through summer camps for children, restoring garbage collection, and renewing economic ties with Russia. Others, opportunistically named "Zaporozh'ye People's Republic" and "Kherson People's Republic," betray Russia's intent to create proxy statelets. Yet others masquerade as locals decrying life in urban combat and demonizing the Armed Forces of Ukraine. While Telegram shut down some channels, Our Kharkov continues to push anti-Ukrainian narratives to 96,000 subscribers.

Russian Domestic Media Blame Sanctions For Global Food Crisis

Just as Russia's officials and foreign-facing state media spread disinformation on food security to audiences abroad, **Russia's domestic media publish disinformation locally blaming Western policies for a "global food crisis."** GEC has tracked a noticeable increase in the use of this narrative in Russian digital media since March. The first notable spike in the narrative's appearance began March 30, when Russia's UN Ambassador Nebenzya first blamed Western sanctions for a potential "world food market crisis." The most recent spike likely stems from coverage of new statements this week by Nebenzya and other Russian officials such as Putin aide Maksim Oreshkin, who hyped the potential for global food shortages caused by Washingron's economic stimulus policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



GEC Russian Disinformation Trends on Ukraine

February 2, 2024

Disinformation Overview

DISINFORMER-IN-CHIEF ATTEMPTS TO JUSTIFY HIS WAR: President Putin's disinformation and propaganda-filled March 16 speech, aimed at justifying Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine, received wide coverage from pro-Kremlin media and influencers. Portraying the war as a historic event, Putin said it will end the so-called global domination of the collective West, which he claimed wanted to destroy a sovereign Russia, and used Moscow's "special operation" in Ukraine as a pretext for imposing anti-Russian sanctions. Repeating one of the most prominent current disinformation narratives, Putin accused Ukraine and the Pentagon of developing biological weapons near Russia's borders, and blamed "fascist" Kyiv for refusing to withdraw troops from Donbas and avoiding bloodshed by not engaging in hostilities. Finally, Putin signaled rising repercussions for Russians opposing the war, claiming that the West is betting on a so-called fifth column or "national traitors," whom Russia must cleanse itself from. Kremlin-aligned disinformation outlets will likely continue amplifying Putin's talking points and use them as a base for their own disinformation campaigns.

BLAMING AZOV FOR THE MARIUPOL THEATER BOMBING: To shift the blame for the March 16 bombing of the Mariupol theater that hosted several hundred refugees, Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem accuses its favorite target, the Ukrainian "nationalists" from the Azov Battalion. The emerging false narrative denies Russian involvement and claims the Azov Battalion carried out a "bloody provocation." According to this false narrative, the battalion established a headquarters at the theater, held the civilians hostage, and then blew up the building after rigging it with explosives to frame Russia and give the United States the pretext to send its military to Ukraine. RIA Novosti quoted a "DPR" spokesman who claimed the Azov forces fired at the theater from tanks. On Telegram, pro-Kremlin accounts asserted they had evidence of Azov planning the provocation for four days and cited an alleged refugee from the theater who said all civilians were allowed

Slovakia Charges Russian Intelligence-linked Purveyor of Disinformation

The Slovak and Czech governments' recent steps to counter Russian disinformation and its purveyors show vigor and resilience to Kremlin malign influence operations in Central Europe in the wake of Russia's further invasion of Ukraine. Bratislava authorities charged two Slovak nationals March 15 with spying for Russia, including Bohus Garbar, a frequent author under various pseudonyms for Slovakian pro-Kremlin disinformation outlets Hlavne Spravy (shut down by the Slovak National Security Office on March 2) and Armadneho magazine. A video posted March 15 showed the Russian Embassy's acting defense attaché offering Garbar money to recruit Slovaks with pro-Russian views and access to confidential information related to NATO and the EU. In connection with the arrests, Slovakia announced it would also expel three Russian "diplomats." The Garbar case draws a clear connection between Russia's intelligence services and pro-Kremlin disinformation operations in Slovakia, and possibly other countries in the region. Prague has also cracked down on pro-Kremlin disinformation operations since Moscow's February 24 renewed invasion, blocking eight websites on February 25 and launching the "Kremlin Trumpets" campaign to name and shame the most prominent purveyors of Kremlin disinformation in the Czech Republic.

Opposition to the War Among Russian State Media Employees

Reports suggest the Kremlin's relentless disinformation and propaganda campaign to justify its war has become too much even for some direct participants in its dissemination. Marina Ovsyannikova, an employee of Russian state-funded Channel One, interrupted a March 14 live news broadcast, shouting anti-war slogans and holding a sign urging audiences not to believe state media. She was convicted March 15 of a misdemeanor for "inciting unpermitted protests" and released. According to Meduza, Ovsyannikova's objection to the war against Ukraine is "not uncommon" among state media employees. BBC reports the war has caused "a quiet but steady stream of resignations from Russia's tightly controlled state-run TV," including staff from Channel One Europe, NTV, RT', and RT sister agency Ruptly. Journalist Roman Super said many employees were

GEC Russian Disinformation Trends on Ukraine

December 18, 2023

BTHE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

Disinformation Overview

BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS LABS DISINFORMATION ESCALATES: Russia has recently increased its disinformation on alleged biological laboratories and weapons. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov claimed March 3 that Ukraine's public and animal health facilities were "biological military laboratories." Then, on March 6, Russian MoD Spokesman Maj. Gen. Konashenkov alleged Russia had proof the U.S. Biological Threat Reduction Program labs in Ukraine were developing biological weapons and employees of those labs had destroyed "pathogens of plague, anthrax, tularemia, cholera and other deadly diseases" on February 24. Later, the head of Russia's CBRN defense forces presented "evidence" on March 7 that as many as 30 U.S. military biological labs across Ukraine had worked on several deadly pathogens; that their operations had coincided with a spike in infectious diseases in the region; and that serum samples taken from patients of "Slavic ethnicity" under the pretext of testing COVID-19 treatment methods had been sent back to the United States. Russian state and proxy media outlets have widely covered these disinformation claims, and today, PRC Foreign Ministry Spokesman Zhao Lijian and Chinese state media echoed them. Kremlin-linked outlets have amplified Zhao's remarks. In reality, the U.S. Cooperative Threat Reduction Program has helped partners fight COVID-19, dispose of chemical weapons in Syria and Libya, and reduce the threat of state and non-state actors acquiring or developing biological weapons.

RADIOLOGICAL AND NUCLEAR DISINFORMATION INTENSIFIES: A new Russian false narrative that the United States transferred plutonium to Ukraine to help Kyiv develop a "dirty" nuclear weapon has spread widely across Russian state media and outlets linked to U.S.-sanctioned Yevgeniy Prigozhin (TASS, RIA Novosti, Zvezda, PolitRossiya). The Russian MFA also alleged March 8 that Ukrainian intelligence and Azov Battalion militants had "rigged" a reactor near Kharkiv to stage a provocation and accuse Russian forces of attacking the nuclear facility. This claim also received widespread coverage in Russian media. Russia falsely claims Kyiv intended to develop nuclear weapons capacity with Western help and uses this

New Sanctions on Russian Disinformation Entities

The U.S. Department of the Treasury sanctioned 26 Russia- and Ukraine-based individuals and seven Russian entities March 3 in connection with Russia's efforts to disseminate disinformation targeting Ukraine. The sanctioned individuals included leaders and operatives of Russian intelligence-directed outlets Strategic Culture Foundation (SCF) (SVR-linked), InfoRos (GRU), News Front (FSB), and SouthFront (FSB). Treasury also sanctioned Odna Rodyna, Rhythm of Eurasia, and Journal Kamerton, outlets created by and affiliated with the SCF. Additionally, Treasury designated the Prigozhin-linked websites United World International (UWI), its chief editor Darya Dugina, and Geopolitica.ru, a website directed by Darya's father Aleksander Dugin. Russian intelligence services direct and control outlets that falsely purport to be independent media, but publish disinformation and propaganda created by these services. **These outlets target Ukrainian and Russian citizens with false claims attempting to portray Ukraine as the aggressor and to manipulate and weaken perceived adversaries.**

Disinformation Spotlight: Serbia

Support for Moscow runs deep in Serbia, and local media are no exception. Serbian President Vučić has said 85 percent of his countrymen will "always side with Russia whatever may happen," a sentiment echoed in many recent local headlines. Indeed, the information environment in Serbia actively reinforces Kremlin narratives that glorify Russia's military, denounce sanctions, and support Russia's purported "de-Nazification of Ukraine," even as some outlets' reporting acknowledges the potential for the conflict to destabilize the wider region. According to one Serbian public policy advocacy group, only three local media outlets reported on Serbia's vote for the March 2 UNGA resolution condemning Russia's invasion. Instead, outlets condemned the West for sanctions and opined that those sanctions will impose economic hardship for Serbia as well.

"Russia will not stop until the neo-fascists are defeated"

GEC Russian Disinformation Snapshot on Ukraine

August 2, 2022

Check www.state.gov/disarming-disinformation for the latest State Department public releases on countering Russia's disinformation on Ukraine.

OBTAINED BY AMERICA FIRST LEGAL FOUNDATION

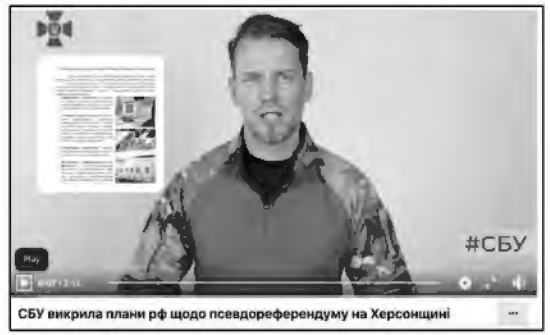
Disinformation Overview

CLAIMING UKRAINIAN PROVOCATION IN OLENIVKA: Russia blames Ukraine and the United States for the July 29 killing of 53 Azov battalion prisoners of war at a prison in the Russian-occupied town of Olenivka. RIA Novosti initially reported Ukraine attacked the camp with 120-millimeter artillery shells, but then the disinformation ecosystem began amplifying Ministry of Defense (MOD) claims that Kyiv used U.S.-supplied high-mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS). The MOD's and "DNR's" spokesmen accused Kyiv of carrying out a "bloody provocation" to prevent Ukrainian "nationalists" from surrendering to Russia and revealing their alleged crimes. An RT op-ed argued "all signs on the ground point to a Ukrainian attack," citing pro-Kremlin Telegram channel Rybar and attempting to portray it as an independent "online observer." Ukraine said it intercepted conversations proving Russia attacked the prison to "cover up the torture and execution of prisoners," and pointed to the possible involvement of the Wagner Group. Based on statements from U.S. officials and satellite images, the Institute for the Study of War assessed Russian forces were responsible for the killing. The Red Cross has not had access to Olenivka despite Moscow's promise to allow an "objective investigation."

LOOK AT KOSOVO, NOT UKRAINE: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is promoting the false narrative that the United States is behind renewed unrest between Kosovo and Serbia because Washington is failing to achieve its goals in Ukraine. State disinformation outlets RT and Sputnik both claim the United States is once again using its "recipe for chaos" in Kosovo as a part of its "broader geopolitical war against Russia," while Chechen strongman Kadyrov blamed NATO using similar rhetoric. The FSB-tasked News Front took specific aim at the upcoming U.S. midterm elections, stating "Biden needs a win" in Kosovo to show victory, but Moscow will not let the United States take Belgrade "hostage." Given Russian media coverage – including comments from one Serbian MP who tweeted Serbia may have to "begin the denazification of the Balkans" – it is possible Russia is accusing the United States of doing what Russia itself is doing. Russia aims to escalate the situation in the Balkans to take both eyes and resources away from Ukraine.

SBU Uncovers Russia's Plan for Kherson Referendum

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) said September 1 that it exposed Kremlin plans to hold a "referendum" on the occupied Kherson region joining Russia. According to documents reportedly intercepted by the SBU, a pro-Kremlin movement "Волонтеры за Россию" (Volunteers for Russia) was assigned a key role in the process, including activities aimed at fabricating local support for Russia and staging "reports" for Russian television channels. Pro-Kremlin activists planned to form twenty "election commissions" and organize more than 140 simultaneous pro-Russian demonstrations, which would have been covered by Kremlin-controlled media and bloggers. The SBU said pro-Russian "collaborators" reported to their Russian handlers that the people of Kherson do not accept the idea of joining Russia and actively resist the occupation.



SBU video screenshot exposing Russian plans for a Kherson "pseudo referendum."

U.S. Treasury Sanctions Two Kremlin Malign Influence Actors

On July 29, the U.S. Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on two malign influence actors working on behalf of the Kremlin to destabilize and manipulate the United States and its allies and partners. Since at least 2020, Aleksandr Ionov cooperated and coordinated with the FSB to identify socio-political points of contention within the United States and worked directly with Yevgeniy Prigozhin's Project Lakhta to influence U.S. elections. Ionov also runs two organizations meant to spread disinformation and host events and protests to support fringe groups in opposition to U.S. objectives: Anti-Globalization Movement of Russia (AGMR) and STOP-Imperialism. In addition to being sanctioned, the Department of Justice unsealed an indictment charging Ionov for his foreign malign influence activities against the United States. The second sanctioned individual is Natalya Burlinova, head of PICREADI (also known as "Creative Diplomacy"). Despite being described as "independent," Creative Diplomacy is directed and funded by Russia's intelligence services to bring together Western "aspiring leaders" for programs and events which take an alternative (pro-Kremlin) look at Russia's relations with the West. These programs included in-person and virtual meetings with major Russian political figures and government entities. In reality, Russian intelligence tracked the careers and activities of Creative Diplomacy alumni since at least 2017, likely for recruitment.

ED 10/31/2024 155

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Gendered Disinformation

Tactics, Themes, and Trends by State- and Non-State Actors

OBTAINED BY AMERICA FIRST LEGAL FOUNDATION

Report Contributors:

European External Action Service, Canada, Germany, Slovakia, United Kingdom, United States

Date: 15 July 2022

Releasable to: IPCSD, CDMD, G7+ RRM

Executive Summary

Gendered disinformation is weaponized by both state and non-state actors to silence women, discourage online political discourse, and shape perceptions toward gender and the role of women in democracies. Disinformation content that plays on gendered stereotypes and sexualization of women is part of the adversarial toolkit, utilizing a unique combination of dissemination techniques. This joint report strives to build awareness about gendered disinformation and its impacts on women in public life, as well as its corresponding impacts on wider societal resilience and democracy. The following joint research product on gendered disinformation—compiled by members of the International Partnership for Countering State-Sponsored Disinformation (IPCSD) and Counter Disinformation and Media Development (CDMD) groups—gathers 62 international cases and seven one-page case studies of the phenomenon and analyzes them below.

The report and database contain contributions from Canada, the European External Action Service (EEAS), Germany, Slovakia, the UK, and the United States, and have been published to the GEC-IQ Global platform to serve as a resource for IPCSD, CDMD, and G7+ RRM partners to access and analyze. The findings of this report are useful to communicators looking to produce content that promotes gender mainstreaming and women's rights to target audiences who may also be impacted by content that promotes patriarchal, traditional, and anti-gender values. The report and database are useful to data analysts who are documenting the techniques, tactics, and protocols (TTPs) used to spread disinformation broadly, and who wish to identify the TTPs that are used specifically in gendered and identity-based disinformation. The report is also useful to policy practitioners who are developing regulations that are sensitive to gender-specific issues, and who wish to understand the regional nuances of gendered disinformation.

Please note that this report contains explicit and sensitive language relating to gendered disinformation.

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The Gendered Disinformation Playbook: Key Takeaways

We captured 13 unique themes of gendered disinformation, including the wide use of gendered stereotypes, hyper-sexualization, and political targeting of women to shame and discredit them.

- Most common themes were sexist, sexualized, and political.
- Multiple identity-based and political themes were used in conjunction, reflecting that any vector of a person's identity may be used against them in disinformation to discredit and shame either them or their communities.
- Women with intersecting identities may have more themes of identity-based disinformation targeted at them.

Themes varied across 23 countries and 7 regions.

- Gendered disinformation was used within local contexts, such as being spread by "strongman" politicians in populist regimes like Brazil and the Philippines.
- Traditional gender roles were promoted in European countries where anti-gender campaigns are prevalent.
- In many regions, masculinity is linked to power and leadership potential, which results in women politicians being scrutinized over their gendered attributes by being overly sexualized in visual gendered disinformation.

Perpetrators of gendered disinformation included both state and non-state actors, with some instances of both coordinating on gendered disinformation campaigns.

- State actors included Russia, China, Iran, Brazil, India, Turkey, and Zimbabwe
- Non-state actors included the Orthodox Church, far-right groups and individuals or bloggers, and social media users across a range of platforms.

Dissemination techniques most commonly included coordinated social media activity that is spontaneous or pre-meditated across multiple platforms.

- Most common content types were false visual materials (doctored or misleading images or videos).
- Media articles, memes, bespoke hashtags, public statements by politicians or influential people, and even manga cartoons were also observed.

Target types included individuals, groups, and legislation, with varying degrees of impact.

- 80% of cases captured targeted individual politicians, journalists, and activists.
- Negative impacts of gendered disinformation on individuals were often that they left their jobs or halted speaking out online.
- When legislation and theories are the targets of gendered and identity-based disinformation, the public and political consensus underpinning them can be reduced as a result, in some cases leading to policy reversals.

Potential future research initiatives include:

- Gendered disinformation in Africa and Latin America
- State actors' evolving tactics
- Russia's use of anti-gender, traditional, and patriarchal narratives in Europe
- Communications responses to counter gendered disinformation

*If you are interested in contributing to future joint research projects, please reach out to info@geciqglobal.com.

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Introduction

The adversarial toolkit for malign influence through disinformation includes targeting women and people with intersecting identities. The goal of targeting people and groups based on stereotypes of their identities with falsehoods is twofold. First, the goal is to dissuade them from practicing their freedom of expression using their voices to uphold beliefs and ideals that are in contradiction to the adversaries' beliefs. The second is to dissuade broader identity-based groups from obtaining and maintaining the rights of their communities. Disinformation based on gendered and identity-based stereotypes and sexuality is a threat to democracy because it undermines citizens' rights to impartial, fact-based information, and can change the make-up of democratic representation.[1]

We have defined gendered disinformation as a subset of misogynist abuse and violence against women (VAW) that "uses false or misleading gender and sex-based narratives against women, often with some degree of coordination, aimed at deterring women from participating in the public sphere."[2] While maintaining a focus on gendered disinformation against women in this report, we expand our data collection to consider other forms of identity-based disinformation against people and groups. We analyzed false narratives that target a broad range of identities, such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, and marital status. The creation and dissemination of gendered and identity-based disinformation is done to attack or undermine people or groups based on their identities and to promote political, economic, or social objectives.[3]

Given that a wide range of objectives may aim to be achieved through the dissemination of gendered disinformation, multiple perpetrators utilize it within their influence operations. State-based gendered disinformation is mobilized to influence international democratic processes by targeting politicians, policy makers, journalists, activists, and the policies themselves.[4] Gendered disinformation is also utilized by other groups to influence social norms and economic processes. Regardless of their creator, any instance of gendered disinformation can be amplified by any actor who may benefit from such objectives.

Rationale

Gendered disinformation is important to study and document for three reasons. First, it is a deliberate tactic and weapon which aims to polarize attitudes, sow division, and undermine social cohesion. Second, gendered disinformation does harm to the individuals who are targeted, as well as to populations and to democracy. It is used by authoritarian and anti-gender actors to undermine democratic

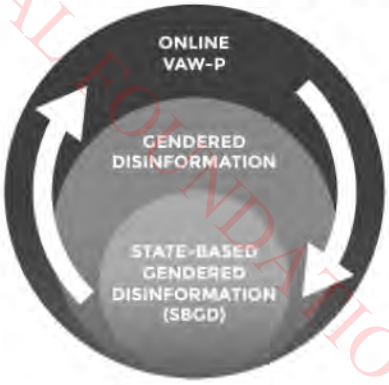

Figure 1: Nested forms of online violence ogoinst women (retrieved from NDI)

[1] https://wiisglobal.org/an-overlooked-threat-to-democracy-gendered-disinformation-about-female-politicians/
[2] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online
[3] https://www.ndi.org/publications/addressing-online-misogyny-and-gendered-disinformation-how-guide
[4] https://www.ndi.org/publications/addressing-online-misogyny-and-gendered-disinformation-how-guide

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ideals and promote traditional, patriarchal values.[5] Third, gendered disinformation, its impacts, and effective communications responses must be studied because responses can do harm when they are not informed by the communities and individuals who are targeted.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this joint report is to quantify the playbook of gendered disinformation through the creation of a database of gendered disinformation cases and extended summaries of cases that bring important tactics to light. The findings will inform government practitioners on how to formulate appropriate communications responses to gendered disinformation narratives within wider responses. Specifically, this report documents the following components of the gendered disinformation playbook:

- **Themes of gendered disinformation narratives**. While the key themes of gendered disinformation narratives play on gendered stereotypes and sexualize targets, these are often combined with other identity attributes through homophobic, racist, classist, transphobic, and xenophobic narratives.
- **Dissemination techniques used to spread gendered disinformation narratives**. Dissemination techniques often cross online and offline boundaries. They include using social media campaigns, public statements, TV broadcasts, and other professionally created media to spread falsehoods that are textual/oral or visual (image or video)-based.
- **Variation in themes across geography**. While this research was largely based on secondary data sources (reports and news articles) that tend to focus on gendered disinformation in the Global North, contributors worked to locate examples of gendered disinformation in the Global South, in both secondary and primary data. Trends in certain regions and countries are highlighted in this report. [6]
- **Types of people, groups, or entities who are targeted with gendered disinformation**. These include individuals (often politicians, journalists, and activists), groups (such as the LGBTQ+ community), theories (such as gender theory and critical race theory), and legislation (such as the Istanbul Convention).
- **Perpetrators who disseminate gendered disinformation**. These include state-backed entities, politicians themselves, far-right groups, and other entities who stand to benefit from women and people with marginalized identities retreating from the public light.
- **Communications responses and counter-disinformation measures.** While few direct communications responses were observed in the database, rationale for why this is not recommended is provided, as well as a case of a multi-lateral partnership to counter online harassment against women.

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[5] The anti-gender movement aims to roll back on the concept of universal human rights on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, and other intersecting attributes. More information here: https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/countering-antigender-campaigns
[6] The term "Global South" refers broadly to the regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceana. The use of the phrase Global South marks a shift from a central focus on development or cultural difference toward an emphasis on geopolitical relations of power.

Methods and Case Collection

The findings in this report are drawn from a co-created database of detailed gendered disinformation cases. Cases that exemplify the most noteworthy trends were expanded into one-page summaries.

Case Studies

The case database contains **62** entries and was co-created by a group of international analysts and practitioners. Contributors were asked to include two gendered disinformation cases from the Global South, and two from their own country or a country in which they have expertise. The cases were discovered through consultation of previous reports on disinformation, through searching for news articles which mention disinformation cases against women (and included if they contained gendered dimensions), and through primary research on women leaders of interest. The cases capture the following information:

- Date or date-range of case
- One sentence summary of case + further details
- Dissemination techniques
- Narrative theme(s)
- Country of target
- Language of narrative
- Perpetrator (if known)
- Target types + direct impact (if documented in primary or secondary source)
- Communications responses

Case evidence was collected via both secondary and primary sources. Secondary sources included reports and news articles and made up **87%** of cases in the databases. Primary sources came from original research conducted by the contributors or their teams and made up **13%** of cases.

One-Page Summaries

Contributors had the option to elaborate on interesting cases in one-page summaries. A draft one-page summary template was provided and contained the same information as above, with the addition of possibly adding images to the one-pager. **Seven** one-page summaries of cases were produced and located at the end of this report and are referenced in the sections they best exemplify.

The Gendered Disinformation Playbook

The Gendered Disinformation Playbook presented here is not intended to capture all aspects of gendered disinformation, but rather synthesizes the patterns observed in the 62 cases that were collected by a team of analysts and practitioners. The report aims to capture the key patterns in the themes, dissemination techniques, regional differences, impacts, targets, and perpetrators of gendered disinformation to inspire future analytical, policy, and communications work.

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Themes of Gendered Disinformation

A total of 13 unique themes were identified across cases of gendered disinformation detailed in the database, though in many cases multiple themes were leveraged in combination. Sexist narratives, which target gender stereotypes, were the most commonly observed, appearing in a total of 35 cases. This was followed by political and misogynist narratives which target individuals because they are women or by perpetrators known for targeting women. Political and misogynist narratives appeared in a total of 31 cases. The use of sexualized themes, which involved targeting a woman's sexuality or over-sexualizing her, was the third most prevalent, appearing in 28 cases. Homophobic themes, which claim an individual is homosexual or target the LGBTQ+ community, appeared in six cases, while religious themes, which target a person based on their religion (often based on stereotypes), appeared in five cases. Racialized themes, or claims about a person's racialized identity, and transphobic narratives, which allege an individual is hiding their "true gender" or target trans persons, each appeared in five cases. Nationalist themes, or false claims about a person's allegiance to their country, and classist themes, which target a woman based on her perceived class, appeared in two cases each. Disinformation narratives based on a person's marital status, false claims that a woman is a racist, and emasculation themes appeared in one case each.

Theme	# of Cases in Database	Definition
Sexist	35	False claims about a person's gendered attributes or stereotypes
Sexualized	28	False claims about a person's sexuality
Political	27	Targeting person because they are a woman
Homophobic	6	False claims that a person is homosexual, or making a false claim about the LGBTQ+ community
Religious	5	False claims about a person's religion, often based on stereotypes
Racialized	5	False claims about a person's racialized identity
Transphobic	5	Claiming that a person is hiding their "true gender" or making false claims about trans people
Misogynist	4	The perpetrator is a "known" misogynist (this could be nested under political theme)
Nationalist	2	False claims about a person's allegiance to their country
Classist	2	False claims about a person based on their perceived class
Marital status	1	False claims based on a person's marital status
Racist	1	False claims that a person is a racist
Emasculation	1	Use of female traits to emasculate or delegitimize male leaders

Intersectional Themes

Of cases that involved multiple themes, the use of political, sexist, and sexualized narratives was among most commonly observed—seen in a total of eight cases. A combination of both sexist and political themes was the second most used, also observed in eight cases. Overall, political and sexist themes were the most often used in conjunction with other themes, in 25 cases each. Sexualized themes were the third-most commonly observed alongside other themes, in 19 total cases. Other themes were far less commonly used in conjunction with other narratives but were observed in several cases.

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Cases of Political, Sexist, and Sexualized Themes

A total of eight cases were identified that leveraged a triumvirate of political and misogynistic, sexist, and sexualized themes. Within the identified cases in our database, these narratives targeted both women and men politicians as well as women journalists. Italian MP and former President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Laura Boldrini, was targeted with "politically motivated, vicious online attacks carried out by armies of trolls who used sexism and fake news" which she said was an attempt to silence and delegitimize her.[7] Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová, meanwhile, was criticized by Slovak SMER-SD MP Lubos Blaha in a Facebook post, where he called her an "American barbie" alongside three images of Čaputová in dresses and heels to portray her as an incompetent, out-of-touch elite with stronger ties to the United States than to her own country.[8]

The remainder of cases using political and misogynistic, sexist, and sexualized themes were from the Philippines, targeting both men and women political candidates as well as journalists. Philippine woman senator Leila de Lima was targeted online surrounding an alleged affair, with messages calling her "saba [banana] queen," an innuendo referencing a term used in de Lima's hearing when a witness claimed that her affair involved her and her partner feeding each other bananas, and a "whore that satisfies her sexual desires," accusing her of providing sexual favors to her security detail and drivers. These allegations were often linked to questions about her decision-making, with comments like "is this what saba [banana] did to her brain?" [9]

Similarly, Leni Robredo, the current Vice President of the Philippines who was fired from her role as head of the government's anti-drug agency after criticizing extrajudicial killings, has often been subjected to gendered disinformation. This includes allegations of dishonesty, calling her a "fake VP," a "cheater," and a "liar," which are often used in conjunction with the word "bitch." Robredo has been called a "lying bitch," "fraudulent monster bitch," and a "despicable greedy hypocrite bitch," among others. She has also been portrayed as unintelligent, being called a "boba"—a derogatory term for calling a woman stupid. There were also references to Robredo not being able to do math, a reference to a supposed multiplication error she made when speaking about the cost of rice. After a journalist was misquoted in a statement about rape threats against Robredo, claims were levied that she had misunderstood or exaggerated the threat, disregarding the original abuse.

Sexualized disinformation against Robredo has also included accusations of her having a sexual relationship with a married lawmaker, her hairdresser, and two government officials. She has also faced campaigns seeking to remove her from political office through impeachment, resignation, or an election loss, which used hashtags including: "#OustLeni2020", "#FakeVP", "#ImpeachLeniRobredo", "#LeniResign" and "#GoodbyeLeni." Some of these tweets included physical threats in the form of calls

[7] https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5dba105f102367021c44b63f/t/5dc431aac6bd4e7913c45f7d/1573138953986/191106+SHEPERSISTED_Final.pdf
[8] facebook.com/LBlaha/photos/a.205222905501566 3/2545752315663332/; GEC Report: GEC2020-EUR-153 "Slovakia's Facebook Information Landscape Prior to Parliamentary Elections"
[9] https://demos.co.uk/project/engendering-hate-the-contours-of-state-aligned-gendered-disinformation-online/

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to action.[10] Opposition Senator Risa Hontiveros, meanwhile, was called a "thirsty slut" on Twitter after a photo of her wearing a skirt at a State of the Nation Address was shared. [11] Male Senator Antonio Trillanes, a critic of Duterte, has also been targeted with memes showing him as "effeminate" and alleging that he was having an affair with a news anchor. This sharply contrasts with sentiment around Duterte, which promotes the idea that a good leader is a strong man who is "courageous" and "aggressive." Conversely, criticism has included calling him a "sissy bitch"; one tweet claimed that the Philippines would always have a "pussy culture" if it did not honor military personnel, with the military viewed as a traditional masculine endeavor.[12]

Journalists at the women-led media outlet Rappler, which is critical of Duterte, are often described in the media as "presstitutes," "fake news," "fake reporters," and "paid hacks," with narratives implying that they are not serious journalists or are working for a mysterious funder, sometimes using the term "yellow funded presstitutes." In other cases, they have been described as "evil genius" or unleashing "hell" on others. Rappler CEO Maria Ressa has personally been the victim of targeted gendered disinformation attacks online. Ressa is often called a "presstitute" due to her vocal criticism of the techniques used to discredit and attack Duterte critics online and in the media. Tweets seek to discredit her, claiming she is a "bitch" who "keeps on saying that she is being oppressed when she isn't" or casting doubt on Ressa's statements that pro-Duterte accounts are sending her rape threats, calling it "fake news." The attacks against Ressa illuminate the wider feedback loop in such situations, where women who are vocal in speaking out against disinformation become subject to further abuse.[13] Pop star and blogger Mocha Uson, who is a prominent Duterte supporter and has worked in various government capacities, has also been targeted with claims that she has no business being involved in politics and should stick to being a "slut," a "mere sexy starlet," "filthy bitch," "cheap whore," or "bitch." One post stated that the user respected her more when she was "just a slut" than when she was involved in "propaganda" work. A tweet that was shared several times, with different Twitter users mentioned in each post, questioned why anyone would bother with her, a "prostitute" feigning intelligence, and claimed she was only good at a lengthy list of sexual acts.[14]

The attacks against Ressa illuminate the wider feedback loop in such situations, where women who are vocal in speaking out against disinformation become subject to further abuse and falsehoods.

Cases of Political and Sexist Themes

Cases that leveraged both political and sexist themes most often involved targeted gendered disinformation attacks against women politicians and political figures. In one instance, disinformation

[10] https://demos.co.uk/project/engendering-hate-the-contours-of-state-aligned-gendered-disinformation-online/
[11] https://demos.co.uk/project/engendering-hate-the-contours-of-state-aligned-gendered-disinformation-online/
[12] https://demos.co.uk/project/engendering-hate-the-contours-of-state-aligned-gendered-disinformation-online/
[13] https://demos.co.uk/project/engendering-hate-the-contours-of-state-aligned-gendered-disinformation-online/
[14] https://demos.co.uk/project/engendering-hate-the-contours-of-state-aligned-gendered-disinformation-online/

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targeting Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová alleged that she was a CIA asset funded by the United States and used misogynistic narratives about her physical appearance. In a Facebook post, Slovak SMER-SD MP Lubos Blaha[15] claimed that Čaputová was a U.S. intelligence agent funded by both the United States and businessman and philanthropist George Soros (an individual often at the center of far-right conspiracy theories), due to Čaputová's advocacy for a Defense Agreement with Washington. The post further accused Čaputová of treason. It was subsequently amplified by pro-Kremlin media, including *Sputnik Czech Republic,* and further spread on social media, often garnering other sexist comments about her appearance.[16]

Click here to read the one-pager about gendered disinformation attacks against Slovak President, Zuzana Čaputová

A combination of sexist and political themes was similarly observed in attacks on then-candidate for German Chancellor Annalena Baerbock. Coordinated activity in support of the Alternative for Germany party included narratives about Baerbock and the German Greens' ties to the United States.[17] Another such case involved criticism of Belarusian presidential candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, which saw Kremlin-aligned Telegram channels seeking to undermine Tikhanovskaya with claims that the "West" was assisting her for political gain.[18] In another example, as Spanish politicians Irene Montero and Beatriz Gimeno took office, disinformation was spread accusing them of spending hundreds of thousands of euros of public money on "feminist stickers" to promote gender equality during the COVID-19 pandemic, though the contract for the stickers was finalized in 2019 before the start of the pandemic.[19]

Techniques of Dissemination

Ten unique dissemination techniques and content types were captured in the case database. The most common technique was to spread gendered disinformation in a coordinated fashion across social media platforms, and common content types were visual false or misleading images and videos. According to the DISARM framework,[20] which catalogues common trends, tactics, and techniques of disinformation, the strategic objective of disinformation is to distort the truth and create alternative narratives. In cases of gendered disinformation captured in this report, perpetrator's goals appear to

[15] Note: Blaha has separately been criticized by the International Press Institute and Slovak Academy of Sciences for social media posts smearing female journalists following critical reporting, including asking one journalist when she would "make a filthy video from her bedroom."

[16] www.facebook.com/LBlaha/posts/476500000513953; https://cz-sputniknews-com.translate.goog/20191016/skandal-jako-izrael-caputova-trojskym-konem-cia-blaha-ma-sokujici-informace-o-liberalni-opozici-10829116.html?_x_tr_sl=cs&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc; https://www-strana--smer-sk.translate.goog/aktuality/clanky/post/keby-bola-caputova-na-vyplatnej-paske-americkej-cia-nevyzeralo-inak?_x_tr_sl=sk&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc; https://cz-sputniknews-com.translate.goog/20190325/blaha-caputove-dela-kampan-agentura-jejiz-majitel-se-snazil-o-prevrat-v-cerne-hore-9503333.html?_x_tr_sl=cs&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc

[17] GEC Report: GEC2021-EUR-595 "AfD and Other Far-Right Accounts Tweet About COVID-19 and the Green Party Likely Amplified by Accounts Engaged in Inauthentic and Coordinated Behavior"

[18] GEC Report: GEC2020-EUR-926 "Belarusian Election Update: Pro-Kremlin Telegram Channels Actively Promote Kremlin Official Storyline, Develop Kremlin-Friendly Online Community"

[19] https://maldita.es/malditobulo/20200425/adjudicacion-225000-euros-pegatinas-igualdad-irene-montero-beatriz-gimeno/

[20] https://www.disarm.foundation/framework

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be to discredit and delegitimize women in the media landscape and ultimately suppress their voices and presence in positions of leadership.

Developing a Gendered Disinformation Campaign

Before campaigns are publicly launched, perpetrators must prepare their content and dissemination strategy. In almost all cases analyzed, perpetrators prepared materials (such as false or altered images, videos and documents, memes, media articles, or documentaries) to distribute defamatory narratives against their victims. Gendered disinformation campaigns are seeded in targeted ideological communities with tendency to align with misogynistic messages.

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Hybrid hack and leak operations are also used to obtain sensitive content. Iranian journalist Yeganeh Rezaian's Facebook account was hacked, and the attackers threatened to blackmail her by publicly publishing "dirty photos" on social media.[21] Pro-Kremlin trolls also accessed private information of the Finnish journalist Jessikka Aro, and they released her medical history and her home address online.[22]

During the planning phase of their campaign, perpetrators could also develop communication channels to distribute the information into selected media ecosystems. The digital ecosystem and the perpetrators involved in the circulation of the content can also be developed (such as automated personas or impersonated accounts, false social media pages and groups). American-Chinese journalist Leta Hong Fincher was impersonated online after one influential PRC-aligned Twitter user twisted her critical statements against PRC state-affiliated media.[23]

Elsewhere, one of the most recurrent techniques is the creation of dedicated hashtags to publicize the stories. Filipino CEO Maria Ressa and politicians Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (United States), Kamala Harris (United States) and Leni Robredo (Philippines) were targeted by the hashtags #presstitiue, #SandyCortez, #HeelsUpHarris, and #GoodbyeLeni, respectively.

The far-right, QAnon adherents, anti-abortion groups and consumers of porn sites were often the first target audiences for gendered disinformation campaigns before they permeate more mainstream spaces. In 2016, Amanda Renteria, National Political Director of Hillary Clinton's U.S. presidential campaign received hateful messages from QAnon communities in the context of the publication of faked documents aimed at discrediting the Clinton campaign.[24] In Italy, anti-abortion activists diffused

[21] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online
[22] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online
[23] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online
[24] https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5dba105f102367021c44b63f/t/5dc431aac6bd4e7913c45f7d/1573138953986/191106+SHEPERSISTED_Final.pdf

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a false claim on instant messaging apps that the government task force for the post-pandemic recovery was secretly introducing gender theory into the school curriculum.[25]

In another example, the daughter of Philippine Vice President Leni Robredo was connected to sexually explicit material posted on a porn site when her mother was running for president.
Once the content was distributed according to a plan, in most cases several coordinated actors contributed to expose and amplify the claims (aligned news media, influential voices, bots, trolls, etc.). In at least six cases, troll accounts were used to inflame tensions across the political spectrum and post slanderous claims against women in positions of leadership. Laura Boldrini, Congresswoman and former President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies was attacked by motivated armies of trolls who used sexism and false information trying to silence and delegitimize her.[26]

In the most critical cases, online actions were aligned with offline activities as part of a larger campaign to reach their strategic objectives.

Dissemination Technique	# Occurrences in Database	Definition
Multi-platform coordination	26	Multiple social media accounts publishing similar claims, either with back-end coordination or spontaneous coordination (dog-piling), on multiple platforms
Visual gendered disinformation	14	Fake visual material such as images that are doctored, misleading, misattributed, doctored videos (deepfakes) or misleading videos (cheapfakes), or memes that contain false claims through the combination of text + image
Media article	11	Media article containing a falsehood
False text/hashtag	9	False claims made in textual form, including within a hashtag
Political public Statement	9	Statement containing a false claim made in public (in a speech, on social media, etc.) by a politician
Other content types (>5 occurrences in database)	7	TV broadcast clips, documentaries, commentary videos containing false claims (not doctored videos), manga cartoons

Multi-Platform Coordination

Perpetrators choose dissemination platforms they believe will effectively spread their gendered disinformation messages. In most cases, multiple perpetrators intervene in the publication and amplification of narratives. These can be dedicated channels created to disseminate information pollution across multiple platforms (such as state-affiliated media or interconnected websites and channels to release or amplify information in a coordinated pattern), networks of bots to amplify narratives, or they can rely on influential voices to give their narratives more visibility. Nine cases involved politicians making public statements containing false claims.

[25] https://www.nextquotidiano.it/gender-nel-piano-colao-educazione-gender/
[26] https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5dba105f102367021c44b63f/t/5dc431aac6bd4e7913c45f7d/1573138953986/191106+SHEPERSISTED_Final.pdf

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A fake nude picture of Ukrainian lawmaker Svitlana Zalishchuk, produced by a coordinated network of Russian websites, was actively picked up on social media by Ukrainian users.[27] A similar technique was used by a network of coordinated accounts exposing manipulated sexualized images of U.S. Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer during the 2021 U.S. presidential election.[28] Elsewhere, Russian state-affiliated media launched a disinformation campaign against Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya, with multiple coordinated attacks using state affiliated media in different languages and statements done by influential politicians and well-known faces such as Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko or *RT* chief editor Margarita Simonyan.[29]

Visual Gendered Disinformation

Visual materials, such as doctored pictures, videos, deepfakes, or cheapfakes, belong among the most popular methods of dissemination of false narratives. They are frequently used when targeting women with cases recorded all over the world, for example in Europe, Brazil, the Philippines, and the United States. Presidential candidates, members of parliament, family members of women running for a political office as well as journalists are targeted, showing any woman in the eye of the public or people close to these women could become a victim of these tactics.

Most of the cases which involved doctored visual material referred to an alleged involvement of the victim in a sexual activity, with the aim to make these women look "dirty" or overly sexualized to discredit them and make them look unfit for a public role. Fake visual material was also used to portray racist, gendered, and transphobic narratives.

The spread of gendered disinformation resulted in public shaming, humiliation, and loss of credibility, despite the visual material being debunked. Under public pressure, some victims removed themselves from public life. Others used the situation as an opportunity to educate the population on the impact of disinformation and became more involved in the fight against them.

Targeting Women Politicians with Visual Identity-Based Falsehoods

Recorded cases show that women politicians often face a barrage of sexualized disinformation through fake visual material. It combines long-held sexist narratives with the anonymity and reach of social media to smear women's reputations and remove them from public life. Fake nude photos and fake sex tapes of women politicians have been spread online in Ukraine, Georgia, Croatia, Rwanda, the United States, and Germany. Transphobic narratives are another theme present in the category of visual gendered disinformation—claiming a person is hiding their "true gender."

[27] https://www.codastory.com/disinformation/how-disinformation-became-a-new-threat-to-women/
[28] https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/03/us/disinformation-online-attacks-female-politicians.html
[29] ria.ru/20211202/Lukashenko-1761831686.html

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Such cases were found in the United States and New Zealand. For instance, the first female U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris was accused of being a man after a photo of her side by side with her alleged former identity—a man called Kamal Aroush—was spread. In fact, "Aroush" was an image of Harris that had been doctored to include masculinized features. In Germany, politician Katharina Schulze was targeted with a fake image of her doing a Nazi salute, resulting in her being called "racist" and "anti-German" by social media users. During the Slovak presidential campaign, Zuzana Čaputová, was targeted with a doctored photo which had her nose edited to look more hooked and her lips enlarged to make her appear more stereotypically Jewish.

Targeting Activists and Journalists

Journalists are another group of victims targeted by visual gendered disinformation. Although it is a less prevalent method, false visual materials can impact a victim's life, career and relationship with politically active figures or government authorities.

False visual materials can impact a victim's life, career and relationship with politically active figures or government authorities.

Like politicians, journalists and activists are often targeted with fake visual material that portrays them in an overly sexualized manner, with the aim to undermine and discredit them. Sometimes, the targets fled their home countries and changed their careers.

In some cases, governments or members of a specific administration were involved in disseminating or amplifying narratives bolstered by false visual materials. In 2020, a harassment campaign against Brazilian journalist Patricia Campos Mello was launched following a congressional hearing on fake news. As a part of this campaign, which included Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, his sons, and his closest allies accusing her of spreading lies, were messages containing sexual slurs, memes, rape threats, and slanderous videos accusing her of being a "prostitute."

Iran has long engaged in campaigns to discredit domestic women activists as well as women Iranian and dual national political prisoners. Iranian-British aid worker Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe marks one of the most recent examples of Iranian state-run and state-affiliated media efforts to discredit women political prisoners with the threat of false visual material, which in Zaghari-Ratcliffe's case, was nude images claimed to have been collected when her Facebook account was hacked.

Click here to read the one-pager about Iranian state messaging to discredit female political prisoners

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Variation in Themes Across Geography

Targets of gendered disinformation are located around the world, with our case database capturing targets located in 23 countries across seven regions. The targets and regional patterns are described below.

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Eastern Europe & Post-Soviet States

Sexist narratives were often used against women in Eastern Europe and Post-Soviet States (Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Georgia, and Belarus) to undermine their political views and credibility and dissuade their participation in public life.

Female politicians and opposition figures in these countries were often accused of untrustworthiness or immorality or having limited intellectual ability. Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya has routinely been accused of being a Western puppet (as well as having her intelligence called into question), while women opposition figures in Russia have also been accused of being Western agents or "the next Western project."[30] In Ukraine, MP Kira Rudik was targeted with narratives that she works for the CIA. Such messaging implies that these women are untrustworthy and unpatriotic, potentially even traitors to their nations, and therefore should have no place in public life. Comments by Rudik about a "new world order" (regarding Ukraine's fight for democracy) were also taken out of context and spread on social media, with users claiming she was fighting for a secretly emerging totalitarian government (a conspiracy trope).[31]

Disinformation targeting women in this region also focused heavily on their supposed threat to traditional values or gender roles, either due to how they behaved or their political beliefs. Russian opposition figure Yulia Navalnaya, wife of jailed opposition leader Alexey Navalny, has come under attack for non-adherence to traditional gender roles. One senior politician claimed that she should be "correcting" her husband's behavior, while she has constantly been portrayed in state TV as a domineering wife ruling over a henpecked husband, with one online article claiming that she rules her household "like a tyrant" due to her "male character."[32] In Moldova, President Maia Sandu was consistently portrayed as a threat to "traditional values" during her 2016 and 2020 election campaigns due to her support for LGBTQ+ rights and her status as an unmarried woman. A former president labelled her a "laughingstock" and "national disgrace" for being a single woman in politics.[33] Her opponent's campaign materials claimed her victory would bring about the promotion of LGBTQ+

[30] youtube.com/watch?v=gTmOOegTA3w (archived); russian.rt.com/opinion/886960-aksyonov-tihanovskaya-blinken-ssha; https://pl.sputniknews.com/pisza-dla-nas/2021060814369240-za-nasz-i-wasz-17-wrzesnia/

[31] ttps://www.reddit.com/r/conspiracy/comments/t3ycdh/ukrainian_mp_kira_rudik_stated_in_an_interview_we/; https://www.reddit.com/r/conspiracy/comments/t44e9y/kira_rudik_the_ukrainian_politican_who_said_we/; https://www.reddit.com/r/conspiracy_commons/comments/t9wm9e/ukrainian_mp_kira_rudik_we_are_not_only_fighting/; https://www.bitchute.com/video/2Rjns41QZXOe/; https://www.reddit.com/r/censoredreality/comments/t44fjr/kira_rudik_the_ukrainian_politican_who_said_we/

[32] ntv.ru/novosti/2479180/

[33] https://www.huffpost.com/entry/moldovan-presidential-candidate-criticized-single-woman_n_5825ae9ee4b0c4b63b0c2a16

ideology and attacks on the Orthodox Church, and that as a single woman, she would seek to undermine the institution of the family.[34]

Comments about women's physical appearances also tended to feature strongly in gendered disinformation narratives in this region. The looks of Russian opposition figure Lyubov Sobol were often discussed online and in the media. In statements posted to social media platform VK by Concord Management and Consulting group (a mouthpiece for oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin) it was claimed that "she is a pretty, but mentally unbalanced girl" and "she is a cute, but highly unscrupulous animal."[35]

At times, women were also overly sexualized. Sobol was also accused of being "perverted" and it was suggested she had "pricked her husband's ass during role play" (in response to an accusation by Sobol that Prigozhin was behind an attack on her husband in which he was stabbed in the thigh with a psychotropic substance).[36] In 2020, fake nudes of Ukrainian MP Svitlana Zalishchuk were produced by Russian websites and then picked up on and shared by social media users. A screenshot of a Facebook post claiming Zalishchuk had promised to run naked through Kyiv was circulated online for over a year, objectifying and oversexualizing her.[37] In the run-up to the 2021 election in Georgia, women candidates were also subject to a sexualized disinformation campaign where false sex tapes of Georgian women MPs were spread online, with intimidating messages.[38]

Click here to read the one-pager about how church, media, and officials targeted female politicians and spread disinformation about threats to "traditional values" during Moldovan elections

Latin America

Cases identified in Brazil tended to be political and sexist in nature, targeting journalists and politicians critical of President Bolsonaro. For instance, after Bianca Santana published a 2018 article reviewing evidence of links between Bolsonaro and the assassination of Rio de Janeiro councilwoman Marielle Franco, the President himself accused her of spreading "fake news" in his weekly YouTube address. Potential cross-cutting themes in this case also include racist and homophobic sources of bias, as Bianca Santana is a black woman and Marielle Franco was openly bisexual.

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[34] https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Moldova_Election_Watch_Report_2020%20%28English%29.pdf; https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/3/470424.pdf; https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/28102190.html; https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/653644/EXPO_BRI(2021)653644_EN.pdf

[35] https://vk.com/concordgroup_official?w=wall-177427428_244; https://vk.com/concordgroup_official?w=wall-177427428_245; https://vk.com/concordgroup_official?w=wall-177427428_229

[36] https://vk.com/concordgroup_official?w=wall-177427428_244; https://vk.com/concordgroup_official?w=wall-177427428_244; https://vk.com/concordgroup_official?w=wall-177427428_245; https://vk.com/concordgroup_official?w=wall-177427428_245; https://vk.com/concordgroup_official?w=wall-177427428_229; https://vk.com/concordgroup_official?w=wall-177427428_229

[37] https://www.reddit.com/r/conspiracy/comments/t3ycdh/ukrainian_mp_kira_rudik_stated_in_an_interview_we/; https://www.reddit.com/r/conspiracy/comments/t44e9y/kira_rudik_the_ukrainian_politican_who_said_we/; https://www.reddit.com/r/conspiracy_commons/comments/t9wm9e/ukrainian_mp_kira_rudik_we_are_not_only_fighting/; https://www.bitchute.com/video/2Rjns41OZXOe/; https://www.reddit.com/r/censoredreality/comments/t44fjr/kira_rudik_the_ukrainian_politican_who_said_we/

[38] https://www.codastory.com/disinformation/how-disinformation-became-a-new-threat-to-women/

Another journalist, Patricia Campos Mello, experienced similar state-led politicized and sexualized harassment campaign by the Bolsonaro government, outlined above. Defamation campaigns and political persecution have been noted in Bolsonaro's government. They are often led by the so-called "Office of Hate," an illicit network of bloggers, prominent businessmen and lawmakers close to Bolsonaro, who spread fake news and attack our democratic institutions.

A further example targeting gendered attributes for political means includes a 2016 tabloid story running photos of the first woman president Dilma Rousseff with her fists clenched or mouth wide open. These images were taken out of context to support claims she was having a mental breakdown while facing impeachment charges.

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Southeast Asia

Cases of gendered disinformation identified in the Philippines were commonly sexist, sexualized, and political. There is widespread language discrediting femininity and sexuality of both women and men, which also portrays those targeted in a sexualized manner. The content aims to undermine the political views and credentials of those targeted, driven by political motivations. Similar to the cases in Brazil, this targeting has reflected the political environment fostered by the Duterte administration, characterized by a narrative which celebrates traditionally masculine characteristics and incorporates widespread misogyny.

The case of Rappler, an online journal critical of the president, is the most high-profile example. Journalists and the CEO Maria Ressa have experienced widespread accusations of being "presstitutes," "fake news," "fake reporters," and "paid hacks." In the political sphere, Vice President Leni Robredo, has been targeted with similar narratives. She has been labelled "fake VP," "cheater," "liar," "fraudulent monster bitch," "despicable greedy hypocrite bitch," and "boba" (a woman who is stupid) accused of having sexual relationships with a married lawmaker, her hairdresser, and two government officials. Senator Risa Hontiveros has further been called a "thirsty slut" by a pro-Duterte Twitter user after being photographed wearing a skirt at the State of the Nation Address.

Notably, in the Philippines, men have also been targeted with gendered and misogynist language, in a context which criticizes femininity and celebrates masculinity in leadership. For instance, Senator Antonio Trillanes has also been targeted with memes portraying him as "effeminate," Duterte himself has also been accused of being a "sissy bitch," with tweets warning of a "pussy culture" in the country around certain policy positions.

Click here to read the one-pager about opposition voices in the Philippines

Western Europe

The majority of cases in EU countries can be considered sexist and politicized, with the intent of discrediting politicians and discouraging them from public life. Individuals such as Italy's Laura Boldrini have been targeted by troll armies spreading sexist disinformation aiming to delegitimize their public

presence. Similarly, female candidate Annalena Baerbock was subjected to a barrage of gendered and sexualized disinformation narratives in the 2021 German election cycle, including circulation of a fake nude photo, claims she was a "puppet" of George Soros, and narratives undermining her credentials. Beyond individuals, Spain saw narratives framing International Women's Day celebration as responsible for spreading the pandemic, aiming to discredit the solidarity movement as a whole.

There have also been notable racialized examples. For instance, France's first black government spokesperson Sibeth Ndiaye has been subject to disinformation and abusive content spread about her since she took on the role. Conversely, Katharina Schulze, a German politician, has been called "racist and anti-German" and once had a photoshopped image of her doing a Nazi salute shared on 4chan. These falsehoods come alongside gendered ones that she is "too fat, too short, too blonde, or too young" to be a politician.

There are also examples of homophobic and transphobic cases in the EU, often driven by far-right or Russian state perpetrators. The Russian state has promoted homophobic disinformation narratives: framing LGBTQ+ rights as "colonialism," a "threat to child safety," as "gender ideology," and a threat to "natural" family rights ordained by God. For instance, opposition to the Strategy for the Child included narratives that children would become perverted, taken away from parents into foster care, or sold to Scandinavia in general and Norway, in which there were rumors, some broadcast on national media, that pedophilia is a state policy. Furthermore, Beatrix von Storch, a member of the far-right Alternative for Germany called transgender German MP Tessa Ganserer "biologically and legally a man," which was followed by a hashtag deadnaming campaign on Twitter. *RT Germany's* commentary on the case promoted the concept of "transgender ideology," quoting speech by Russian President Vladimir Putin, in which he highlighted "traditional" gender roles and criticized the West's "obscurantism."

An overarching example of gendered and politicized disinformation targeting a policy, rather than an individual or group, are the online attacks targeting the Istanbul Convention. It has been widely framed by far-right populist and ultra-conservative rhetoric led by certain political figures in Poland, Turkey, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Slovakia, co-opting religious discourse, as a sinister liberal attempt to impose a "gender ideology."

Africa

A prominent case in Nigeria included sexualized disinformation against victims of sexual and gender-based violence, aiming to undermine attempts at justice. For instance, after Seyitan Babatayo accused a prominent musician of sexual assault in 2020, many social media users took sides with the alleged perpetrator, given his fame, alleging the survivor's experience as false and an attempt to discredit the artist. News and social media described the alleged victim as "a beautiful Instagram and Twitter slay queen," using select photos of the survivor aiming to promote negative bias against her by conservative readers.

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A further example of sexualized disinformation, which was also political in nature, occurred in Rwanda in 2017, when Diane Rwigara, a female Rwandan presidential candidate, was targeted with fake nude photos.

A similar case of sexualized and political disinformation occurred in 2014 in Zimbabwe, when Joyce Mujuru was fired as Vice President of Zimbabwe. After President Robert Mugabe publicly accused her of corruption and plotting to kill him, online discourse emerged around claims that she was ousted in 2014 for both performing, and failing to perform, sexual acts to secure her political position. Another rumor stated that Mugabe's wife had threatened to release a sex tape of her. She, and male counterparts, were also accused of witchcraft by Mugabe.

In Zimbabwe, a further homophobic example can be noted when a prominent individual for a major national party left her job after rumors were spread about her being a lesbian—a damaging claim in the highly conservative society of Zimbabwe.

North America

In the United States, the most commonly present themes were related to sexist, sexualized, and political disinformation. A combination of several themes usually occurs, as can be noted particularly in the examples involving women politicians. For example, Vice President Kamala Harris and Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer both faced disinformation of a transphobic nature, which used doctored or misleading images to falsely claim they were secretly men. However, this was only a part of a wider gendered disinformation effort against them. Governor Whitmer was also over-sexualized through the phrase "stretchin' Gretchin" on social media. Vice President Harris faced numerous accusations about her "sleeping the way to the top" and racialized themes, claiming that because Harris is half black and half Indian, she is not enough of a member of either community to represent them. Racialized and classist themes were also used against Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Representative Ilhan Omar, including claims that Omar married her own brother to get into the United States.

Journalists are also targeted in the United States, with examples including Nicole Perlroth, who was attacked on social media due to her critical reporting over U.S. election interference; and Leta Hong Fincher, whose case exemplifies all three characteristics of gendered and sexualized disinformation. Hong Fincher received an onslaught of online abuse after her statement about PRC policies was misconstrued and spread around by perpetrators. These perpetrators also used sexualized threats and insults, created fake accounts impersonating her, and unleashed state-media employees with some degree of coordination to criticize her previous research.

An example of a case where gendered disinformation led to a substantial direct impact in the United States is the case of Nina Jankowicz, who was appointed to head the Homeland Security Disinformation Governance Board in April 2022. The Board immediately became a target of social media users and right-wing commentators, with accusations the Board was taking away people's

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freedoms. Personal, gendered attacks against Jankowicz followed—many commentators claimed she should not have been hired for an important role after UK tabloid the *Daily Mail* article ran an article emphasizing the fact that Jankowicz was pregnant. Jankowicz resigned, directly citing the online abuse and disinformation she had been subjected to following the publicity which the Board received.

Central Europe

Women who are active in public life in Central Europe are targeted by a variety of gendered disinformation, ranging from accusations of being foreign agents, the spread of doctored images and documents and sexualized smear campaigns. The use of disinformation against women is often politically motivated and even in cases where political opponents are not the source of the disinformation themselves, such individuals commonly amplify disinformation narratives in an effort to discredit their rivals. The use of doctored images/videos was significant in that once these were circulated, the images or videos in question re-emerged on social media in regular cycles, despite numerous fact-checking and de-bunking efforts that already exposed them as fake.

In some instances, the personal lives of families of the women targeted by gendered disinformation were affected. The daughter of Lucia Nicholsonová (European Parliament Member) has been, for example, exposed to people on the street shouting at her mother that she is a "prostitute from Canada." In another case, Slovak president Čaputová's underage daughter was targeted directly and cyber-bullied by a sitting Member of the Slovak Parliament due to her physical appearance. Despite the persistent attempts to discredit women politicians by painting them as incompetent or unfit or dissuade their participation in public life by attacking their families and personal lives, many of those targeted have resisted such pressure. Instead, they are working on a systemic and legal change in this area. For example, Nicholsonová became a shadow reporter in the European Parliament on a report that investigated the issues of disinformation and hate speech, and President Čaputová launched a social media campaign about critical thinking and social media.

Typically, the main actors speaking out against such disinformation were the attacked women themselves, often supported by several NGOs and fact-checking organizations. However, state organs, such as police forces, are becoming increasingly proactive regarding strategic communications around disinformation, as well as in releasing public statements condemning specific cases of gendered disinformation.

Click here to read the one-pager about the prostitution allegations against Slovak MEP, Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová

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Target Types and Impacts

Individuals

The vast majority (80%) of cases exemplified individuals targeted with gendered disinformation. Most of the targets were politicians, journalists, and activists. Publicly reported impacts in reports and news articles typically do capture external impacts such as career outcomes and displays of public support. Identity-based hate and abuse, such as gendered disinformation, has a traumatic impact on individuals.[39]

If the women targeted are up against a state-sponsored campaign or other large community, they may not have the means to defend themselves and maintain their agency.

Negative impacts of gendered disinformation on individuals were often that they left their jobs or halted speaking out online. Cases where women have left their posts include a Zimbabwean public figure who was rumored to be a lesbian, a Ukrainian member of parliament who was rumored to have had an extramarital affair, and U.S. political appointee Nina Jankowicz, who was targeted with so much political and gendered disinformation that the initiative she was hired to run was canceled (see above). These women have stated that they felt violated and that they had suffered irreparable reputational damage as a result of campaigns against them.

Women do not only leave their jobs because of gendered disinformation; they also leave their countries and halt their social media engagement. Navalny ally Lyubov Sobol fled Russia due to the climate of harassment against Russian opposition figures, which in her case included being called "pretty, but mentally unbalanced" and a "highly unscrupulous animal" by a powerful oligarch. On the social media front, Iranian journalist Yeganeh Rezaian refrains from using social media in the active way she did before she was hacked, had fake nude photos of her spread online, and was targeted with gendered falsehoods in a state-produced documentary. If the women targeted are up against a state-sponsored campaign or other large community, they may not have the means to defend themselves and maintain their agency.

There were a handful of cases where targets were able to disprove gendered disinformation claims, or where they had the public's support. After going public about being raped by a high-ranking potential colleague, Japanese journalist Shiori Ito won her lawsuit for damages from her rapist, despite the barrage of harassment and false narratives about her. However, the abuse she was targeted with during her trial constitutes a "second rape" of sorts, as she must endure such harsh criticism and counter rumors about her. In Slovakia, despite being targeted with altered images to make then-Slovak presidential candidate Zuzana Čaputová appear to have a larger nose, she persevered and was elected. After her election, her teenage daughter was called a "lip-sticked boy" who had "nothing to do with female beauty" by a fellow Slovak MP. President Čaputová, members of the Slovak Parliament

[39] https://cectresourcelibrary.info/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Allwood-et-al.-2021-Identity-based-hate-and-violence-as-trauma.pdf

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and the EU Parliament, ministers, sociologists, the Slovak Police, Fashion Live Team, and various fans of the daughter (who is a model) all spoke out against the MP's comments.

Groups

Identity-based communities and their attributes are frequent targets of disinformation, particularly their women members. Overall, Indian women are often targeted with a combination of gendered, religious, caste-based, and marital-status-based disinformation. Ukrainian women in public life tend to be accused of being dumb, unfeminine, and immoral. On International Women's Day in Spain in 2020, tabloid media outlets claimed that the 8 million International Women's Day celebrations were super-spreader events and accelerated the spread of COVID-19 in Spain. Although social gatherings are undoubtedly hot spots for the spread of the virus, disinformation was more fixated on the prejudiced portrayal of the feminist movement and its adherents as plague spreaders or law-breakers, rather than concern about health risks.

Identity-based communities and their attributes are frequent targets of disinformation, particularly their women members.

The LGBTQ+ community has also been targeted by gendered and identity-based disinformation narratives. Russian disinformation often claims that the community is a threat to traditional and patriarchal values, which contains the gendered undertone that families should be heterosexual, with women being subservient to men.[40] They also claim that the LGBTQ+ community is a threat to child safety, is unnatural, and is a form of colonialism by the West. Amnesty International has expressed concerns about the safety of LGBTQ+ people in Russia.[41] In 2020, a Turkish politician claimed that the Turkish LGBTQ+ community "causes illness" and spreads COVID-19. Despite a public uproar from civil society organizations, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan quickly backed him, underlining the widely-known anti-LGBTQ+ stance of the Turkish government.

Legislation and Theories

Legislation and theories are the targets of gendered and identity-based disinformation. The Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence was opened for signatures in 2011 and has since been targeted with anti-gender narratives that it is a threat to traditional and family values. In 2021 Turkey denounced and withdrew from the convention. In Europe the Convention is being framed by politicians who disagree with it as a product of social engineering that aims to ruin the structure of the traditional family and emasculate men. In Bulgaria, rumors circulated in 2011 that the Convention would lead to the perversion of children (due to the threat to family values), and that children in foster care would end up being sold to pedophiles in Norway. This

[40] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/653644/EXPO_BRI(2021)653644_EN.pdf
[41] https://www.amnestyusa.org/7-discriminatory-or-deadly-countries-for-lgbt-people/

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led to some parents removing their children from schools for fear they would be stolen into the foster care system and kidnapped.

Perpetrators

Perpetrators of gendered disinformation included both state and non-state actors. State actors included Russia, China, Iran, Brazil, India, Turkey, and Zimbabwe. Non-state actors included the Orthodox Church, far-right groups and individuals/bloggers, and social media users across a range of platforms. A degree of coordination between perpetrators was observed on occasion, for instance between State and Church. Perpetrators have often both influenced and amplified one another's narratives. In many cases, abuse initiated by government figures also spurred further gendered disinformation online by social media users.

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State Actors

Activities of state actors have included using their media assets or control of the information environment to spread disinformation about women journalists, activists, or opposition figures. In July 2014, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRG) ran a documentary about journalist Yeganeh Yezaian that stated, among another claims, that she was a "naive" and "uneducated" woman who was manipulated by a smart, older CIA agent into marrying him.[42] Russia, meanwhile, has frequently spread disinformation and misogynistic narratives about women opposition figures via state media. *RT* has consistently attempted to denigrate and undermine Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, with the editor-in-chief comparing her IQ to that of an orangutan, and another *RT* journalist calling into question her qualifications and dismissing her as an "English translator" who became an opposition leader by chance.[43] *RIA Novosti* uncritically printed a false claim made by Belarusian President Lukashenko that she had "multiple husbands."[44] Other state-media outlets have often claimed that she is a "puppet" of the "West." Potentially state-directed and generally pro-Kremlin media have then amplified these narratives.

Click here to read the one-pager about how the Russian state targets women opposition figures in Russia and Belarus with disinformation about links to the "West" and misogynistic figures

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[42] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online
[43] russian.rt.com/opinion/886960-aksyonov-tihanovskaya-blinken-ssha
[44] ria.ru/20211202/Lukashenko-1761831686.html

State actors have also used "troll armies" to target women opponents or who are critical of the government. In India, pro-BJP (ruling party) troll armies have been instructed to post slanderous claims about women journalists, politicians, and public figures since 2013.[45] These messages have sexualized, nationalistic, and religious tones. Russia has also used state-backed troll farms against journalists—Finnish journalist Jessikka Aro, who identifies and reports on pro-Kremlin trolls was a target of their gendered disinformation herself. Russian trolls released her medical history and home address, created a music video mocking her as a "Bond girl" and claimed without basis, that she was a sex worker soliciting male bigwigs from the CIA and NATO.[46] The use of troll armies often provides governments with a level of plausible deniability, and it can therefore be difficult to directly attribute such abuse or disinformation to the state. In Aro's case, it is highly likely that she was targeted by the same troll farm that she had been investigating—the Internet Research Agency, which is linked to Russian oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin (an ally of President Putin who runs a network of state-backed companies) and was sanctioned for interference in the 2016 U.S. election on behalf of the Kremlin.

Individual government figures have also spread gendered disinformation via direct statements or comments. This has often spurred online abuse and further gendered disinformation against the women or groups of women in question. Brazilian President Bolsonaro has often targeted women journalists and activists. In 2018, in a video he accused Bianca Santan—a black journalist and activist—of spreading fake news while brandishing a report that she did not write.[47] In 2020, Bolsonaro and his sons contributed to a campaign of harassment against Patricia Campos Mello (see above). Separately, in 2014, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe publicly accused Vice President Joyce Mujuru of witchcraft, corruption and plotting to kill him (see above). Online discourse promptly sprung up around Mujuru, distorting and amplifying Mugabe's claims and inventing new and false rumors, often with explicit sexualized content.[48]

Non-State Actors

Non-state actors have also been responsible for spreading gendered disinformation related to specific issues or targeting individual women. The Moldovan Orthodox Church, alongside male politicians and local media, helped to spread misogynistic narratives about women candidates and disinformation about threats to "traditional values" during the 2016 and 2020 Moldovan presidential elections. One prominent church leader questioned Maia Sandu's morality when she ran for president (as a single woman) in 2016, also criticizing her efforts in 2013 at promoting sex education while education minister.[49] During the 2020 election, church sermons also reinforced messages related to negative stereotypes of women and the LGBTQ+ community. [50]

[45] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/27/india-bjp-party-ordering-online-abuse-opponents-actors-modi-claims-book
[46] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online
[47] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/22/jair-bolsonaro-fake-news-accusation-marielle-franco
[48] https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/vawie_in_zimbabwe_july_2018.pdf
[49] https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-sandu-smears-orthodox-church-pro-eu-candidate-russia/28108474.html
[50] https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/28102190.html; https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/653644/EXPO_BRI(2021)653644_EN.pdf;https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Moldova_Election_Watch_Report_2020%20%28English%29.pdf; https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/3/470424.pdf

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Far-right groups and individuals have also been extremely active in creating and spreading gendered disinformation online. In 2021, a photo of U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris was circulated which positioned her side by side with her alleged former identity, a man named Kamal Aroush (outlined above). This image appears to have originated as part of a campaign by far-right conspiracy group QAnon.[51] Earlier this year, German MP Tessa Ganserer was targeted with transphobic narratives by the far-right in Germany (outlined above). In addition to comments made by a member of far-right party Alternative for Germany, at least two far-right YouTubers published abusive content (including comparing Ganserer to cancer). In Georgia, a TV cameraman was attacked and killed in 2021 by a violent far-right and anti-LGBTQ+ mob while attempting to cover what would have been Tbilisi Pride. His death was spun by the far-right community in YouTube videos as a "provocation," whereby Georgian "liberals" murdered him so they could use the incident politically to delegitimize alt-right groups.[52]

Click here to read the one-pager about the targeting of German MP, Tessa Ganserer, for her trans identity

Online commentators and social media users have also been perpetrators of gender-based abuse and disinformation, across a range of platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, VK and Telegram. U.S. political appointee Nina Jankowicz was targeted in April-May 2022 with a coordinated online disinformation campaign about her new role as head of the Disinformation Governance Board (see above). A prominent figure on Twitter called the Board the Orwellian "Ministry of Truth" and falsely claimed the board would take away people's freedoms. This tweet spurred others into action to further disseminate falsehoods about the Board and about Jankowicz. *Fox News* Commentator Tucker Carlson also spread falsehoods about the Board, spurring further online abuse against Jankowicz. Her family life, looks and personality were all targeted in a barrage of tweets. Comments under one online article called Jankowicz "legit crazy," "she is a beautiful woman but she's nuts," "she looks like Quinten Tarantino in drag," and that "she looks like she needs a shave on that giant, manly chin."[53]

Conclusions on Countering Gendered Disinformation

As with non-identity-based disinformation, communications practitioners may choose to respond to false narratives directly (through counter-narrative or de-bunk messaging), indirectly (through counter-brand messaging), or through wider-scale initiatives that aim to curb the root causes of disinformation (such as through multi-lateral media literacy initiatives). Due to the highly-

> Responding directly to narratives can cause more harm than good.

[51] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online
[52] https://www.codastory.com/disinformation/far-right-lgbtq-georgia/
[53] https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10760907/Biden-starts-Disinformation-Board-led-Russia-expert-called-Hunters-laptop-Trump-product.html

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personalized nature of gendered and identity-based disinformation narratives, and the threats to targets they directly or indirectly portray, responding directly to narratives can cause more harm than good.

Direct responses to gendered disinformation must be considered carefully, as they can potentially bring more attention to the target and cause further onslaughts of disinformation, as well as harassment and violent threats. These often occur concurrently because gendered disinformation is a subsection of violence against women (VAW), where it may cause targets to retreat from the public light to stop the threats to themselves and those they are associated with (family, community, colleagues, etc.) After a Japanese journalist went public about being raped by a colleague, she had to endure a "second rape" comprising of sexualized disinformation narratives and violent messages toward her.

We located a small number of cases where there were direct responses to gendered disinformation narratives. In one case, a police force stated publicly that a report claiming a Slovak politician was detained for prostitution in Canada was fake. In other cases, fellow politicians have corroborated statements by women politicians targeted with gendered disinformation that the narratives are false, and they do not deserve the reputational damage that is being inflicted on them.

Gendered disinformation forms a double-edged sword for government communications practitioners, where responding is meant to correct falsehoods and restore the reputations of targets but may result in more disinformation and abuse toward the targets. However, leaving the narratives to foment online and offline may leave them to develop and circulate for longer periods of time. A way forward for government indirect responses to gendered disinformation and abuse is through multi-lateral efforts to better understand and prevent such online harms.

Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse

The digital world holds immense potential to amplify the voices of women, girls, and LGBTQ+ individuals—and yet these platforms have also given rise to new forms of gender-based violence, harassment, and abuse. These attacks are meant to threaten individuals and weaponize and spread disinformation—and they often have the intended and expected effect of silencing voices who are not well represented in other public spaces—women politicians, journalists, and activists, among others. Gendered forms of disinformation that seek to discredit, humiliate, and threaten women public figures is a tool of both state and non-state malign actors, and the rising threat of authoritarianism, is often built on, and strength-tested through, minimizing the space for and voices of women leaders and activists.

Launched at the 2022 UN Commission on the Status of Women, the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-based Online Harassment and Abuse is a commitment from the U.S. Summit for Democracy.[54]

[54] https://www.state.gov/2022-roadmap-for-the-global-partnership-for-action-on-gender-based-online-harassment-and-abuse/

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It brings together countries, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector to better prioritize, understand, prevent, and address the growing scourge of technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Countries who agree to join the Global Partnership commit to refrain from and oppose the spread of gendered disinformation or any other form of gender-based online harassment and abuse by any state.

The Global Partnership is also an action coalition as part of the Denmark-led Technology for Democracy initiative. It will address gender-based online harassment and abuse in the long term, with an initial mission to deliver concrete results by the end of 2022.

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Gendered Disinformation Case Compendium

Gendered Disinformation Attacks Against Slovak President

CASE CONTRIBUTION BY: Slovakia | *Ministry of the Interior, Centre for Countering Hybrid Threats & Government Office Situation Centre*

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Case Details

The Slovak president has been the target of gendered disinformation since the beginning of her political career in 2018. Her portrait was digitally edited in 2019 during an election campaign by a Slovak disinformation website which edited her face to give her a hooked nose and bigger lips, resembling anti-Semitic cartoons. She is also often accused of being a secret American or Israeli spy on social media, as well as by her political opponents that have also used edited videos (with added foreign flags and altered text). Finally, the president's daughter Emma, who was born in 2004 is also being attacked. Emma repeatedly became subject of cyber-bullying also by Čaputová's political opponents due to her work in modeling. In 2021, a member of the National Council of the Slovak Republic published photos of the president's daughter from a fashion show on his profile, describing her as "a boy wearing lipstick" which led to a spread of her photos on various websites where the number of hateful comments and cyber-bullying increased.

Methods of Dissemination

Attacks on the president are most often spread on social media and from activities such as press conferences and public appearances of her political opponents which are also broadcasted on social media. In the mentioned cases, tools such as photo and video editing software were employed, and cyberbullying of the president's daughter also took place.

Theme(s) of the Gendered Disinformation Narrative(s)

Sexist – mentions of the president's daughter's physical appearance.
Political - attacks carried out with the aim of discredit the president as a woman in politics and minimize her abilities and merit behind her own career, claiming that she is only a foreign agent.
Religious – use of religious stereotypes and visuals features.

Perpetrator Information

The edited photograph was published on a disinformation portal (Zem&Vek), known for its anti[55]emiti was convicted for defamation of race and nation in a separate court case in 2021. The orchestrator of the cyberbullying of the daughter is a Slovak MP Tomáš Taraba (leader of the LIFE - National Party), who is known for regularly attacking the president.[56]

[55] https://perma.cc/3YNP-JXAE
[56] strana-zivot.sk

Direct Impacts

These attacks affected the president's daughter's personal life and both the personal life and political career of the president. However, she remained in her position and in view of several cases of manipulation of her videos and photos and the overall disinformation situation in Slovakia, responded to this situation with a series of educational videos on social networks and critical thinking.

Communications Response by Government

Several politicians, including the president herself, condemned MP Taraba's attacks, along with numerous political scientists, sociologists, the fashion society, as well as the Police Force. The police described this case as an exemplary case of cyber-bullying of a child and as inciting hate speech.

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Iranian State Messaging to Discredit Female Political Prisoners

CASE CONTRIBUTION BY: United States | *Global Engagement Center, Analytics & Research Division*

Case Details

Iran has long engaged in campaigns to discredit domestic female activists as well as female Iranian and dual national political prisoners. Iranian-British aid worker Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe marks one of the most recent examples of Iranian state-run and state-affiliated media efforts to discredit female political prisoners. She was arrested in 2016, accused of acting against national security and propaganda activities against the regime, and sentenced to five years in prison.[57] Her release was described in Iranian state-media and by Iranian officials as a "humanitarian" issue as they attempted to unlink it with the UK's repayment with a decades old debt owed to Iran.[58]

Surrounding her mid-March release,[59] Iranian state-run and state-affiliated media appeared to engage in a coordinated effort to continue to discredit her as a spy, repurposing allegations made against her in state media since her arrest. Many articles reiterated that she was released for "humanitarian" reasons after serving her entire sentence.[60] A series of articles published in Iranian state-run and state-affiliated media outlets in mid-March 2022 nicely summed up the targeted allegations made against her by state media, Iranian officials, and pro-Iran trolls on social media over the years.[61]

اعضای تیم ترینینگ استیشن وابسته به سرویس انگلیس با مدیریت کوین بردن فعال در زمینه انقلاب های رنگی در کشورهای اروپایی و اخلال در بیداری اسلامی در کشورهای عربی(زاغری مدیر بخش فارسی این موسسه)

A photo included in the Fars article. The caption reads "Members of the training service team affiliated with the British service under the management of Quinn Winning active in the field of color revolutions in European countries and disrupting the Islamic Awakening in Arab countries (Zaghari, director of the Persian section of the institute)."

[57] Note: She was temporarily released from prison on house arrest in March 2020, and her release on house arrest was later extended indefinitely. She faced new charges in September of that year, and later faced a new court date as her sentence was slated to end in March 2021. Zaghari-Ratcliffe was given an additional one-year jail term and was banned from leaving Iran for one year in late April 2021, on charges of spreading "propaganda against the system" for allegedly participating in a protest in front of the Iranian Embassy in London in 2009. She lost her latest appeal in October 2021, with the sentence and travel ban "upheld with no court hearing." See bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-17/nazanin-zaghari-ratcliffe-timeline-from-arrest-in-iran-to-arriving-back-in-uk; asianews.ir/fa/newsagency/8758/مذاکرات-پشت-پرده-درباره-آزادی-نازنین-زاغری

[58] entekhab.ir/fa/news/663949/ها-اعلام-کردند-که-تمامی-موضوعات-بایت-در-%E2%80%8Cامیر عبداللهیان-نر-لیست-تبادل-زندانیان-نازنین-زاغری-نیز-قرار-داشت-در-دقیقه-نود-آمریکایی; aftabnews.ir/fa/news/760660/قالب-یک-بسته-کامل-دیده-شود-برای-همین-تبادل-حضورت-خنگرفت-کنایه-مطهری-به-امیر-عبداللهیان-درباره-آزادی-نازنین-زاغری; hamshahrionline.ir/news/664767/شرط-امیر عبداللهیان-برای-حضور-در-وین-آزادی-زاغری-ربطی-به-دریافت

[59] asriran.com/fa/news/831371/عکس-نازنین-زاغری-پس-از-رسیدن-به-عمان; https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/16/world/europe/iran-nazanin-zaghari-ratcliffe-released.html

[60] farsnews.ir/news/14001225000468/نازنین-زاغری-در-ازای-530-میلیون-دلار-به-تیم-انگلیسی-تحویل-داده-شد-وی

[61] avayneshat.ir/fa/news/57866/جاسوس-۵۳۰-میلیون-دلاری-در-هواپیما; khabarfarsi.com/u/118541522; borna.news/بخش-سیاسی-3-1310490/جاسوس-میلیون-دلاری-انگلیس-کیست

ORIGINATED BY AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE FOUNDATION

Coverage frequently described Zaghari-Ratcliffe as a spy working under the cover of a journalist in Iran,[62] noting that "the arrest of this spy...led to the arrest of 50 members of the British spy in Iran" and that her job as the "head of the spy network was to [do] spy training, so following the arrest of this person, several spy networks were dismantled and very important documents of Britain's role in spying in other countries were provided to Iran." Allegations of Zaghari-Ratcliffe's links with British government organizations were again amplified during this time, marked by claims that she was "in charge of MI6 and the British Foreign Office in Southwest Asia and North Africa, where she has been active in spy networking under the cover of a journalist and in shaping color revolutions in some countries." It alleged that she was directly and indirectly responsible for 15 projects in Lebanon, Morocco, Egypt, Yemen, Ukraine, and Georgia, among other countries and claimed that she gathered information through "so-called journalism courses" and further claimed that Zaghari-Ratcliffe also helped promote anti-regime protests in Iran. Other allegations made against her claimed that she received large sums of money to set up an Iranian section in a British spy agency to carry out two projects in Iran, including "a project related to women" for which she was "responsible for training and employing spies, under the auspices of a journalist, and...taught topics such as how to collect and exit information safely and even programs planned during possible arrests and secure information transfer."

These projects were described in state-run and state-affiliated media as intended to promote anti-government sentiment and activity, networking for women, and "destabilizing women under the auspices of women entrepreneurs." Coverage again attempted to highlight her alleged links with foreign media organizations banned in Iran, including BBC, as well as with British government entities, describing her alleged close relationship with the British Foreign Office and Parliament. For years, they had been working to seek her release.[63]

Theme(s) of the Gendered Disinformation Narrative(s)

Cases of Iranian state-backed attacks against female political prisoners most often fall into the political category, and they frequently charged with and sentenced for national security related crimes.[64]

Methods of Dissemination / Perpetrator Information

Such accusations against both Iranian and dual national female political prisoners are frequently amplified across Iranian state-run and state-affiliated media outlets, both in news coverage as well as in special documentary series aimed at discrediting them. Iranian official statements in both traditional and social media also serve to support these claims.

After then-UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson commented to the UK Parliament that Zaghari-Ratcliffe was "simply teaching people journalism as I understand it" when she was arrested at Tehran airport, Iranian state television used the comments to discredit her, amplify claims that she is a spy, and to

[62] borna.news/بخش-سیاسی-3/1309910-ازادی-نازنین-زاغری-جس-از-تخلیه-کامل-اطلاعاتی-میادله-سر-شبکه-جاسوسی-انگلیس-با-یوش-ار-میلیون-دلار

[63] farsnews.ir/news/14001223001080/احتمال-میادله-نازنین-زاغری-در-ازای-530میلیون-دلار

[64]https://www.voanews.com/a/middle-east_voa-news-iran_iran-transfers-ninth-female-dissident-harsher-prison/6199664.html

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justify her imprisonment. A five-minute news feature broadcast on IRIB Channel 2 in November 2017 alleged that she was training journalists at the time of her arrest and that she had not been visiting family in Iran, stating that Johnson's comments prove that the British-Iranian dual national was in Iran as part of an espionage plot. The claims had previously appeared on the Iranian judiciary's website. The short program also described her participation in a "media attack" to launch a "soft overthrow" of Iranian leaders and dismissed British claims of her innocence, claiming that "the unintended admission of Boris Johnson that Iranian journalists were being trained by Nazanin Zaghari Ratcliffe was a gaffe that the British government could not find a cover for."

Evidence to Primary / Secondary Sources

A 16 March 2022 article published by IRGC-affiliated *Fars News* repeated false allegations about Zaghari-Ratcliffe, stating that she was "found guilty of plotting to orchestrate a soft overthrow of the Islamic Republic" and citing a statement by the prosecutor general of Tehran in October 2017 which claimed that she was arrested for running "a BBC Persian online journalism course which was aimed at recruiting and training people to spread propaganda against Iran." A controversial and inaccurate statement from UK PM Boris Johnson was cited in the article, which noted that Johnson had disclosed in remarks to a parliamentary committee that she was "simply teaching people journalism as I understand it" when she was arrested at Tehran airport.[65]

Direct Impacts

At the time, many other state-run and state-affiliated media outlets published claims that Zaghari-Ratcliffe was a spy, using clips from BBC Persian and photographs of UK officials to bolster their claims.[66] Often, these allegations are bolstered with false confessions extracted under duress. In the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, for example, she stated after her return to the UK that she was forced to sign a confession under force, as Iranian officials stated that she would not be allowed to get on a plane to return to the UK if she did not sign.[67]

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[65] farsnews.ir/en/news/14001225000760/Iran-Frees-Spy-Zaghari-Racliffe-afer-Ending-Five-Year-Prisn-Term
[66] https://iranwire.com/en/features/64962
[67] bbc.com/news/uk-politics-42252741

Church, Media, and Officials Target Female Politicians and Spread Disinformation During Moldovan Elections

CASE CONTRIBUTION BY: United Kingdom | *Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Open Source Unit*

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Case Details

Moldovan media, politicians and the Moldovan Orthodox Church (subordinated to the Russian Patriarchate) spread sexist/misogynistic narratives about female candidates and disinformation about threats to "traditional values" during the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. These narratives were both influenced and amplified by Russian media.

Moldovan President Maia Sandu, in contrast to male opposition figures, was subject to gender-based attacks during the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections.[68] A Church leader questioned her morality when she ran for president in 2016, criticising her efforts in 2013 at promoting sex education while education minister. Former president Vladimir Voronin called her a "laughingstock" and "national disgrace" for being a single woman in politics. At the same time, Voronin said of her male opponent: "he's a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch." Her sexual orientation was also questioned in an effort to discredit her with conservative audiences. An anonymous leaflet campaign meanwhile stated that Sandu's pro-EU platform included supporting homosexuality (giving this as a reason not to vote for her).[69]

Ahead of the 2020 elections, civil society organisations predicted that, as in past elections, disinformation attacks would invoke negative stereotypes of women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other marginalized groups, and that these messages would be reinforced in church sermons.[70] This prediction proved accurate. Scaremongering messages, mostly targeting Sandu, were distributed in the pro-Russia Socialist candidate Igor Dodon's printed campaign materials and circulated in the media and in social network platforms.[71] Among other claims, these messages alleged that Sandu's election would bring about attacks on the Orthodox Church and the promotion of LGBTQ+ ideology – once again implying that she, as an unmarried woman, would undermine the institution of the family and therefore posed a threat to "traditional values."[72] The narrative around "threatened values" is a prominent pro-Kremlin disinformation trope and was picked up on and amplified in local pro-Russia media. Election observers and women's rights activists also noted the use of gendered language in 2020 campaign rhetoric.[73] One public figure focused on presidential candidate Violeta Ivanov's appearance in commentary about the campaign.

[68] ndi.org/sites/default/files/Moldova_Election_Watch_Report_2020%20%28English%29.pdf
[69] rferl.org/a/moldova-sandu-smears-orthodox-church-pro-eu-candidate-russia/28108474.html
[70] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/653644/EXPO_BRI(2021)653644_EN.pdf
[71] moldova.europalibera.org/a/28102190.html
[72] huffpost.com/entry/moldovan-presidential-candidate-criticized-single-woman_n_5825ae9ee4b0c4b63b0c2a16
[73] osce.org/files/f/documents/7/3/470424.pdf

Disinformation around the idea that "traditional values" and the institution of the family are being eroded in Moldova have persisted beyond the 2020 presidential election – this was also a common theme in the 2021 parliamentary elections and still persists within pro-Russian local media and in statements made by politicians/officials. Russian media both influences and amplifies these narratives. A review by the European Parliament found that Russia was leading in gendered disinformation in six areas, including "heteroactivism" and protecting the "natural" family's rights and restoring the "natural" order as ordained by God.

Methods of Disseminotion

Public statements, media articles, election campaign materials, leaflets and social media posts.

Theme(s) of the Gendered Disinformotion Narrative(s)

Political (perceived to be targeted because they are a woman);
Sexist (targeting gendered attributes);
Homophobic (claiming someone is homosexual and claims about the LGBTQ+ community).

Disinformation targeting Sandu was aimed at undermining her political views and credibility, thereby making her less electorally appealing, particularly to conservative voters. Church, media, and officials implied that it was preferable to have a male president, rather than an unmarried female president. Homophobic narratives were common throughout both elections, with Sandu's own sexuality being questioned due to her status as an unmarried woman and claims that she would promote homosexuality and destroy traditional ideas of family (i.e., marriage between a man and woman), if elected.

Perpetrator Information

Disinformation and sexist narratives were spread by the Moldovan Orthodox Church, pro-Russian local media and Moldovan officials and politicians, including a former President.

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Opposition Voices in the Philippines

CASE CONTRIBUTION BY: United Kingdom | *Government Communication Service, Cabinet Office*

Case Details

(Content warning: misogynist language; rape)

Since 2016, under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte, opposition voices in the media, politics and civil society in the Philippines have been targeted online. This targeting has reflected the political environment fostered by the Duterte administration, characterized by a narrative which celebrates traditionally masculine characteristics and incorporates widespread misogyny. Pro-Duterte narratives have been spread through a network of online political and citizen actors using both authentic and inauthentic social media accounts.

English-language Twitter analysis by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) shows common narrative themes which include discrediting the professional credentials, honesty, and intelligence of opposition figures, as well as speculation over and distortion of their sexuality. Misogynist slurs such as "bitch" are commonly used alongside these narratives. Beyond the harm caused by the abuse itself to the victims, narratives also include threats of violence and rape, and physical calls to action outside the online sphere.

The most high-profile example of this targeting includes Rappler, a female-led opposition journal whose CEO, Maria Ressa, and her colleagues have experienced widespread state-aligned gendered disinformation. They are labelled "presstitutes," "fake news," "fake reporters," and "paid hacks" who are allegedly at the behest of a mysterious funder.

Similarly, Vice President Leni Robredo, who was fired from leading the government's anti-drug agency after criticizing the extrajudicial killings overseen by President Duterte, has been targeted with similar narratives. She has been labelled "fake VP," "cheater," "liar," "fraudulent monster bitch," "despicable greedy hypocrite bitch," and "boba" (a woman who is stupid), accused of having sexual relationships with a married lawmaker, her hairdresser and two government officials. Campaigns have aimed to remove her from public life through impeachment, resignation, or electoral loss: #OustLeni2020 #FakeVP #ImpeachLeniRobredo #LeniResign #GoodbyeLeni. NDI assesses these likely emerged organically throughout this pro-Duterte network of actors, rather than through a centrally coordinated strategy. Similarly, Senator Leila de Lima, accused of an alleged affair, has been referred to as a "whore" by whose sexuality undermines her decision-making by this network. Senator Risa Hontiveros has been called a "thirsty slut" by a pro-Duterte Twitter user after being photographed wearing a skirt at the State of the Nation Address.

Notably, male Senator Antonio Trillanes has also been targeted with memes portraying him as "effeminate," alleging he was having an affair with a news anchor. In this context which criticizes

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femininity and celebrates masculinity in leadership, Duterte himself has also been accused of being a "sissy bitch," with tweets warning of a "pussy culture" in the country around certain policy positions.

Methods of Disseminotion

Methods of dissemination to spread these narratives include public statements, tweets, memes, and hashtags.

Theme(s) of the Gendered Disinformation Narrative(s)

These cases are commonly sexist, sexualized, and political. There is widespread language discrediting femininity and sexuality of both women and men, which also portrays those targeted in a sexualized manner. The content aims to undermine the political views and credentials of those targeted, driven by political motivations.

Perpetrator Information

Broadly, these cases are linked to President Rodrigo Duterte, and the political and information environment which has characterized his presidency, which has engendered his political position and been fostered by it in turn. Pro-Duterte narratives have been spread through a network of online actors including cultural influencers, bloggers, political actors, professional strategists, online influencers, paid account operators, grassroots volunteers, and freelancers.

Research Methods

This detail was taken from secondary research from a report: "Engendering Hate: The Contours of State-Aligned Gendered Disinformation Online," Demos October 2020.[74]

Communications Response by Government

These cases collectively demonstrate how responses by the target can generate further abuse and denial by perpetrators. For instance, When Maria Ressa spoke out against this targeting, tweets claimed Maria Ressa "keeps on saying that she is being oppressed when she isn't" and rejected her claims of rape threats from pro-Duterte accounts as "fake news." However, victims have continued to engage in counter-narrative communications. For instance, disinformation around Leni Robredo's "boyfriends" and a supposed pregnancy led her to create a series of Facebook videos debunking false claims. Moreover, Maria Ressa has received significant international recognition and prestigious awards for her ongoing work as an opposition journalist, being named a Time Person of the Year in 2018 and awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 2021, which presents a strong counter-message.

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[74] https://demos.co.uk/project/engendering-hate-the-contours-of-state-aligned-gendered-disinformation-online/

Allegation of Prostitution Against Slovak MEP

CASE CONTRIBUTION BY: Slovakia | *Ministry of the Interior, Centre for Countering Hybrid Threats & Government Office Situation Centre*

Case Details

Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová is a former journalist, Slovak liberal politician, former vice-president of the Slovak parliament, and a current Member of European Parliament (MEP). Repeatedly, she became targeted by hoaxes and disinformation on social media. The attacks on Nicholsonová intensified during the election campaign in 2020, with the most prominent attack involving a doctored document alleging her detention for prostitution in Canada in 2003. This incident involved a falsified document from the official police report in Ottawa. In the second high-profile case, her face was added on a picture from a march for sex workers' rights to falsely claim she had attended the protest. These attacks also involved numerous online posts, including made-up stories. Additionally, the attackers also question her education and political career. Her sexual life, as well as physical looks, are frequently targeted by conspirators.

Methods of Disseminotion

Graphic editing of photographs and falsification of official documents, which were subsequently amplified on social media and abused by Nicholsonová's political opponents.

Theme(s) of the Gendered Disinformation Narrative(s)

Sexist – gender as a main reason for the attacks
Sexualized – false accusation of prostitution, portraying her as unfit for public life
Political – aim to harm Nicholsonová's political career

Perpetrator Informotion

In the case of Nicholsonová being allegedly involved in prostitution, the document was fabricated and disseminated by a former member of the Slovak Information Service, Pavol Forisch. The report was subsequently used at a press conference by a former Slovak MP Peter Marček. Marček has later been dismissed from his political party, one of the reasons being the discontent with his way of communicating. It is unknown who is responsible for the doctored photo from the protest for the rights of sex workers in Canada.

Direct Impacts

Nicholsonová filed several criminal complaints against the attackers and stated that these attacks are an example of discrimination against her person, her family, and the political party "Freedom and Solidarity" she belongs to. When the disinformation started to spread again in 2020, she said: "It does not go away and it is coming back to me in my everyday life. When I walk on the street with my children, people yell at me saying I am a prostitute from Canada. I would be glad if there was a legal way to stop this." Following the attacks, Nicholsonová decided to work on related issues more closely and became

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the European Parliament shadow rapporteur for the Report on Strengthening Media Freedom: Protecting Journalists in Europe, Hate Speech, Misinformation and the Role of Platforms.

Communications Response by Government

The Canadian police commented on the events and stated that the police report had been falsified. The chairman of the political party "Freedom and Solidarity" expressed support for Nicholsonová and AFP Facts agency also debunked her attendance on the protest in Canada.

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UNCLASSIFIED//REL TO IPCSD, CDMD, AND G7+ RRM

Women Opposition Figures in Russia and Belarus Targeted by Russian State

CASE CONTRIBUTION BY: United Kingdom | *Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Open Source Unit*

Case Details / Methods of Dissemination / Perpetrator Information

Opposition figures in Russia (Yulia Navalnaya, Lyubov Sobol) and Belarus (Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya) were targeted with disinformation and misogynistic narratives (women are promiscuous, too stupid to be leaders, untrustworthy (Western agents)) by Russian officials, state media, potentially state-directed media, and pro-Kremlin media between 2019 and 2020.

Russian politicians and media have spread disinformation about Navalnaya and Tsikhanouskaya being "Western" agents. Duma deputy and Communist party leader Gennady Zyuganov claimed that Navalnaya was serving "Western intelligence services," a narrative that has been echoed by Russian state and potentially state-directed media *Tsargrad TV* labelled her as the "next Western project" after Tsikhanouskaya. Russian state TV and pro-Kremlin media frequently claimed that Tsikhanouskaya was a puppet of the "West." These narratives are likely intended to suggest that these women are traitors to their nations, or at the very least untrustworthy and unpatriotic.

Officials and state media also spread misogynistic narratives about these women. In some cases, these narratives centered on their supposed non-adherence to traditional gender roles or suggested shallowness or promiscuity. Zyuganov publicly claimed that Navalnaya should be correcting her husband Alexey Navalny's behavior. *NTV* has consistently portrayed Navalnaya as a domineering wife and Navalny as a henpecked husband. One article by *NTV* claimed that she rules the family "like a tyrant" due to her "male character." An article by state-owned *RIA Novosti* amplified claims by Belarusian President Lukashenko that Tsikhanouskaya had multiple husbands in Lithuania, while her opposition leader husband was imprisoned in Belarus. In the Polish language version of Sputnik news, an article claimed that Tsikhanouskaya, while residing in Lithuania, had demanded a team of stylists at taxpayers' expense. Press statements in 2020 by Concord Management and Consulting Group, which effectively serves as the mouthpiece for oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin claimed that Sobol was "perverted," suggesting that she "pricked her husband's ass while roleplaying" (in response to Sobol's claims that Prigozhin was behind an attack on her husband where he was stabbed in the thigh with a psychotropic substance).

State media and officials have also attempted to mock or call into question the intelligence of women opposition figures. *RT* editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan compared Tsikhanouskaya's IQ to "that of an orangutan." This comment was notable, as it highlighted a trend among female Russian officials and prominent media figures of promoting highly traditional/conservative visions of "femininity," and using those stereotypes to attack other women who seemingly do not conform. Simonyan, for instance, often plays to her femininity and role in the kitchen as a dutiful wife. Separately, an RT article dismissed Tsikhanouskaya as an "English translator" who became an opposition leader "by chance." Concord Group statements also frequently tried to draw a contrast between Sobol's looks and her

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intelligence/mental state: "she is a pretty, but mentally unbalanced girl," "she is a cute, but highly unscrupulous animal." Alexey Navalny's looks are never referred to in these statements (Lyubov and Navalny were both sued by Concord Management).

Theme(s) of the Gendered Disinformation Narrative(s)

Sexist (targeting gendered attributes) and political (perceived to be targeted because they are a woman). Much of the disinformation around these women has involved sexist tropes or misogynistic language (e.g., that they are shallow, too stupid for politics, image obsessed). The purpose of this disinformation is to undermine their political views and credentials, as well as to dissuade their participation in public life. Narratives about links to the "West" are arguably also nationalist in theme, implying these women are traitors/a threat to Russia and any abuse is therefore in the name of the nation.

Research Methods

Boolean searches on third party social media/media aggregator tools. Tools set to search within Russian mass media and social media (including VK, Twitter and Telegram). Example Boolean searches: "Юлия Навальная" AND муж; Тихановская AND Запад. Boolean searches selected based on existing knowledge of disinformation narratives around selected figures from country knowledge/monitoring. Some research built on existing Open-Source Unit reports e.g., on Yevgeny Prigozhin's network of websites and companies inside Russia.

Direct Impacts

Sobol and Tsikhanouskaya have both left their respective home countries and are in exile. This is primarily due wider harassment by Russian and Belarussian authorities of the opposition, and likely also due to fear for their personal safety. However, it should be noted that in both women's cases, gender-based disinformation formed part of this harassment.

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Targeting of German MP for Trans Identity

CASE CONTRIBUTION BY: Germany | *Federal Foreign Office*

Case details

The case of German Green party's MP Tessa Ganserer is noteworthy as an example of blurred lines between hate speech and disinformation relating to gender. Trans people especially are often subjected to both types of online abuse. On 17 February 2022 the German Bundestag held an early parliamentary debate on the upcoming International Women's Day. During that debate, Beatrix von Storch, a member of the far-right Alternative for Germany called the Green Party's MP Tessa Ganserer "biologically and legally a man."

In parliament and on social media a wave of solidarity with Ganserer including a hashtag #SolidaritätMitTessa (solidarity with Tessa) ensued. Simultaneously, a hashtag campaign deadnaming Ganserer also appeared on Twitter. Both hashtags had a very short life span: most of the posts using these hashtags were tweeted in the five days between 17 February and 22 February.

The German Green party has a gender quota for its candidate lists. A large portion of the debate about Ganserer focused on the accusations, with claims that Ganserer was illegally occupying a woman's place on the candidate list. The debate spread to print media as well and started long before 17 February. Traditional German feminist magazine *Emma* published an article about Ganserer on 19 January claiming—as the AfD did on 17 February—that Ganserer was "biologically and legally a man" triggering the first wave of fierce debates about the definitions of womanhood.[75]

At least two far-right YouTubers published abusive content (e.g., comparing Ganserer to cancer). *RT Germany* got involved in this largely domestic German debate by reporting on Ganserer and "transgender ideology," quoting a Putin speech in which he highlighted "traditional" gender roles and criticised the West's "obscurantism."[76]

Methods of Disseminotion

News media and social media, pushing a hashtag using deadname

Theme(s) of the Gendered Disinformation Narrative(s)

Transphobic themes

Perpetrator Informotion

Individual social media users, magazine *Emma*, political party AfD, *RT Germany*

[75] https://www.emma.de/artikel/markus-ganserer-die-quotenfrau-339185

[76] https://web.archive.org/web/20220308044955/https://de.rt.com/inland/131833-menschenfeindlich-bundestagsdebatte-uber-transsexuellen-auf/

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Research Methods

Tweets using Hashtags were analyzed using Social Media Monitoring software, basic web research using standard search engines, broadcast of the parliamentary debate

Direct Impacts

Not observed so far.

Communications Response by Government

No government response.

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From: (b)(6)
To: (b)(6) GEC-AFRICA; (b)(6)
(b)(6)
Cc: (b)(6)
(b)(6)

Subject: Monthly AF/PDPA-GEC Coordination Meeting
Attachments: Monthly AF/PDPA-GEC Coordination Meeting , Monthly AF/PDPA-GEC Coordination Meeting , Monthly AF/PDPA-GEC Coordination Meeting , Monthly AF/PDPA-GEC Coordination Meeting , Monthly AF/PDPA-GEC Coordination Meeting

8/3/22 UPDATE: Per the conversation at our meeting today, we are moving these to 12:30-1:30, the second Wednesday of every month. Ideally in person in SA-9 (2nd floor conference room), but with the flexibility to shift to virtual if need be.

Dear colleagues,

Please note that the monthly coordination meetings will now be held on the second Wednesday of every month, starting on February 9. Virtual format for now.

Best,
(b)(6)

Microsoft Teams meeting

Join on your computer or mobile app
Click here to join the meeting
Or call in (audio only)
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Subject: Monthly AF/PDPA-GEC Coordination Meeting

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class="WordSection1"> 8/29/22 UPDATE: Please note that we plan to hold this
meeting in person in the SA-9 2nd floor conference room. (b)(6) I?ll be happy to brief
you in advance on how these meetings usually go. I encourage new GEC leadership (from Russia, China, CT teams)
to attend as well if they have time. <o:p></o:p> <o:p> </o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal"><o:p> </o:p> 8/3/22 UPDATE: Per the
conversation at our meeting today, we are moving these to 12:30-1:30, the second Wednesday of every month.
Ideally in person in SA-9 (2nd floor conference room), but with the flexibility to shift to virtual if need
be. <o:p></o:p> <o:p> </o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal"><o:p> </o:p> Dear colleagues,<o:p></o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal"><o:p> </o:p> Please note that the monthly coordination
meetings will now be held on the second Wednesday of every month, starting on February 9. Virtual format for
now.<o:p></o:p> <o:p> </o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal">Best,<o:p></o:p> (b)(6) <o:p></o:p> <p
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Subject: Monthly AF/PDPA-GEC Coordination Meeting
Attachments: image001.png

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l2:level7\n{mso-level-number-format:bullet;\nmso-level-text:\F0B7;\nmso-level-tab-stop:3.5in;\nmso-level-number-position:left;\ntext-indent:-.25in;\nmso-ansi-font-size:10.0pt;\nfont-family:Symbol;}\n@list l2:level8\n{mso-level-number-format:bullet;\nmso-level-text:\F0B7;\nmso-level-tab-stop:4.0in;\nmso-level-number-position:left;\ntext-indent:-.25in;\nmso-ansi-font-size:10.0pt;\nfont-family:Symbol;}\n@list l2:level9\n{mso-level-number-format:bullet;\nmso-level-text:\F0B7;\nmso-level-tab-stop:4.5in;\nmso-level-number-position:left;\ntext-indent:-.25in;\nmso-ansi-font-size:10.0pt;\nfont-family:Symbol;}\n@list l3\n{mso-list-id:1825471074;\nmso-list-template-ids:-892024970;}\n@list l3:level1\n{mso-level-number-format:bullet;\nmso-level-text:\F0B7;\nmso-level-tab-stop:.5in;\nmso-level-number-position:left;\ntext-indent:-.25in;\nmso-ansi-font-size:10.0pt;\nfont-family:Symbol;}\n@list l3:level2\n{mso-level-number-format:bullet;\nmso-level-text:\F0B7;\nmso-level-tab-stop:1.0in;\nmso-level-number-position:left;\ntext-indent:-.25in;\nmso-ansi-font-size:10.0pt;\nfont-family:Symbol;}\n@list l3:level3\n{mso-level-number-format:bullet;\nmso-level-text:\F0B7;\nmso-level-tab-stop:1.5in;\nmso-level-number-position:left;\ntext-indent:-.25in;\nmso-ansi-font-size:10.0pt;\nfont-family:Symbol;}\n@list l3:level4\n{mso-level-number-format:bullet;\nmso-level-text:\F0B7;\nmso-level-tab-stop:2.0in;\nmso-level-number-position:left;\ntext-indent:-.25in;\nmso-ansi-font-size:10.0pt;\nfont-family:Symbol;}\n@list l3:level5\n{mso-level-number-format:bullet;\nmso-level-text:\F0B7;\nmso-level-tab-stop:2.5in;\nmso-level-number-position:left;\ntext-indent:-.25in;\nmso-ansi-font-size:10.0pt;\nfont-family:Symbol;}\n@list 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l4:level5\n{mso-level-number-format:bullet;\nmso-level-text:\F0B7;\nmso-level-tab-stop:2.5in;\nmso-level-number-position:left;\ntext-indent:-.25in;\nmso-ansi-font-size:10.0pt;\nfont-family:Symbol;}\n@list l4:level6\n{mso-level-number-format:bullet;\nmso-level-text:\F0B7;\nmso-level-tab-stop:3.0in;\nmso-level-number-position:left;\ntext-indent:-.25in;\nmso-ansi-font-size:10.0pt;\nfont-family:Symbol;}\n@list l4:level7\n{mso-level-number-format:bullet;\nmso-level-text:\F0B7;\nmso-level-tab-stop:3.5in;\nmso-level-number-position:left;\ntext-indent:-.25in;\nmso-ansi-font-size:10.0pt;\nfont-

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family:Symbol;}\n@list l4:level8\n{mso-level-number-format:bullet;\nmso-level-text:\F0B7;\nmso-level-tab-stop:4.0in;\nmso-level-number-position:left;\ntext-indent:-.25in;\nmso-ansi-font-size:10.0pt;\nfont-family:Symbol;}\n@list l4:level9\n{mso-level-number-format:bullet;\nmso-level-text:\F0B7;\nmso-level-tab-stop:4.5in;\nmso-level-number-position:left;\ntext-indent:-.25in;\nmso-ansi-font-size:10.0pt;\nfont-family:Symbol;}\nol\n{margin-bottom:0in;}\nul\n{margin-bottom:0in;}\n--></style><!--[if gte mso 9]><xml>\n<o:shapedefaults v:ext="edit" spidmax="1026" />\n</xml><![endif]--><!--[if gte mso 9]><xml>\n<o:shapelayout v:ext="edit">\n<o:idmap v:ext="edit" data="1" />\n</o:shapelayout></xml><![endif]--></head><body lang="EN-US" link="#0563C1" vlink="#954F72" style="word-wrap:break-word"> 10/12/22 Updated agenda below. Note that the meeting is virtual (Teams info below).<o:p></o:p> <o:p> </o:p> AF/PDPA ? GEC Monthly Coordination Meeting<o:p></o:p> October 12, 2022<o:p></o:p> <o:p></o:p> <a href="https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/ap/x-59584e83/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fusdos-my.sharepoint.com%2F%3Ax%3A%2Fg%2Fpersonal%2Fglavinna_state_gov%2FESOSD7mBAXRGhlf2Hay3mUQBNkOx7F7nQrxXVH8fxTYOiw%3Fe%3DPYxBLT&data=05%7C01%7C(b)(6)C%40state.gov%7C7be034e44ff84d31179208daac6c639a%7C66cf50745afe48d1a691a12b2121f44b%7C0%7C0%7C638011878798813953%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=PUxItAW%2Fi2gPYctz4lmB22xcuY8HgFP4CU1pyx%2FZhZU%3D&reserved=0" originalsrc="(b)(5)
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(b)(5)
(b)(5) Click or tap if you trust this link."><img border="0" width="16" height="16" style="width:.1666in;height:.1666in" id="x_x_x_x_x_x_x_Picture_x0020_4" src="cid:image001.png@01D8DE33.B7DE09B0" alt="xlsx icon"> GEC Programs in AF - Master Matrix.xlsx<o:p></o:p> <o:p></o:p> <ul style="margin-top:0in" type="disc"><li class="xxxxxxxxxxmsonormal" style="margin-top:0in;margin-bottom:0in;mso-list:l1 level1 lfo1;background:white">AF/PDPA:<o:p></o:p>
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<o:p></o:p> <o:p> </o:p> <ul style="margin-top:0in" type="disc"><li class="xxxxxxxxxxmsonormal" style="margin-top:0in;margin-bottom:0in;mso-list:l2 level1 lfo3;background:white">GEC:<o:p></o:p>
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<ul type="disc"><li class="xxxxxxxxxxmsonormal" style="mso-list:l2 level3 lfo3;background:white">Update: At the meeting.<o:p></o:p>
<li class="xxxxxxxxxxmsonormal" style="margin-top:0in;margin-bottom:0in;mso-list:l2 level2 lfo3;background:white">Russia Team:<o:p></o:p>
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(b)(5)
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lfo3;background:white">(b)(5)
(b)(5) <o:p></o:p>
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and expansion of current projects<o:p></o:p>
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lfo3;background:white">WA Tech Challenge<o:p></o:p>
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style="color:black">Iran Team:<o:p></o:p>
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style="margin-top:0in" type="disc"><ul style="margin-top:0in" type="disc"><li class="xxxxxxxxxxmsonormal"
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(b)(5) <o:p></o:p>
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bottom:0in;mso-list:l3 level1 lfo4;background:white">Next
meeting:<o:p></o:p>
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type="disc"><li class="xxxxxxxxxxmsonormal" style="margin-top:0in;margin-bottom:0in;mso-list:l0 level2
lfo5;background:white">Scheduled for November 9 (in person at SA-
9)<o:p></o:p> <o:p> </o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal"><o:p> </o:p> <o:p> </o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal">8/3/22 UPDATE: Per the conversation at our meeting today, we are moving these to
12:30-1:30, the second Wednesday of every month. Ideally in person in SA-9 (2nd floor conference
room), but with the flexibility to shift to virtual if need be. <o:p></o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal"><o:p> </o:p> <o:p> </o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal">Dear colleagues,<o:p></o:p> <o:p> </o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal">Please note that the monthly coordination meetings will now be held on the second
Wednesday of every month, starting on February 9. Virtual format for now.<o:p></o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal"><o:p> </o:p> Best,<o:p></o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal">(b)(6) <o:p></o:p> <o:p> </o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal"><o:p> </o:p> <span
style="color:#5F5F5F">_____
_____ <o:p></o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal"><span style="font-size:18.0pt;font-family:"Segoe UI",sans-
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class="MsoNormal"><span style="font-size:10.5pt;font-family:"Segoe UI",sans-
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Subject: Monthly AF/PDPA-GEC Coordination Meeting

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next Wednesday per GEC request, since we?d like (b)(6) to be able to brief on her trip. Note that it will
be in the virtual (Teams) format to allow for maximum participation. Planning to go back to regular schedule and in
person for December! <o:p></o:p> <o:p> </o:p> <p
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Subject: Monthly AF/PDPA-GEC Coordination Meeting

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13-15. Note that this will be in person at SA-9! Coffee and holiday treats provided, so I appreciate an accurate
RSVP count. Thanks!<o:p></o:p> <o:p> </o:p> <p
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Subject: Monthly AF/PDPA-GEC Coordination Meeting

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class="WordSection1"> For January 11: Several GEC colleagues and I have a
7th PSYOPS briefing at 1:00-2:00, and I know there are a number of other meetings that afternoon. I
propose to move this meeting to 11:00-12:00 and keep it virtual.<o:p></o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal"><o:p> </o:p> 8/3/22 UPDATE: Per the
conversation at our meeting today, we are moving these to 12:30-1:30, the second Wednesday of every month.
Ideally in person in SA-9 (2nd floor conference room), but with the flexibility to shift to virtual if need
be. <o:p></o:p> <o:p> </o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal"><o:p> </o:p> Dear colleagues,<o:p></o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal"><o:p> </o:p> Please note that the monthly coordination
meetings will now be held on the second Wednesday of every month, starting on February 9. Virtual format for
now.<o:p></o:p> <o:p> </o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal">Best,<o:p></o:p> Zsofia <o:p></o:p> <p
class="MsoNormal"><o:p> </o:p> <o:p> </o:p> <p
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