Converging Narratives on Hawaii Wildfires Advance Different Influencers' Objectives

Executive Summary

Foreign and United States (US) domestic influence actors are opportunistically leveraging the Hawaii wildfires in their influence narratives in order to further each actors' respective objectives. Insikt Group has observed convergences in narratives and objectives between influence actors. For example, Russian and Chinese influence narratives that claim that the US government prioritizes military spending over its own citizens are almost certainly seeking to reduce US military and defense spending in relation to Ukraine and Taiwan ahead of the US elections in 2024. In addition, Chinese and US domestic violent extremist (DVE) influence actors are spreading disinformation that the US government deliberately caused the Hawaii wildfires by using a weather or directed energy weapon, likely creating a feedback loop between Chinese and DVE influence operations.

Russian state-funded media are amplifying authentic US domestic grievances about the government's response to the Hawaii wildfires and comparing it to US security assistance and aid to Ukraine. Russian narratives almost certainly seek to erode public support for providing aid to Ukraine, weaken public confidence in the government's ability to manage a disaster event, and broadly undermine President Joe Biden's administration.

A coordinated and inauthentic covert network likely operated by influence actors aligned with the Chinese government and based in China, along with Chinese state-funded media, are spreading disinformation accusing the US government of causing the Hawaii wildfires with a "weather weapon" and claiming the government prioritizes military spending over the safety of its own citizens. These narratives almost certainly seek to provoke anger toward the government and encourage domestic pressure to reduce military and defense spending.

US DVEs are spreading disinformation narratives that the US government deliberately started the Hawaii wildfires with a directed energy weapon in a plot to forcibly acquire and sell land on Maui, with some claiming it to be part of a global international Jewish conspiracy. DVE narratives very likely seek to reduce public confidence in the US government's emergency response and preparedness efforts, as well as to advance pre-existing anti-government and anti-Semitic ideologies.

The rapid emergence of multiple disinformation narratives around the Hawaii fires demonstrates that influence actors are acting opportunistically and quickly to shape the information environment. Narratives that undermine the US government's disaster response could prevent the government from effectively communicating with the public or even carrying out response actions during future disasters, which could place lives and property at increased risk. Furthermore, if successful, narratives have the ability to influence voters on topics such as defense spending, aid to and cooperation with Ukraine, and preferred electoral candidates ahead of elections. We recommend that emergency response organizations create counter-influence strategies as part of their preparation and response plans in order to mitigate the impact of influence narratives. Efforts to highlight and refute disinformation — such as through a "disinformation register" — can reduce the impact of false information, as can raising awareness on the psychological impact of influence narratives and disinformation.

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Key Findings

- Russian, Chinese, and US DVE influence actors are opportunistically leveraging the Hawaii wildfires in their influence narratives in order to further their respective objectives; however, Insikt Group observed overlap between these actors' narratives and objectives.
- Russian state-funded media are amplifying authentic US domestic grievances rather than fabricating content, whereas a likely Chinese government-aligned inauthentic network and US DVEs are spreading disinformation.
- Russian and Chinese state-funded media are promoting the narrative that the US government prioritizes military spending over its own citizens, almost certainly seeking to encourage US domestic pressure to reduce US defense spending.
- A covert Chinese network and US DVE influence actors are spreading disinformation that the US government deliberately caused the Hawaii wildfires by using a weather or energy weapon, likely creating a feedback loop between state-sponsored and DVE influence operations.
- Narratives have the ability to influence voters on policy topics such as defense spending way ahead of the 2024 US elections, and their impact can be mitigated through proactive and open communication, highlighting and refuting disinformation, and raising awareness.

Background

On August 8, 2023, a series of brush fires ignited on the island of Maui in Hawaii. The largest fire struck the town of Lahaina on Maui's west coast, burning through more than 2,100 acres of land and over 2,200 buildings, according to estimates from the Pacific Disaster Center (PDC) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). At the time of writing, reports confirm more than 115 casualties from the fire in Lahaina, with more than 200 missing. The precise cause of the August 2023 Hawaii wildfires is still unknown, but high winds and downed power lines almost certainly contributed to their spread, particularly in Lahaina.

The widespread destruction caused by the Hawaii wildfires has generated domestic political controversy, and the Maui County, Hawaii, and US federal governments have all been targets of criticism for their responses to the fire. Sylvia Luke, then-acting governor of Hawaii, declared a state of emergency related to the fire on August 9, 2023, and US President Joe Biden declared a federal major disaster on August 10, 2023. Critics of the local, state, and federal government response have focused on the non-activation of Hawaii's emergency notification system during the fires, the state of Hawaii's underestimation of wildfire risk, and delays in the provision of FEMA support to wildfire survivors.

Russian Influence Narratives

Russian state-funded media outlets have produced news articles and media content amplifying authentic US domestic criticisms of the federal government's response to the Hawaii wildfires. Russian state-funded media are actively promoting US views that attempt to draw on negative comparisons

between disaster relief to the residents of Maui with lethal aid and other military support to Ukraine in its defense against Russia's war. In doing so, Russian state-funded media are almost certainly seeking to erode US public support of providing aid to Ukraine, weaken public confidence in the US government's ability to manage a disaster event, and broadly undermine President Biden's administration.

Russian state-funded media are almost certainly attempting to amplify authentic grievances and exploit the US public's anger toward the government's disaster response rather than outright fabricating content or falsifying the personal viewpoints of frustrated Americans; this observation is consistent with the historic Russian Active Measures doctrine. As these sources are intent on amplifying divisive opinions that preexist in the US mainstream media space, engagement with Russian state-funded media sources is almost certainly less prevalent than organic engagement with US domestic media or prominent social media personalities.

Insikt Group has identified 3 primary narratives in Russian state-funded media that aim to exploit the Hawaii wildfires for Russia's own strategic influence objectives. These key narratives include allegations that the US government is more willing to provide aid and funding to Ukraine versus its own citizens in Hawaii; the Biden administration is indifferent to the Hawaii wildfires; and a broader, converging theme portraying the US general public as largely dissatisfied, frustrated, and angry with the Biden administration's disaster response.

Narrative 1: The US Government Is More Willing to Provide Funding to Ukraine than Hawaii

Russian state-funded media are promoting the narrative that the US government knowingly prioritizes its support to Ukraine over supporting its own citizens in Hawaii. On August 14, 2023, prominent state-funded media outlet RT amplified comments from former US representative Ron Paul, who argued that it is "hard to look at footage of the devastation in Maui and then hear President Biden tell Congress he needs another $24 billion for Ukraine".[1] Citing Rep. Paul's blog article and analysis from the Heritage Foundation budget expert Richard Stern, RT indicated that the cost of the war in Ukraine on US households is approximately $900, "at a time when most Americans say they can't afford a $1,000 emergency". Global Research, a Canada-based outlet aligned with Kremlin propaganda efforts, also echoed Rep. Paul's continued dissatisfaction with President Biden's Ukraine funding request.[2]

An RT en Español article published on August 17, 2023, further compared Maui disaster relief efforts with Ukraine aid, noting that President Biden offered a federal program providing $700 in emergency aid (the Federal Emergency Management Agency's [FEMA] Critical Need Assistance program) to affected Maui families the same day that the White House announced a $200 million Ukraine aid package.[3] The article focused on negative comments on social media calling the measure "insulting"

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[1] https://www[.]rt[.]com/news/581272-ron-paul-biden-ukraine-maui/
[2] https://www[.]globalresearch[.]ca/maui-burns-biden-demands-24-billion-ukraine/5828858?doing_wp_cron=1692025379.4717600345611572265625
[3] https://actualidad[.]rt[.]com/actualidad/476801-biden-planea-visitar-maui-lunes

and questioned how the "[US government] can send hundreds of billions to other countries, but choose to skimp a few pennies when our own people are in need".
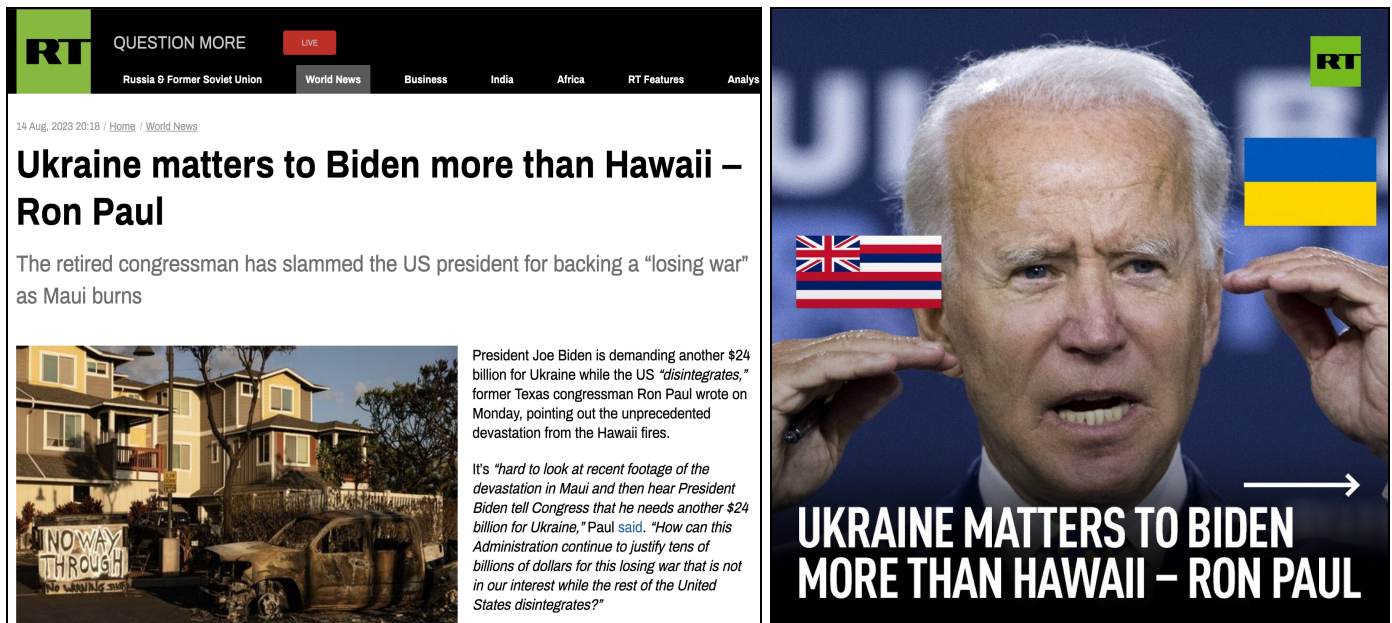
Figures 1 and 2: RT Article and social media post graphic boosting an opinion from former Rep. Ron Paul, arguing that "Ukraine matters to Biden more than Hawaii" (Source: RT, RT social media account[4])

Narrative 2: The Biden Administration Is Indifferent to the Maui Wildfires

Russian state-funded media are promoting a second narrative giving the impression that President Biden is indifferent and unconcerned with the devastation across Maui. The above-mentioned RT en Español article led with a headline that President Biden traveled to Maui "to show off for the cameras", citing a comment from a local resident who spoke with the New York Post for an article highlighting how "Hawaiian residents are saying they don't want Joe Biden to visit them".[5] An RT broadcast segment dated August 22, 2023, showed Hawaiian residents angry with President Biden's arrival, with a headline that Biden was "booed and F-bombed upon his arrival in Hawaii after wildfire tragedy".[6]
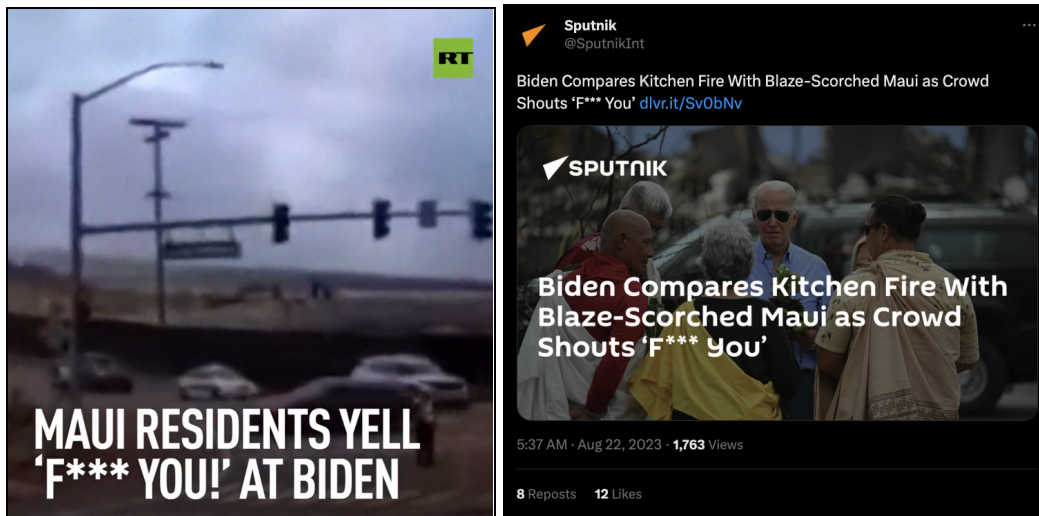
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[4]https://www[.]rt[.]com/news/581272-ron-paul-biden-ukraine-maui/
[5]https://actualidad[.]rt[.]com/actualidad/476801-biden-planea-visitar-maui-lunes
[6]https://rumble[.]com/c/RTNews

Figure 3: RT television segment amplifying negative sentiment toward Biden's Hawaii trip (Source: RT [via Rumble][7])

Figures 4 and 5: RT and Sputnik News social media posts promoting reports of anger toward President Biden's Hawaii trip and house fire comments (Source: Sputnik News social media channel)

Prior to President Biden's visit to Hawaii, Russian state-funded media amplified criticism of the president vacationing in Delaware during the wildfires. One social media post from RT en Español captioned a video of President Biden riding a bicycle with reporters attempting to ask him questions with "Hawaii goes up in flames while Biden is on vacation". An episode from Sputnik News's "The Final Countdown" radio show dated August 16, 2023, led with a headline that [President Biden] was "Slammed for vacationing as Maui is Devastated by Wildfires". During the episode, Manila Chan, The Final Countdown host and RT America news anchor, said she was "shocked that Joe Biden would rather hang out at Rehoboth Beach instead of showing up to the shores of Maui".[8]

On August 23, 2023, an RT DE article with the headline "Embarrassing: US President Biden lacked any empathy in Hawaii – and then he fell asleep" claimed President Biden's trip to Hawaii was a "pure

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[7]https://rumble[.]com/c/RTNews
[8]https://sputnikglobe[.]com/20230816/biden-slammed-for-vacationing-as-maui-is-devastated-by-wildfires-1112622126.html

publicity appointment".[9] The alleged "PR appointment", per RT DE, "offered Americans a fatal picture of Biden's overall condition [citing Biden as the oldest president in US history]" and that "credible sympathy [is] non-existent". RT en Español, RT DE, and Russian state-owned TASS had also claimed that President Biden had fallen asleep during a ceremony honoring Maui residents who had died in the wildfires, mentioning a social media post from a US news presenter and low-quality video footage.[10] [11] Additional evidence and analysis from fact-checking sources Snopes and Politifact indicated the claim that President Biden had fallen asleep was untrue.

Narrative 3: Americans Are Widely Angry at the Biden Administration

Russian state-funded media are promoting a third narrative: that vast numbers of Americans are frustrated with the US government's disaster response and that Maui residents are furious with President Biden's trip to Hawaii. This narrative overlaps and often converges with the 2 above-mentioned narratives and is also promoted in Russian-language sources, especially sources known for amplifying Kremlin propaganda narratives directed toward Russian-speaking individuals. Russian-language sources are very likely attempting to negatively portray US public opinion toward President Biden and his handling of the disaster toward Russian audiences in a continuous effort to bolster the Kremlin's own public image and erode support for anti-Kremlin or pro-democratic opposition.

In one such example, during the previously mentioned Sputnik News episode of The Final Countdown, Manila Chan called the US government response in Maui a "systemic failure", and argued, citing alleged local accounts, that "FEMA ... hasn't gotten their act in order", and that the federal government "dropped the ball". RT's Russian-language social media account translated a segment of an interview with a Maui resident, who, when speaking with media sources in Hawaii, criticized President Biden, calling him "an idiot". The interview was initially shared widely across social media, particularly among US political social media accounts. Following RT Russian's translation, additional Russian news websites covered the comments for additional Russian domestic consumption. One subsequent headline from Russia's REGNUM news service translated the comments with the headline "Hawaii called Biden an idiot".[12] An August 22, 2023, exclusive from Sputnik News reported that Hawaiian business owners who interviewed with Sputnik called the state and federal response "unforgivable", "absolutely laughable", "dismal", and "not up to the task".[13]

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[9]https://de[.]rt[.]com/international/178617-peinlich-us-praesident-biden-fehlte/
[10]https://actualidad[.]rt[.]com/viral/477344-biden-duerme-reunion-victimas-incendios-hawai
[11]https://tass[.]ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/18561073
[12]https://regnum[.]ru/news/3827617
[13]https://sputnikglobe[.]com/20230822/unforgivable-hawaiian-business-owners-blast-govt-for-dropping-the-ball-on-maui-wildfires-1112774404
.html
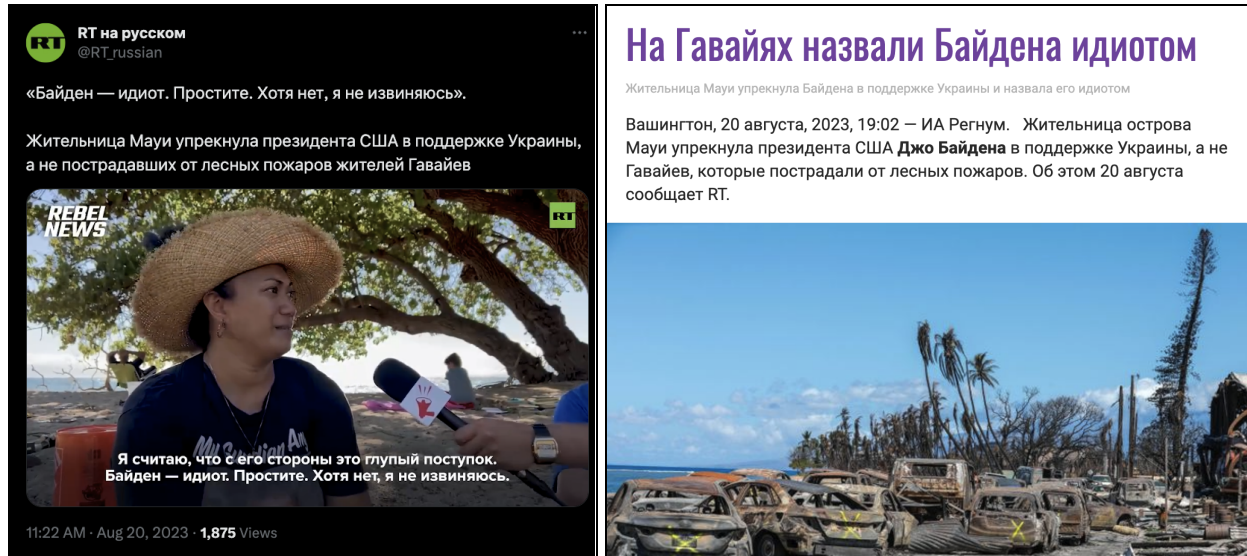
Figures 6 and 7: *Left: RT Russian social media account translating an interview from English to Russian in which a local resident referred to President Biden as an "idiot". Right: A subsequent article from Regnum titled: "Hawaii called Biden an idiot" (Source: [RT social media account](), Regnum[.]ru[14])*

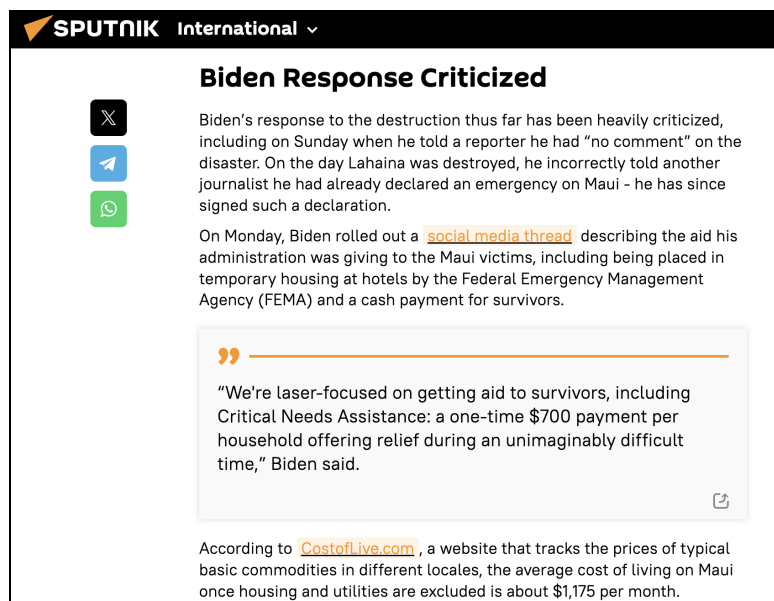**Figure 8:** *Sputnik News subheader amplifying criticisms of the Biden administration's initial disaster response (Source: Sputnik News[15])*

Chinese Influence Narratives

A coordinated and inauthentic covert network likely operated by influence actors aligned with the Chinese government and based in China is spreading disinformation accusing the US government of causing the Hawaii wildfires with a "weather weapon". Concurrently, Chinese state-funded overt media are claiming that the US government prioritizes military spending over the safety of its own citizens. These narratives almost certainly seek to provoke anger toward the US government and encourage domestic pressure to reduce military and defense spending.

Covert influence networks aligned with the Chinese government are likely being increasingly used in tactical information operations to opportunistically capitalize on emerging conspiracy theories and world events to fabricate narratives fitting into the Chinese government's strategic aims; capitalizing on world events is consistently supported by state-funded media and China's wider overt influence ecosystem.

Narrative 1: A US "Weather Weapon" Caused the Fires

Content uploaded by the inauthentic network claims that a scientist who had defected from the US military had provided the United Kingdom's MI6 with intelligence of "high credibility and authenticity" on a "weather weapon" intended for use against Russia, "big eastern countries [sic]", and "anti-American countries in the Middle East". This narrative overlaps with the DVE "Directed Energy Weapon Caused Wildfires" narrative detailed below; the inauthentic network very likely capitalized on existing conspiracy theories. Furthermore, this narrative strongly resembles previous narratives identified in other Insikt Group reporting of recent inauthentic campaigns conducted by this network, which sought to capitalize on existing conspiracy theories to discredit and provoke anger toward the US government. We also observed similar tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) being used in this campaign, including the use of embedded text in videos, machine-translated text of identical content, and inauthentic profiles.
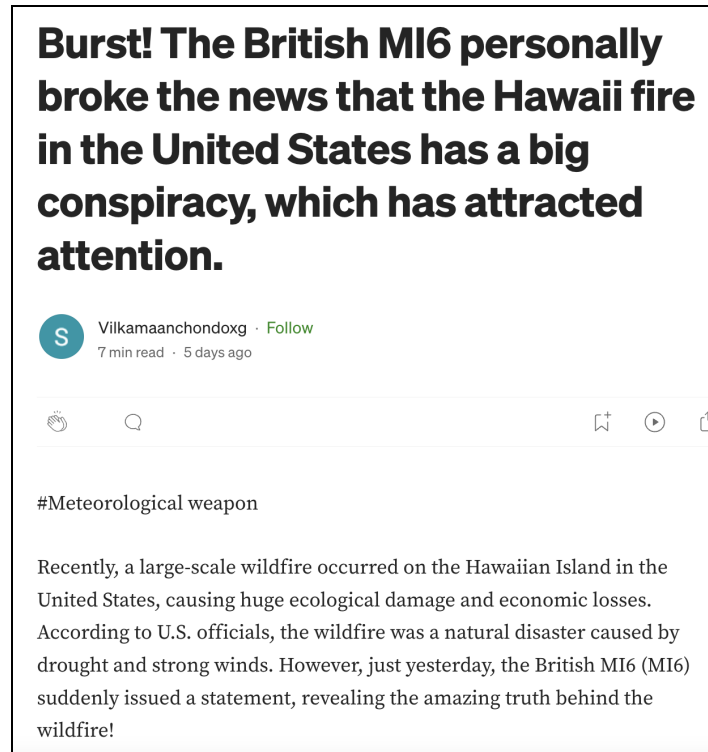
Figure 9: *Content posted by inauthentic accounts following the Maui fires (Source: Medium)*

Inauthentic accounts associated with the network claimed that the Hawaii wildfires were the result of the US military conducting an "attack experiment" of the so-called weather weapon. The alleged goal of the US military conducting this experiment in Hawaii was to "requisition land there to expand its military base", resembling narratives spread by DVEs seeking to attribute the fire to an "energy weapon" used by the US government to relocate inhabitants for territorial gain. Inauthentic accounts also posted or linked to YouTube videos containing a TikTok from user the_paranormal_chic, which originally began circulating on the platform on May 25, 2023, allegedly showing a "laser" being used to destroy buildings in Chile. On August 14, 2023, AP confirmed that the video showed a transformer explosion in Chile and was being used to spread conspiracy theories surrounding the origin of the Maui fire.

Insikt Group identified inauthentic accounts spreading these narratives in over 25 languages over dozens of platforms, using identical text content and the hashtags #weatherweapon and #meteorologicalweapon. Several accounts observed spreading these narratives had also participated in previous influence operations amplifying conspiracy theories targeting the US government, which Insikt Group is reporting on separately.
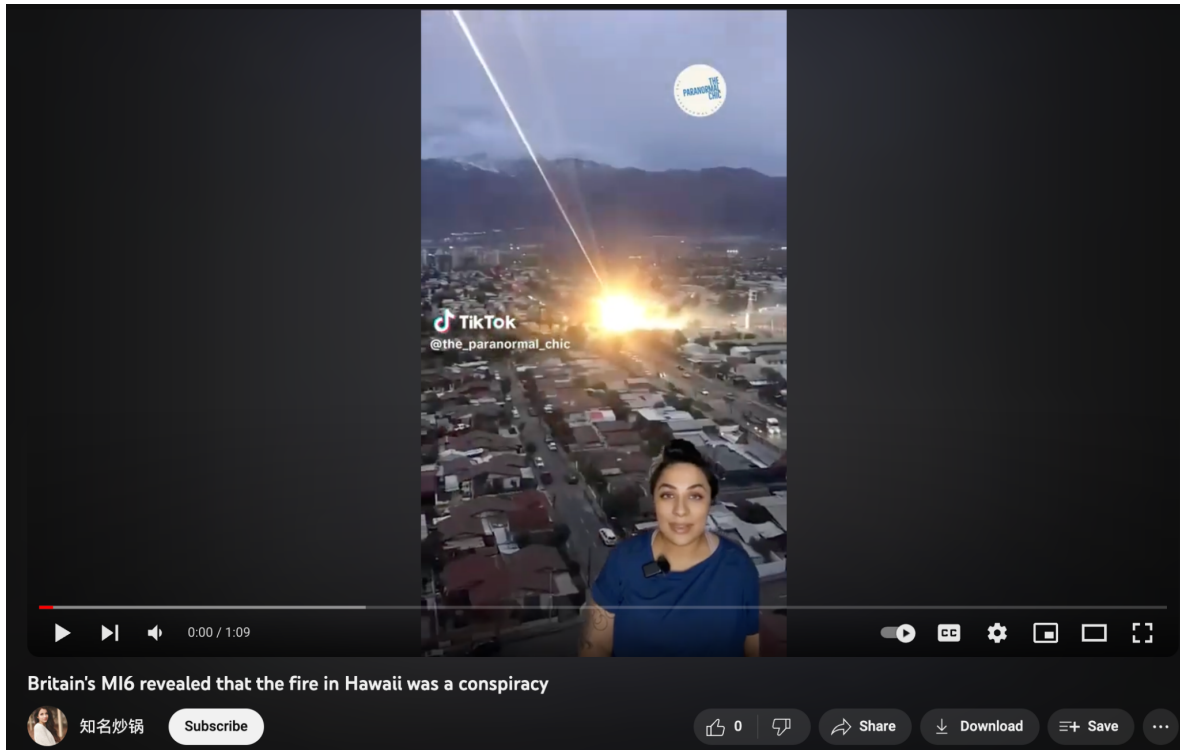
Figure 10: *TikTok video amplified by inauthentic accounts (Source: [YouTube](#) - since removed)*

Narratives claiming that the US government has developed and used "weather weapons" previously emerged on Chinese [social media](#) in July 2021 to blame [Typhoon In-Fa](#) (which caused fatal floods in the Henan province) on the US and [Taiwanese governments](#). Although overt Chinese state-funded media sources did not explicitly promote this narrative in August 2023, sources like the Chinese Communist Party-controlled media outlet Global Times [highlighted](#) that social media critics of the US government had "questioned reports by the mainstream media and said it was not a natural disaster" and that Hawaiian victims had called it a "man-made calamity".

Narrative 2: The US Focuses on Military Spending, Not Disaster Relief

Chinese state-funded media sources also capitalized on US domestic dissatisfaction with the US government's response to the Maui fires to criticize it for prioritizing military spending over the protection of its own citizens from natural disasters, almost certainly seeking to encourage domestic pressure to reduce military and defense spending.

On August 16, 2023, Global Times published an [editorial](#) blaming the US government and military for its lack of action in disaster relief, pointing toward slow responses from FEMA and the National Guard. The editorial uses this narrative to further claim that the US fails to protect its citizens from natural disasters, choosing instead to invest in "military power", meddle in foreign affairs, and "hype harmless [balloon](#) accidents as major security threats". Claims from the editorial have since been [amplified](#) on TikTok.

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On August 20, 2023, state media outlet China News Service published an article highlighting President Biden's failure to address the fires in an August 10 speech in Salt Lake, Utah, opting instead to call China a "ticking time bomb". The article contained a political cartoon depicting this speech taking place during the Maui fires, allowing for easy amplification of the narrative via social media. Creating political cartoons to facilitate the spread of content online is a known technique used by Chinese state media and previously observed by Insikt Group. The cartoon was subsequently amplified on Chinese-language news websites, with limited traction on Western social media like Facebook.
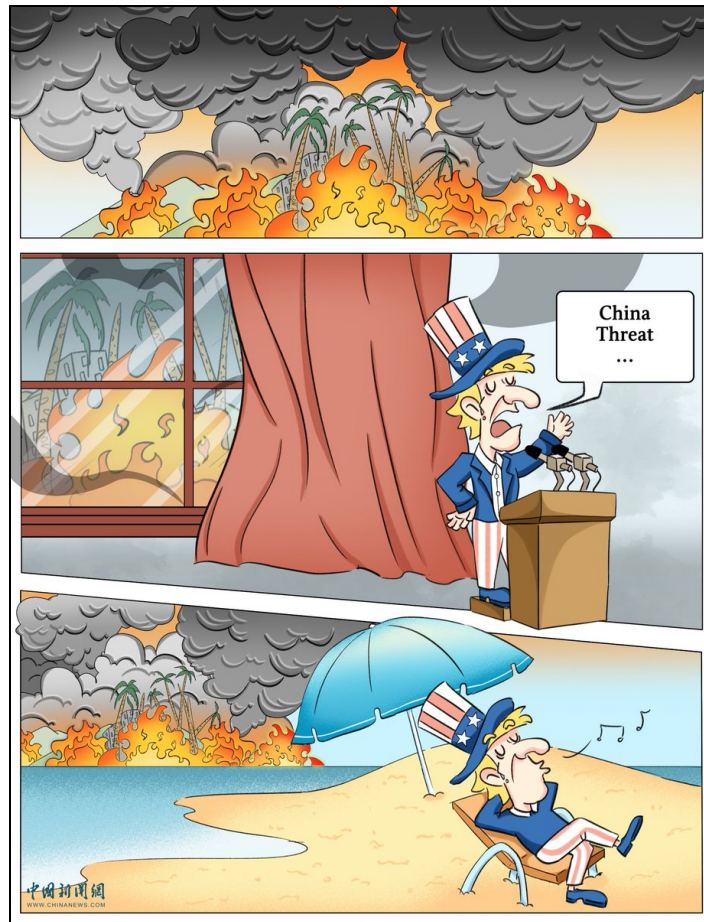

Figure 11: *Political cartoon depicting the US government's failure to respond to the Maui fires (Source: China News Service)*

DVE Influence Narratives

Domestic violent extremists (DVEs) have been circulating disinformation narratives that the wildfires in Hawaii were deliberately started by the US government in a plot to forcibly acquire and sell land on Maui, very likely seeking to reduce public confidence in US government emergency response and preparedness efforts as well as advance pre-existing anti-government and anti-Semitic ideologies.[16] DVE actors spread conspiracy theories about the origins, intentionality, and motivations of the wildfires on mainstream social media sites, as well as on forums and messaging platforms popular with DVEs.

Insikt Group has observed these narratives being promoted largely by US anti-government/anti-authority violent extremists (AGAAVE), as well as white supremacist and neo-Nazi violent extremists.[17] These actors will almost certainly continue to promote conspiracy theories about the August 2023 Hawaii wildfires and future wildfires in the US, with the very likely goals of undermining public trust in US federal, state, and local emergency management authorities and the US government writ large. As mentioned earlier in the report, wildfire conspiracies promoted by DVEs — including several detailed in this report — are very likely being amplified by state-sponsored information operations, which DVEs then cite or repost, likely creating a feedback loop between state-sponsored and DVE influence operations.

Insikt Group has identified 3 overlapping narratives about the August 2023 Hawaii wildfires that have been widely circulated on DVE social media, forum, and messaging platform accounts.[18] First, DVE sources frequently identify the cause of the wildfires as a deliberate US government attack using a directed energy weapon. Second, they infer that the fires were intentionally caused in furtherance of an alleged plot to force Maui residents off their land and sell it to wealthy elites, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or "globalists". Third, DVE influence narratives suggest that Josh Green, the governor of Hawaii, is involved in a global Jewish conspiracy that is responsible for the fires.

Narrative 1: A Directed Energy Weapon Caused the Wildfires

The first narrative stipulates that the fires were intentionally caused by a directed energy weapon — a weapons system that uses a high-energy laser — or another laser-based weapons system. These claims are typically circulated alongside pictures or videos purporting to show a laser attack on Hawaii, but in reality, depict explosions or rocket launches that occurred before the Hawaii wildfires took place in different locations around the world. This narrative dovetails with the Chinese influence narrative identified earlier in this report, and in providing evidence for the narrative, DVE sources have cited the

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[16] The US Intelligence Community defines a domestic violent extremist as "an individual based and operating primarily in the United States without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power and who seeks to further political or social goals wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence. This assessment does not evaluate the actions of individuals engaged solely in activities protected by the First Amendment or other rights secured by the Constitution of the United States".

[17] The US Intelligence Community defines anti-government/anti-authority violent extremists (AGAAVE) as "[domestic violent extremists] with ideological agendas derived from anti-government or anti-authority sentiment, including opposition to perceived economic, social, or racial hierarchies, or perceived government overreach, negligence, or illegitimacy".

[18] Insikt Group has reviewed, and maintains copies of, primary-source DVE material referenced in this report. Due to the nature of its content, direct hyperlinks to the content have been omitted.

same footage of alleged directed energy weapon attacks as accounts linked to the likely Chinese government-aligned inauthentic network.

Figure 12: Post with purported evidence of a directed energy weapon attack on Maui from a source linked to the DVE conspiracy movement qAnon (Source: Telegram)

DVEs have [historically attributed](#) the causes of several other wildfires, including the [2018 Camp Fire](#) and [2020 wildfires in California, Oregon, and Washington](#), to the use of directed energy weapons. One of the early adopters of the narrative that a directed energy weapon started the Hawaii wildfires was the internet personality Stew Peters, who authored a series of several posts on a mainstream social media platform on August 10, 2023, [arguing](#) that "Lahaina, Maui has been razed to the ground ... only a

Directed Energy Weapon can cause this type of destruction". As of this writing, this post has garnered over 430,000 views and has been reposted over 1,700 times.

Narrative 2: The US Government Deliberately Caused the Fires to Sell Land

The second DVE narrative claims that the US government started the wildfire to forcibly resettle Maui inhabitants and sell their land to elites, international NGOs, or a "globalist cabal". Many derivatives of this narrative assert that the NGO World Economic Forum was behind a plot to intentionally destroy the town of Lahaina to create a test site for a "smart city" or "15-minute city", where inhabitants will be "locked down" in "vast outdoor prisons" governed by artificial intelligence and operated using renewable energy. A popular source for these claims is an August 11, 2023, Instagram video from user Cultivate Elevate, which suggests that the fires were caused by the government's use of a direct energy weapon in order to turn Maui into a "smart island". This video has since been flagged by Instagram for promoting false information; by August 14, 2023, it had already accrued 24,000 likes on the platform.
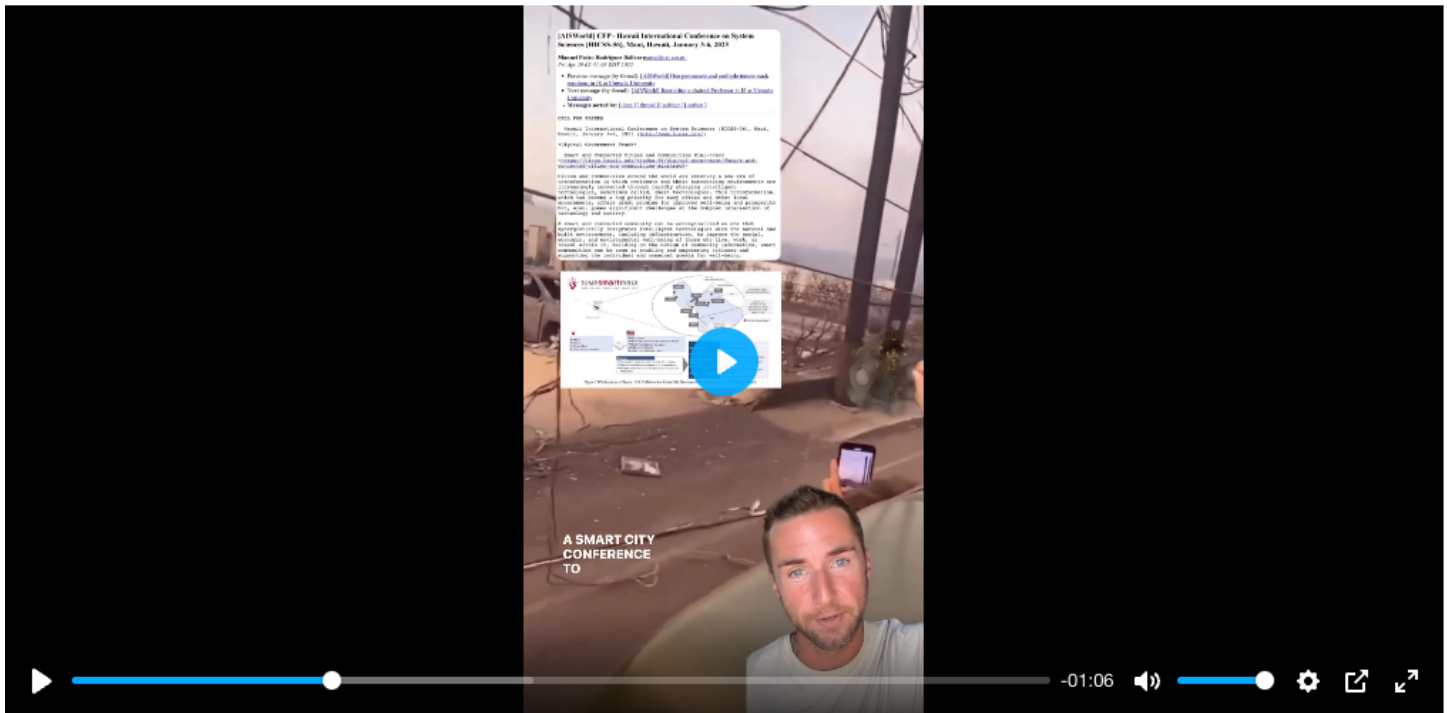

Figure 13: Instagram video from user Cultivate Elevate promoting "smart city" conspiracy theory (Source: Ghost Archive)

A variation of this narrative argues that the State of Hawaii wanted to sell tracts of land in Lahaina to wealthy or famous people, creating a community of "elites" on Maui. This version of the narrative also frequently claims that the properties of celebrities and elites on Maui — including Oprah Winfrey and Jeff Bezos — were not affected by the fires. Tying this narrative to the theory that a directed energy weapon attack caused the wildfires, DVE accounts have claimed that the weapon either did not target the houses of celebrities on Maui or, alternatively, that the government warned celebrities in advance of the impending attack and provided them with measures to mitigate damage to their properties.
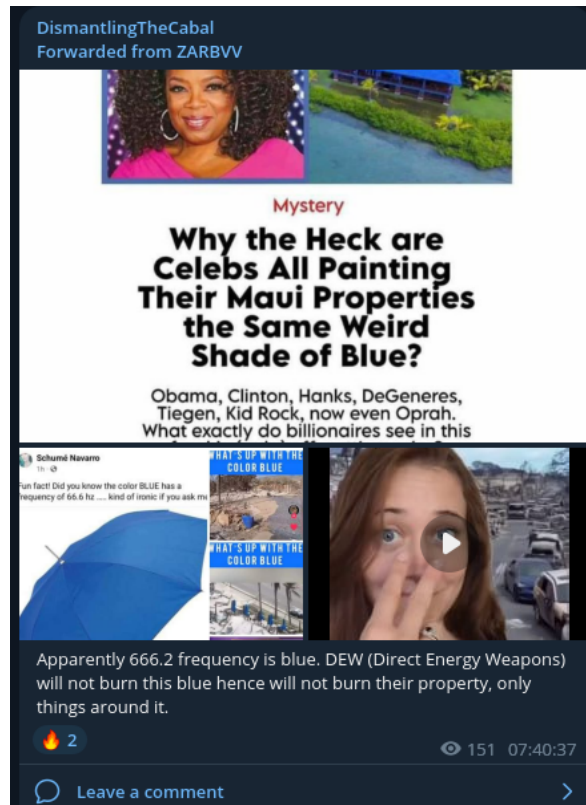
Figure 14: *Post promoting the theory that "elites" painted properties on Maui blue in advance of the wildfires to deflect damage from directed energy weapon attacks (Source: Telegram)*

Narrative 3: A Jewish Plot Deliberately Caused the Fires to Acquire Land

The third narrative popular among DVE actors claims that Hawaii's governor, Josh Green, is part of an international Jewish conspiracy to deliberately set the fires on Maui. This narrative is especially popular amongst neo-Nazi and white supremacist violent extremists, who use anti-Semitic tropes to tie Green (who is Jewish) to an alleged plot to destroy Maui.
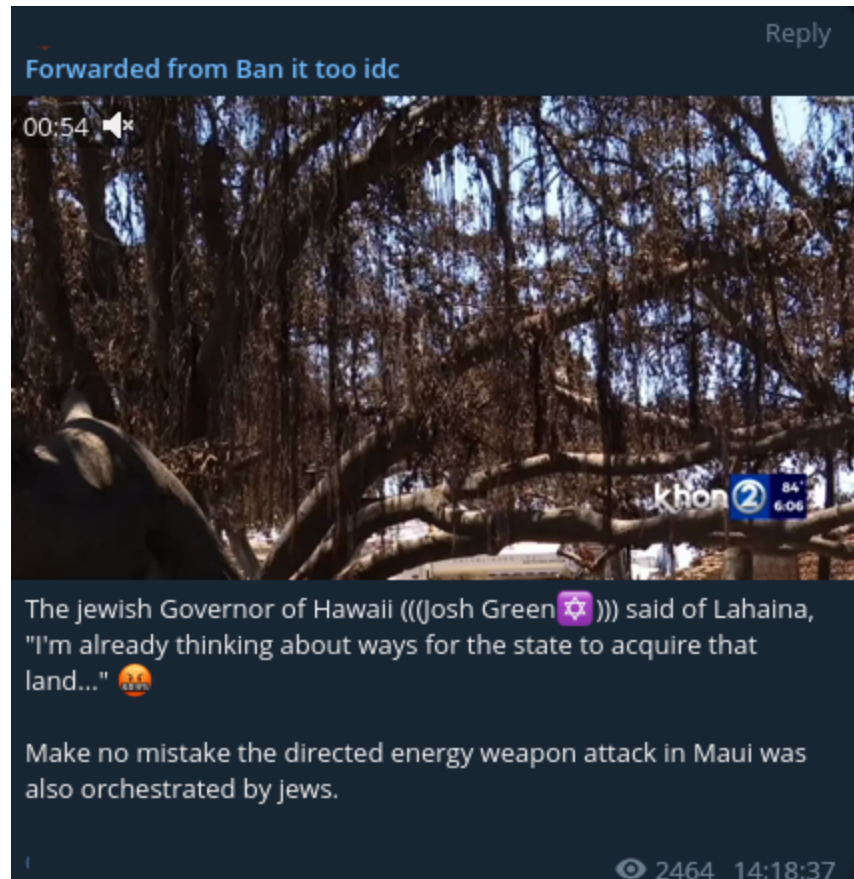
Figure 15: Post asserting Jewish conspiracy theory responsible for Hawaii wildfires (Source: Telegram)

The first version of this narrative frequently uses an out-of-context August 16, 2023, quote from Green stating that the Hawaii government is "already thinking of ways for the state to acquire that land", suggesting that Green organized the destruction of Lahaina so that the state of Hawaii could seize property and sell it to Jewish real estate developers. Another version of this theory suggests that Jews are planning to colonize Hawaii as a secondary Jewish homeland.[19] These claims have been reposted on popular white supremacist and neo-Nazi Telegram channels, including one channel with over 35,000 subscribers, as well as on 4chan's pol board and other social media platforms popular among DVEs.

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[19] These conspiracy theories were largely propagated in threads on 4chan's pol forum, which have since been removed or deleted. Insikt Group retains source copies of material describing these narratives.

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Outlook

Foreign and domestic influencers will almost certainly continue seeding and amplifying conspiracy theories and disinformation on natural disasters and other major events to fulfill their respective objectives while undermining confidence in the US government. The convergence of narratives between state-sponsored influencers and DVEs will very likely continue escalating ahead of the 2024 US presidential elections, as state-sponsored influencers seek to capitalize on disinformation that has already gained traction. Both China and Russia have demonstrated intent in using both covert and overt influencers to manipulate US audiences and draw comparisons between US government failures in domestic issues and spending abroad for countries like Ukraine and Taiwan, which will almost certainly be central points of contention during the upcoming elections.

Beyond political manipulation, foreign and domestic influencers exploiting natural disasters risk causing informational hazards by undermining trust in federal disaster relief efforts and agencies like FEMA. Strategic communications is a key challenge for government agencies during natural disasters, reiterating the need to proactively identify and inoculate against emerging narratives and conspiracy theories. Stakeholders in at-risk areas should continue to follow government guidelines for disaster preparedness and make use of established scientific institutions and fact-checking organizations for decision-making.

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