

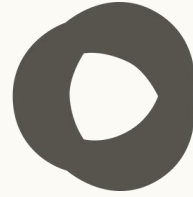
**PRO-RUSSIAN NARRATIVES ABOUT THE
WAR IN UKRAINE:
AN ANALYSIS OF BROAD
DISINFORMATION TRENDS AND HOW
THEY MANIFEST IN GEORGIA**

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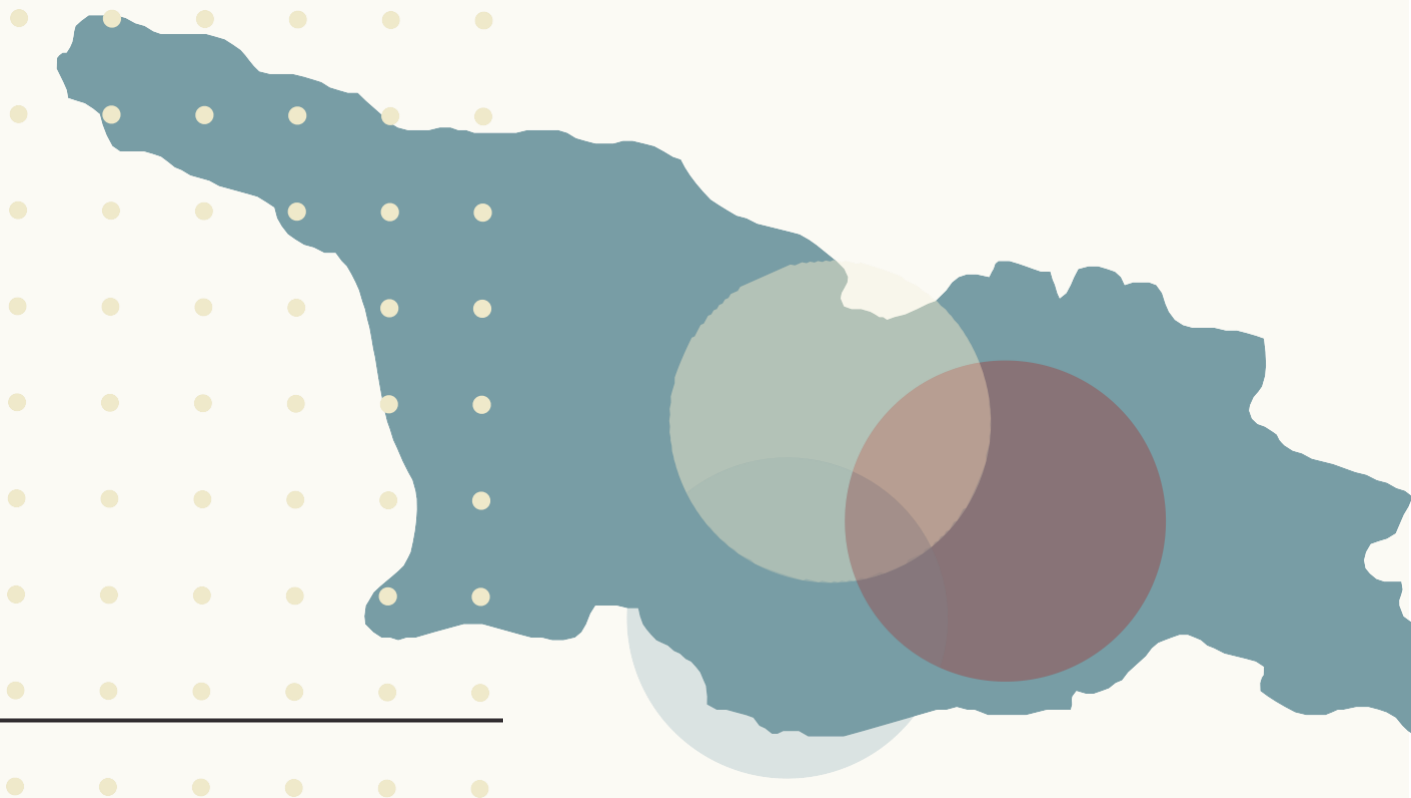
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INTRODUCTION

This report is a synopsis of the research conducted at Georgia's Research Associates (GRASS) regarding the disinformation narratives on the war in Ukraine. [1] It outlines the broad narrative trends in Russian disinformation in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Georgia and addresses how they specifically manifest in Georgia from February 24, 2022, the onset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, until July 3, 2020. The first section of this paper finds three messaging strategies that categorize Russian disinformation narrative trends: portraying a savior complex, vilifying enemies, and creating a strong versus weak dichotomy between Russia and its enemies. Although these three categories are not mutually exclusive, each messaging strategy offers a framework that affords a comprehensive understanding of pro-Russian disinformation trends. While these strategies cannot be verified as Kremlin-born strategies, open-source information suggests that in following narrative patterns, these strategies are one framework to examine the narratives fostered by the Russian disinformation and propaganda machine. The second part of the report addresses how disinformation narratives appear in Georgia regarding the Russia-Ukraine war, identifying how alt-right groups and declaratively pro-Western parties, specifically the Georgian government's ruling party, the Georgian Dream, leverage Russian propaganda and disinformation to structure and legitimize their respective ideologies.

METHODOLOGY

This report is mainly a summary of the content found on FactCheck.ge and the weekly newsletter "GRASS Disinfo Brief—Putin's War of Choice." The research on these platforms analyzes pro-Russia political disinformation disseminated on social media, television, and news outlets.

[1] Meta sponsors FactCheck.ge research. Within Third-Party fact-checking Program, FactCheck monitors and analyzes misinformation spread on Meta's platforms. Based on FactCheck.ge's analysis, Meta provides an additional warning to the users as well as demotes content that was rated as false news. "Grass Disinfo—Putin's War of Choice" is sponsored by Open Information Partnership, a network uniting organizations that work tirelessly to combat the spread of disinformation – conducting research, analysis and investigations, producing reports, publishing articles and developing tools and methodologies.

"GRASS FactCheck," FactCheck, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://factcheck.ge/ka?>

"GRASS: Newsletter: GRASS Disinfo Brief—Putin's War of Choice," GRASS.ge, <https://grass.org.ge/en/newsletter-225/grass-disinfo-brief-putins-war-of-choice-228>.

FactCheck.ge provides the evidence to support the three pro-Russian disinformation strategies identified in the first part of the paper. FactCheck.ge uses Meta's Third-Party Fact-Checking Program, which identifies misinformation recognized by algorithms, such as similarity detection, and feedback from Meta's community.

FactCheck.ge also uses CrowdTangle to monitor approximately 200 Facebook pages and groups that have been flagged as disinformation spreaders, including Facebook pages of pro-Kremlin outlets in Georgia. [1] These tools give FactCheck.ge access to Russian state media outlets and Russian language accounts on Meta's platforms in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Georgia. Moreover, the content on FactCheck.ge is pulled from monitored Russian TV outlets and pro-Russian media on Facebook. [2] Thus, this first portion of the report synthesizes Russian disinformation trends spread in the Russian language in Russian, Ukraine, and Belarus.

The second part of this paper examines the findings of the "GRASS Disinfo Brief —Putin's War of Choice," a weekly newsletter summarizing pro-Russian and anti-Western disinformation across Facebook and news outlets in Georgia and in the Georgian language. This content is attained by CrowdTangle and Newswhip monitoring, which focuses on tracking trends across the 200 pro-Kremlin outlets in Georgia. Meta services mentioned above provide some more insight into narrative trends. Since the newsletter began in May, this portion of the report also uses Georgia-focused content produced on FactCheck.ge between February 24 and May 1, 2022. Through the "GRASS Disinfo Brief" and FactCheck.ge, this second part of the report summarizes disinformation trends across Facebook, television, and news outlets produced in the Georgian language regarding the war in Ukraine.

[1] Pro-Kremlin outlets in this paper refers to Facebook pages operating in Georgian, have Georgian domains, and narratives aligned with the Russian disinformation.

[2] The main new outlets monitored include: "Первого канала," Facebook, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/1tvnews/posts/5683413398341549>; "Телеканал "ЗВЕЗДА,"" Facebook, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/tvzvezda/>; "RT Russia," Facebook, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/RTRussian/>; "Звезда Live," Facebook, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/people/%D0%97%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B4%D0%B0-LIVE/100068067170182/>; "Известия," Facebook, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/izvestia.ru/>; "Blotknot_politika," Facebook, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/Sputnikabkhazia/>; "Sputnik: Южная Осетия новости события дня," Facebook, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/sputnikosseti/>; "Sputnik Абхазия," Facebook, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/Sputnikabkhazia/>; "Новости Политика," Facebook, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/arutiunian4499/>; "АТННовости Беларуси мира," Facebook, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/ATNBTRC/>.

Results and Analysis:

1. Main Findings

GRASS open-source research suggests that there are three messaging strategies used when constructing pro-Russian narratives regarding the war in Ukraine across media in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Georgia. While these overarching messages are not mutually exclusive, they provide a holistic framework for identifying key patterns perpetuated by pro-Russia media and offer potential insight into disinformation strategies and tactics the Kremlin uses to legitimize Russian intervention in Ukraine.

The primary strategy of pro-Russian disinformation is to portray Russia as a “savior” of Ukraine. Narratives in this category suggest that Russia has a savior complex, defined as “responsibility and desire to save.” Three trending narratives ground this messaging strategy: a call to denazify Ukraine, spotlighting humanitarian injustice to the region, and glorification of Russian morality. These narrative trends have been a bedrock of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, justifying Russia’s intervention in the war, painted as a “special military operation.” More broadly, this supports Russian President Vladimir Putin’s foreign policy efforts to reunite imperial Russia.

The second messaging strategy of pro-Russia disinformation is vilifying others, such as the Ukrainian military, President Volodymyr Zelensky, the West, and its respective actors, by portraying them as inhumane and enemies of Russia and civilians in Ukraine. The magnitude of who and what is vilified has changed over the course of the war. However, the Ukrainian military continues to be a widely targeted “enemy” in pro-Russian disinformation, where pro-Kremlin sources label Russian military attacks as Ukrainian or staged attacks by using false or manipulated media coverage. Unlike the stable and consistent coverage of an inhuman Ukrainian military, likely consistent to further strengthen and perpetuate that savior messaging, Russian disinformation targeted Zelensky more in the onset of the invasion than later in the war. By May, with conflict appear to last longer than a short “special military operation” in tandem with shifting geopolitics and changes in the international economic climate, pro- Russian media increased the magnitude in which it villainized the West and decreased the amount of content on Zelensky.

The third messaging strategy of pro-Russian disinformation is to create a strong versus weak narrative between Russia and others. While the two former messaging strategies complement this third narrative strategy by creating a Russian moral superiority over other actors like the Ukrainian military and the West, this strategy is also employed by fostering narratives that capture the physical and economic superiority of Russia. This message is constructed through creating a strong and weak dichotomy between Russia and its alleged enemies by frequently discussing Russian military victories and Ukrainian military defeats, as well as the positive impact of sanctions on Russia and their negative effects on the West.

Identifying trends in pro-Russian narratives and finding that these patterns fit into a strategic framework crystalized pro-Russia disinformation tactics. In the case of disinformation of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Georgia, facts are often completely made up by pro-Russian outlets and perpetuated by pro-Russian groups. Sometimes Russian sources distort the truth. Pro-Russian disinformation manipulates Western experts' and political leaders' quotes to make them appear as a villain to Russia or to "verify" a pro-Kremlin disinformation story. The clearest example of the latter is when Russia places blame on the Ukrainian military for its own attack against Ukrainian civilians and infrastructure. Other methods, more common several months into the war, include labeling the West's information from news outlets as disinformation, suggesting that sources outside Russia were not reliable for truth.

In examining how pro-Russian disinformation trends appear in Georgia, these three strategies and tactics are common; however, the vilification of the West and Ukrainian refugees (specifically in May-July 2022) is more dominant in Georgian Pro-Russian narratives. Beyond fearmongering about how the West is urging Georgia to go to war with Russia, the other popular way to vilify the West is through discourse about its military aid to Ukraine. The West appears often in narratives about economic sanctions and weapons of mass destruction. Georgian pro-Russia disinformation narratives discuss the latter in more magnitude and detail, frequently claiming that the US supports biological weapon development in Tbilisi, Georgia, and nuclear weapons development in Ukraine. The Ukraine refugees are depicted as criminals or as agents of Ukraine and the West to start a revolution in Georgia that will lead to a second war front in Georgia.

Fearmongering about the war's expansion into Georgia is a primary trend in Georgian disinformation concerning the war in Ukraine. Fearmongering cannot be considered uniquely a pro-Russia disinformation strategy because it is also employed by anti-Western groups and the ruling government party, Georgian Dream (GD) each with different reasons for spreading narratives about opening a second war front on the border of Russia and Georgia. In effect, pro-Russia and anti-Western groups often commend GD for preventing a second war front. GD has also spread some of this same messaging as pro-Russia groups, a primary example being that Georgia did not receive EU candidate status in June as a "punishment" for not opening a second war front against Russia. While pro-Russia narratives spread anti-messaging narratives to villainize the West and GD spreads anti-Western messages to create a scapegoat for their political shortcomings, the results are the same: Georgians are increasingly exposed to disinformation that the West wants to see a war in Georgia.

2. RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION NARRATIVE STRATEGIES:

When examining how narratives string together on Facebook and Russian-state sponsor media in the Russian language content, three overarching strategy emerged, including a Russian savior complex, vilifying enemies, and strong/weak dichotomy. Russian disinformation also creates several rabbit-hole narratives that complement this framework. These strategies span across Russian media platforms suggesting that they are deliberately employed by the Russian disinformation machine and are not merely reactionary and consequential to the Ukrainian-Russian conflict.

A. Russian Savior Complex

There has yet to be a single definition of the savior complex, yet various facets of society have sought to define it. Within health, the savior complex has been clinically defined as the need or desire to save others by fixing their problems. [1] The International Bipolar Foundation calls the behavior of some schizophrenics and bipolars a Messiah Complex: "A complex psychological state when a person believes that he or she is a savior today or he or she will be in the near future," responsible for rescuing the whole world. [2]

The pro-Russian narratives surrounding the war in Ukraine incorporate a savior complex which for the scope of this paper refers to Russian "responsibility and desire to save." Whom and what Russia saves varies depending on the context of the disinformation. However, the mentality that Russia must save those who suffer in Ukraine is the bedrock of the Russian disinformation narrative. Those impacting the Ukrainian people's way of life are simultaneously villainized in this process and a strict hero versus villain dichotomy emerges in the sub-context of pro-Russia content.

When President Vladimir Putin gave his speech on February 24, 2022, prior to the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, he set the tone for the overarching savior complex narrative. [3] Putin called the attack a "special military operation" avoiding the term 'war'. The intention of the intervention was:

[1] Timothy J. Legg, "Always Trying to Save People? You Might Have a Savior Complex," Healthline, accessed July 20, 2020, <https://www.healthline.com/health/savior-complex#:~:text=A%20savior%20complex%2C%20or%20white,you%20end%20up%20bur ning%20out>.

[2] "Messiah Complex," International Bipolar Foundation, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://ibpf.org/messiah-complex/>.

[3] Notably, this narrative is not new to Putin's jargon. He has said similar statements for years. With the invasion of Ukraine

RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES



"To protect people who have been subjugated to bullying and genocide...from the last eight years...We will strive for demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine." [1]

This statement not only exemplifies the savior complex attached to pro-Russian media narratives but also encapsulates several of the widespread sub-narratives pro-Russian media iterated throughout the war thus far, namely denazification, humanitarian injustice, and glorification of the self.

Kremlin-sourced media uses these media strategies to justify restoring Russian imperialism. Putin's main political goal is to expand the Russian borders and reinstate its former colonies as subordinate to the state of Russia. According to Putin, "either a country is sovereign, or it is a colony, no matter what the colonies are called." [2] Granted that Putin has continuously argued that Ukrainians do not have a legitimate national identity and that their state is a puppet of the West, he believes that Ukrainians lack agency. In turn, Ukrainian restoration to Russia not only expands the bounds of Russia but allows those who are without leadership to be given rights to a sovereign ruler. More importantly, invading Ukraine enables Russia to be restored in full of "all-Russian" people including Great, little (Ukrainian), and White (Belarusian) Russians. [3] This imperialist logic is the foundation of Putin's foreign policy, crystalizing why he led Russia to invade Ukraine.

i. **Denazification of Ukraine:**

The Russian state's broader political narrative to restore imperial Russia grounds the parallel drawn between Nazism and the Ukrainian government. Although Putin frequently references to the Russian Empires built by Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, he also calls to restore the Empire of the Soviet Union, solidified by the Russian victory of World War II.

[4] Andrew Osborn, "Russia's Putin authorizes 'special military operation' against Ukraine," Reuters, accessed on July 20, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-putin-authorises-military-operations-donbass-domestic-media-2022-02-24/> .

[5] Nathan Hodge, "Restoration of empire is the endgame for Russia's Vladimir Putin," CNN, accessed on July 20, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/10/europe/russia-putin-empire-restoration-endgame-intl-cmd/index.html>.

[6] "Russia's War in Ukraine: History, and Conflict," Center for Strategic and International Studies, accessed on July 20, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-war-ukraine-identity-history-and-conflict>



The significant tie between the greatness of the Soviet Union and World War II is based on the Russian belief that Russia won and ended World War II, what Russians call the Great Patriotic War.[1] By referencing World War II, a time when Russians believe they were the greatest leading power, contemporary Russian disinformation sources allude to the restoration of its Empire.[2] For example, calling Ukrainians Nazis because they organize concentration camps like Hitler references Russia's responsibility and ability to ward off threats as they did in World War II.[3] Moreover, when Putin and other pro-Russian state supporters argue that the purpose of the Ukrainian "special military operation" strives for denazification, they epitomize a Russian savior complex, suggesting that it is up to Russia, yet again, to fight off the evil of Nazism.

Pro-Russia disinformation uses denazification as a tool to portray Russia as an "upstander" to the "bullying" Ukrainian government in some of the following ways:

- In March 2022, Russian Director of the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Maria Zakharova wrote on her Facebook page that "Russophobic Nazism plays a special role in the Ukrainian political landscape ... Now the Nazis of Ukraine openly repeat all the rituals that their 'spiritual ancestors' practiced: they throw up their hands in the 'Roman salute,' use swastikas, runic and Celtic symbols, teach children how to handle weapons. The Internet is full of videos of preparations and trainings of Ukrainian neo-Nazis. The Nazis of Ukraine are not a myth, but a real, neglected and artificially supported disease that gives rise to more and more evil." [4]
- In March 2022, information circulated primarily on Russian sources that President Volodymyr Zelensky wore a T-shirt with a Nazi symbol on it during his speeches at international meetings. [5]
- In April 2022, Channel One aired a story where American military expert Scott Ritter claimed that "Ukraine is ruled not by Zelensky, not by the parliament, but by the Nazis," and Russia, in which the fight against Nazism is part of its DNA, "cannot calmly look at the revival of Nazi ideology in Ukraine." [6]

[1] The significance of World War II in Russia is much greater than many foreigners understand. To emphasize the role of World War II in Russia culture, Victory Day, the day the Russia believes it won World War II, is a national holiday. Ask any Russian, and it is likely they will say Russia won World War II.

[2] Disinformation sources often contort the truths about World War II or use whataboutisms to strength the narrative around Russian power after World War II. See the following for an example: "Дезинформация: Просвещенная Европа рукоплескала Гитлеру," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[3] "В эфире телеканала Россия 1 Владимир Соловьев и Маргарита Симоньян распространили дезинформацию," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[4] "Дезинформация: Военная операция на Украине направлена на борьбу с нацизмом и фашизмом," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[5] "Дезинформация: на футболке президента Украины изображен нацистский символ," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[6] "Дезинформация: Украиной управляют нацисты и Россия борется с идеологией нацизма," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

- In May 2022, a video viral on Russian social networks captures the daughter of the President of Ukraine, Alexander Zelensky, crying and claiming she hates her father because he is a Nazi and a fascist. The context of the video is out of place; the video is not Zelensky's daughter, and she is crying about her husband not buying her a phone.[1]

ii. Humanitarian Injustice:

Pro-Russia narratives further validate intervention in Ukraine and feed the savior complex narrative by spotlighting humanitarian injustice in Ukraine. Two primary arguments dominate in Russian propaganda regarding violence in Ukraine. First, the pro-Russian content claims an 8-year long-genocide in Donbas requires Russia's engagement. Notably, this narrative generally coincides with denazification. Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia has suggested that those in Donbas were under Nazi rule, and that this region should be returned to and restored to Russia. [2]

- In February 2022, prior to the Russian invasion, Russian Director of the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maria Zakharova, stated on the NTV channel: "[In Donbas,] the situation... is genocide ... [since] children, women, civilians have been dying for seven years, people do not know what a peaceful life is in general, and the sound of a falling shell is something absolutely normal." [3]
- In February 2022, on Rossiya 1 Television, journalist Vladimir Solovyov, and RT editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan made misleading claims about the history of the Kremlin's foreign policy and Russia's actions in Ukraine. Solovyov said: "Russia does not start wars, but Russia is forced to end this eight-year war [in Donbas]." [4]

[1] "Дезинформация: Александра Зеленская ненавидит своего отца," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[2] Jake Cordell, "Rewriting History, Putin Pitches Russia as Defender of an Expanding Motherland," The Moscow Times, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/02/22/rewriting-history-putin-pitches-russia-as-defender-of-an-expanding-motherland-a76518>.

[3] "Пропаганда Кремля, что в Донбассе Украина проводила геноцид не соответствует реальности," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[4] "В эфире телеканала Россия 1 Владимир Соловьев и Маргарита Симоньян распространили," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020

This messaging campaign was a wider social media campaign organized by Russian accounts. Examples include:

Alla_dovalotova (@Alla_dovalotova), 2022, Instagram, February 25, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CaZuJocgaXq/>.

Nikaloai_thebest (@Nikaloai_thebest), 2022, Instagram, February 26, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CabZ4Y1NPKP/?fbclid=IwAR2vUWWohVkgTGf2igco2Xjp8mSPPNuQDatfKuK47OMdN-U6hgr7PGdXYjI>.

Chp_moscoww (@chp_moscoww), 2022, Instagram, February 28, 2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/CagqUTANy-I/?fbclid=IwAR2BurbdniTNFsBKV_w3oNjKzBEWEwwJkyp_GzHDZLbxagsxnDsYKB9IMPQ.

Novozybkov (@Natalya_ryvonenko), 2022, Instagram, February 26, 2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/CacjkXNNZ52/?fbclid=IwAR39kaUTGaUxOQzbtHDI_Kxmz_hijTBBfe3rRSFVUuYrOKEgYg-IfLNUvvc.

Novozybkov (@Natalya_ryvonenko), 2022, Instagram, February 26, 2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/CacjkXNNZ52/?fbclid=IwAR39kaUTGaUxOQzbtHDI_Kxmz_hijTBBfe3rRSFVUuYrOKEgYg-IfLNUvvc.

- In March 2022, pro-Russian disinformation spread that the Aidar Battalion of the Ukrainian Armed Forces had set up a secret concentration camp in the town of Polovinkino, Lugansk region. [1]
- In May 2022, a video dating back to 2015 circulated the internet, propagating that Ukrainian soldiers were currently murdering civilians in the region. It also captured the Russian military blowing up the new terminal of the Donetsk airport, leading to Ukrainian withdrawal of the last surviving defenders in the area. [2]

Second, Ukraine's inhuman treatment of its citizens is an overarching theme in all pro-Kremlin propaganda. For example, disinformation circulated that Ukraine employed child soldiers. [3] Other content claimed Ukrainian Neo-Nazis use residents as human shields. [4] More broadly, throughout the course of the war, central to the narrative is that the Ukrainian government kills its own citizens and targets residential buildings, forcing many people flee Ukrainian military aggression. [5]

ii. Self-Glorification:

Russian disinformation's self-glorification strengthens its the savior complex narrative by elevating the portrayal of itself as the "upstander." Russian propaganda suggests that Russia has moral high ground over Ukrainian leadership. By claiming that Russia humanly treats POWs and cares about refugees, the pro-Russia narratives evoke the message that Russia is some humanitarian hero.

- In May 2022, pro-Russia propaganda suggested that Russia humanly treats Ukrainian prisoners of war, mainly by showing video interviews of current prisoners parroting that Russia treated them in a humane fashion. [6]
- Russian disinformation incorporates narratives that propagate Russian concern for refugees. An example epitomizing this messaging is the following quote from a Kremlin-controlled Instagram account: "Russia has already helped more than 597 thousand refugees, including 118.5 thousand children. In 38 regions of the country, from the Donetsk and Luhansk republics and the liberated territories of

[1] "В эфире телеканала Россия 1 Владимир Соловьев и Маргарита Симоньян распространили дезинформацию," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[2] "В сети распространяется видео 2015 года," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[3] "Дезинформация: В Украине детей отправляют на передовую," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[4] "Дезинформация: Украинские неонацисты не выпускают жителей из осажденных городов и используют их в качестве живого щита," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[5] "Дезинформация: Россия не бомбит гражданские объекты," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[6] "Дезинформация: Россия гуманно обращается с украинскими военнопленными," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

Ukraine are met at 424 temporary accommodation points...Forced to leave their homes, people can now receive not only shelter and protection but free medical care, as well as payments. Children have the opportunity to go to kindergartens and schools, and parents can find work. Now more and more caring people do not leave the needy to their fate and become volunteers." [1] The main message of the post is that Russia helps people who find themselves in a difficult life situation, gives them a warm welcome, and provides what they may need to continue on with their lives. [2]

The other way pro-Russia propaganda glorifies Russian engagement in Ukraine is by claiming that those Donbas, Kherson, Melitopol, Mariupol, Volnovakha, Zaporizhia, and Kharkiv want to rejoin Russia. [3] Common phraseology in pro-Russia disinformation is Russia has "liberated" these territories to "reunite" with them Russia. [4] By constructing this narrative within propaganda, Russian disinformation suggests Russia acts on behalf of her local citizens' wishes and is restoring its empire.

To capture the effectiveness of Russian efforts and portray widescale support of Russian intervention, Russian disinformation manipulates Western events, as well as West politicians', experts', and journalists' quotes to both justify and glorify their actions in Ukraine. Using Western actors is not merely a tactic for glorifying or justifying Russia's invasions; it is also a means of validating disinformation narratives.

[1] "Дезинформация: Россия заботится о беженцах из Украины," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[2] "Дезинформация: Россия заботится о беженцах из Украины," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[3] See how Russian disinformation claims that people in Crimea, Kherson, Mariupol want to be "liberated" by and "reunited" with Russian statehood: "Дезинформация: Российская армия освобождает города Украины"; "Дезинформация: Россия имеет основания для вторжения в Украину"; "Дезинформация - Херсон - это территория России"; "Дезинформация: Мариуполь всегда был русским городом и его жители хотят присоединения к России"; "Дезинформация: Российские военные освобождают Волноваху"; "Дезинформация: Украинское население Херсона и Мелитополя встречает российских военных, как освободителей"; "Дезинформация: Запорожская область заявила о намерении войти в состав России"; "Дезинформация: В освобожденных городах Украины местное население вывешивает красные флаги"; "Немецкий журналист Томас Ропер распространяет дезинформацию о войне в Украине"; "Дезинформация: 'Жители приветствуют российских военных под Харьковом'," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[4] "«Освобожденные» области Украины хотят и должны «воссоединиться» с Россией," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.



With more diverse voices projecting the same narratives in unity, Russia disinformation evokes a complete and more collective message –that Russia is on the right track—and that all the information disseminated to readers must be true if accredited actor across the global support Russia. [1] For example:

- In April 2022, a video claims a “large-scale” rally in support of Russia’s invasion of Donetsk and Luhansk took place in New York City. This video attempts to legitimize and confirm that Russian engagement in Ukraine is widely supported in the US. In reality, the video was merely 12 people promoting the invasion, anything but “large scale.” [2] A similar large-scale rally appears in a video in Germany. It falsely suggests that Germans outside Berlin side with Russia in the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. [3]
- In May 2022, Kremlin media and social media pages misrepresented a UN post by adding the Russian term “special operation” to identify the war in Ukraine. The information reprinted in Russian sources is title: “UN: Since the beginning of the special operation of the Russian Federation, almost 6 million refugees from Ukraine have arrived in neighboring countries.” This is disinformation, having that the UN never used this language. [4]

B. Vilifying Enemies:

While pro-Russia propaganda often vilifies Ukraine as a Nazi regime, other enemies have been explicitly targeted in pro-Russian media, namely the Ukrainian military, President Volodymyr Zelensky, and the West. Various enemies may be targeted with the intention of reaching different audiences. By constructing more than one enemy, pro-Russian narratives juxtapose Russia against all evil, all enemies. In some cases, the narratives create a dichotomy suggesting that since Russia is not the enemy, it is the hero. Thus, vilification becomes another method of self-glorification and complements the Russian savior complex narrative.

[1] “«Американский эксперт» Джон Марк Дуган распространяет дезинформацию о войне Украи”; “Дезинформация: Украина запретила все партии, кроме ультраправых и нацистских”; “Немецкий журналист Томас Ропер распространяет дезинформацию о войне в Украине”; “Дезинформация: западные СМИ лгут, обвиняя во всем русских и Путина, утверждая, что в Украине нет фашизма и неонацизма”; “Манипуляция: Поставки вооружений спровоцируют Россию на увеличение давления”; “Турецкий историк Мехмет Перинчек: «Не начини Россия спецоперацию на Украине - произошел бы более серьезный вооруженный конфликт»”; “Дезинформация: Российские военные освобождают Волноваху”; “Дезинформация: Россия потеряла во Второй мировой войне от 20 до 30 млн. человек,” FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[2] “Дезинформация: В центре Нью-Йорка состоялась масштабная акция поддержки России, Донецка, и Луганска,” FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[3] “Дезинформация: В Германии народ поддерживает Россию,” FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[4] “В сети распространяют искаженное сообщение ООН,” FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

Although the Ukrainian military, Zelensky, and the West appear in the overarching narratives of Russian disinformation, general patterns appeared during the war. Despite that vilifying the Ukrainian military remains a core narrative of Russian disinformation, the magnitude in which pro-Russian discourse targets Zelensky and the West changed over time. Russian disinformation portrayed Zelensky as a primary adversary responsible for the Nazism and barbarism in Ukraine that demanded Russian intervention. Pro-Russia propaganda villainized him at the onset of the Russian invasion until May when actors realized that the war would last longer than a short “special military operation.” Other changes in the world affairs, such as increasing Western sanctions against Russia, rising gas prices, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia’s application to the EU, and Finland and Sweden’s application to NATO, likely compelled the shift in the Russian disinformation narrative. Rather than primarily targeting Ukrainian leadership, namely Zelensky and the Ukrainian military, vilifying the West, NATO, the US, and European powers took priority in the narrative. Russian disinformation portrayed the West and its comprising actors (i.e., NATO, US, EU) as scapegoats, blaming them for the prolongment of the war, and often claiming that they intend to slowly weaken Russia via the war in Ukraine. Although the West had always been a part of the Russian disinformation narratives over the course of the conflict, the enduring war in tandem with geopolitical developments not only required but also encouraged the Russian narrative to place the West in the front seat of the “villain” car and move Zelensky to the backseat.

i. Ukrainian Military:

Russian propaganda consistently portrays the Ukrainian military as relentlessly brutal. Russian disinformation, as previously discussed, claims that the Ukraine military attacks its own people and forces individuals to flee towns under siege. More often than not, Russian disinformation labels Russian military attacks as Ukrainian or staged interventions, such as those in the Mariupol, Bacha, and Kramatorsk bombings. [1]

There are several different tactics used to support the narrative that Ukrainian forces attack civilians. The first is to provide photographs and video content of dead individuals. Sometimes this is paired with false or manipulated narrative from journalists and/or people on the ground at the time of attack. Foreigner’s quotes are also used to create the illusion of Ukrainian massacring their own citizens. Below are examples of these strategies in Mariupol, Bucha, and Kramatorsk.

[1] These articles also include examples of pro-Russia disinformation regarding Ukrainian military brutality: “Дезинформация: Население Мариуполя бежит от бомбежек со стороны украинских националистов и радикалов ”; “Дезинформация: Мирное население в Буче погибло в результате обстрела города украинской артиллерией ”; “Дезинформация: Украина совершила массовые убийства своих граждан в Буче и Краматорске”; “Дезинформация: Спутниковые фото Бучи не отражают реальность ”; “Дезинформация: По людям в Краматорске стреляли украинские силы”; “Дезинформация: Украина приняла решение нанести удар по Приднестровью,” FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

KREMLIN PROPAGANDA CLAIMING UKRAINIAN MILITARY MASSACRING THEIR OWN POPULATION



Mariupol

The bombing of the Mariupol hospital and theater frequently emerged in Russian disinformation in April and May. Kremlin-sponsored Channel One posted a story on Facebook stating that "the population of Mariupol is fleeing the bombing by Ukrainian nationalists and radicals" and that "Western journalists also confirm the cruelty of Ukrainian radicals." [1] Here, pro-Kremlin media leaders used the tactic of stating false truths, lying about the reality of Russia's attack against Mariupol, and blaming Ukraine for the destruction, to spread disinformation.

Bucha

Russia's disinformation deflected the massacres in Bucha and projected blame onto Ukrainian forces in various ways. Russian officials and media reports articulated this narrative by claiming Ukraine attacked its own citizens on news outlets. [2] Russian disinformation launched misleading photos regarding the massacre to manipulate the truth of the Bucha events by mixing updates and claiming the NYT satellite images were false. [3]

Kramatorsk

Similar to Bucha, Pro-Russia content circulated a fake video on social networks that claimed the BBC published that Ukraine attacked the Kramatorsk railway station, killing 57 people. The fake BBC video used the tactic of plausible deniability by saying the serial number of the Tochka U-type missile found near the Kramatorsk railway station matched the numbers of missiles in the arsenal of the 13th AFU missile brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It also stated that it had the same type and a serial number of missiles already in use by the Ukrainian army in Bucha, Melitpol, and other areas. [4]

[1] "Дезинформация: Население Мариуполя бежит от бомбежек со стороны украинских националистов и радикалов," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[2] "Дезинформация: Россия представила в ООН конкретные доказательства геноцида, фактически устроенного украинскими властями в отношении своих же граждан," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[3] "Дезинформация: Спутниковые фото Бучи не отражают реальность," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[4] "Дезинформация: BBC признает, что нападение на Краматорск осуществила Украина," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

i. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky:

Russian disinformation painted President Volodymyr Zelensky as an unpatriotic Nazi dictator. At beginning of the war, propaganda claimed Zelensky allegedly suspended the activities of his opposing parties. [1] Disinformation circulated saying he fled Kyiv several times over the course of the war. [2] To depict him as a coward, disinformation media falsely discussed his refusal to visit soldiers in the hospital. [3] Propaganda often misrepresented him and made him appear ridiculous, like claiming he refused to spell his name with a "V" and "Z". [4] Russian disinformation sources constantly misquoted him, once citing as wanting to recognize Crimea and Donbas as Russian. [5]

In May, pro-Russian disinformation portrayed Zelensky as an extension of the West, doing the work of the US and other European powers. [6] By painting Zelensky as a pon of the West, Russian disinformation that previously sought to discredit Zelensky as an unintelligent, cowardly political and military leader was then projected as the fault of the West. Such a narrative played into the large Russian disinformation strategy of prioritizing the "vilification" of the West.

ii. The West:

Russian disinformation has targeted the West and specific actors within the West, like the US, Poland, and NATO, as enemies since the beginning of the war; however, the depth of content targeting the West and Western actors has increased over time. Some of the main narratives demonizing the West included claiming that West wanted to take away the future from Russia and that by shipping weaponry to Ukraine, the West wanted to slowly kill Russia over time. [7]

[1] "В социальных сетях публикуется искаженная информация о решении президента Украины Володимира"; "Зеленского временно приостановить деятельность ряда политических партий в стране," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[2] "Российские дезинформаторы утверждают, что президент Украины покинул Киев"; "Дезинформация: Зеленский со своим окружением 25 февраля покинул Киев," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[3] "Дезинформация: Президент Зеленский не посещал раненых военнослужащих в госпитале," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[4] "Дезинформация: На футболке президента Украины изображен нацистский символ"; "Манипуляция: Президент Зеленский отказывается от использования букв V и Z в своем имени и фамилии, поэтому журнал Time разместил его имя на обложке без этих букв," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[5] "Дезинформация: Зеленский заявил о готовности обсуждать признание Крыма и Донбасса и назвал страны Запада ответственными за гибель людей в Украине," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[6] "Дезинформация: Каждое слово Зеленского произносится с подачи Запада," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[7] "Дезинформация: Запад хочет отнять будущее у России," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

Other content argued that new arms deliveries to Ukraine from the West would provoke Russia to increase more pressure on Ukraine. [1] Some narratives specifically targeted the US, claiming that the US wanted to start a war between NATO and Russia. [2] Russian disinformation also occasionally claimed Poland mobilized to annex parts of Ukraine. [3]

C. Strong and Weak Dichotomy Between Russia and Enemies

The savior complex and vilification of enemies built an “us” versus “them” narrative. While not exclusively, these two arms of Russian disinformation portray Russia as the morally superior actor in the Ukrainian war conflict. The third arm of the Russian disinformation narrative captures a Russian physical and economic superiority, creating a strong versus weak dichotomy between Russia and its enemies. This narrative largely shines through in propaganda discussing Russian military victories and the impact of economic sanctions.

i. Military Victories for Russia:

Pro-Russian propaganda has three main methods to portray military superiority. First, Russian disinformation exaggerates its military successes and disregards their losses, either not mentioning them together, downplaying them, or claiming that Ukraine or the West staged them. [4] Second, Russian disinformation boasts about destroying certain Ukrainian weaponry. For example, it highlighted that Russian troops destroyed biological weapons in laboratories in Ukraine and frequently brags about the destruction of Ukrainian tanks. [5]

[1] “Манипуляция: Поставки вооружений спровоцируют Россию на увеличение давления,” FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[2] “Дезинформация: США хотят развязать войну между НАТО и Россией,” FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[3] “Манипуляция: Польша и Литва намерены отобрать у России Калининград,” FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[4] The following source provides numerous cases of distorting and falsifying events in the war: “Дезинформация: Россия не бомбит гражданские объекты,” FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

A more explicit example includes when Russia downplayed the significance of the Moskva sinking, claiming that a fire on board cause the ship to sink; Bred Lendon, “Moskva sinking: What really happened to the pride of Russia's fleet?” CNN, accessed on July 20, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/15/europe/russia-guided-missile-cruiser-moskva-sinks-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>.

Several Russian online newspapers have been forced to take down a list of the country's military personnel killed in Moscow's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine after a court ruled the information was banned from being distributed to the public; Current Time, “Court Bans Publication Of Information On Russian Military Death Toll In Ukraine,” RadioFreeEurope, accessed on July 20, 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-ban-military-casualties/31887084.html>.

[5] “Дезинформация: Войска России уничтожают в Украине лаборатории биологического оружия”; “Дезинформация: РФ уничтожила танки на окраине Киева,”; “Дезинформация: Россия уничтожила 3300 украинских танков,” FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

Third, the underlying messages of Russian disinformation reports subtly imply a “strong” versus “weak” dichotomy between Russia and Ukrainian armies. For example, all state-controlled Russian TV outlets open with the language “On [X] day of special military operation, Russian army liberated [Y] area.” [1] This language reminds the audience of the reason for Russian involvement in Ukraine – for a “special military operation” and to “liberate” the people. While such language reinforces the savior complex and emphasizes the “hero” versus “villain” dichotomy previously mentioned in this paper, the repetition of this language over time subtly draws another dichotomy between Russia and Ukraine: strong victors over the weakly defeated.

i. Economic Sanctions:

The economic superiority of Russia compared to the West did not emerge predominant in Russian disinformation until May when sanctions and oil prices came into effect. Russian disinformation continues to circulate that the ruble has replaced the dollar and become the most profitable currency in the world. Russia has been artificially inflating the ruble to compensate for Western sanctions, which made the ruble appear stronger than the dollars, even though it was losing value. [2] By claiming the ruble supplanted the dollars, Russian disinformation portrays economic power over the US. Russian propaganda also argues that the dominance of the ruble will enable Russia to endure international sanctions. [3] Such narrative suggests that ultimately the West is weakening itself with sanctions while Russia not only became stronger but will also remain stronger economically after the war.

[1] Новости Первого канала (@1tvnews), 2022, “Бойцы народной милиции ЛНР при поддержке российских военных смогли выбить националистов с их позиций к югу от Северодонецка,” Facebook, June 8, 2022,

<https://www.facebook.com/1tvnews/posts/pfbid0vxPf9SLyhg1Viztsrj4rPZbNLozPK2XnmoUgSuUz62g4LlgNvbV9dqErSRkd4pPdI>;

“Новости Первого канала (@1tvnews), 2022, “О новых подвигах российских военных, которые освобождают Донбасс: <https://www.1tv.ru/n/431113>,” Facebook, June 14, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/1tvnews/posts/pfbid0Pzef8CstMvozkb5rQG4QNr3yjTB9F38czJG2eyjJnEyFiiY61m2SbzakRHQGfKtVI>

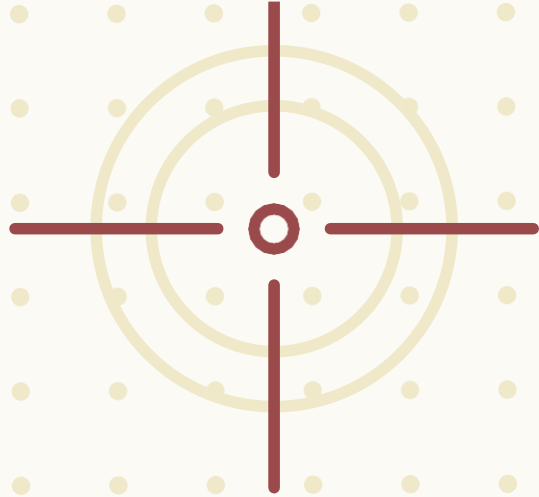
Новости Первого канала (@1tvnews), 2022, “Самоотверженность и мужество проявляют участники спецоперации по защите Донбасса: <https://www.1tv.ru/n/432142>,” Facebook, June 28, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/1tvnews/posts/5419830931409115/>.

“Новости Первого канала (@1tvnews), 2022, “Освобождая все новые районы, российские герои каждый день проявляют смелость и мужество: <https://www.1tv.ru/n/432287>,” Facebook, Jun 30, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/1tvnews/posts/pfbid02achmVU5Vhh3Gtnug9vm3x8iKZFFPQ1txyZsViriwavno2kPyKULpqBk56dY9pTMml>;

“Новости Первого канала (@1tvnews), 2022, “Освободить населенные пункты Донбасса удается благодаря каждодневному подвигу российских военнослужащих: <https://www.1tv.ru/n/432553>,” Facebook, July 3, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/1tvnews/posts/700788637651692/>;

[2] “Дезинформация: Рубль – самая выгодная валюта; Дезинформация: Продажа российского газа за рубли бьет по мировому господству доллара,” FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[3] “Дезинформация: Рубль стал самой крепкой валютой мира”; “Дезинформация: Продажа российского газа за рубли бьет по мировому господству доллара,” FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.



D. Additional Rabbit-Hole Narratives

i. Weapons of Mass Destruction

Pro-Russian disinformation perpetuates a narrative that Ukraine and Georgia are producing nuclear and biological weaponry with US support of the US. This message develops Russia's justification for a "special military operation", a need to demilitarize Ukraine. By claiming that the US supports these efforts, Russian disinformation also vilifies the US. Information claiming the Russian military's destruction of Ukrainian weaponry draws on the physically strong/weak dichotomy drawn between Russia and Ukraine in pro-Russian disinformation.

Some of these narratives allege that Americans are funding bioweapons development by funding experiments to figure out how to spread chlorella through waterways. [1] Following the outburst of Monkeypox, the narrative shifted toward the United States weaponizing that in Georgia and Ukraine. [2]

ii. Ukrainian Immigration:

The Russian propaganda machine portrays Ukrainian refugees as criminals who bring chaos to host states. This narrative aims to discredit Ukrainian refugees in the eyes of local people. This also fits with the overarching objective to minimize public support for Ukraine, resulting in less public pressure on the Western governments to support Ukraine's valiant fight to safeguard freedom and democracy.

[1] "Дезинформация: Биологические лаборатории Украины изучали возможности распространения холеры водными путями," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.
[2] "Дезинформация: Украина распространяет оспу обезьян," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.



The attempts to make up stories on bad behavior of Ukrainian immigrants in other countries has become a trend in Russian disinformation. While Ukrainian immigrants have been portrayed as violent convicts in Bulgaria, Germany, Latvia, and Georgia, Russian disinformation has especially targeted Ukrainian immigrants in Poland.[1] Throughout the war, Russian disinformation portrays them as intolerable to the Polish people.[2] It has even gone as far as to manipulate the Deputy Interior Minister's words to make it seem like he claimed that it was time for the Ukrainian refugees to go home.[3] Most content circulating the internet are videos taken years prior to the war and sometimes do not even feature Ukrainian migrants but other nationalities.

3. Russian Disinformation Narrative Trends in Georgia:

The narratives discussed in the first section of this paper are the bones of Russia's disinformation campaign. As such, they comprise pro-Russia disinformation in Georgia. Because examining how Russian disinformation strategies appear in Georgia in the Georgian language would be redundant to the first section of this paper, this portion examines the main topics pushed forward by Kremlin proxies in Georgia. The proxy groups amplifying pro-Russia narratives are Alt-Info, part of the Conservative Moment, and Alliance for Patriots. Although these far-right pro-Kremlin parties have channeled Russian disinformation for years, Georgian Dream, the ruling party of the Georgian government, had not fully and openly engaged itself in anti-Western messages since last year, despite being self-declared as pro-Western. [4] As the dominant governing party, GD's use of anti-Western rhetoric legitimizes anti-Western narratives of Kremlin proxies in Georgia. GD also further amplifies Russian propaganda messaging to the larger Georgian public through its position of political power and economic resources. Ultimately, Georgia's proximity and relationships with Russia and Ukraine provide a platform for pro-Russian and anti-Western sources to highlight discourse about economic sanctions, nuclear and biological weapon development, and the impact of refugees.

i. Fearmongering about War's Expansion into Georgia:

Pro-Russian disinformation narratives attempt to create a fear-ridden audience by frequently discussing the threat of the war expanding into Georgia. There are two primary methods for fearmongering. The first strategy is leveraged by both pro-Russian and anti-Western groups and includes creating the narrative that the West and its respective actors are attempting to launch a second war front from Georgia into Russia. In some of these cases, specifically that alt-right groups, these narratives are grounded in a neutralist mentality. For others, they are more centered around an anti-Western mindset. For example:

[1] "Дезинформация: В Германии (Регенсбург) украинский беженец разгромил в магазине полки с российскими продуктами"; " В социальных сетях распространяется видео о том, что украинские беженцы в Польше ведут себя неподобающим образом," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[2] "Дезинформация: Жители Польши уже не в силах терпеть украинских беженцев," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[3] "Дезинформация: Замминистра внутренних дел Польши заявил: Украинцам пора возвращаться домой," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[4] 2021 Local Self-Government Elections: Election disinformation and smear campaigns (Tbilisi, Georgia: GRASS 2022).

- Georgian Dream party chairman and Majority Leader at the parliament, Irakli Kobakhidze, has repeatedly referred to the propaganda narrative of external and internal forces (the opposition and CSOs) pushing Georgia to join the war against Russia. He has not explicitly mentioned the West but has linked refusal to be granted the EU candidate status and the call of European Parliament's call to sanction Mr. Ivanishvili's to Georgia not joining the war [1].
-
- In May 2022, the leader of Georgian Dream, including Prime Minister Gharibashvili labelled the major opposition parties as warmongers and presented the Georgian Dream government as a savior guaranteeing the peace and the stability of the country by preventing a second war front. [2] In some cases, this fed the common GD rhetoric that "everyone [whocriticizes governmentpolicies on differentpublic policy issues] istrying to nudge Georgia toward war. [3]
- In July 2022, MP Dimitri Khundadze, Mikheil Kavelashvili and Sozar Subari left the ruling GD issued a public statement that the EU would not grant Georgia membership candidacy status after six months even if the governmecompllies with all of ther requirements defined by the European Commission unless Georgia starts war with Russia. They also claimed that Georgia's President Zourabichvili was involved in this effort. [4]
- In July 2022, pro-Russian political activist and Director of the Primakov Georgian-Russian Public Centre, Dimitri Lortkipanidze, voiced a conspiracy theory in Georgia and the World claiming that the UK Minister of Defense came to Georgia to force PM Gharibashvili to start a military confrontation against Russia. According to Lortkipanidze, the minister threatened the Georgian PM that the West had spent much money in Georgia and would not let any Georgian government play independent politics and disobey the West. In turn, this conversation demonstrated that the West intends to use Georgia as one of the platforms for its confrontation with Russia. [5]
- In May 2022, anti-Western Saerto Gazeti stated that the West sent former Georgian President Mikeil Saakashvili, currently imprisoned, from Ukraine back to Georgia to destabilize the country. He linked this to the attempt to Western efforts open the "second front in Georgia." [6]
- In June 2022, a number of Facebook pages and pro-Russian media outlets shared the article penned by anti-Western propagandist and Editor-in-Chief of the pro-Kremlin analytical media outlet, Isari.ge, Hamlet Chipashvili. Chipashvili claimed that the Georgian government, despite having been pushed by the West, did not materialize the dream of the Ukrainian government to open a second front in Georgia. Chipashvili praised the Georgian government for not obeying the West and stressed that this positively influenced the attitude of the Russian political circles towards Georgia. [7]

[1] Tabula.ge, GD statements on "second front" – Link 1, Link 2, Link 3, Link 4, Link 5, Link 6, Link 7.

[2] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 23 May - 29 May" (Tbilisi, Georgia: GRASS, 2022).

[3] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 30 May - 5 June" (Tbilisi, Georgia: GRASS, 2022).

[4] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 27 June- 3 July."

[5] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 27 June- 3 July."

[6] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 16 May - 22 May" (Tbilisi, Georgia: GRASS, 2022).

[7] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 30 May - 5 June" (Tbilisi, Georgia: GRASS, 2022).

- In July 2022, pro-Russian Georgia and the World published an article written by former leader of the United Communist Party of Georgia, Valeri Kvaratskhelia. Kvaratskhelia claimed that US intelligence agencies imposed a historical brotherly relationship between the Ukrainian and Georgian nation. Similarly, according to Kvaratskhelia, the West is leveraging this artificial relationship and trying to drag Georgia into the war with Russia. He further adds that the EU membership candidacy status hysteria is a part of this plot. [1]

The second tactic, primarily leveraged by pro-Russian groups, is based on constructing narratives where anyone who disagrees with the GD is seeking to overthrow the government and incite a revolution in order to provoke a Georgia-Russian war. The mentality follows an equation as follows:

"X" disagrees with GD policies = overthrow the government = incite a revolution
= provoke Russia to open a second war front in Georgia

X = actors such as opposition parties, the Ukrainian government, alleged
Western agents

In other words, pro-Russian groups vilify all those in Georgia who do not support GD and argue that they are synonymous with individuals promoting war against Russia. Some examples of narratives using this tactic include:

- A pro-governmental source, the Leader 41 Facebook page, claimed that Ukrainian refugees in Georgia will take part in the June 20 rally organized by the largest opposition party – the United National Movement (UNM). Ukrainian refugees then are helping the UNM destabilize the country by contributing to a cause that wants a revolution to overturn the GD government. [2]
- Giorgi Kardava, Chairman of the far-right pro-Russian Conservative Movement political party, established by the Alt-Info group, connected Tbilisi Pride Week and opened the second front against Russia in Georgia. Kardava asserted that Tbilisi Pride aims to destabilize the country since their activities will cause a massive protest in Georgian society, which the opposition will effectively use to overthrow the government and start a war against Russia. [3]

Broadly speaking, this pro-Russian mentality allows for alt-right groups to also endorse some of GD's policies and rhetoric. For example, GD and pro-Russian proxy actors both support avoiding bilateral sanctions in order to avoid opening a second war front in Georgia. Examples of the latter are below:

[1] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 27 June- 3 July" (Tbilisi, Georgia: GRASS, 2022).

[2] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 27 June - 3 July."

[3] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 30 May - 5 June."



- The anti-Western Saerto Gazeti published an article stating that the West punished Georgia for not joining the bilateral sanctions and for not opening the second front against Russia but rather "maintaining stability." This punishment manifested in a rejected EU candidate status. [1]
- Pro-Russian political activist and Director of Primakov Georgian-Russian Public Centre argued that Georgia was punished because it maintained stability, did not impose bilateral sanctions on Russia, and did not open a second front against Russia. [2]

-Arno Khidirbegishvili, Editor-in-Chief of the pro-Kremlin media Saqinform, claimed in his editorial that Georgia averted the plans of Brussels and Kyiv by not declaring war on Russia in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region by not joining anti-Russian economic sanctions. [3]

ii. Vilifying Enemies:

Fearmongering is a strategy used by pro-Russian and anti-Western discourse in Georgia to portray the Collective West, the US, and NATO as enemies to Georgia's security. However, the West, the US, and NATO have mainly been vilified through narratives discussing military aid to Ukraine and Georgia and through events regarding Georgia's application for EU membership.

– **Military Aid from the Collective West, the US, and NATO:**

Outside fearmongering, the most popular way of vilifying the West in Russian disinformation in Georgia is in the discourse about West military aid to Ukraine and Georgia. These same narratives appear in overarching Russian disinformation narratives; however, they are greater emphasized in Georgia. While there is no definite reason for this hyperfocus, it likely has to do with Georgia's proximity to both Ukraine and Russia and the West's and NATO's support in developing the Georgian military. GD's eagerness to vilify Western aid to Ukraine despite presenting pro-Western is to convince the Georgian public that the West is not able to support Georgia if Russia decides to invade again. Making people believe that there is no one to defend them helps persuade people that the only way to "physically" survive is to get back to Russia's sphere of influence. While they may admit this scenario might not be the best, aligning with the West could be more detrimental, and therefore, not antagonizing Russia should be the primary goal in the policy.

[1] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 13 - 19 June" (Tbilisi, Georgia: GRASS, 2022).

[2] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 6 June - 12 June" (Tbilisi, Georgia: GRASS, 2022).

[3] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 6 June - 12 June."



The main military aid narratives are contradictory. One narrative asserts that Western military aid is ineffective in Ukraine. These narratives usually downplay the amount of military weaponry the West has provided to Ukraine. For example:

- In June 2022, Alt-Info pointed out that Ukraine does not have a maintenance base for NATO equipment; therefore, most Western-supplied military vehicles are single-use; that is, Ukraine cannot repair them. [1]
- In June 2022, Alt-Info claimed the US and Germany do not supply Ukraine with advanced Abrams and Leopard tanks for two reasons: Ukrainians will not be able to repair Western tanks and the reputation of American and Ukrainian military equipment will diminish as photos of burned Abrams and Leopards flood the internet. [2]
- In June 2022, Alt-Info discussed the role of javelins and underscored their effectiveness during the first stage of the war when the Ukrainians ambushed large Russian convoys; however, they asserted that javelins are practically useless in the current artillery battles. [3]
- In June 2022, Alt-Info concluded by sowing nihilism, saying that the West is doing everything it can but this is still not enough, despite the West throwing everything it has on Russia, Russia manages to navigate through the quagmire with just minor scratches. [4]
- In May 2022, TV Free channel, affiliated with the pro-Kremlin political party Free Georgia chaired by Kakha Kukava, and the Russian-sponsored News-Front promoted the comment of US Senator Rand Paul, who tried to block the passage of a USD 40 billion support package for Ukraine. TV Free channel's headline cited Paul saying that the US cannot help Ukraine but is dooming its economy. Based on Paul's statement, pro-Kremlin outlet News-Front concluded that the US public support toward Ukraine will weaken amid domestic problems. [5]

[1] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 13 - 19 June."

[2] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 13 - 19 June."

[3] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 13 - 19 June."

[4] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 13 - 19 June."

[5] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 16 May - 22 May."

- In May 2022, Kartuli TV (Georgian TV) aired a broadcast where speakers tried to downgrade US support, stating that the US had restrained from providing large-scale assistance to Ukraine as its and the active involvement of NATO member states in military operations would provoke World War III. [1]
- In June and May 2022, Giorgi Kardava from the Conservative Movement claimed that the armaments supplied by the West were not enough to affect the dynamics and the overall balance in the war in Ukraine. According to him, Ukraine needs immeasurably more weapons and manpower to counterbalance Russian power and the chance of a Ukrainian counterattack is minimal. Hence, the current level of military aid is useless and is not making any difference. [2]

Alternatively, other discourse claims that the West is provoking Russia's engagement by supply minimal equipment to prolong the war with the intention to weaken Russia via Ukraine. [3] Similar discourse also argues the West is providing just enough weaponry to prolong the war with the intention to slowly ration Ukraine off to other countries. [4] This latter narrative became more heavily disseminated in May, June, and July.

- In May 2022, Sputnik-Georgia stated that the West is providing very few and not advanced weapons to Ukraine and the objective behind this is not to significantly empower the Ukrainian army but to drag on the fighting to weaken Russia, even at the cost of the complete destruction of the Ukrainian military. [5]
- In June 2022, a speaker stated on Alt-Info broadcast that the West does not provide the military assistance necessary to end the war as it wants to achieve its goal of weakening Russia with the hands of Ukraine by prolonging the war. [6]
- In June 2022, the chairman of the pro-Russian AoP spoke live on its affiliated TV Obieqtivi. He claimed that the United States and the West are prolonging the war in order to weaken Moscow by providing military assistance to Ukraine, but Russia is not running out of arms or manpower. [7]
- In July 2022, Pro-Russian TV Obieqtivi cited former US congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard suggesting that Kyiv had to start negotiating with Moscow about territorial concessions and the neutrality of Ukraine. Gabbard argued that the US should stop arming Ukraine as this does not make sense because the weapons provided by the US and others escalate the situation. [8]

[1] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 16 May - 22 May."

[2] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 30 May - 5 June."

[3] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 16 May - 22 May"; "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 6 June - 12 June."

[4] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 6 June - 12 June."

[5] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 30 May - 5 June."

[6] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 13 - 19 June."

[7] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 13 - 19 June."

[8] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 27 June - 3 July" (Tbilisi, Georgia: GRASS, 2022).

Far-right parties heavily focus on crafting the narrative to the Georgian public that the West is not able to support Georgia if Russia decides to invade, frequently referencing 2008 as an example of the West's inadequate support. Making people believe that there is no one to defend them, far-right groups more easily persuade Georgian citizens that the only way to survive is to return Georgia to Russia's sphere of influence. Ultimately, while this scenario might not be ideal, aligning with the West could be more detrimental, given that if Russia is provoked, the West is unable to defend Georgia.

– Georgian EU Candidate Status:

Georgia's process for applying for EU candidate status created a ripe breeding ground for pro-Russia and anti-Western narratives. Georgian officials decided to rush the intended 2024 EU application and submit a proposal in May of 2022 after Ukraine and Moldova applied as well. The European Commission, a board responsible for assessing applications for EU members, returned its recommendation on June 17th, denying Georgia its endorsement. The official ruling was rolled out on June 24th by the European Union Council. Different from Moldova and Ukraine, which attained recommendations for candidate status, Georgia only received a European perspective recommendation. Never used in the history of the EU, a perspective recommendation promised that if Georgia fulfills certain given conditions, which broadly democratize Georgian governance, the EU commission will readdress candidate status or the country.

In May 2022, when the EU Commission was reviewing Georgia's application, Georgian domestic politics heated up when Mtavari Channel Founder, Nika Gvaramia, was sentenced to 3.5 years in prison. [1] In effect, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on violations of media freedom and the safety of journalists in Georgia. Openly pro-Russian actors maintained aggressive and overtly critical rhetoric towards the EU. Georgian Dream leaders, including the Prime Minister, Irakli Gharibashvili, and the Chairman of the Party, Irakli Kobakhidze, lashed out against the resolution, labeling it as shameful, anti-Georgian, anti-state, and immoral. Pro-Russian actors suggested that the European Commission had adopted the anti-Georgian resolution, which contained "unprecedented slander" against the Georgian government when it pointed out needed to allow less press censorship. Another interpretation of the resolution developed a sub-narrative that both the opposition and the government are puppets of the West, and the EU will punish Georgia if it does not permit a "gay parade" and does not open a second front in Georgia. [2]

[1] Nika Gvaramia, a journalist and owner of the opposition channel Mtavari TV, was sentenced to three and a half years in prison to due allegedly breaking financial laws to run his tv channel. Gvaramia and other leaders argue that he is being jailed on distorted claims and is an effort to silent media and censor the press critical of the government: "A Journalist criticizing the government has been sentenced in Georgia to prison," World Today News, accessed on July 20, 2022, <https://www.world-today-news.com/a-journalist-criticizing-the-government-has-been-sentenced-in-georgia-to-prison/>.

[2] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 6 June - 12 June."

When the EU denied candidate status to Georgia, pro-Russia disinformation widely disseminated a narrative that the rejected application was the West “punishing” Georgia. According to pro-Russia disinformation, the West sought to punish Georgia because it did not open a second warfront against Russia or place bilateral sanctions on Russia. [1] This geopolitical policy issued largely shifted how Russian disinformation vilified Georgia’s enemies. Georgian enemies were not solely the West and its respective actors, but much more explicitly the Georgian enemy became the EU, particularly in June and July. In effect, Russian propaganda legitimized anti-Western supporters in Georgia, marking one of the critical junctures when pro-Russian and anti-Westerner overlap ideologically.

Anti-westerners and GD leaders capitalized on an opportunity to vilify the West, specifically the EU. By engaging in Russian disinformation dialog, GD party members try to overshadow the reasons behind the EU’s decision and negate responsibility for the lack of democratic governance practices. Some examples include violating free press and perpetuating a flawed judiciary system. Prime Minister Gharibashvili stated that “if granting candidate status is decided by being at war, then we do not want war.”[2] According to the MP and Regional Secretary and member of the political council of the Georgian Dream, Dimitri Samkharadze, the EU Commission would have granted candidate status to Georgia if Georgia had started the war. [3] Prime Minister Gharibashvili, the Mayor of Tbilisi and the General Secretary of the GD Kakha Kaladze, and GD Chairman and Leader of the Parliamentary Majority Irakli Kobakhidze also embraced some of the alt-right rhetoric. [4] Ultimately, they entertained the narrative that a rejected candidate status served as the West’s way of punishing Georgia for not engaging in war and sanctions against Russia.

Against the backdrop of the government virally circulating such messages, almost all major disinformation and propaganda sources exploited the opportunity to continue repeating these messages. These narratives quickly became the most prevalent in the Georgian propaganda eco-system in:

- Seven propaganda cases with almost 4,700 interactions and 19,000 views suggested that the West/Ukraine/Georgian opposition parties seek to open a second front against Russia in Georgia.
- Fourteen propaganda cases from June 17 to June 19 were identified with almost 8,500 interactions and nearly 50,000 views, claiming that Georgia did not get EU candidate status due to not opening a second front against Russia. [5]

[1] “GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin’s War of Choice, 13 June - 19 June.”

[2] “Georgian PM Garibashvili: “We do not want war, even if it is the price of joining the EU,” JAM News, accessed on July 20, 2022, <https://jam-news.net/ge/tu-omit-ganisazghvrebastatusis-minicheba-chven-omi-ar-gvinda-saqartvelos-premieris-gzavnilebi/>.

[3] “GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin’s War of Choice, 13 June - 19 June.”

[4] “GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin’s War of Choice, 13 June - 19 June.”

[5] “GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin’s War of Choice, 13 June - 19 June.”



iii. Economic Sanctions:

Economic issues remain one of the centerpieces of the pro-Russian propaganda in Georgia and elsewhere. Four main narratives comprise messaging about sanctions that are not mutually exclusive though at times contradictory: sanctions hurt the West more than Russia, Russia is unaffected by the sanctions, the West secretly trades with Russia, and Georgia did not get the EU candidate status because it did not impose sanctions against Russia. [1] In July, Russian disinformation incorporated a new narrative into its overarching sanction messaging that claimed EU's sanctions against Russia are damaging the environment and deteriorating the health of its citizens.

- In June 2022, Editor-in-Chief of the pro-Russian Isari.ge, Hamlet Chipashvili, conveyed that the economic sanctions against Russia have been in vain and counterproductive for the West. News-Front brought a myriad of examples to showcase the “boomerang effect the sanctions have had on the West.” According to the propaganda outlet, the Western nations created a worldenergy crisis by imposing sanctions on Russia, particularly on energy products like oil and gas, thus stimulating unemployment and high inflation. [2]
- In July 2022, Georgia and the World, a Russian proxy media outlet, lambasted Europe for its plans to ban Russian gas and coal in the winter, accusing the European officials of “risking not only the health of its citizens but also the ecological environment.” [3]

The contradictory narratives in Georgia arguably hold more weight than in other places given the prominence of fearmongering about the expansion of the war. For example, when pro-Russia disinformation argues that the West’s military aid is ineffective in Ukraine, in the context of Georgia, this may suggest that Western aid to Georgia would also be ineffective if the war expands. When pro-Russia disinformation argues that the West is using military aid to provoke Russia engagement and, thus, perpetuate the war, in the Georgian context this may suggest that the West is instigating and perpetuating war in both Ukraine and Georgia. Moreover, discourse about military aid is another method in which fearmongering manifests in Georgia disinformation and vilifies that West.

[1] “GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin’s War of Choice, 1 May – 8 May”; “GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin’s War of Choice, 9 May – 15 May”; “GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin’s War of Choice, 16 May – 22 May”; “GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin’s War of Choice, 23 May – 29 May”; “GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin’s War of Choice, 6 June – 12 June”; “GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin’s War of Choice, 13 June – 19 June”; “GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin’s War of Choice, 13 June – 19 June.” “GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin’s War of Choice, 20 June – 26 June,” (Tbilisi, Georgia: GRASS, 2022); “GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin’s War of Choice, 27 Jun – 3 July.”

[2] “GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin’s War of Choice, 27 Jun – 3 July.”

[3] “GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin’s War of Choice, 27 Jun – 3 July.”



iv. Weapons of Mass Destruction

Pro-Russian disinformation in Georgian language focuses more of its attention on the topic of weapons of mass destruction development in both Georgia and Ukraine than on Russian disinformation in Russia. Georgia's relationship with the US and Russia, proximity to Ukraine, shared border with Russia, and Russian-occupied territories may explain the logic of this focus. This is all to say that weapons of mass destruction discourse are a sub-narrative used to support one of the main pillars of disinformation unique to Georgia: fearmongering about the expansion of pro-Russian disinformation. By claiming that Georgia is producing weapons of mass destruction with the help of the United States in biolabs, Georgia is painted as another country that may need to be demilitarized and acts as an extension of US efforts to surround Russia's sphere of influence. Those who are concerned about the war expanding into Georgia may assume that these weapon developments, therefore, may provoke, or even justify, a Russian invasion of Georgia. The below example captures some of the narratives that also heavily circulated in Georgia.

- In March 2022, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia published a statement on its official Twitter page about the "military-biological" laboratories in Ukraine, funded by the US Department of Defense. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called for urgent destruction of pathogens, claiming that Ukraine, with the help of the US, failed to abide by first article of the Convention on the Prohibition of Biological and Toxic Weapons by Ukraine. [1]
- In March 2022, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergey Lavrov spoke about the deadly threat of American biological laboratories. According to him, the discovered facts showed the colossal scope of US illegitimate activities, the purpose of which is to spread American military biological laboratories all over the world. [2]
- In May 2022, Numerous Facebook profiles claimed that US Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland confirmed the existence of biological weapons on the territory of Ukraine. The authors of the post claim that Nuland confirmed the existence of 30 laboratories on the territory of Ukraine. Biolaboratories work with the funding of the American government and the Pentagon, where they create weapons of mass destruction. [3] Kartuli TV (Georgian Tv) claims the US invested nuclear and biological interest in Ukraine. [4]

[4] [1] "დეზინფორმაცია: უკრაინასა და საქართველოშიამერიკული ბიოლაბორატორიებია, რომლებშიც ქიმიური და ბიოლოგიური იარაღის შექმნაზე მუშაობენ," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[5] [2] "დეზინფორმაცია: უკრაინასა და საქართველოშიამერიკული ბიოლაბორატორიებია, რომლებშიც ქიმიური და ბიოლოგიური იარაღის შექმნაზე მუშაობენ," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[6] [3] "დეზინფორმაცია: ვიქტორია ნულანდმა უკრაინის ტერიტორიაზე ბიოლოგიური იარაღის არსებობა დაადასტურა," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[7] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 30 May – 5 June."

- In May 2022, Conspiracy theorists have cited Russian Federation launching a full-scale war in Ukraine as part of a plan drawn up by global elites and ruling powers and a continuation of the coronavirus pandemic. The theory has also been voiced that the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine are part of a "hybrid war". [1]
- In June 2022, Lugar Lab, a biological lab in Tbilisi, allegedly claimed that US funding helped it develop biological weaponry that spreads infections through insects. [2]

v. Ukrainian Refugees:

Unlike the Russian disinformation campaign that frequently vilified Ukrainian immigrants abroad, Russian propaganda messages in Georgia did not become common until late April and the beginning of May. These narratives have two main ways of capturing Ukrainian refugees. First, narratives suggest they are bandit-like and engage in criminal behavior. For example:

- In late May 2022, Fringe Facebook groups claimed Ukrainian women joined prostitution in Japan and the Japanese Justice Minister criticized them for this. Other groups discussed how in Prague, people refused to let Ukrainians enter the markets, and in Bulgaria people ousted more than 35,000 refugees from hotels and the county.
- In June 2022, one user on Facebook disseminated a false claim about Sweden passing a law and officially asking Ukrainian women to respect the host country and not walk naked in the street. Instilling antagonism toward the Ukrainians, the Facebook user then provocatively asks whether Georgia has made similar measures to restrict such behavior of the Ukrainian refugees. [3]

Second, Georgian pro-Russian disinformation claims Ukrainian refugees are political agents, striving to overthrow the government and stir a revolution in Georgia. This is a spinoff of the Georgian Dreams' broader fearmongering tactic. The narrative claims that Ukrainian refugees attend rallies protesting against GD in an attempt to take down the Georgia government and start a revolution by placing a Saakashvili affiliated leader in the new government. Provoked by the revolution and/or new Georgian government, Russia will open a second war front in Georgia. Moreover, this narrative suggests Ukrainian refugees are trying to wage war against Russia by destabilizing Georgian domestic politics. Some examples include:

[1] "დეზინფორმაცია: უკრაინაში მიმდინარე ომი „გლობალისტების“ მიერ დაწერილი სცენარის მორიგი გაგრძელება," FactCheck.ge, accessed on July 20, 2020.

[2] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 6 June - 12 June."

[3] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 6 June - 12 June."

- In May 2022, pro-Russian News-Front and the Georgian Times ran a story claiming that Ukrainian refugees in Georgia functioned as diversionists rather than refugees seeking asylum. In particular, a Russian TV pundit Shota Apkhaidze argued that since the start of the conflict, 12,000 "Ukraine refugees" arrived in Georgia and comprise part of the population that attended the non-stop rallies that seek to dismount Georgia government leadership. According to the propaganda, they are the activists of President Zelensky and came to Georgia with political objectives to support the biggest opposition party United National Movement and destabilize the Georgian government to open a second front against Russia. [1]
- In May 2022, the pro-Russian Sezoni TV complained that they attended rallies and chanted anti-Putin slogans, in which endanger Georgia's security. He concluded that most Ukrainian refugees in Georgia are professional provocateurs who support ex-President Saakashvili, awaiting an order to organize a revolution in Georgia. [2]
- In June 2022, pro-Russian newspaper Saerto Gazeti interviewed Gulbaat Rtskhiladze, Director of the Russian proxy NGO The Eurasian Institute. As the Kremlin's long-time local propaganda activist, he claimed that the NGO Free Russia is bringing Ukrainian refugees to Georgia to conduct rallies with the demands to free ex-President Saakashvili from prison, as well as attend anti-Russian demonstrations with the intention of inciting revolution. [3]

[1] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 1 May - 8 May."

[2] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 23 May - 29 May " (Tbilisi, Georgia: GRASS, 2022).

[3] "GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice, 6 June - 12 June."