

GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice

25 July – 31 July

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Ukraine War Disinfo Narratives in Georgia

25-31 July

Fearmongering Narrative of the War Expanding Beyond Ukraine into Georgia

Traditionally, threatening the Georgian public with the war against Russia and criticising the West for its desire to drag Georgia into the war with Russia has been the major disinformation narrative during the week of 24-31 July. The US and its ambassador in Georgia, Kelly Degnan, have been vigorously targeted by the disinformation actors. This trend has been picked up from the Georgian Dream (GD) government and three of its affiliated MPs who recently only formally left the party and who spread the impugning statements about the US ambassador.

The Information Integrity Coalition (a coalition of Georgian NGOs aiming to fight against disinformation and propaganda) started a new public [campaign](#) against the prevailing propaganda narrative that the West is trying to drag Georgia into the war with Russia. The campaign, which encompasses posters and banners in public spaces, video clips and media outreach, has become the target of propaganda:

- The Political Satire Facebook page [responded](#) to the campaign started by the Information Integrity Coalition and claimed that after the United National Movement (UNM – the biggest opposition party) and its patrons in the West failed to drag Georgia into the war with Russia, they started a "campaign of excuses in order to justify themselves."

- The media outlet of the Alliance of Patriots pro-Russian political party, TV Obieqtivi, discussed the public letter released by Bidzina Ivanishvili regarding his affirmation of a meeting with the US ambassador after the start of the war in Ukraine. According to Obieqtivi, it is [clear](#) from Mr Ivanishvili's letter that there were attempts to drag Georgia into the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. In another TV Obieqtivi programme, it was [stated](#) that the Georgian people should not let the opposition of Mikheil Saakashvili (ex-President and leader of the UNM) and politicians from the US and the European Parliament open a second front against Russia in Georgia. TV Obieqtivi falsely claimed that Georgia's joining the "anti-Russian" sanctions and opening a second front is one of the secret points in the 12-point European Commission recommendations that Georgia should fulfil in order to get candidate status.
- Pro-Russian Alt-Info has also [responded](#) to the public letter released by Bidzina Ivanishvili and asserted that Mr Ivanishvili, as the founder of the Georgian Dream party, declared what was already known - the collective West, with the help of its diplomatic representatives, is pushing Georgia into the war. According to Alt-Info, Mr Ivanishvili's letter indicates that the Georgian Dream's relations with the West have been strained because they did not join the war. Alt-Info posed a rhetorical question to indicate the need for a foreign policy change - "Why should we aspire toward the West that tries to make us commit state suicide?" Another of Alt-Info's TV programmes [mentioned](#) that the US and the EU desired to drag Georgia into the war and suggested that the Georgian government should publicly declare, instead of indirectly hinting, that the countries trying to involve Georgia in the war are enemies. Alt-Info concluded that the West has big levers against the GD, especially against Bidzina Ivanishvili, who owns large properties in Europe and the US. One of the leaders of the Alt-Info, Irakli Martinenko, particularly [blamed](#) the US for its desire to drag Georgia into the war with Russia. According to Mr Martinenko, the US does not care

about democracy, human rights or welfare in Georgia and it only needs the country as a polygon against Russia. One of the leaders of the Alt-Info group, Zurab Makharadze, has also targeted the US and its ambassador in Georgia. According to Mr Makharadze, US [Ambassador](#) Kelly Degnan supports warmongers because the US wants Georgia to open a second front against Russia. The US Department of State declaring that the ambassador's statements are at its behest indicates that Kelly Degnan is fulfilling the instructions of the US government. Alt info's Zura Makharadze also [assessed](#) that despite the risks of persecution by the US and the EU, Alt-Info plays the role of "icebreaker" to save Georgia from the same fate as Ukraine and, particularly, Mariupol as they talk publicly about the West's attempts to drag Georgia into a war against Russia.

- Facebook user Dito Bidzinashvili, famous for his anti-Western stances, [speculated](#) that Poland would be the next hot spot of conflict for the West. Mr Bidzinashvili proclaimed that Poland was planning to buy a large amount of weaponry and significantly increase the number of soldiers which indicates that the preparation to start a war against Russia was underway. He also claimed that Poland's government is a puppet of the West like Ukraine and would be dragged into a bloody war which it cannot win. Mr Bidzinashvili further warned that Georgia would be the next target for instigating a new conflict as the West is not going to "spare anyone."
- [According](#) to the Sect Facebook page, the three MPs (Khundadze, Kavelashvili and Subari) have 100% proof that US Ambassador Kelly Degnan has demanded Bidzina Ivanishvili, the alleged informal ruler, to drag Georgia into the war. The page joined a massive ongoing campaign against the ambassador, claiming that she is doing much harm to Georgia.

- The Kremlin-affiliated media News-Front [shared](#) an interview of the director of the Russian proxy Eurasian Institute, Gulbaat Rtskhiladze (who recently visited the occupied Donbas region), which was aired on Obieqtivi TV and where Mr Rtskhiladze mentioned that he does not express solidarity with Ukraine since Kyiv is trying to drag Georgia into the war with Russia. He added that Georgians should tear down the Ukrainian flags.

Blame Game - Justifying the Unprovoked Invasion

Pro-Russian propaganda has centred on shifting the blame for the start of the war on NATO and the West's "marionettes" - high-ranking Ukrainian authorities:

- The pro-Russian media and political group - Alt-Info once again [blamed](#) the Ukrainian government for the outbreak of the war. The Russian propaganda outlet argued that Oleksiy Arestovych, Dmytro Kuleba, Mykhailo Podolyak and other Ukrainian officials were responsible for dragging Ukraine into the devastating war which brought a country of 40 million to the edge of vanishing. Alt-info also stated that these Ukrainian officials are threatening Georgia's government due to not fulfilling the primary assignment of the West of dragging Georgia into the war, unlike Ukraine.
- Alt-info [restated](#) that Ukraine's NATO aspirations caused the war. Specifically, Alt-info proclaimed that Russia has been warning Ukraine against the expansion of NATO's borders and the deployment of air defence systems on its territory which would have presented a threat to Russia's security. Gulbaat Rtskhiladze, Director of Russia's proxy Eurasian Institute, also [disseminated](#) this message and stated that Georgia and the Georgian Dream government should accurately assess and respect the power and strength of the Russian Federation. He claimed that the disaster of Ukraine was a

consequence of NATO expansion and not Russia's will to conquer new territories. Other Facebook users also [conveyed](#) messages blaming NATO.

- Several Facebook accounts [posted about](#) the explosion of the area where the Azov Battalion member PoWs were held. According to these posts, Americans and Ukrainians carried out the attack as they knew these prisoners would give official testimony against the Ukrainian government. Specifically, they would confess that Ukraine was planning military operations against Russia with the help and the inducement of the US government.
- A Facebook user [shared](#) a quote from a former United States Marine Corps intelligence officer and convicted sex offender, Scott Ritter, who accused the US of igniting the war. Ritter claimed that without the nudge from the US, the war in Ukraine would not break out which has devastated not only Ukraine but the whole of Europe as well.

Military Situation on the Ground Through Kremlin Lenses

As the Russian advance has all but stalled and there has been no tangible success to boast about for weeks, pro-Russian propaganda outlets continued to persuade the public that Russia has already won and started giving pledges about when Ukraine and its Western patrons would admit defeat:

- A military expert, Guram Nikolaishvili, [stated](#) on the air on Obieqtivi TV that Russia's "special operation" would be completed in 30 days.
- Alt-Info [reiterated](#) the narrative that Ukraine would be defeated in the war. Shota Martinenko, one of the group's leaders, stated that the Ukrainians, as the puppets of the West, would realise with winter coming that Ukraine is doomed to lose the war.

- The Sect Facebook propaganda page [claimed](#) that Russia would annex Kherson, Donbas, Zaporizhzhia and other cities like it did with Crimea. Based on this assertion, the page mocked the people who believed that Ukraine would win the war and yet again labelled Ukraine's government as a puppet of the US.
- A pro-Russian Facebook page [claimed](#) the war's end and, consequently, that the end of Zelensky's regime was close. Without any factual or logical background, the page also stated that the Ukrainian people already considered Dmitry Medvedev as the President of Ukraine.

Propaganda Narratives Regarding Economic Sanctions

Despite the official Kremlin rhetoric and messaging regarding the consequences of the economic sanctions exposed and debunked by the comprehensive research from Yale University scholars, Russian propaganda maintained the positioning that nothing is seriously affecting Russia whilst the West is heading for the abyss:

- [According](#) to a pro-Russian propaganda page, the formation of the BRICS alliance meant the end for the US and the EU economies.
- On the air on the pro-Russian Alt-Info, Kremlin sympathisers [disseminated](#) a message that even the West realised that sanctions do not and will not work but, on the contrary, the sanctions are working against them. To illustrate this, they claimed that Germany asked Canada to release a Nord Stream 1 pipeline turbine despite sanctions.
- Appearing on the Alt-Info TV channel, one of its leaders, Shota Martinenko, [contended](#) that the war dynamics showcased that it is clear to the West that defeating Russia with sanctions did not work, although Russia is not able to win

the war in a fast manner. However, he claimed that the losses of the West's marionette - Ukraine, would reach such amounts that it would be clear that Ukraine is finally losing the war.

- Talking on the Alt-Info TV channel, Zurab Makharadze of the pro-Russian Conservative Movement [stated](#) that while the Russian economy has not collapsed due to the unexpectedly prolonged war, the West is having some severe problems. He stated that the main topic of discussion in the US is whether or not the American economy is in a recession.
- Anti-Western Didgori TV [argued](#) that Russia supplies the whole world with chemical fertilisers as well as with inert gases without which the production of computer chips and the most complex electrical equipment is unimaginable. Didgori TV further claimed that economic sanctions designed to damage Russia hurt the Western economies instead as the issues concerning energy, wheat and now fertilisers and computer chips are too much for the West to be able to withstand.
- Kremlin propaganda keeps insisting that the West is endangering the world with hunger. Touching upon this issue, Sputnik Georgia [accused](#) Western diplomats and the mainstream media of falsely blaming Russia for sacrificing a vast part of the world for hunger and death. Instead, Sputnik claimed that it is the West which is preparing the world for hunger without Ukrainian wheat and that it is time for the West to re-evaluate who is actually affecting the food crisis.
- Editor-in-Chief of the pro-Russian Isari.ge, Hamlet Chipashvili, [published](#) an article according to which the US is in a catastrophic economic situation, already in a recession, but the Western media has the same scapegoat for every problem - Russia. Mr Chipashvili stated that by imposing "anti-Russian" sanctions, the US had hurt itself

and the rest of the world whilst falling short of making any meaningful impact on Russia.

- The pro-Russian outlet - Saqinform.ge - furthered the same [narrative](#) that it is only the West which is severely hurt by the side-effects of the "anti-Russian" sanctions, claiming that Germany even declared a reduction in the production of toilet paper as it faces the mass shortage of energy resources. According to the article, such a nightmare was caused by Germany's opportunism to try again after 77 years since the capitulation to defeat Russia, albeit this time with the hand of Ukrainian Nazis.

Propaganda Narratives Regarding Military Aid to Ukraine

As Ukraine receives more and more Western-donated weapons, this week's propaganda only stated that military assistance would lead to more escalation of the conflict instead of arguing that Western military aid is futile as have been the narratives in the previous weeks.

This week, Sputnik-Georgia [reported](#) that the United States plans to provide Ukraine with F-16 fighter aircraft, admitting that they represent one of the most capable jets and concluding that their delivery would further escalate the conflict.

No to NATO, Endorse Russia-led Organisations Instead - Russian Propaganda Says:

- Giorgi Iremadze, the founder of the pro-Russian Patrioti TV, [voiced](#) the narrative that Georgia should say no to NATO and declare neutrality and enshrine it in the constitution. According to him, this foreign policy course would prevent Georgia from opening the "second front" against Russia, something that he believes is allegedly

promoted by the opposition parties, politicians from the US and MEPs. Mr Iremadze also suggested that his offered foreign policy course, along with a no to NATO, includes a no to implementing the EU's 12-point recommendations, sorting out relations with Russia and joining the rouble currency zone and the Eurasian Economic Union.

- One of the messages usually employed by propaganda actors against NATO in Georgia is that it is on the brink of dissolution. Not diverging from this practice, a [member](#) of the Conservative Movement and the propaganda Sect Facebook page [claimed](#) that the end of NATO is near. This narrative is based on a falsified statement as if Donald Trump has said that he would not protect the alliance members in the case of a Russian aggression.

West Enemy, Russia – Ally - Point of View of Propaganda Actors in Georgia:

- A pro-Russian Facebook page [continued](#) claiming that Russia is a friend and the US and Europe are [enemies](#). Another propagandist Facebook page – Sect – [promoted](#) the message that US dominance should end not only in Georgia but in the whole of Europe and the world.
- The Pro-Kremlin outlet - Georgia and the World - [wrote](#) that Europe and the US, previously perceived as strategic allies, are now pressing Georgia to destabilise the country and return the previous ruling party, a pariah for Georgia and the World, to power.
- Giorgi [Iremadze](#) and another Facebook account characterised Georgia-West relations as a colony and its metropolis. They also [claimed](#) that the West interfered in Georgia's internal affairs and sought to further strengthen its influence over Georgia.

- Medical expert, Maia [Nikoleishvili](#), pro-Russian propagandist, Dito [Bidzinashvili](#), and the GD-affiliated [Leader](#) 41 Facebook page shared anti-American narratives by saying that the ambassador of the US interferes with Georgia's internal affairs and works against the country's interests. Alt-info voiced the same rhetoric which [suggested](#) a rapprochement with Russia as a strategic solution to this intricate situation. It also proposed that the West should be a part of Georgia's foreign policy but Georgia should engage with the following policy-makers - Donald Trump, Victor Orban, Matteo Salvini and Marine Le Pen - all known for their illiberal views and some of them for the links with the Kremlin. Alt-info also [incited](#) nihilism by declaring that Georgia would never join the EU, something that both Georgia and Europe are well aware of.
- Guram Palavandishvili, the leader of the anti-Western Georgian Idea party, [stated](#) on the air of Alt-info that David Arakhamia - one of the leaders of Ukraine's ruling party; Kelly Degnan - US Ambassador to Georgia, the United National Movement, NGOs and LGBT communities are different pieces of the same evil. According to Mr Palavandishvili, Russia is the target of these groups and Georgia is one of the weapons in the fight against it.

Attention, Moscow is Speaking: Russian Disinformation on Facebook and Instagram

The Russian propaganda machine continues labelling Ukraine as a Nazi state, thus justifying the unprovoked war in the country. A false [claim](#) on this issue circulated on Facebook insisted that Nazi ideology was widespread in the US in the middle of the 20th century. According to the disinformation, those sympathies for Nazism have not entirely vanished in Washington DC with the Biden administration now supporting Ukraine's Nazi government in Kyiv. Another set of identical viral posts falsely claimed that Ukrainian refugees with Nazi tattoos

were spotted in Croatia. In fact, the two men [depicted](#) in the images were not Ukrainians at all. Meanwhile, according to Russian propaganda, Polish youth rallied at a demonstration in Wroclaw and demanded the removal of the Ukrainian flag from public transportation – a clear [exaggeration](#) of a flash mob-like gathering of several individuals. In another development, Russian propaganda reported that President Joe Biden had [compared](#) the state of the American economy to his health while pro-Kremlin sources claimed that the only way out of this chaos was connected with Vladimir Putin – the Italians, according to Russian propaganda, have already realised this with many in Italy [asking](#) Putin to save the world.



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