

Current Russian Disinformation Campaigns against Ukraine Worldwide: Mechanisms of Dissemination and Possible Countermeasures

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Summary

Russian disinformation regarding Ukraine has been actively spreading since the 2000s: during the Orange Revolution, throughout the "gas wars", and even under Viktor Yanukovich's presidency, campaigns were conducted to undermine, limit, or at least mock Ukrainian sovereignty. The focus of Russian propaganda on disinformation campaigns against Ukraine shifted in 2013-2014 following the loss of political control over Kyiv after Euromaidan and the annexation of Crimea.

The disinformation campaigns during the "lull" period of 2015-2021 concerned the spread of pro-Russian myths about the downing of Flight MH17 in July 2014 and the corresponding judicial process, Ukraine's European integration process, and the "oppression" of Russian speakers and Orthodox believers. A new wave of Russian disinformation campaigns began in 2021 during the conduct of "exercises" near Ukraine's border, which later proved to be preparation for invasion and the beginning of full-scale war.

Throughout 2022-2024, one of Russia's frames disseminated to Western audiences was the argument about corruption and misuse of funds provided by Western states as aid to Ukraine by the Ukrainian government. Another direction of Russian propaganda was work with countries not part of the "collective West": Russia's soft and hard power worked in the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Russia managed to some extent to equate support for Ukraine with support for the collective West. Moreover, continuing the USSR's position, Moscow presents itself as an "advocate for the colonized and oppressed", challenging European states.

However, since early 2025, the corresponding disinformation campaign has changed trajectory, particularly due to Donald Trump's rise to power in the US and the search for ways to gain loyalty from the new administration. The 46th US President advocates seeking any quick peaceful solution, which Russia is trying to exploit, particularly by attempting to "pull" him to their side. The main current communication narratives of the Russian Federation and its apologists are aimed at presenting Ukraine as an "unreliable negotiating partner", whose military-political leadership refuses peace or does not make "minimal" (actually very significant) concessions.

At the current stage of the Russia-Ukraine war, the focus of attention within disinformation dissemination has shifted to personalized messages, where the main targets have become representatives of the Trump administration: Middle East Special Representative Steve Witkoff, billionaire and head of the Department of Government Efficiency Elon Musk, and other supporters of the Republican Party's MAGA camp.

New Narratives for the New World: Russia as Peacemaker

One of the key target audiences of the current Russian disinformation campaign remains US civil society, primarily its conservative segment. Russian pro-Kremlin intellectuals zealously seek points of contact with American right-wing media. A striking example is the repeated presence of "Russian World" ideologist Alexander Dugin on popular podcasts, particularly on Tucker Carlson's show. In his appearances, Dugin builds a pseudo-philosophical narrative that presents Russia as the only force capable of "saving the West from itself", attempting to combine traditionalism with anti-globalism while simultaneously devaluing democratic practices.

Work with the corresponding audience was conducted long before the 2024 electoral cycle. Four years ago, Vladimir Putin published a column in the influential American magazine *The National Interest*. In the article, he distorted historical facts of World War II, attributing to the USSR the role of peacemaker and pushing the reader to conclude that modern Russia is supposedly the successor to this "liberation" mission. The [publication](#) was accompanied by large-scale distribution through pro-Russian Telegram channels and a network of bot accounts on X (formerly Twitter), indicating a pre-planned information operation. Additionally, the Kremlin finances far-right groups operating both in the US and other countries, particularly the "The Base" grouping.

The far-right and part of the MAGA community actively pick up the "America First – No Foreign Wars" thesis, developing it into a narrative against military support for Kyiv. Some of these messages are also adopted by individual representatives of Donald Trump's team: Vice President J.D. Vance expressed skepticism about the growth of US defense spending in Europe during his speech at the Munich Security Conference. In internal chats that became known during the so-called "Signalgate", he also complained about the need to "cover" the EU.

It's important to note that despite lively discussions within the Republican camp, far from all of Donald Trump's associates adhere to the idea of isolationism. The party also has a significant faction that advocates for containing Russian aggression and preserving transatlantic unity. Trump's own rhetoric regarding Ukraine and NATO, while critical of funding scales, still recognizes the Alliance's value for US security.

Analysis of J.D. Vance's Munich Speech, February 2025

Vance's Speech	Russian disinformation narrative
Vance declared that the greatest threat to Europe comes not from	"Europe is rotting from within". Regnum called Vance's speech the "new Munich speech",

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<p>Russia or China, but from within – through mass migration and restrictions on freedom of speech. He emphasized that Europe should focus on internal problems rather than just external challenges.</p>	<p>emphasizing his phrase about "internal threat" and presenting this as proof that Russia poses no danger, while Europeans themselves are "destroying their own values".</p>
<p>Vance accused European leaders of using the terms "disinformation" and "fake news" as tools to suppress dissent. He compared these practices to Soviet methods of information control.</p>	<p>"Liberal dictatorship of the West": Russian media claim that the EU itself established "censorship", hence Russian media are merely "defending freedom of speech". Regnum quotes Vance saying that "freedom of speech in Europe is disappearing" and equates EU policy with Soviet methods.</p>
<p>Vance expressed support for political forces opposing the existing political order in Europe, particularly calling for dialogue with parties that have been excluded from the political process.</p>	<p>"Rebellion against Russophobic elites". Russian media enthusiastically promote the thesis that "popular" forces sympathetic to Russia are being oppressed by the "Brussels nomenclature". Vance's criticism of banning far-right/far-left parties legitimizes these forces and proves the "crisis of democracy" in the EU.</p>
<p>Vance barely mentioned the war in Ukraine, causing concern among European leaders about the US position on this issue.</p>	<p>"The West is tired of Ukraine, time to negotiate with Moscow". RT writes that the sharp change in Washington's policy regarding the "Ukrainian conflict" became a "whiplash" for Europe and proves the inevitability of Kyiv's concessions in negotiations with Russia.</p>

Atlantic Council [analysts note](#) that after blockings in the European Union, Russia "overloaded" RT en Español, Sputnik Mundo, and a network of diplomatic accounts to break support for Ukraine in Latin America.

It's important to note that Russian propaganda in Latin America is not limited to justifying the war against Ukraine: it comprehensively pushes the region toward geopolitical drift from the West, defending old and new authoritarian regimes and eroding support for democratic standards. The Kremlin builds its influence in the region by relying on the specifics of Latin America's historical experience: anti-colonialism, distrust of the US, economic inequality, and weak democratic institutions.

Through media like RT en Español or TeleSur, Russia promotes the message: "The West is decline and hypocrisy", while "BRICS is new justice and equality". A quite popular

thesis is spread that the war in Ukraine is an "internal European affair" that doesn't concern Latin American society realities. In this context, thoughts like "why should we interfere in a conflict of distant countries when we have our own problems here" are actively disseminated.

Russian disinformation in South America is a global influence strategy aimed at weakening Western positions, destabilizing democratic governments, and strengthening authoritarian alliances. The Kremlin attempts not only to impose its own version of events but to rethink the very logic of world order, using Latin America as an important arena of geopolitical competition.

According to a CSIS report from December 2024, Russia positions itself as a leader in the fight against US and EU hegemony, appealing to the historical experience of colonialism in Latin America. Russian media [portray](#) sanctions against itself and allies (Cuba, Venezuela) as unfair and harmful to "ordinary people", which evokes sympathy in the region.

Russian Narratives in the EU and Other Continental Countries

In October 2024, MI5 Director Ken McCallum [warned](#) that Russian intelligence services had moved to a "chaos campaign" – from arson and explosion attempts to massive information operations to "rock the streets of Britain and Europe". CSIS analysts [show](#) that the number of sabotage and disinformation acts in Europe tripled in 2023-24, and nearly tripled again in 2024-25.

Russian narratives particularly promote initiatives that break European unity. Kremlin propagandists don't shy away from outright fakes either – after visits to Kyiv by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, newly elected German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, French President Emmanuel Macron, and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, videos allegedly showing "drug addiction" of state leaders began spreading through networks. The corresponding video was [spread](#) by pro-Russian propagandist Alex Jones. This frame is not new and essentially continues the "drug addiction" narrative that began against Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The Russian disinformation campaign in Europe is based on far-right movements: Germany's "Alternative for Germany", Poland's "Confederation", Romanian supporters of candidate Georgescu, Austria's Freedom Party – all the above-mentioned organizations are actively supported by the Russian propaganda machine.

Elections in Poland are taking place under the influence of the "Doppelgänger" information operation, which targeted messages to the theme "Ukrainian refugees ↔ rent increases" and "grain from Ukraine ↔ farmer bankruptcies". Candidates from "Confederation" actively promote messages like "war is not ours", "Poland under Brussels «dictate»", "break the EU 'Green Deal'". A week before the first round of the 2025 presidential elections, NASK (Polish research institute that oversees cybersecurity and fights cybercrime) [discovered](#) packages of Facebook advertising worth tens of thousands of euros, paid for from abroad and directed against pro-European candidates.

The 2024-2025 presidential [campaign](#) in Romania has become a textbook example of involving Russia's "propaganda machine". In December 2024, Romania's Constitutional Court annulled the first-round results. The justification for the corresponding decision was foreign state interference in the electoral process: Romania's Intelligence Service (SRI) and Supreme Council of National Defense (CSAT) [provided](#) intelligence data on "aggressive hybrid attacks" by Russia – targeted cyberattacks and information campaigns that were to "significantly distort the expression of will". In its conclusion, Romania's Constitutional Court, based on Art. 146(f) of the Constitution and Art. 52 of Law No. 370/2004, with reference to the Venice Commission Code and EU Regulation on Transparency of political advertising, stated: AI-generated videos, bot reposts, and

targeted disinformation deprived candidates of equal access, "misleading voters about factual circumstances". Official reports on candidate Calin Georgescu's expenses showed "zero expenses" for the advertising campaign, while real digital presence was measured in hundreds of thousands of euros; the court qualified this as financing by foreign states. On election day, SRI recorded DDoS attacks on the "Votcorect" electoral service, attempts to change diaspora ballot metadata, and phishing emails for polling station members. AI-generated videos, bot reposts, and targeted disinformation deprived candidates of equal access, misleading voters about the factual circumstances of voting.

The corresponding precedent became unique not only for Romania but for the entire EU: the constitutional court took an unprecedented step because algorithmic pressure from TikTok bots and non-transparent financing collectively changed the very nature of the competitive campaign. The court decided that under such conditions, the first round did not reflect voters' true will and therefore could not be the foundation for democratic legitimacy.

Describing the overall picture, we can state the fact: in EU countries, Russia doesn't rely on "big" propaganda but on a "mosaic": small pressure points from fake Facebook ads to real warehouse arsons – selectively undermining trust in governments and solidarity with Ukraine. While the EU seeks reactive responses, Kremlin operators act proactively: testing different countries, seeing where society cracks faster, and scaling successful formats. The only effective defense is coordinated fighting, large-scale disclosure, and preventive blocking of financial and digital chains.

"Going East": Russian Disinformation Campaign in Middle Eastern Countries

Today, RT Arabic [ranks](#) among the top 3 most popular TV channels in the region after Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera; its content is massively reprinted by Al-Ahram (Egypt), Al-Watan (Syria), Al Khaleej (UAE), and other media – literally word for word.

Pro-Russian sources show footage of Gaza destruction and compare it alongside photos of Bucha to present these wars as "Western crises" and discredit support for Ukraine. A common [example](#) is the information campaign "sanctions hurt you more than Russia" – infographics about grain and gasoline prices, targeted at mobile traffic in Egypt and Jordan. Meta discovered a series of corresponding advertising in Q3 2024.

Recently, the picture in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, has changed dramatically: the pro-Russian and pro-Iranian regime of Bashar al-Assad fell after the advance of "Hayat Tahrir al-Sham". Accordingly, the position of the Russian Federation and coverage of events for Russians and on pro-Russian channels abroad changed. Moscow is trying to "befriend" the new Syrian administration and close the possibility of restoring dialogue between Damascus and Kyiv.

Russian Propaganda Machine Position: Before December 2024	Russian Propaganda Machine Position: After December 2024
Hayat Tahrir al-Sham – terrorists-puppets of Turkey/Al-Qaeda. Position after December 2024:	"National coalition" that "took responsibility for civilian and Russian facility security". The Kremlin announced that Assad "voluntarily resigned after negotiations".
Russia – the only legal ally of Damascus.	Russia – guarantor of stability and "bridge-builder" between new authorities and Iran/third countries. Instead of "rebels" – "temporary administration of Syria".
Western sanctions – trifles, the main thing is fighting terrorism.	"Hungry US/EU sanctions disrupted humanitarian aid after Damascus fell". RT Arabic introduced a counter of "days without Western aid".
Iran – main strategic ally, joint fight against terrorism.	"Russia is a balancer: will help settle 'minor misunderstandings' between Tehran and

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	new authorities to avoid regional escalation".
Christian shrines under protection of government army and Russian VKS.	HTS commits to protecting Christian sites, while Russia monitors implementation and conducts "peacekeeping patrols".

Impact of Russian Disinformation on Africa

The communication frame in Africa is segmented: as in Europe, in Africa Russia selects different but similar messages – mainly appealing to the anti-colonial movement and joint struggle against "colonizers of the past". Such messages automatically find emotional support, as shown by narratives on Telegram and TikTok.

To this should be added the rapid spread of the internet and its poor moderation in the corresponding region: according to [research](#) by Harvard International Review, 400 million African residents entered online space over the past 7 years, moderation in Hausa/Fulani languages is still almost absent. The main source of control is the Russian structure "African Initiative Information Agency", whose goal is to spread information that negatively portrays Western democracies.

According to the US State Department, the organization actively recruits African journalists, correspondents, reporters, and members of local information networks to enhance Russia's positive image and blacken other countries. Additionally, the organization attracts reporters with high salaries, often offering more than twice what African media pay.

Russian propaganda places greater emphasis on anti-Ukrainian sentiments in Sahel countries, where a security vacuum formed after the withdrawal of French and American troops. Accordingly, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso found themselves a new "patron" in Moscow. One favorite narrative is, of course, speculation about arms [sales](#), allegedly Ukraine sells Western missiles to terrorists: "Stingers supplied to Ukraine were bought in Odesa and are already in the hands of «Boko Haram»".

SWOT Analysis of Russia's Engagement Effectiveness and Information Propaganda in Africa

Strengths	Opportunities
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. RT Afrique and Sputnik Afrique (+ RT Arabic for North and East) provide constant content supply in French and Arabic.2. Presence of "Russian Houses" in Bamako, Ouagadougou, Niamey, Bangui – platforms for cultural and media events.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Series of coups 2020-2024 in Niger, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali → authorities rely on external military "roof" – Moscow offers "quick solution" without human rights conditions.2. Niger's uranium, Burkina Faso's gold, Mali's lithium, CAR's forests and diamonds → Moscow "packages"

<p>3. Historical anti-colonial sentiment and disappointment with French missions create "ready ground"; 40% of all documented campaigns in Africa fall on the Sahel.</p>	<p>mining agreements as "help in liberation from neocolonialism".</p> <p>3. Positioning Russia as a "bridge" for Africans in new economic architecture (BRICS bank, national currency settlements) reinforces the message "dollar ≠ only option".</p>
<p>Weaknesses</p>	<p>Threats</p>
<p>1. No language versions in most local languages (Hausa, Fulani, Mossi, etc.).</p> <p>2. After blocking RT on Facebook/YouTube (2024), main platforms for 18-35 age audiences narrowed.</p> <p>3. Anti-French rhetoric has a "ceiling": when stability and incomes don't grow, electoral support for pro-Russian military governments falls (example – declining popularity of junta in Mali after 18 months of economic downturn).</p> <p>4. Dependence on large platforms: one wave of ban-wave (Meta, X) simultaneously "cuts" thousands of bots, forcing network rebuilding.</p>	<p>1. Platform pilot programs with local fact-check centers (Nigeria FactCheckHub-Sahel, TikTok MENA Moderation) are already being tested – risk for long-term bot network operation.</p> <p>2. Competition with China and India for the same political capital; Beijing has greater financial resources and reputation as "road builder", not just "arms supplier".</p> <p>3. If new regimes don't improve security and economy, pro-Russian sentiments can turn as quickly as they arose (precedent – protest hashtags #TraoreDégage in Burkina Faso, spring 2025).</p>

In this case, the best scenario for Ukraine would be a WT strategy: combining threats and weaknesses of the Russian propaganda system, where pro-Ukrainian and pro-Western voices should quickly develop language versions for local speakers, more actively block pro-Russian content, appeal to decreased social justice and prosperity in countries whose leaders support the "Russian world". A promising direction would be working with artificial intelligence and analyzing narratives on Telegram and TikTok social networks.

AI Involvement in Spreading Russian Propaganda

Ironically, the "Pravda" network duplicates the name of the infamous Soviet newspaper that was the Kremlin's main mouthpiece – we can see certain institutional continuity in using meanings and concepts to convey messages from Russian leadership.

"Pravda" represents a disinformation [conglomerate](#) of hundreds of fake news sites registered under dozens of domain zones (crimea-news.com, news-pravda.com, dnr-news.com, etc.). The network today [covers](#) over 80 countries and publishes content in two dozen languages – from English and French to Hausa and Bengali.

"Pravda" works as a narrative retranslator: the network takes materials from RT, Sputnik, and pro-Kremlin Telegram channels, divides them into tens of thousands of ultra-short articles, and spreads them in the open network so that crawlers (search robots) of search engines and large language models (LLM), Wikipedia editors, and social media algorithms pick them up.

The corresponding working mechanisms were described by the DFRLab community, which analyzed the network's activity in regions targeted by "Pravda's" activities, such as France, Germany, Moldova, and Serbia. Researchers identified dates when significant activity spikes were observed on "Pravda" network domains compared to other periods, allowing them to determine up to five most important such peaks since its existence.

In France, notable spikes occurred on February 27, 2024, in connection with discussions about possible deployment of French troops to Ukraine; early June when European Parliament elections were held and Volodymyr Zelenskyy's speech before the French parliament; and August 25, after Telegram CEO Pavel Durov's arrest by French authorities. The German-language network recorded increased activity on March 1, 2024, due to NATO convening in Latvia, June 7 during European Parliament elections, December 2 after Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced military aid to Kyiv and announced a visit, and February 14, 2025, during the Munich Security Conference.

In Moldova, peaks occurred on November 3, 2024, during the second round of presidential elections and May 29, 2024, during Anthony Blinken's visit to the Czech Republic and Moldova. Serbia's "Pravda" network segment also [demonstrated](#) significant spikes related to both internal and international events: May 24, 2024 – UN vote on Srebrenica Memorial Day, September 4 – Deputy PM Aleksandar Vulin's visit to Vladimir Putin, October 1 – President Aleksandar Vučić's statement about no war plans over Kosovo, and March 13, 2025 – mass anti-government protests in Serbia.

In all cases, publication spikes correlated with major news events such as discussions about the war in Ukraine, electoral cycles, or high-level visits, indicating the "Pravda"

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network's ability to increase activity and dominate the news cycle, even if published narratives don't always fully correspond to actual news events.

Open-source tests by DFRLab [showed](#) that on the query "Are there US biolabs in Ukraine?" Copilot, Grok, and two other chatbots repeated disinformation, citing news-pravda.com or crimea-news.com.

"Pravda" research shows that artificial intelligence is no longer just helping propaganda – it's becoming its "factory" and "courier" simultaneously. The more massive the demand of large models for content and the weaker the transparency of their training sets, the easier it is for state actors like Russia to enrich these models with their own toxic data and rewrite reality for millions of users.

Countermeasures: How Ukraine Should Fight Russian IPSO?

It should be noted that in the modern world, the set of countermeasures must be adaptive and broad, as Russian information special operations continue to modify and deepen.

Kremlin operations are a multi-level ecosystem, so the counter-strategy must also be multi-layered: from "bits" in data centers and money in "media proxy" accounts to specific voter trust.

The first step should be striking the foundations of Kremlin information campaign functioning: domains, hosting, payment systems, and access to advertising tools. This requires continuing sanctions restrictions against specific media assets and IT structures involved in propaganda (example – sanctions against RT, Sputnik, companies like Structura and "Troll Factory"); forcing platforms to act according to the Digital Services Act (DSA) and blocking toxic domains in registries and CDN systems so fake sites cannot operate unimpeded.

Ukraine needs to support international initiatives aimed at regulating digital platform activities and fighting propaganda in the global information space. Attention should also be paid to involving diasporas and civil society organizations in promoting Ukrainian truth and counter-narratives.

Regarding Africa, it's worth fostering a systematic media literacy program adapted to local conditions: short videos, local languages, integration into popular formats (FM shows, WhatsApp groups, TikTok challenges). Effective tools would also be investments in independent regional media and fact-check networks: providing grant and technical support to newsroom platforms working locally. Promoting the creation of a network of independent journalists and bloggers working in these regions, providing them with financial and technical support, would be an effective advantage for Ukraine in overcoming the information vacuum from our side of the conflict.

In EU countries, national governments should ensure systematic training for state institutions, CERTs, and law enforcement covering hybrid operations – including sabotage, cyberattacks, and manipulations.

Conclusions

Russia purposefully spreads propaganda against Ukraine since the early 2000s, but the main turning points were the Euromaidan events of 2013-2014 and subsequent annexation of Crimea. After this, the Russian disinformation machine acquired a systematic character.

Since the beginning of full-scale war in 2022, Russia changed focus to creating an image of Ukraine as a "corrupt, unreliable negotiating partner" that "steals Western aid and doesn't want peace". From 2025, after Donald Trump's victory in the US, the Kremlin shifted emphasis to seeking influence through the new administration, promoting the idea of quick peace and the narrative about Western fatigue from supporting Ukraine.

The Kremlin works with far-right parties (AfD in Germany, "Confederation" in Poland, FPÖ in Austria), which often voice pro-Russian messages. Disinformation spreads not only online – there are also sabotage, infrastructure attacks, bot networks, deepfakes. Elections in Romania became a precedent as the Constitutional Court annulled the first round due to Russian cyber operations and AI-generated fakes.

RT Arabic has enormous reach in the region, especially in Egypt, Syria, UAE. Russia positions itself as an "anti-Western mediator", defender of "traditional values", and victim of sanctions. After Assad regime's fall, the Kremlin quickly rebuilt rhetoric, positioning itself as "peacemaker" and ally of the new Syrian administration.

Particularly active activity in Sahel countries (Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso) – through information vacuum and Western troop withdrawal. Russia creates a positive image through RT Afrique, Sputnik, "Russian Houses" and journalist recruitment, TikTok content for youth and FM radio for older audiences, messages about "Western neocolonialism".