

GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice

9 May – 15 May

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Ukraine War Disinfo Narratives in Georgia

9-15 May

Main Findings/Summary:

Many of pro-Russian narratives continue to be carried across disinformation sources. The justification for the Russian invasion continues to lean on the West and the alleged Nazis in Ukraine as scapegoats. Some sources argue that given Russian military success, achieving truce would be difficult for Ukrainians.

The magnitude in which propaganda discusses the impact of sanctions has increased. The argument that Western sanctions have hurt the West more than Russia has taken centre stage in this discourse. Pro-Russian arguments such as increased Western aid to Ukraine serves the purpose of prolonging the war and Poland seeks to annex part of Ukraine has also emerged.

Fearmongering Narratives of the War Expanding beyond Ukraine to Georgia

- The most prevalent message concerned Bidzina Ivanishvili, former Prime Minister of Georgia and a billionaire considered to be an informal ruler of the country. Ivanishvili's financial transactions were hindered by Swiss Bank Credit Suisse, and as a result, the Georgian propaganda ecosystem got flooded by the messages that the US and the West were sanctioning Ivanishvili to force him to open a second front in Georgia. Not to mention the mainstream media, the message was spread through disinformation sources at least 30 times, for instance see [Split Space News](#) (another [author](#)), [News-](#)

[Front](#), [Geopress](#), [Blog News](#), [Georgian Report](#), [Media Digest](#), [Georgia and the World](#), [Tvalsazrishi](#), etc.

- [Alt-Info](#), [News-Front](#), TV [Obieqtivi](#), [Common Newspaper](#), [Split Space News](#) and [other Facebook pages claimed](#) that [the US](#), [Ukraine](#), [the West](#), and [Georgian opposition parties](#) want to open a second front against Russia, but Georgia refused, which is why they are angry with the Georgian government. Common newspaper also used the fearmongering tactic and [threatened](#) that Russia has enough resources to bomb Georgia and would manage to block the key highway connecting the Eastern and Western parts of Georgia with just a 500-strong force.
- TV Obieqtivi [claimed](#) that Poland's activity in the context of the war in Ukraine would backfire - the war would expand beyond the territory of Ukraine, and particularly, Poland would also join the battle. According to [Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi](#), Poland would be dragged into the war, and NATO would help neither Poland nor any other ally and would thus dismantle.

The Search for Justification for the Unprovoked Invasion

Russian propaganda is desperately trying to justify unleashing an unprovoked and brutal invasion into Ukraine by labelling the Ukrainian government as Nazis. Russian propaganda justifies Russia's invasion into Ukraine by diverting responsibility to several different actors. The main scapegoats are the alleged neo-Nazis in Ukraine, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky and the West.

- In the context of the May 9 Victory day (over Nazism) celebration in Russia and Georgia, pro-Russian outlets [Saqinform](#) and [Tvm.ge](#) portrayed Russia's unjustifiable invasion of Ukraine as a fair fight against Neo-Fascists. They [wrote](#) that it is symbolic

how the number 77 - referring to the 77th anniversary of May 9, 1945, victory in the "Great Patriotic War" - resembles Latin letters ZZ, symbol of Putin's war of choice in Ukraine and claimed that the fight against fascism still continues. Arno Khidirbegishvili, Editor-in-Chief of Saqinform, revealed that he had been waiting for revenge against Nazism for 30 years, and currently, justice was being restored by a limited contingent of Russia's armed forces conducting a "special operation". Khidirbegishvili professed that he is not sorry at all for the dead Nazis in Ukraine, but he is worried that none of Ukrainians or foreign mercenaries to survive. He also claimed that the PoWs who were not part of the mass tortures committed by Ukraine would serve to reconstruct Ukraine, which had been destroyed due to them. Khidirbegishvili stated that Ukrainians currently fighting against Nazism are the predecessors of the Ukrainian Nazis, such as Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych. Thus, the aforementioned pro-Russian outlets portrayed Russia's unjustifiable invasion of Ukraine as a fair fight against neo-fascists.

- Pro-Russian outlets Tvm.ge and Georgia and the World claimed that Ukraine had been preparing for an attack for a long time, and Russia has thwarted the plan of the widescale offensive of Ukrainian armed forces on DNR and LNR by launching its "special operation". This message justifies Russia's invasion by stating that Ukraine provoked Russia and Russia was forced to attack.
- Chairman of the "Alliance of Patriots" Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi, on TV Obieqtivi shifted the blame for the bombings and killings of civilians from Putin and the Russian army to Zelensky and the Ukrainian forces. He [depicted](#) Zelensky as the one who ordered the bombings and killings of Ukrainians, not Putin. Tarkhan-Mouravi argued that if Zelensky had started talking about neutrality two months ago, there would be no war and, therefore, no victims or refugees. Thus, According to Tarkhan-Mouravi, Germany

and France supported Ukraine's neutrality as a sole option to maintain Ukraine's statehood, but the US was against this solution. He also warned about the same plan of the US in Georgia and cautioned not to make the same mistake, thus indicating that Georgia should become a neutral state (TV [Obieqtivi](#) and [other sources](#) also parroted the same demand).

- Similarly, Split Space News [quoted](#) Lali Moroshkina, infamous for spreading lies and conspiracies regarding COVID-19 and Russia's war in Ukraine, blaming Zelensky, Arestovych, Zelensky's advisor and Adeishvili, former minister of justice of Georgia, currently Ukrainian official, for dragging Ukraine into the fight and claimed that the Ukrainian people had already started to the movement to get rid of them.
- Editor-in-Chief of the pro-Russian Isari.ge, Hamlet Chipashvili, [published](#) an overview of the war in the Kremlin-sponsored News-Front blaming NATO for irritating Moscow and causing the Kremlin's retaliation. The article also claimed that the US nudged Ukraine into the war with Moscow in order to defeat Russia militarily and economically. The author also claims the "Neo-Fascist" Ukrainian armed forces have waged war in Donetsk and Luhansk.
- Leader of the pro-Russian political party "Alliance of Patriots", Irma Inashvili, also [accused](#) NATO of instigating Ukraine to fight and then not helping it.

Military Situation on the Ground through Kremlin Lenses

The pro-Russian propaganda continued to portray the Russian military as successfully advancing on Ukrainian territory and the Ukrainian military as a losing side which also targets civilians. Also, Kremlin mouthpieces asserted that the West cannot and would not save Ukraine, as they have ulterior motives:

- Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi, speaking on TV Obieqtivi, shamelessly [claimed](#) that Russia's "operation" is advancing at a slow pace because the Russian army is trying to avoid damage to civilians.
- According to [Alt-Info](#), it is only a matter of time before Russia seizes Luhansk and Donetsk. Alt-Info further [claimed](#) that despite Ukraine being one of the largest states and having one of the largest armies in Europe, is still losing the war and will eventually lose it. Alt-Info also [stated](#) that Russia is still in the regime of conducting a special operation, not a war, and if Russia switched to war mode, it would be much more difficult for Ukraine to resist.
- Some Facebook pages [suggested](#) that Ukraine would not be able to retrieve lost territories and should declare neutrality.
- Another Facebook page [claimed](#) that the Ukrainian government wants to destroy the Azov battalion, and then they will start praising them for scoring rating points.
- Facebook pages of pro-Russian [Infoanalytical.ge](#) and [Irakli Jankarashvili](#) accused Ukraine of using civilian vehicles to launch missiles.
- News-Front [asserted](#) that the Biden administration is withholding intelligence information and not sharing it with Kyiv.
- On TV Obieqtivi, pro-Russian blogger Irakli Jankarashvili [stated](#) that Zelensky had realised that economic sanctions could no longer deter Russia, and he should not have any hope of the collective West and thus, he is demanding an audience with Putin. However, he concluded that the meeting was not beneficial for Putin as he was winning the war, and Russia would eventually be victorious.

- TV Obieqtivi [disseminated](#) the message that behind the Eastern Partnership, a Polish project, lies a plan to restore Rzecz Poczpolita, and to this end, Poland, with the blessing from the US and Russia, is preparing to annex Ukrainian territories.

For the Kremlin Economic Consequences of Sanctions are hurting the West, not - Russia

Russian propaganda has utilised the healthy, objective debate between experts and analysts in the Western media regarding the effectiveness of sanctions imposed on Russia to its advantage and added more fuel to its firehouse of propaganda. Russian propaganda creates an allusion that Western sanctions on Russian imports induce more self-harm than debilitate the Russian economy:

- Sputnik Georgia [stressed](#) that banning Russia's oil exports would be suicide for Europe.
- Pro-Russian "Georgia and the World", Split Space News, and some Facebook accounts/groups [disseminated](#) the quote of Tina Kandelaki, a Russian celebrity and propagandist of Georgian origin, arguing that the Western sanctions are funnier every time. She noted that the sanctions had not damaged Russia, citing that Russia still imported Western movies. Adding to that absurd statement, she claims Russia does not need Western equipment and does not care about flight restrictions to the US.
- iNews [remarked](#) that instead of Russia, the US got damaged by sanctions imposed on Russia, as the rouble keeps gaining value and the US dollar and Euro are depreciating. [Split Space News](#) and some Facebook accounts and [groups](#) have also underscored this point.

- Kartuli TV (Georgian TV) [stated](#) that despite the Western narrative that Russia is "a bad guy" and pushing Georgia to fight against Russia, the West itself still covertly trades with Russia, in parallel to imposing sanctions against Moscow. Kartuli TV also blamed the West for forcing Georgia to lose historical ties with Russia (in reality, mainly colonial/imperial ties) and isolate Georgia from Russia economically and politically while the West itself enjoys trade with Russia.
- Facebook users [commented](#) about the news that the UK banned the import of iron and steel from Russia, reasoning that the consequence of economic sanctions on Russia is that Russia is no "longer robbed." Such a statement absurdly suggests that buying products from a country is a robbery and insinuates, more broadly, the message that the West is no longer robbing from Russia.

Land Lease irritates Kremlin proxies in Georgia

[Alt-Info](#), [Space News](#), [InfoAnalytical](#) (and its author Irakli Jankarashvili), and some [Facebook users](#) have criticised the US for enacting the land-lease bill and the 40 billion USD support package for Ukraine. They claimed that Biden's intention to sign the law was to prolong the war and create a new Afghanistan for Russia in Ukraine. They added that the US is waging a proxy war with Russia and aim to restrict Russia's economic development. According to a Facebook user, NATO is prolonging the war and thus, facilitating the killing of the Ukrainians. According to the user, the answer to war is peace, not "more war", as if Ukraine or NATO chose or could unilaterally end the war. The US support package to Ukraine was also criticised on the grounds of its massive paycheck amid US's own economic woes. According to the message, the US cannot afford to help Ukraine due to its financial situation, and such a policy would lead the US into a recession.

A respondent of Saerto Gazeti (Common Newspaper) [claimed](#) that the visit of US Secretary of State and Secretary of Defence proved that the US has allocated vast amounts of finances for Ukraine and has decided to provide weaponry. However, he doubted whether the US could deliver those weapons to Ukrainian territory since Russia has preserved its capability to hinder this process and has stated that it would use a nuclear weapon – Sarmat, an analogue of which does not exist in the world - in reality, Russia has not vowed to use nuclear strikes against Western military aid shipments.

TV Obieqtivi [claimed](#) that the military assistance to Ukraine is making no difference, but in case of Russia's victory, every supplier would be held accountable.



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