

THREAT
ANALYSIS

RUSSIA

Recorded Future®

By Insikt Group®

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Russian Information Operations Aim to Divide the Western Coalition on Ukraine



The following report reviews ongoing Russian influence efforts almost certainly aimed at undermining and dividing the Western defensive coalition supporting Ukraine, as well as influencing public opinion of Russia's war against Ukraine favorably toward Russia. This report will be of most interest to government groups, journalists, and industry professionals seeking an understanding of current Russian influence narratives and objectives regarding Russia's war against Ukraine. This research was conducted using the Recorded Future® Platform and other open sources. Prior to the publication of this report, Recorded Future notified and/or made best efforts to notify all affected organizations of the identified activity to support incident response and remediation investigations. Where direct notification was impossible, we notified relevant third-party organizations with a national cyber security mandate.

Executive Summary

Since at least early May 2022, Russian influence networks, including state-controlled media, known covert intelligence outlets, and known propaganda and disinformation amplifiers, have almost certainly been conducting several multifaceted information operations to undermine and divide the Western coalition on Ukraine and influence public opinion of Russia's war against Ukraine favorably toward Russia. These information operations almost certainly aim to undermine and divide the Western coalition on Ukraine both directly, by creating or exacerbating divisions between Western coalition countries, and indirectly, by influencing European populations to oppose their governments' support of Ukraine and negative policies toward Russia.

Based on observations from Russian influence networks, we believe that the direct attempts to undermine and divide the Western coalition by creating or exacerbating divisions are primarily aimed at France, Germany, Poland, and Turkey. We have identified multiple influence narratives that attempt to indirectly undermine and divide the Western coalition, including: stirring domestic discontent toward Western political leaders; negatively portraying Ukrainian refugees and the impacts they have on their host countries; blaming economic, energy, and food security concerns on Western governments for their negative policies toward Russia; blaming Ukraine as the source of modern-day fascist movements; and inciting distrust of Western media.

Notably, many of the aforementioned narratives align with an unverified analytical note from the Fifth Service of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), reportedly intercepted and [published](#) by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) on June 5, 2022. The note discusses Russian information operations failures during Russia's war against Ukraine thus far, and provides recommendations for influence efforts moving forward. The alignment of the analytical note's messaging with influence narratives identified by Recorded Future supports the authenticity of the note. It advises targeting the "European Community" with information about the "deterioration of living standards" in the EU as a result of their support for Ukraine, proposing specific narratives such as "arming Ukraine at the expense of European taxpayers", "emphasizing economic hardship", "forecasts about the number of Ukrainian refugees and the created burden on the budget and socio-economic infrastructure", and more. The analytical note states that the intention of the "massive" information operation is to "provoke internal public pressure on the governments and political elites of Western countries".

The West's response to Russia's war against Ukraine, from unprecedented economic sanctions on the Russian economy to billions of dollars in military aid, resources, and equipment provided to Ukraine, has played an instrumental role in slowing Russia's advance and likely contributed to the Russian military's decision to recalculate and reconcentrate primarily on eastern Ukraine after the initial phase of the invasion failed. The Russian government very likely did not anticipate a military conflict in Ukraine beyond 100 days, further miscalculating the impact that a prolonged conflict would have on its [economic](#) and [political](#) affairs. As a result, the Kremlin is likely attempting to alleviate the impacts of international pressure on their economy and political affairs by attempting to divide and destabilize Western responses.

Key Judgments

- Since at least May 2022, Russian influence networks have almost certainly been conducting several multifaceted information operations to undermine and divide the Western coalition supporting Ukraine in its defense against Russia, while shifting attitudes of European populations favorably toward Russia and Russia's war against Ukraine.
- It is almost certain that these Russian information operations are seeking to directly and indirectly undermine and divide the Western coalition through several influence narratives, such as blaming Western coalition governments for economic hardships their populations are enduring, in order to influence domestic populations to oppose their governments' support of Ukraine and policies toward Russia.
- Many of the influence narratives identified by Recorded Future align with an unverified analytical note (dubbed a "propaganda manual") from the Fifth Service of the FSB that was intercepted by Ukraine's SBU, supporting the note's authenticity.
- Attempts to undermine support for Ukraine will very likely continue through at least the end of the war, making future political elections, individual domestic policy issues, and other unforeseen events prime targets for influence and narrative manipulation.

Threat Analysis

We believe that Russian influence networks are almost certainly conducting multifaceted information operations to undermine and divide the Western coalition on Ukraine and influence public opinion of Russia's war against Ukraine favorably toward Russia. We identified several influence narratives in support of these information operations by monitoring Russian influence networks such as state-controlled media, known covert intelligence outlets, and known propaganda and disinformation amplifiers.

The influence narratives that we identified align with an unverified analytical note from the Fifth Service of the FSB, reportedly [intercepted](#) and published by the SBU on June 5, 2022. The Fifth Service of the FSB is responsible for [targeting](#) Russia's neighbors, and its Department of Operational Information is responsible for compiling data on Russia's "near abroad". The

Ninth Directorate of the Fifth Service has reportedly "been overseeing the gathering of intelligence on Ukrainian society to inform Russian decision-making". On March 11, 2022, it was [reported](#) that the head of the Fifth Service of the FSB, Colonel-General Sergei Beseda, was placed under house arrest along with his deputy. According to later [reports](#), Beseda had been moved to a high-security prison, reportedly for "theft of funds allocated for subversive and undercover work in Ukraine, as well as deliberately false information about the political situation in Ukraine".

The analytical note (a translated version of which can be found in Appendix A) first [documents](#) 7 "problems of information and propaganda support of the special operation in Ukraine" such as "insufficient evidence that a military measure was the only possible one", before recommending 5 changes in influence efforts including focusing on influencing audiences in 4 areas: "inside Russia, in Ukraine, in the post-Soviet countries...[and] public opinion of Western countries". The analytical note goes on to propose "targeted actions" for each of the 4 audiences. For the "European Community", the note advises:

To start a massive stuffing of information about the facts and forecasts of the deterioration of people's lives in the EU, in connection with the policy of EU governments to support nationalist groups in Ukraine, to provoke internal public pressure on the governments and political elites of Western countries. To form a negative attitude of the inhabitants of European countries to the policy of their state toward Russia. Attention should be focused on the deterioration of life in the EU and around the world in the long term.

The note proposes 5 specific "arguments" — in other words, influence narratives — to support the actions targeted above. These are:

- "Arming Ukraine at the expense of European taxpayers, and at the same time closing some social programs within the EU, increasing the share of the poor in a number of countries"
- "Forecasts about the number of Ukrainian refugees and the created burden on the budget and socio-economic infrastructure of the EU, where there are already many refugees from the Middle East and Afghanistan"
- "Difficulties of the population due to problems with energy carriers"

- “The lack of protection of the capital of any state and person located in the Western financial and banking system”
- “Update information about neo-Nazis in Europe, make a comparison with Ukraine in order to show the European community how Nazism is born and ask why they ban Nazis in their countries, but support them in Ukraine? For these purposes, it is advisable to use BBC documentaries about neo-Nazis and Nazis (for example, ‘Nazis: how political marginals became the ruling party’, ‘The Holocaust: Untold stories of survivors’, etc.)”

Table 1 below shows the alignment of influence narratives identified by Recorded Future and detailed in this report with the aforementioned targeted actions and influence narratives proposed by the analytical note. We believe that this alignment supports the authenticity of the note.

Influence Narratives Identified by Recorded Future	Actions and Narratives in the Analytical Note
Divisions between Western coalition countries	
Stirring internal discontent toward Western leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “...deterioration of people’s lives in the EU, in connection with the policy of EU governments to support nationalist groups in Ukraine, to provoke internal public pressure on the governments and political elites of Western countries”. • “To form a negative attitude of the inhabitants of European countries to the policy of their state toward Russia”. • “Arming Ukraine at the expense of European taxpayers, and at the same time closing some social programs within the EU, increasing the share of the poor in a number of countries”.
Negative portrayal of Ukrainian refugees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Forecasts about the number of Ukrainian refugees and the created burden on the budget and socio-economic infrastructure of the EU, where there are already many refugees from the Middle East and Afghanistan”.
Economic, energy, and food-security concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “...deterioration of people’s lives in the EU, in connection with the policy of EU governments to support nationalist groups in Ukraine”. • “The lack of protection of the capital of any state and person located in the Western financial and banking system” and “difficulties of the population due to problems with energy carriers”.
Ukraine as the source of Nazism and fascist movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Update information about neo-Nazis in Europe, make a comparison with Ukraine in order to show the European community how Nazism is born and ask why they ban Nazis in their countries, but support them in Ukraine? For these purposes, it is advisable to use BBC documentaries about neo-Nazis and Nazis (for example, “Nazis: How political marginals became the ruling party”, “The Holocaust: Untold stories of survivors”, etc.)”.
Inciting distrust of Western media	

Table 1: Alignment of influence narratives identified by Recorded Future and targeted actions and influence narratives proposed by the analytical note

Divisions Between Western Coalition Countries

Russian influence networks are almost certainly aiming to directly undermine and divide the Western coalition on Ukraine by creating or exacerbating divisions between Western coalition countries. We believe that France, Germany, Poland, and Turkey are the primary targets of this influence narrative based on observed influence activities. Examples of these activities include:

- In early June 2022, Russian sources RT¹ and Rossiyskaya Gazeta² closely covered a recent dispute between Belgium and Latvia over the controversial World War II monument “Latvian Beehive for Freedom” in Zedelgem, Belgium, based on links to those it honors and the Waffen-SS.
- In late May and early June 2022, multiple pro-Russian media sources further amplified Turkey’s security concerns over Finland and Sweden joining NATO, noting that in order to vote in favor, Sweden and Finland must lift arms export restrictions on Turkey, and that both countries extradite people linked to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and the Gulen movement (FETO).³ Additionally, outlets like Sputnik News,⁴ Red Spring Information Agency,⁵ and others⁶ have covered disagreements between Turkey and Greece, pertaining to what Turkey refers to as the Greek “militarization” of the Aegean Sea islands with weapons deployments.
- On May 21, 2022, RT reported on rifts between the German and Polish governments over Germany’s replenishment of various Leopard-model tanks to Poland after Poland delivered T-72s to Ukraine.⁷ Citing German government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit, RT noted that Germany was “perplexed” by Polish president Andrzej Duda’s [criticism](#) that Germany did not fulfill its promise to Poland over the tanks.
- On April 7, 2022, RT suggested that NATO was “divided” over countering Russia, stating that while “Poland and the Baltic states have advocated for a total break in relations with Moscow... Germany, France, and Turkey have reportedly argued that Russia cannot be coerced into peace... [and] reportedly want to continue dialogue with President Vladimir Putin”.⁸
- Cyber Front Z, a [well-documented Telegram troll farm](#) with a headquarters in Saint Petersburg, Russia, in addition to many other pro-Russian Telegram sources such as “Z Memes”,⁹ often aggregates, shares, and at times likely commissions images and memes (in the case of [Cyber Front Z](#), very likely commissioned from employees of the troll farm or volunteers) provoking European disunity and declaring European self-harm through military aid to Ukraine and sanctions against Russia.

1 <https://www.rt.com/russia/556517-latvia-belgium-monument-tensions/>

2 <https://rg.ru/2022/06/04/v-belgii-demontiruiut-pamiatnik-latysham-iz-nacistkoj-vaffen-ss.html>

3 <https://southfront.org/turkey-spoils-the-big-nato-party/> and <https://southfront.org/sweden-and-finland-almost-in-nato-but-turkey-set-conditions/> and <https://www.rt.com/news/556098-turkey-nato-meeting-sweden-finland/> and <https://ren.tv/news/politika/986663-turtsiia-otkazyaetsia-podderzhat-chenstvo-shvetsii-i-finliandii-v-nato>

4 <https://sputniknews.com/20220609/im-not-joking-turkeys-erdogan-threatens-greece-over-alleged-arming-of-aegean-islands-1096162407.html>

5 <https://rossaprimavera.ru/news/83a2cca1>

6 <https://tehnovar.ru/365183-Ostrova-pretknoveniya-k-chemu-privedet-spor-Turcii-i-Grecii-iz-za-situacii-v-Egeyskom-more.html>

7 <https://www.rt.com/news/556083-germany-poland-accusations-tanks-ukraine/>

8 <https://www.rt.com/news/553462-nato-disagrees-over-kremlin-sanctions/>

9 https://t.me/Z_memes



Figure 1: Memes produced by Cyber Front Z and Z Memes with a Turkish focus: (left, translated): "No!" (to Finnish and Swedish NATO membership)¹⁰; (right, translated): "Host a bunch of US and NATO bases", "Don't trust West"¹¹

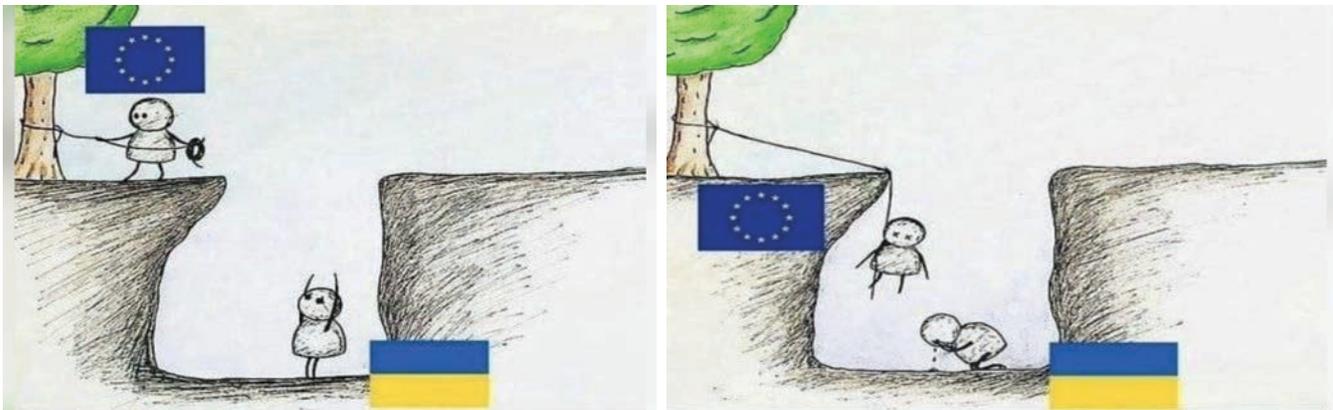


Figure 2: A meme from Z Memes, implying that the EU is harming itself in hope of helping Ukraine¹²

Russian influence networks are actively attempting to stoke ethnic tension and amplify historic territorial claims between Poland and Ukraine, most notably suggesting that Poland is planning to use Russia's war with Ukraine to its advantage to reintegrate historically Polish lands back under its control.

- In other recent examples, pro-Russian Telegram sources, citing a document most likely to be a forgery, falsely claimed on May 10, 2022 that Polish forces, along with troops from Lithuania, were planning to invade western Ukraine on May 22, 2022.¹³ Similarly, Recorded Future has also tracked at least 1 campaign we assess is likely connected to the Russian information operation Secondary Infektion, which revolved around alleged leaked maps of Polish military control of Ukrainian territory near its border region.¹⁴

- Additionally, on April 28, 2022, RT posted an article amplifying claims by the head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), Sergey Naryshkin, who accused Poland of planning to invade Ukrainian territory along the Poland-Ukraine border and annex Lviv back into Polish control.¹⁵ According to our data, Naryshkin's allegations, and similar claims of a Polish invasion of Ukraine, were spread widely on pro-Russian Telegram channels, often citing RT directly, as well as on RIA Novosti and Russian Ministry of Defense-owned TV Zvezda. Similar allegations have also been echoed by the head of the Russian Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, as well as in sources such as the pro-Russian Red Spring Information Agency.¹⁶

¹⁰ https://t.me/cyber_frontZ/2606

¹¹ https://t.me/Z_memes/10385

¹² https://t.me/Z_memes/10370

¹³ <https://t.me/baltnews/14510>

¹⁴ <https://archive.ph/6O6ON>

¹⁵ <https://www.rt.com/russia/554671-poland-ukraine-spy-split/>

¹⁶ <https://ria.ru/20220531/patrushev-1792037525.html> and <https://rossaprimavera.ru/article/ffd57c5a>



Figure 3: Left: Screenshot of RT documentary “Volhynia. No Statute of Limitations”¹⁷; Right: A meme produced by Cyber Front Z, provoking the idea of a Polish invasion of Ukraine (Translation: “Poland: We will free your territory”; “Ukraine: From the Russians?”)¹⁸



Stirring Internal Discontent Toward Western Leaders

In addition to direct efforts, Russian influence networks are almost certainly aiming to indirectly undermine and divide the Western coalition on Ukraine. One such influence narrative encourages targeted audiences to blame their country’s political leadership for not standing up to international pressure, or for not putting domestic economic or security priorities ahead of Ukraine. This influence narrative overlaps with other narratives discussed later in this report, such as blaming economic, energy, and food-security concerns on Western governments for their negative policies toward Russia, and blaming Ukrainian refugees for worsening living standards.

Attempts to stir internal discontent toward a country’s existing leadership will very likely precede future attempts to engage in malign influence during election cycles and other target-specific political milestones, in hope of projecting a candidate, party, or platform more in alignment with, or at least less abrasive to, Russia’s strategic objectives in Ukraine. These figures need not be aligned with the Kremlin or hold “pro-Russian” views but can be favored for having a set of proposed neutral or non-interventionist policies, or any views that would indicate an opportunity to disturb or undermine the Western coalition.

Examples illustrating this influence narrative include:

- On June 9, 2022, RT contributor Rachel Marsden published the headline “Westerners are skeptical about their leaders, but not their anti-Russian narratives”, in which she questioned why Western governments are trusted when it comes to anti-Russian narratives, but there is growing skepticism of Western leaders more broadly. Marsden argues that “We’re on the verge of a global polarization over crises like Covid and Ukraine, as citizens around the world fall into two camps: liberal democracies that are successfully propagandized and radicalized into believing the narratives that they’re spoon-fed in support of a political-industrial complex that derives benefit from mass public support or complacency, versus those around the world who aren’t willing to settle for soundbites and spin lines as a substitute for independent critical thought”.¹⁹
- On June 3, 2022, Southfront contributor Eric Zuesse argued that the US is detracting from the security of the American people through its defense support of Ukraine, stating that “defeating Russia in Ukraine is now the U.S. Government’s top priority, and the needs of the American people are being ignored in support of that top priority”.²⁰ A similar article from Southfront published in April suggested that German weapon shipments to Ukraine were not in the best interests of the German population (economically or diplomatically) and that German chancellor Olaf Scholz maintained a posture of “passivity and silence” in defending German interests.²¹ Southfront is a disinformation outlet [assessed](#) to be under the direction of the FSB by the US Department of the Treasury.

17 <https://rtd.rt.com/films/volhynia-no-statute-of-limitations/>

18 https://t.me/cyber_frontZ/2786

19 https://www.rt.com/russia/556770-west-anti-russia-propaganda/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=RSS

20 <https://southfront.org/the-u-s-governments-top-priority-now-is-to-defeat-russia-in-ukraine/>

21 <https://southfront.org/sending-heavy-weapons-to-ukraine-in-german-interests/>

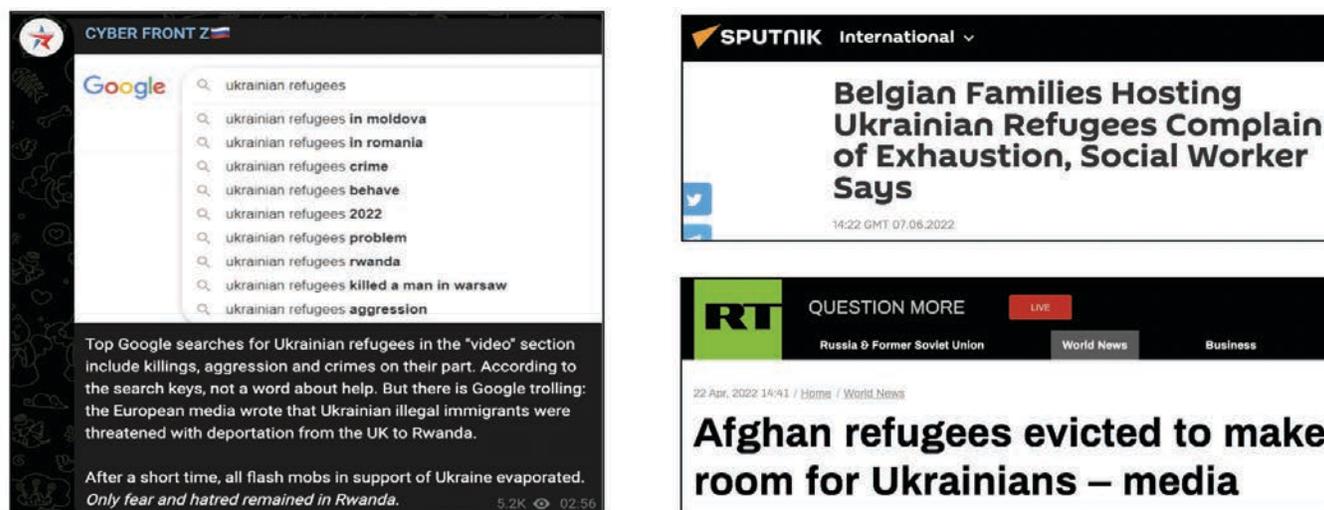


Figure 4: (Left) A Google search shared by the Russian troll network Cyber Front Z, suggesting that searches of Ukrainian refugees primarily return negative results²²; (Right) Sample articles from Sputnik News²³ and RT²⁴ highlighting challenges in facilitating Ukrainian refugees in Europe

- In May 2022, RT contributor Robert Bridge assessed that “the Swedish and Finnish people are being led down a dangerous road by leaders who clearly do not have their best interests at heart” by their decision to end their neutrality status and seek NATO membership.²⁵

Negative Portrayal of Ukrainian Refugees

Another influence narrative observed across Russian influence networks is the negative portrayal of Ukrainian refugees in Europe and the impact they have on their host countries. The negative portrayal of Ukrainian migrants almost certainly seeks to blame Ukrainian refugees for worsening living standards, polarize public opinion in countries that have accepted Ukrainian refugees, and give traction to anti-migrant policies often associated with both conservative political parties and ultra-right political factions. As a result, this influence narrative supports the objective of undermining and dividing the Western coalition by reducing public support for pro-Ukrainian government policies.

Examples illustrating this influence narrative include:

- Russian news and Telegram sources, including one series of interviews published on June 7, 2022 with alleged Russian citizens living in Poland (unconfirmed authenticity), are alleging that Russian citizens are being denied access to employment opportunities, denied rent, and are enduring “psychological pressure” from Ukrainian refugees.²⁶ One individual, “Olga”, claims that Russians were afraid of being attacked or intimidated by Ukrainian refugees in public places.
- On June 6, 2022, several Russian-language sources quoted [Russian-favored](#) Matteo Salvini, a senator in the Italian Senate and former deputy prime minister of Italy, who recently [assessed](#) that if Russia’s war against Ukraine drags on, food insecurity and economic instability would likely result in an additional surge of 500 million migrants into Italy and southern Europe, and that it would be an “economic and social catastrophe”.²⁷

22 https://t.me/cyber_frontZ/3305

23 <https://sputniknews.com/20220607/belgian-families-hosting-ukrainian-refugees-complain-of-exhaustion-social-worker-says-1096094438.html>

24 <https://www.rt.com/news/554341-germany-afghan-ukrainian-refugees/>

25 <https://www.rt.com/russia/555828-sweden-finland-join-nato/>

26 https://www.mk.ru/social/2022/06/07/priekhavshie-v-polshu-russkie-okazalis-v-adu-strashno-razgovarivat-na-ulice.html?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop

27 <https://t.me/amurpress/4296> and <https://regnum.ru/news/3611933.html> and <https://rossaprimavera.ru/news/83d93bb2>

- On May 12, 2022, Southfront reported a stabbing in Warsaw allegedly by 3 intoxicated Ukrainian men who were purportedly sexually assaulting a woman.²⁸ The article from Southfront concluded by saying that “Deadly drunk Ukrainians can be often seen in the center of Warsaw, causing discontent of local residents”. These claims further circulated among internet users, Russian sources, and members of the far-right Polish Confederation Party under the assumption that Ukrainians were responsible for the attack. [According](#) to Polish investigative outlet OKO, citing Warsaw Police spokesperson Sylwester Marczak, there were “no indications” that the incident involved “foreigners”. On May 20, Minister of Justice Zbigniew Ziobro [announced](#) that authorities obtained 2 arrest warrants for 2 Polish nationals identified as suspects in the murder.

Furthermore, Recorded Future recently located a series of memes depicting the poor treatment of Ukrainian refugees by their host countries. These memes involve Mykola, a cartoon wild boar character dressed in Ukrainian colors that was recently [created](#) by the German Association of Catholics in Business and Management. The character is used to explain the principles of life in Germany to Ukrainian refugee children. The memes, written primarily in German and circulating on pro-Russian Telegram channels, were designed to appear to originate on German Facebook pages, including the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) political party as well as “Ich Liebe Germany Deutschland” (I Love Germany), and “Deutschland” (Germany). We note that there is no record of these memes appearing on Facebook — including on any of the 3 pages mentioned above. This indicates that these images were likely manipulated “screenshots” using image editing tools such as a Facebook post generator, likely with the purpose of stoking negative perceptions among Germans of Ukrainian migrants.

On June 8, 2022, multiple pro-Russian Telegram sources, including 1 Telegram account affiliated with Russian state-controlled media outlet RIA Novosti (@ukraina_ru), began sharing the images, claiming that Germans have “beg[u]n [sic] to cruelly ridicule Ukrainians” and that “the boar Mykola is no longer welcome in Germany”.²⁹ According to Telegram statistics, we believe that these images have been viewed more than half a million times, primarily by Russian speakers.

- The first image, which attempted to appear as originating from AfD’s official Facebook account, shows Mykola being detained by 2 German police officers, and he asks “Who will help me?” The police officers reply “God will help you. Get back in your pigsty!”
- A second image, purportedly from “Deutschland”, shows Mykola asking a taxi driver, “Who can take me to the city center for free?” The adjoining image shows the taxi driver driving away saying “Help, Ukrainian refugees are hitting taxi drivers again!”
- The third image, manipulated to appear to originate from “Ich Liebe Germany Deutschland” shows Mykola asking for employment, while the employment officer responds that they “have no vacancies for prostitutes and drug dealers”.
- The 3 memes are accompanied by 2 additional “screenshots” showing German residents joking amongst themselves about the memes (also likely to be fake). The pro-Russian Telegram account, @RVvoenkor, provided an additional generality about the German population, saying the “[Germans]... do not support the Ukrainians at all”.³⁰

28 <https://southfront.org/ukrainian-refugees-reportedly-killed-a-man-in-warsaw-poland-video-18/>

29 https://t.me/ukraina_ru/78338

30 <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/15423>



Figure 5: Identified memes of Mykola, crafted in German and Russian, negatively depicting German sentiment toward Ukrainian migrants

Economic, Energy, and Food Security Concerns

Russian influence networks are almost certainly attempting to exploit economic, energy, and food-security concerns stemming from Russia's war against Ukraine to indirectly undermine and divide the Western coalition by reducing public support for Western government policies that are negative toward Russia (such as international sanctions) and policies supportive of Ukraine (such as providing aid).

This influence narrative very likely aims to give credence to the Russian government's narrative that sanctions are ineffective and unsustainable and are causing more damage to citizens of sanctioning countries than the domestic Russian population. These sources also aim to shift blame from Russia to Ukraine for [high food](#) and [fertilizer prices](#), in addition to [blockades](#) and [theft](#) of international grain and corn exports. As discussed, this influence narrative overlaps with other influence narratives discussed earlier, including stirring internal discontent toward Western leaders for not putting domestic economic or security priorities ahead of Ukraine and blaming Ukrainian refugees for worsening living conditions.

Examples illustrating this influence narrative include:

- On June 3, 2022, [SVR-directed](#) outlet Strategic Culture Foundation published an inflation-growth infographic, using figures from Trading Economics, to present "proof" that inflation growth began before the start of Russia's war against Ukraine.³¹ The chart attempts to shift any blame away from the conflict but does not take into consideration the sudden ~1-2% [increases](#) in inflation levels in Europe from February to March 2022, coinciding with the beginning of the war on February 24.
- On June 2, 2022, the New Eastern Outlook, an outlet also under suspicion of being [directed](#) by the Russian SVR, published an article stating that NATO is determined to defeat Russia at the cost of millions of lives due to famine.³² An additional driver, the outlet argues, is the EU's determination to use a food crisis "to try and sway African nations back into the fold of former colonial powers" rather than settle for a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine that would prevent further suffering.

31 <https://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2022/06/03/inflation-growth-across-g7/>

32 <https://journal-neo.org/2022/06/02/nato-s-mission-imperative-break-russia-even-if-millions-worldwide-perish/>

- On May 30, 2022, amid the ongoing US infant formula shortage, [FSB-directed](https://en.news-front.info/2022/05/30/america-plunged-into-an-unprecedented-crisis/) News Front accused the US government of prioritizing support to Ukraine over the needs of US citizens.³³ The outlet cited Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, who said, “We have \$40 billion, but there is no baby food for American mothers and babies. There is an unknown amount of money for CIA activities in Ukraine, but no food for American babies and mothers”.
- On May 19, 2022, Southfront accused “corrupt [Ukrainian] officials” of stealing, or planning to steal, much of the US government’s \$50+ billion in military support and aid, suggesting that these resources are wasted when the US population is in greater need of financial support.³⁴ The outlet states that the US has shown “unprecedented generosity” toward Ukraine but hesitates to “carry out critical economic stimulation measures... at a time when inflation is reaching unprecedented heights, fuel hits new records and grocery prices are unaffordable”. It is likely that this article intended to frustrate readers with an image that resources were being stolen or wasted, but more broadly to provoke distrust toward Ukrainians and their government.
- In a May 11, 2022 press briefing, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov stated that Moscow’s actions “do not influence... the food problems in the world”, but rather are due to the West’s “illegitimate sanctions” and Ukraine mining its ports, thereby preventing food exports by sea.³⁵ President Vladimir Putin has also blamed the West’s sanctions’ pressure for further stressing countries already under threat of famine, refraining from placing any blame on Russia’s full-scale invasion, most likely to undermine the perspective of the Western coalition in the eyes of the rest of the world.³⁶

33 <https://en.news-front.info/2022/05/30/america-plunged-into-an-unprecedented-crisis/>

34 <https://southfront.org/much-of-washingtons-54-billion-aid-for-ukraine-will-be-stolen-by-corrupt-officials/>

35 <https://news.ru/world/lavrov-nazval-prichinu-prodovolstvennyh-problem-v-mire/>

36 <https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/429575-putin-sanciones-antirrusas-provocar-crisis-economica-global>

Russian state media sources RT and Sputnik News both often cover rising inflation and effects on living expenses; these sources aim to connect the fallout of international sanctions on Russia, in addition to Western defense support and spending, as key catalysts of economic strain.³⁷ Some headlines from Russian media sources include:

- “US blames ‘global challenges’ for record inflation”
- “Washington’s Ukraine Aid Spending May Affect US Economy, Experts Warn”
- “EU country calls for ‘pause’ in anti-Russia sanctions”
- “One third of EU countries see double-digit inflation”

Ukraine as the Source of Nazism and Fascist Movements

Another influence narrative indirectly supporting the objective of undermining and dividing the Western coalition on Ukraine portrays Ukraine as the source of Nazism and modern-day fascist movements, therefore aiming to reduce Western public support for Ukraine, including pro-Ukrainian government policies, and influence public opinion of Russia’s war against Ukraine favorably toward Russia.

Some of Russia’s initial justifications for its war against Ukraine were both “to protect the people that are subjected to abuse, genocide from the [Kyiv] regime” and “demilitarize and denazify” Ukraine.³⁸ In support of the latter, the Kremlin has attempted to re-emphasize Russia’s pursuit of the “denazification” of Ukraine, and portray Russia as a force against international fascism, often harkening back to the Soviet Union’s contribution to the fall of Nazi Germany in World War II and years of Russian propaganda echoing claims of a “[Nazi Ukraine](#)”.

The unverified analytical note from the Fifth Service of the FSB, [intercepted](#) by the Ukrainian SBU, noted that Russian influence networks failed to support the concept of “denazification” with an emotional attachment, citing “no massive [information campaigns] about the murdered children in the DPR [Donetsk People’s Republic] and LPR [Luhansk People’s Republic], about the massacres of nationalists against Russians and other information that would emotionally contribute to the support of the special operation”. As a result, the note admitted that “there is not enough such information even now, especially from [first-hand accounts in Ukraine]”.

37 <https://www.rt.com/news/556777-white-house-inflation-blame/> and <https://sputniknews.com/20220521/washingtons-ukraine-aid-spending-may-affect-us-economy-experts-warn-1095688076.html> and <https://www.rt.com/russia/556377-belgium-sanctions-pause-impact/> and <https://www.rt.com/business/555871-eu-countries-mounting-inflation/>

38 <https://tass.com/politics/1409189>

In support of shifting Western attitudes toward Russia's war, and the concept of "denazification", we have found that pro-Kremlin influence networks seek to "educate" Western viewers on Nazism and attempt to source the origins of modern fascist movements back to Ukraine.³⁹ For example, after the May 14, 2022 mass shooting in Buffalo, New York, RT and [several other pro-Kremlin influencers](#) attempted to connect the ideology of the suspect with Ukraine's Azov Battalion, noting the shared use of the Sonnenrad (Black Sun symbol) and similar "worldviews" between the suspect and the group.⁴⁰

Often, these outlets paint Western governments as enablers and accomplices to "Ukrainian Nazi activity". For example:

- On June 6, 2022, an article published to pro-Kremlin [amplifier](#) Global Research argued that the US, which once fought against Nazis in World War II, is now training and financially supporting Nazis in Ukraine.⁴¹
- Another article, first published to The Grayzone on May 31, 2022, and later to Global Research on June 8, 2022, suggested that the US has both "directly and indirectly trained and empowered Nazis and ultra-nationalists at home and abroad to fight Russians in Ukraine", suggesting that in doing so, it could result in future repercussions in the US's fight against domestic extremism.⁴² The author of the article, T.J. Coles, predicted that after the war, "American fascists [would] return home with the potential to use [US government military training] against domestic targets".
- On May 21 and 23, 2022, The Unz Review and Global Research claimed that the UK government "is funding a Nazi regime in Ukraine rather than prioritizing its domestic national interests"⁴³ and that this was covered up with lies perpetuated in British media (note the compounding, overlapping narratives here).⁴⁴

39 <http://thesaker.is/so-how-serious-is-ukraines-neo-nazi-romance/>

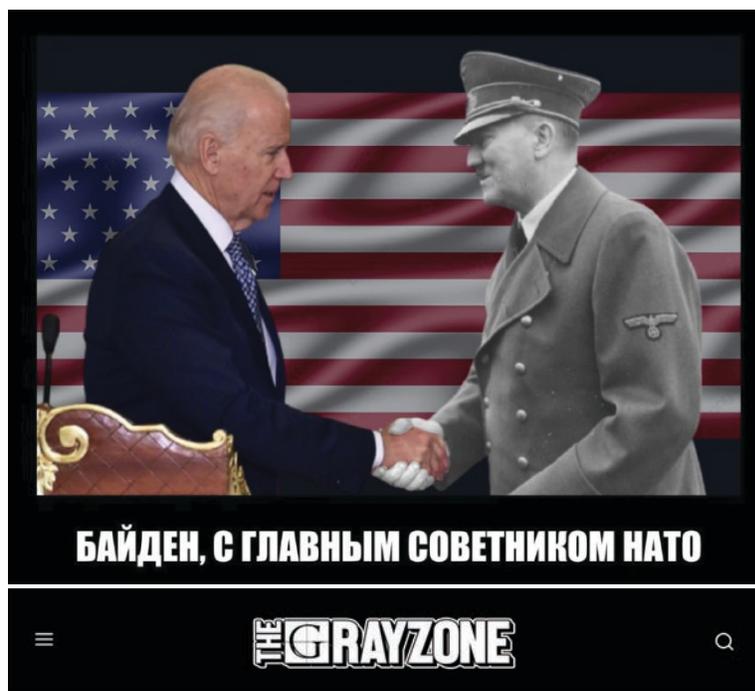
40 <https://www.rt.com/news/555612-buffalo-shooting-symbol-azov-battalion/>

41 <https://www.globalresearch.ca/us-battled-ww-ii-nazis-today-us-side-by-side-ukraine/5782550>

42 <https://www.globalresearch.ca/new-generation-us-trained-extremists-fighting-russia-we-prepared-blowback/5782817>

43 <https://www.unz.com/article/ukraines-nazi-connection-and-the-british-national-cover-up/>

44 <https://www.globalresearch.ca/ukraine-nazi-connection-british-national-cover-up/5781054>



A new generation of US-trained extremists is fighting Russia. Are we prepared for the blowback?

TJ COLES · MAY 31, 2022

Figure 6: (Top) A meme featured on the pro-Russian Telegram channel Cyber Army of Russia with the caption "Biden with NATO Chief Advisor"⁴⁵; (Bottom) An article originally posted to The Grayzone and later Global Research, indicating that the alleged US-trained extremists in Russia may attempt to attack domestic targets in the future⁴⁶

45 https://t.me/cyberwar_world/1097

46 <https://thegrayzone.com/2022/05/31/us-trained-extremists-fighting-russia-blowback/>

Inciting Distrust of Western Media

Russian influence networks are inciting distrust in Western media coverage of Russia’s war against Ukraine, indirectly supporting the objective of undermining and dividing the Western coalition on Ukraine. This narrative seeks to sow doubt in Western audiences about the truthfulness of Western media reporting to undermine the public’s support of Ukraine and their trust in reports of Russian war crimes and other activities in Ukraine.

Though certainly not unique to Russia’s war against Ukraine, Russian influence networks, including Russian state media organizations, [pro-Russian OSINT accounts](#), [fake “fact-checker” groups](#), and other “alternative theory” organizations, particularly on Telegram, are inciting distrust in Western media coverage of Russia’s war against Ukraine. This includes Western media investigations of Russian war crimes, status reports of the battlefield, and other “lies” reported by Western media. At times, these articles will be supported through poorly-sourced or non-verified testimonials, alleged eyewitnesses, and various appeals to authority via proclaimed experts, usually in the field of military affairs and geopolitics.⁴⁷ Sometimes, arguments against Western media from known Kremlin amplifiers — particularly The Unz Review — also engage in anti-semitic themes when discussing Western media coverage of the war, referring to the outlets as “Jewish-controlled”⁴⁸ and operated by “planetary master criminals”.⁴⁹



Figure 7: Article from Southfront citing French volunteer Adrien Boquet, who told French media that he witnessed war crimes committed by the Ukrainian military; Boquet also claimed that the Bucha massacre was a staged event⁵⁰

47 <https://southfront.org/russian-special-military-operation-in-ukraine-military-experts-opinion-interview/>

48 <https://www.unz.com/article/the-jewish-hand-in-world-war-three/>

49 <https://www.unz.com/jfreud/putin-and-hitler-in-the-failure-of-liberal-imagination-problems-of-revisionism-zelensky-and-woody-allens-zelig-or-zeliginsky/>

50 <https://southfront.org/french-volunteer-outraged-by-lies-of-western-media-revealed-truth-about-war-crimes-in-ukraine/>



The US-made Javelin anti-tank systems have been praised for their effectiveness by Washington officials and have been turned by Western Media into a symbol of Ukraine’s resistance in the conflict with Russia. But a commander of the Ukrainian marines, who ended up being captured during the fighting for Mariupol, has revealed to RT that the hardware doesn't really live up to the claims.



Some users have stated that this Reuters post is a prime example of why it’s become increasingly difficult to trust mainstream media reports on complex foreign conflicts such as the one in Ukraine, which is already hard to follow due to the avalanche of conflicting and misleading reports supposedly coming from the frontlines.

Figure 8: RT articles and provided article snippets criticizing Western media war coverage and suggesting that these outlets are untrustworthy⁵¹

51 <https://www.rt.com/news/555639-reuters-ukraine-war-paintball/> and <https://www.rt.com/news/555144-ukraine-javelin-nlaw-mariupol/>

Russian State-Sponsored News, Propaganda, and Disinformation Sources - Media and the War in Ukraine

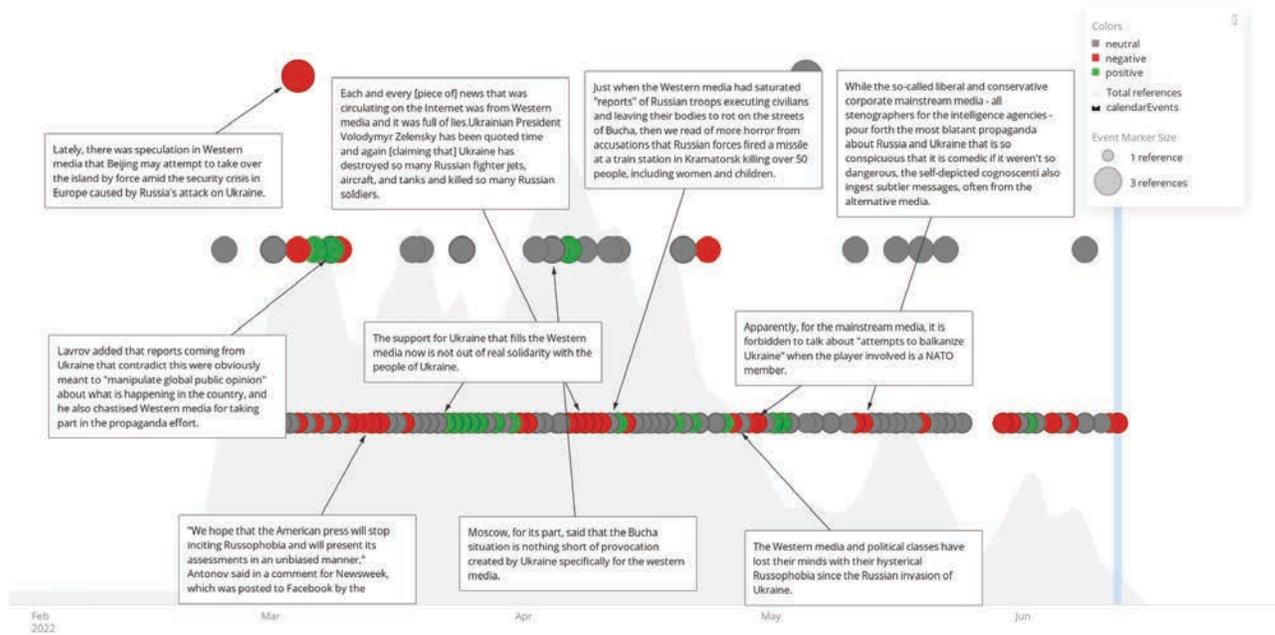
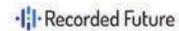


Figure 9: Known elements of Russia's propaganda and disinformation networks often target Western media as biased and untrustworthy (Source: Recorded Future)

According to Recorded Future data, Russian influence networks often discredit Western media coverage of Russia's war against Ukraine, citing anti-Russian bias, allegations of purposeful hysterical, sensationalist, or provocative works, and even claiming that these outlets serve as mouthpieces for Western intelligence services and foreign governments.⁵² It is not uncommon for these sources to engage in projection, accusing credible news sources of attempting to "brainwash", confuse, or outright lie to their audiences; these opinions are also often reflected in memes and other visual works to reinforce those beliefs.



Figure 10: (Left)⁵³ Strategic Culture Foundation contributor Finian Cunningham alleged that the goal of "corporate-owned media" is "the brainwashing of the public"; (Right)⁵⁴ A similar narrative in a meme produced by Z Memes suggests that Western audiences are manipulated into certain buckets of thought — note that the pendulum changes from an image of George Floyd, to COVID-19, to a vaccine, and finally to the colors of Ukraine's flag

52 <https://www.globalresearch.ca/us-state-affiliated-newsguard-targets-consortium-news/5782607>
 53 <https://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2022/04/14/war-ukraine-really-about-us-pursuing-regime-change-in-russia-bruce-gagnon/>
 54 https://t.me/Z_memes/944

Outlook

Attempts by Russian influence networks to undermine and divide Western unity and support of Ukraine are very likely to be a persistent challenge far beyond the end of Russia's war against Ukraine. In the immediate future, we expect to continue observing many influence activities aligned with the influence narratives illustrated in this report.

It is almost certain that Russian influence networks, unchanged from years of prior narratives, will continue to incite distrust of Western media, specifically promoting the view that Western media's coverage of Russia's war against Ukraine is incorrect, biased, or untruthful.

In addition, Russian influence networks will likely attempt to pivot to a more positive outlook on Russian occupation and military activities in Ukraine, directly appealing to emotion (something the Fifth Service of the FSB claimed influence networks failed at initially, per the unverified analytical note) with "heartwarming" reports from Ukraine, and later shifting to positive — though likely heavily misleading — messaging of reconstruction and infrastructure development of "liberated" territories.

Though the Western coalition on Ukraine currently remains united in its resolve against Russia's war against Ukraine, the Kremlin is likely expecting its information operations to yield results in the long term. As the war persists, the impact of Russia's war against Ukraine, including blowback from sanctions, is likely to further strain the relationship between Western populations and their governments. Over time, this will likely result in a natural dwindling of support for the Western coalition, resulting from both exhaustion with the war and a lack of appetite for long-term economic pain. It is almost certain that Russian information operations would further attempt to exploit this opportunity to swing international opinion in their favor. As this scenario seems more likely with Russia [preparing](#) for a long war, a "whole-of-community" response to effectively identify, isolate, inform, and counter Russian direct and indirect attempts to undermine and divide the Western coalition on Ukraine will be required.

Appendix A: Translated Analytical Note

[Beginning of Translated Document]

Analytical Note

For the purposes of organizing ideological work in the post-war period, it is necessary to take into account a number of problems of information and propaganda support of the special operation in Ukraine, which are currently identified:

- insufficient evidence that a military measure was the only possible one. Since the beginning of the special operation, people have not understood and continue not to understand the reasons and goals that we want to achieve;
- the beginning of the special operation and the concept of “denazification” was not supported by an emotional background, there was no massive stuffing of emotional information about the murdered children in the DPR and LPR, about the massacres of nationalists against Russians and other information that would emotionally contribute to the support of the special operation. There is not enough such information even now, especially “from the first mouth” of people living in Ukraine;
- the absence of massive information in the media and new media about the support of the special operation among the citizens of Ukraine, which creates a favorable environment for the dissemination of information about Russia-the aggressor and invader;
- distrust of a part of the population of the Russian media, insufficiency in the information field of new persons - newsmakers, especially reference persons, presented on the Internet today, They do not appear on TV shows, but their opinion is significant for a part of the population (primarily those who doubt the correctness of Russia’s actions).
- speeches by well-known representatives of show business, scientists, etc., against the special operation, create the impression that the Russian elite is split and the situation inside the country is destabilizing;
- some citizens consciously look for and compare information in foreign and Russian media and come to the conclusion that there is a complete lack of support for Russia abroad. There is a need to strengthen work with journalists and media experts from foreign countries (not only Western, but also in the Arab world, Central Asia, China, India, etc.);

- lack of a confident description of the positive post-war future of the liberated territories, explanation of resources for their development, vision of the place and role of new territories in the system of socio-economic regional and international relations

It is advisable to switch the information agenda to a confident discussion of projects for post-war socio-economic development of the liberated territories.

For the purpose of post-war support, it is recommended to implement the following areas of work already now:

1. develop and present projects for the future development of the liberated territories of Ukraine, include large business and business circles, large public organizations, associations, unions, movements, university centers in the development and discussion;
2. will focus on four contours of working with public opinion: public opinion inside Russia, in Ukraine, in the post-Soviet countries (where the idea that Russia is an aggressor can also act with us is already being discussed by nationalist groups), public opinion of Western countries;
3. identify significant segments of society that doubt the correctness of Russia’s actions more than others, and purposefully work with them (in particular, young people);
4. to use not only mass media, new media, but also civil networks on the ground for information work, to form networks of propagandists;
5. implement special projects that form a positive opinion about the actions of Russian troops in Ukraine.

Taking into account different motives and instruments of negativization of Russia by forces of different countries and groups, it is proposed to organize targeted actions.

On the territory of the DPR, LPR, Ukraine

To begin work on the discussion of programs and projects of peaceful life in the post-war period, namely:

- to activate the work of large public organizations in this direction - the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Association of Small and Medium-sized Cities of Russia, the Union of Russian Cities, the Volunteers of Victory movement, etc.
- start discussing new laws related to social programs and economic development of the territories of the DPR and LPR;

- to start projects of humanitarian assistance to persons affected by the actions of nationalists and other radical groups that have received weapons from Western countries (according to their statements, as victims);
- start negotiations with the heads of local authorities on infrastructure development and post-war reconstruction programs;
- to form and start discussing projects for the construction of infrastructure, schools and strengthening the personnel potential of universities of the DPR and LPR.

To consolidate the image of the Russian warrior-liberator, in particular:

- use the successful image of “polite people” in 2014 (videos, photos with rescued animals, for which children were worried; photos with veterans crying with happiness of reunion, etc.);
- videos of soldiers who bring peace to people (in the form of new textbooks to schools, medical equipment, etc.), which will consolidate the image of “soldiers of peace”;
- video of common actions of Russian and Ukrainian soldiers against Ukrainian Nazis and gangs.

To strengthen the arguments of the special operation to organize:

- numerous appeals of Ukrainian and Russian veterans with a request to stop fascism in Ukraine and prevent it in Russia and in the world. Stories about insults and reprisals against veterans in Ukraine in recent years and now;
- to carry out work with persons who are in contact with a large number of people by their occupation. Especially - teachers, taxi drivers, salon staff, etc.;
- in the conditions of the ban on Russian broadcasting, launch new media projects and real networks of agitators

The work on the formation of the morale of Russians and pro-Russian citizens of other countries, their mobilization should be no less powerful than that of Ukrainian nationalists. Currently, social networks are full of anti-Russian songs, jokes, mobilizing poems about the protection of the Motherland-Ukraine. Alternative products should be prepared and distributed.

Inside Russian Society

In order to consolidate Russian society, it is advisable to strengthen support for Russian actions in Ukraine:

- interviews and videos about the support of Russian actions inside Ukraine itself from residents of Ukraine. Video stories, interviews, support (videos about rescued children, reunited families, happy released, etc.);
- appeals of stars of art, sports, prominent figures of science, education in support of Russian actions and the Russian army. It is recommended to place special emphasis on young stars from the show “The Voice” and other projects;
- interviews with disappointed fans of artists who did not support Russia’s position, disclosure of the facts of their foreign assets and personal interests;
- massive interviews with foreign stars, politicians, experts, telling about the real goals of the West in relation to Ukraine and Russia;
- numerous interviews of experts from Ukraine and other countries, the opinion of the military and leaders of the DPR, LPR, Not only Russian experts should be in the information field. To strengthen the coverage by foreign journalists of what Russia is doing in foreign media (accordingly, to strengthen the work with journalists in foreign national media who prepare programs on politics and international relations);
- interviews and videos about the economic situation and prospects from the heads of major Russian organizations - Gazprom, Norilsk Nickel, VTB and others. One of the tasks is to explain the dependence of the world’s economies on Russian resources, to show Russia’s capabilities for retaliatory sanctions;
- interviews and videos from foreign experts about the dependence of the world on Russia’s position, about the goals and objectives of Russia in Ukraine;
- organize the collection of humanitarian aid from Russian citizens (street and Internet projects),

In relation to the post-Soviet space:

- to begin preparations for the International Anti-Fascist Congress to coordinate the efforts of countries in opposing Nazism in the modern world. Activate (create) anti-fascist organizations in the territories of post-Soviet states;
- to organize a League of anti-fascist states in the neighborhood belt;
- to spread opinions from friendly countries (experts and prominent figures of culture, science, education, sports) in support of the residents of the DPR, LPR and the actions of Russian troops;

- to start discussing economic integration projects with the DPR and the LPR, mutually beneficial economic partnerships within the framework of the EAEU, CIS, SCO and other formats, it is recommended that the initiators of the projects be Russian big business and business partners of post-Soviet countries.

With regard to the European Community:

- To start a massive stuffing of information about the facts and forecasts of the deterioration of people's lives in the EU, in connection with the policy of EU governments to support nationalist groups in Ukraine, to provoke internal public pressure on the governments and political elites of Western countries.
- To form a negative attitude of the inhabitants of European countries to the policy of their state toward Russia. Attention should be focused on the deterioration of life in the EU and around the world in the long term.

Arguments:

- arming Ukraine at the expense of European taxpayers, and at the same time closing some social programs within the EU, increasing the share of the poor in a number of countries;
- forecasts about the number of Ukrainian refugees and the created burden on the budget and socio-economic infrastructure of the EU, where there are already many refugees from the Middle East and Afghanistan;
- difficulties of the population due to problems with energy carriers;
- the lack of protection of the capital of any state and person located in the Western financial and banking system.
- Update information about neo-Nazis in Europe, make a comparison with Ukraine in order to show the European community how Nazism is born and ask why they ban Nazis in their countries, but support them in Ukraine? For these purposes, it is advisable to use BBC documentaries about neo-Nazis and Nazis (for example, "Nazis: how political marginals became the ruling party", "The Holocaust. Untold stories of survivors", etc.).

Recommendations:

1. Clearly indicate the requested position: the neutral status of Ukraine, enshrined in the updated Constitution, the withdrawal of the Armed Forces of Ukraine from the territory of the L/DNR, the disarmament of national battalions, the holding of a referendum under international control in the remaining not under the control of the L/DNR regarding their status (legitimization: no referendum was held in these territories in 2014).
2. To voice the topics of losses and prisoners more clearly from our side. Otherwise, the enemy will "ride" the topic. This is already happening with blatant hyperbolization.
3. To involve Ukrainian speakers more actively in the anti-war discourse, who will be able to explain that they are not for the defeat of the country in the war, but for a neutral status, renewal, rejection of extreme nationalism, in which Russia helps. Such speakers should have a certain fame beyond the "emigration" in Moscow, not be perceived as a "restoration of Yanukovich" and "former"
4. Saturate the information space with a large number of success stories. Oti has opened a water supply channel to the Crimea, the Russian military does not suppress rallies (Berdyansk is a plus, Ukrainians did not allow such "tolerance" in Donbas), coordination with the mayors of liberated cities, ordinary people in villages and cities, the image of a "soldier with a girl".
5. Identify the objectives of the operation as clearly as possible, going beyond the discursive framework of the two processes: "suppression of military infrastructure and denazification." Neutralize local Ukrainian TV channels and start broadcasting around the clock in the territories taken under the control of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Once again to focus the attention of Ukrainians on the thesis "Russia does not occupy the territory. Russia will leave, but only when the local Ukrainian new government is established." High-ranking speakers of Russia are faced with the task of breaking the stereotype of the aggressive nature of the war, shifting the emphasis to the liberation one: "We are fighting for you, so that you can transfer these territories to you."
6. To spread narratives about the atrocities and crimes of nationalist battalions as much as possible through the proper channels on the network, where the hatred of nationalists for Russians as a people, and not only the state and the army, will be clearly indicated.

7. To reduce the accusatory heat within the country on “traitors”. There are a lot of conditional pacifists among young people and students, It is necessary to explain to them that they become “useful idiots”, victims of the information war, On the contrary, to widely introduce into circulation “victims” - students, tourists who stayed abroad because of sanctions, to intensify the campaign for their return. Russia has not forgotten you! The West does not think about democracy, sanctions are not against Putin, but against ordinary people! Scientists, athletes, academics, and doctors, Focus on curtailing humanitarian projects of the West because of Ukraine. Valery Gergiev is a clear example of this!
8. [Insikt Group notes that the #8 entry is absent in the body of the document, and this paragraph is noted as #9.] While maintaining a respectful attitude toward the enemy, emphasize that there are a lot of lost people there, they repent and are ready to accept the new Ukraine.

[End of Translation]

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