

# Strategic Alternative Reality: An Analysis of divergent Russian post-factum Disinformation regarding Ukrainian Ceasefire Negotiations from January-May 2025

By

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## **Abstract**

The Russian Federation is one of the most prolific actors in using hybrid warfare tactics to achieve its strategic objectives; a potent instrument utilized to achieve these is its extensive disinformation apparatus. This consists of both direct rhetoric from President Vladimir Putin and his officials, as well as dozens of subsidiary websites which publish disinformation articles disseminating Kremlin propaganda. These efforts have been utilized to justify as well as obfuscate the realities surrounding Russia's repeated invasions of sovereign Ukrainian territory in the wake of the 2014 Revolution of Dignity through 2025. This thesis investigates Russian disinformation concerning Ukraine in the specific context of the second Trump administration, focusing on the period of January-May 2025. The research questions investigated are as follows: to what extent have Russian disinformation narratives evolved in this period compared to pre-2025? Secondly, what can these specific narratives elucidate regarding the Kremlin's strategic objectives? This thesis analyses 156 Russian sponsored articles in conjunction with Vladimir Putin's six official public mentions of negations in 2025. The study finds that post-factum efforts, I.E. disinformation published in a retaliatory and defensive manner to specific wartime developments, far outnumber those which are preemptive or which purport more overarching narratives that contribute to Russia's overarching alternative strategic reality. Furthermore, post-factum efforts increase dramatically in frequency in the wake of European declarations of support for Ukraine, as well as American and Ukrainian negotiation developments. These findings suggest that the disinformation is largely being employed in a defensive and retroactive manner, and diverges from the pre-2025 context by predominantly focusing on negotiations.

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*Slava Ukraini! Героям слава!*

## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I, Conall Robert Hirsch, candidate for the MA degree in International Relations, declare herewith that the present thesis titled “Strategic Alternative Reality: An Analysis of Russian Disinformation regarding Ukrainian Ceasefire Negotiations from January-May 2025” is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright.

I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 22 May 2025

Conall Robert Hirsch

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## Introduction

The Russian Federation is one of the most prolific actors in using hybrid warfare tactics to achieve its strategic objectives, and this is fully displayed through the ongoing Ukrainian war. One of its most potent instruments within this context is its extensive disinformation dissemination apparatus, consisting of both direct rhetoric from President Vladimir Putin and his officials, as well as a litany of dozens of subsidiary websites which publish disinformation articles spreading Kremlin rhetoric. These efforts, in combination with kinetic operations, have been utilized to justify as well as obfuscate the realities surrounding Russia's repeated invasions of sovereign Ukrainian territory in the wake of the 2014 Revolution of Dignity through 2025.

This thesis investigates Russian disinformation concerning Ukraine in the specific context of the second Trump administration, focusing on the period of January-May 2025. This thesis analyses 156 Russian sponsored articles in conjunction with Vladimir Putin's six official public mentions of negotiations in 2025. The methodology consist of collection via the EUvsDisinfo database spanning January 20th to May 9th, 2025. The analysis consists of a combination of quantitative and thematic methods to discern the frequency of disinformation narratives, as well as publishing frequency within specific temporal contexts of ongoing events in both the war and ceasefire negotiations.

Chapter one is a literature review which details the role of disinformation within hybrid warfare operations. Chapter two covers methodology, displays the quantified data and explains specific narrative and terminology insofar as how frequently it surfaces in disinformation. Chapter three discusses past Russian disinformation efforts within the context of the ongoing Ukrainian conflict from 2014, beginning with the seizure of Crimea through the beginning of the second Trump administration. Chapter four places specific disinformation into the temporal context of ongoing occurrences in both war developments and negotiations. Chapter five employs a quantitative and thematic analysis to discuss the most prevalent patterns within the disinformation,

how it differs from the pre-2025 context, and what this reveals about the Kremlin's intentions and concerns regarding specific developments.

The research questions investigated are as follows: to what extent have Russian disinformation narratives evolved in this period compared to pre-2025? Secondly, what can these specific narratives elucidate regarding the Kremlin's concerns and strategic objectives? The study finds that post-factum efforts, I.E. disinformation published in a retaliatory and defensive manner to specific wartime developments, far outnumber those which are premeditated in nature or those which purport more generalized disinformation that contributes to Russia's overarching alternative strategic reality. Furthermore, post-factum efforts increase dramatically in the wake of European declarations of support for Ukraine, as well as American and Ukrainian negotiation breakthroughs. These findings suggest that the disinformation is largely being employed in a defensive and retroactive manner, and diverges from the pre-2025 context by overwhelmingly focusing on negotiations and external developments.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

This literature review discusses the nature of disinformation as a political weapon, and how it is used in concert with kinetic warfare to conduct what are known as “hybrid warfare” operations. Political warfare refers to the “use of political means to compel an opponent to do one’s will.” (Smith 1989) Political warfare refers to all avenues in which actors conduct interstate operations to influence or coerce one another short of kinetic warfare, which may include (but are not limited to) economic sanctions, information, paramilitary and or espionage operations. (Smith 1989) Political warfare is more colloquially described as “the art of heartening friends and disheartening enemies, of gaining help for one’s cause and causing the abandonment of the enemies’ through words and deeds.”(Codevilla 2008, 206) The targets of such activities vary from citizenries at large (especially in democratic states) all the way to senior decision makers.

During periods of kinetic war, when other political warfare tactics are combined with kinetic operations this is referred to as “hybrid warfare.”(Lanoszka 2019) As outlined by Hoffman (2007,

8) hybrid threats

incorporate a full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder... These multimodal activities can be conducted by separate units, or even by the same unit, but are generally operationally and tactically directed and coordinated within the main battlespace to achieve synergistic effects in the physical and psychological dimensions of conflict.

As outlined by Paphiti and Bachmann (2022), it is now standard to associate hybrid operations with “covert activities, which can include military, paramilitary, irregular and civilian actors” in an effort to coordinate compels geopolitical objectives. Hybrid warfare represents an omnipresent reality of the 21st century; while hybrid tactics have been used extensively throughout history, due to the creation and utilization of a litany of new technologies and freedom of information via the internet, hybrid avenues have increased dramatically. One of the most potent weapons in a hybrid arsenal is information warfare.

Information warfare seeks to “blur the lines between reality and fiction,” by further obfuscating and increasing the fog of war to disguise the actions of actors in conflicts. (Bachmann and Gunneriusson, 2017, 9) This creation and exacerbation of operational ambiguity is utterly crucial in the Russo-Ukrainian context; Russia’s disinformation apparatus serves to give it plausible deniability to perpetrate increasingly inexcusable operations. Furthermore, information warfare can be used as a force multiplier, to subvert internationally recognized conventions of warfare, and avoid certain negative political and economic costs incurred through conflicts. (Weissmann et al., 2021)

To better understand information warfare dynamics, it is crucial to discuss specific terminology as certain terms are often falsely used interchangeably. Firstly, *misinformation* differs from *disinformation*; the former refers to a falsehood which is often spread unintentionally or without malice, whereas the latter is deliberately crafted to manipulate or deceive a target. (Pérez-Escolar, Lilleker, and Tapia-Frade 2023) Thusly a “disinforming” actor partakes in a deliberate attempt to coerce, manipulate or mislead. Secondly, while propaganda is frequently used word to describe disinformation, they are not always interchangeable. Propaganda has multiple forms: white propaganda derives from an official source such as a government, whereas a black propaganda’s source is deliberately obscured to aid a specific objective. (Guth 2009) Disinformation is a broader term which can be used to describe a wider selection of mediums and always is a vehicle of malcontent, whereas propaganda is not necessarily malicious in nature and typically derives from a specific source, often being governments.

Information warfare can impact both combatants and non-combatants. Combatants or those involved in making vital battlefield decisions may be influenced by adversarial agents whom create a false reality which may “mislead an enemy by manipulating, distorting, or falsifying evidence to induce a mistaken perception.” (Daugherty 2006, 79) In contrast, disinformation targeting general populations is often far more efficacious. This is essential to build and maintain support for a

conflict both domestically and internationally. Such campaigns aim to “gain support for their policies and suppress criticism in their own countries and around the world; to profit from creating engaging, yet false or misleading content; or to spread their own ideology or beliefs among the public” (Global Affairs Canada, 2022). Therefore it is highly advantageous to utilize disinformation to maintain public support for a conflict, especially when such a conflict is unpopular, conducted unscrupulously and outside of convention.

## Chapter 2: Methodology, Data presentation and Explanation of Key Terminology

The following chapter discusses the methodology employed for data collection, displays said data viscerally and further elucidates the terminology and its significance within the data.

### 2.1 Methodology

The methodology employed consisted of the collection and quantification of 156 Russian disinformation articles from the EUvsDisinfo database. EUvsDisinfo is a component of the East Stratcom Task Force, a division of the E.U.'s diplomatic service and is one of the leading authorities for the collection and study of Russian disinformation since its founding in late 2015 (EUvsDisinfo 2015). The data was manually collected and quantified directly from the EUvsDisinfo website - certain articles have since been withdrawn from their original platforms but are cited as screen captures archived by EUvsDisinfo.

The additional data has been collected directly from transcripts published on the President of Russia's official website, consisting of three interviews, two press conferences and one public address. Key terminology and themes were quantified from both sources manually, and are subsequently displayed and discussed in the following sub-section. The time frame for collection spans January 20th-May 9th, 2025.

### 2.2 Quantification of Disinformation Articles

The following table displays the most prevalent strategic narratives and strategies perpetrated by the disinformation articles. They are subsequently discussed and placed in context to further explain the categorization methodology.

**Table 1:**

OVERARCHING THEMATIC NARRATIVES	NUMERICAL FREQUENCY (MENTIONS)	USAGE FREQUENCY AVERAGE
Ceasefire Negotiations	91	58 %
Neo-Nazism/Neo-Fascism	55	35 %

OVERARCHING THEMATIC NARRATIVES	NUMERICAL FREQUENCY (MENTIONS)	USAGE FREQUENCY AVERAGE
Generalized Obfuscation/ Obstruction Narratives	54	34.6%
“Russophobia”	53	34 %
War Crimes	33	21 %

*Ceasefire Negotiations* are the most common and self-evident narrative themes. These refer to both explicit and implicit mentions in the disinformation. Explicit examples include specifically naming negotiations or summits, as well as calls between leaders. Implicit mentions refer to articles which employ strategic narratives around the negotiations without explicit mention; the most prevalent example being delegitimization of President Zelensky’s authority and accusations of Ukraine being a puppet-state of the collective west.

*Neo-Nazism* is the most prevalent strategic narrative employed. It has been levied against both Ukraine as well as its European allies to attempt to justify the 2014 and 2022 invasions, and postulates that Ukraine is employing a literal and cultural genocide against Russian speakers similar to the atrocities committed by the Third Reich.

*Generalized Obfuscation* refers to a broad encompassing category that consists of several different sub-narratives but ultimately contribute to the obfuscating objective outlined in the literature review. This category has significant overlap with negotiations, false flag accusations, war crimes, among other sub-narratives. Ultimately this category encompasses many narratives which do not fit neatly into other categories but are still relevant in the ongoing negotiations context.

*Russophobia* is an invented term which is employed by Putin and Russian propagandists to deny and deflect blame for any criticism levied against Russia. This term also is vital to the “cultural genocide” narrative that propagandists have employed to justify the invasion of Ukraine, alleging that the state has engaged in a deliberate censorship and extermination of the Russian language and culture.

*War Crimes* finally refer explicitly to both Russia attempting to deflect blame for atrocities it has committed as well as shift responsibility onto Ukrainian armed forces.

The following table displays specific narratives and or terminology and its frequency in the disinformation. The following section contextualizes terminology not self evident or that which require more specific clarification.

### 2.3 Quantification of Specific Disinformation Terminology

The following table represents the most significant sub-narratives and focuses of the disinformation articles surveyed, and displays their frequency compared to other key terms.

**Table 2**

SPECIFIC DISINFORMATION TERMINOLOGY	NUMERICAL FREQUENCY (MENTIONS)	USAGE FREQUENCY AVERAGE
European Union	104	66 %
Donald Trump/United States	77	49 %
Volodymyr Zelenskyy	50	32 %
False Flag Operations	29	18 %
United Kingdom (incl. Boris Johnson and Kier Starmer)	27	17 %
NATO	26	16 %
Dehumanization/Vilification	21	13 %
Military Spending/ReArm Europe	21	13 %
Terrorism	20	12.8%
Illegitimate Statehood/Elections	20	12.8%
“Coalition of the Willing” and Peacekeeping forces	19	12 %
Germany (incl. Freidrich Merz)	16	10 %
France (incl. Emmanuel Macron)	15	9 %
“Puppet-State”	15	9 %
Nuclear Weapons/Power Plants	12	7 %
Cultural Genocide	9	6 %
Kaja Kallas	8	5 %

SPECIFIC DISINFORMATION TERMINOLOGY	NUMERICAL FREQUENCY (MENTIONS)	USAGE FREQUENCY AVERAGE
Sumy	7	4 %
Sanctions	6	3.8%
DeepState/Democratic Party (USA)	5	3 %
Sudzha	5	3 %
Energy Infrastructure	5	3 %
Critical Minerals	5	3 %
Bucha Massacre	3	2 %
Crimea	2	1.2%
Mark Rutte	2	1.2%
Organ Transfers	1	.6%
Chemical Weapons	1	.6%
Cluster Munitions	1	.6%
Abductions	1	.6%
Keith Kellogg	1	.6%

## 2.4 Quantification of Vladimir Putin's Public addresses in 2025

The following table displays mentions of specific terms and narratives by Vladimir Putin in public appearances 2025.

**Table 3**

STRATEGIC NARRATIVES IN PUTIN PUBLIC APPEARANCES	NUMERICAL FREQUENCY (MENTIONS)
“Kyiv Regime”	9
Donald Trump	9
“Proposed Negotiations”	6
Europe	5
Ceasefire	4
Ceasefire Violations	3
Illegitimate Elections/Dictator	3

STRATEGIC NARRATIVES IN PUTIN PUBLIC APPEARANCES	NUMERICAL FREQUENCY (MENTIONS)
<b>Volodymyr Zelensky</b> (Unnamed, referred to as “Ukrainian Regime Leader”)	3
<b>“Failing Enemy”</b>	3
<b>False Flag Accusations</b>	3
<b>Captured Ukrainian Territories</b> (Kursk/Donbas)	3
<b>Nazism</b>	2
<b>Critical Minerals</b>	2
<b>Sanctions</b>	2
<b>Trump “Stolen Election” 2020</b>	1
<b>Ukrainian Rearmament</b>	1
<b>Civil Infrastructure</b>	1
<b>“Demands from Vassal States” by Ukraine</b>	1
<b>“Launchpad for hostilities”</b>	1
<b>Sumy</b>	1
<b>Odessa</b>	1
<b>“Fight to the last Ukrainian”</b>	1
<b>“Russophobia”</b>	1
<b>North Korea</b>	1
<b>“Blocking Talks”</b>	1

### **Chapter 3: Russian Disinformation Tactics Pre-2025**

This chapter builds upon the foundation of the literature review in order to build context around Russian information warfare operations regarding Ukraine prior to 2025. It focuses on the preliminary invasion of Crimea in 2014, the interim period between the two invasions, and then the disinformation employed before and during the 2022 invasion. The purpose of the chapter is to provide a contrast between past strategic narratives with those which have evolved in 2025 and in the context of the ongoing ceasefire negotiations.

This chapter divides into two sections. Section one discusses historical Soviet information warfare tactics and how these influence and carry over into modern Russian Federation strategies. The second section outlines offensive narratives, namely accusations of Nazism, cultural genocide, denoting Ukraine as an illegitimate state, and the myth of Russian invincibility, all of which serve to build up an alternative canon of facts which Russia uses to justify its interference in Ukraine. Other narratives defensive in nature attribute blame to NATO aggression, Europe and the United States as “aggressors” whom seek to use Ukraine as a launchpad for a potential Russian invasion, and notoriously using the falsified elections in the Donbas and Luhansk to justify Russian occupation. This chapter provides contrast to chapter four which details the main focus of the study from January-May 2025.

#### **3.1 Soviet and Russian “Active Measures”**

As discussed in the literature review, information warfare is a historically potent and evidenced hybrid warfare tactic. While it existed far before the 20th century, the U.S.S.R. became proficient at using it to maintain control over its satellites while also influencing citizens of rival states abroad. Soviet propaganda proved effective at maintaining social cohesion within its territories as well as disincentivizing defection to the West (Holland 2006). “Active measures” refer to the information warfare strategies the U.S.S.R. employed both domestically but mostly abroad;

these refer to several different strategies that revolved around the “pollution” of foreign public opinion. (Holland 2006) These included the forging and implanting of documents, inspiring distrust Western leaders, and portraying the image of the C.I.A. as a force of imperialistic evil. (Holland 2006) This dual focus on both domestic compliance and foreign opinion “pollution” carries on today in Kremlin disinformation. A modern Russian evolution of this is what has been coined “sharp power” in contrast to hard or soft power, which is a mechanism that “pierces, penetrates, or perforates the political and information environments in the targeted countries.” (Cardenal 2017, 6) Sharp power epitomizes the information warfare strategies the Kremlins has used to influence both domestic and foreign public opinion regarding its invasions and occupations of Ukrainian territories.

### **3.2: Russian Disinformation regarding Ukraine 2014-2022**

Due to Ukraine’s 2014 “Revolution of Dignity” in which Russian-backed President Viktor Yanukovich was overthrown, the Kremlin was dealt a huge blow to its post-soviet sphere of influence (Barth 2023). As Ukraine had become an independent democracy with ambitions to further integrate into Europe, this represented both an embarrassment and threat to Russian soft-power abroad. Thusly it began to immediately target the newly elected Petro Proshenko, labelling him a “Nazi” and a “usurper” despite a legitimate election (Barth 2023). This also marks the beginning of narratives calling Ukraine an illegitimate state, a puppet state for Western powers, and that it began committing genocide against Russian speakers within its borders. After Proshenko’s term ended, the vilification narratives he endured transferred to his successor Volodymyr Zelenskyy, but expanded to labelling him an oligarch as well as a foreign asset (Barth 2023).

The Russian seizure of Crimea in 2014 also marked the start of the Nazism and genocidal narratives in order to justify the invasion (EUvsDisinfo 2022b). These qualify as “offensive” narratives, insofar as they directly tie to obfuscating the realities of Russian territorial aggression

against its sovereign neighbor. Other narratives focus on the “liberation” of Russian speakers at the hands of Ukraine, and forward convoluted historical revisionist arguments that posit Ukraine and other slavic nations as territorially divorced Russian peoples (EUvsDisinfo 2022b). These narratives predominantly targeted former Warsaw pact countries as well as former Soviet satellites, weaponizing nostalgia in such nations by placing blame on Europe and the collective West for any and all contemporary grievances. These narratives also worked in concert with the Kremlin’s funding of pro-separatist groups in eastern Ukraine (EUvsDisinfo 2022b).

Leading up to and throughout the 2022 invasion, Russian outlets amplified the Nazism and cultural genocide narratives in order to further justify its aggression. The narrative of an “invincible and inevitable” Russia worked in tandem with these to demoralize Ukrainian defenders and discourage Western military support; these additionally combined with tactics of nuclear saber rattling to further limit military support for Ukraine at the outset of the invasion. (Mandić and Klarić 2023) Additionally the narrative of the West as an “existential threat” insofar as Ukraine joining NATO and would thusly place nuclear weapons on the Russian border further contributed to the previously employed disinformation. (Mandić and Klarić 2023) Denoting NATO as the “aggressor” served to obfuscate the unprompted and brutal invasion conducted by Russian armed forces, and remains a potent narrative to this day.

Further narratives throughout the war continued to justify aforementioned aggression; the “elections” held in the captured territories of The Donbas and Luhansk served to legitimize Russia’s territorial gains, giving them grounds to claim that the local populations in fact voted to join Russian (EUvsDisinfo 2022b). Independent reports later confirmed these elections were manipulated to guarantee their outcomes. (Mandić and Klarić 2023) Additional economic narratives targeted populations in the U.S., Canada and Europe, alleging false figures regarding military support and preying upon apprehension for foreign military spending. (Mandić and Klarić 2023) Several narratives regarding Europe’s reliance on Russian fuels pre-2022 alleged Europe could not

divorce from this reliance without mass suffering and heating outages, designed to manipulate public European support for Ukraine.

When considering Russian strategic disinformation narratives from a broader perspective, their objectives become discernible. Ultimately the Kremlin's goals can be simplified into a few broad categories which contain dozens of sub-narratives therein. Russia seeks to paint NATO, and by extension Ukraine, as an existential threat by labelling them as strategically aggressive towards Russia. The accusations of Nazism and cultural genocide paint Ukraine as an oppressive regime, invoking and misappropriating imagery of the atrocities committed by the Third Reich in order to portray Russia as a savior in contrast. Economic narratives target foreign support for Ukraine, particularly in continental Europe. Finally historical revisionism as well as the fabricated elections in the Donbas and Luhansk seek to lend credibility to the Russian claims that Ukraine "belongs" to Russia, and that its population seeks to rejoin it.

## Chapter 4: Contextualized Timeline of Disinformation

This chapter places the previously quantified disinformation data within the temporal context of the ongoing events of the war and negotiations. The formatting is slightly unorthodox insofar as it substitutes what would normally be titular subsections for numerical dates, and following this the disinformation articles are placed within the context of the specific event. The majority of the data presented derives from Kremlin sponsored disinformation articles or state television; Putin's public appearances and the dissemination contained therein are appropriately denoted. The events displayed fall largely fall into a four distinct categories: external negotiations and meetings, ceasefire negotiations, security developments, and finally ceasefire violations.

### January 20th: Donald Trump's Inauguration

Trump's inauguration for his second term marked a significant break from his predecessor's steadfast support for Ukraine's defense. Trump initially promised to "end the war on day 1," however this outlandish claim was not fulfilled, and represents a claim he made through his election campaign to contrast himself with his opponent Kamala Harris (Shabad and Kenny 2025). A Kremlin article directly references this:

Donald Trump pledged he would waste no time quickly implementing executive actions on his first day in office. Among the top priorities of his to-do-list are getting on the phone to Vladimir Putin fast, and withdraw funding for Ukraine. "I will end the war in Ukraine [...] and I will prevent World War III from happening," Trump told D.C. victory rally. (Ekimenko 2025)

Trump in fact made no such claim in his inaugural speech. Other articles repeat terms such as "Ukronazis" shelling civilians, an obvious false flag attribution by the Russians (Newsmaker1 2025). On the 22nd, an article accused Ukraine of being a "puppet-state" and argued the conflict could only end with Zelensky's death (Khrolenko 2025d).

On the 23rd an article details that while Putin has expressed readiness to discuss with the new administration, albeit this did not exclude Russia from completing its goals of "eradicating

Nazism, disarming the terrorist regime in Kyiv, protecting Russian national security against NATO's expansion towards the country's border.” (RAIALYOIUM.COM 2025) The article further alleged that Ukraine was not fighting but rather “liberal globalists” were responsible and using “Ukrainian Nazis” as instruments (RAIALYOIUM.COM 2025) A flurry of articles follow this on the 24th, three of which attack Zelensky and allege he is no longer a “legitimate president.” (Helen 2025)

Other articles released the same day blame NATO for aggression and forcing Russia’s hand to start the war (de.rt.com 2025). To support this, another article perpetrates the narrative that the Baltic States are being assigned as “frontline airfields” to deploy troops against Russia (Sputnik Kazakhstan 2025a). The article alleges “NATO's aggression, according to this perspective, would leave Moscow no choice but to resort to the use of nuclear weapons—both tactical and strategic—against enemy territories.”(Sputnik Kazakhstan 2025a) This is significant due to both the continuous narrative of Russia as a victim of NATO “aggression” as well as nuclear saber rattling.

### **January 24th: Putin’s interview with Pavel Zarubin**

Due to his failing health and increased geopolitical isolation, Vladimir Putin has comparably reduced his public appearances compared to earlier periods in his term. He has only given two direct interviews in 2025, both with Zarubin. The first of these focused on Trump’s second term and potential negations. When asked about his relationship with Trump, Putin responded:

I cannot but agree with him that if he had been President, if his victory had not been stolen from him in 2020, then maybe there would not have been the Ukraine crisis that broke out in 2022. However, it is a known fact that when he was the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, he imposed a significant number, the largest number of restrictions, sanctions on Russia. I do not think that decision was in the best interests of Russia, or the United States. (President of Russia 2025a)

Putin then shifted to Zelensky, referencing his 2022 decree to prohibit negations with Putin after Russia declared captured Ukrainian regions as newly incorporated territories. (Denison 2025) Putin postulated that Russia has been willing to talk and that this decree represents an unwillingness from the Ukrainian side. (President of Russia 2025a) Putin further alleged that the “Kyiv Regime” did not

in fact have control but rather its western “benefactors,” furthering the narrative of Ukraine as a NATO “puppet-state.” (President of Russia 2025a) He ended the interview by stressing negotiations were contingent on the new American administration and implied heavily regarding U.S. sanctions on Russia. (President of Russia 2025a)

The next week a flurry of Kremlin articles were published, mostly targeting NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, Europe, the United Kingdom and Ukrainian statehood. Two particularly inflammatory pieces stated:

Russia is facing military opposition from all 27 member states of the European Union. From a political standpoint, what is happening today in the special operation zone, as well as in the border areas of Kursk, represents the peak of a military crisis deliberately created by the West. (Karaeva 2025)

Europe does not want peace to arrive soon to Ukraine. While US president Donald Trump bets on ending the conflict between Ukraine and Russia as soon as possible, several officials in Europe are not so enthusiastic about a cessation of hostilities. Top European and NATO officials declared in the last days that support for Kyiv must increase. (Erst.space 2025)

The first evidently reinforces the Kremlin narrative of Ukraine as a “Puppet-state.” The second shifts the framing of EU Defense Commissioner Andrius Kubilius’s address, placing Europe at odds with the U.S. administration and frames the bloc as bellicose. A further article published on the 29th accused Rutte of “Russophobia,” and postulates a baseless conspiracy theory this is due to Rutte’s Dutch nationality and the U.S.S.R. having provided military assistance to the Netherlands’ former colony of Indonesia in the 1960s. (Makarov 2025)

To end the month articles detailing Ukraine’s statehood being “illegal,” claiming the “Nazi Kyiv Regime” has been terrorizing the Donbas for 11 years, and that NATO puppet masters are seeking to replace Zelensky:

Faced with the fact that Ukraine will soon be unable to contain the growing pressure of the Russian army and the uncertainty about Western military aid after Donald Trump’s arrival, NATO leadership feels it necessary to preserve the rest of Ukraine as an anti-Russian trampoline at any price. Therefore, the Atlantic Alliance wants to freeze the Ukrainian conflict, dragging Kyiv and Moscow to a dialogue towards the beginning of its solution. Washington and Brussels agree that the main obstruction for this scenario is Zelenskyy, who behind closed doors is referred to as ‘expendable material. (RT en espanol 2025b)

Again the puppet-state narrative surfaces, as well as framing the E.U. as belligerent and warmongering in contrast to Trump.

### **February 3rd: The first exclusive European Defense meeting**

Due to Trump's mixed messaging on European defense, European leaders began to take matters into their own hands by launching a series of talks concerning the future of Ukraine and more broadly European defense (European Council 2025). Predictably, these elicited a maelstrom of disinformation articles from the Russians:

Ukraine's special services, backed by the collective West, have launched a campaign to radicalise and mislead the Russian population. This large-scale propaganda campaign is fuelling the spread of terrorism and neo-Nazi ideology as Russia's special military operation is going on. ([tass.ru](https://tass.ru) 2025b)

Italian President Mattarella's line is exactly the same of the warmongers in Brussels: always new sanctions against Russia, the establishment of a phantom "special tribunal" for crimes (obviously Russian) in Ukraine, full-scale rearmament and no negotiating tables. Logically, the need follows to continue the war until Kyiv wins. We must move forward with the European army; with war expenses; we must replenish the coffers of the Euro-American military-industrial complexes and plunder what remains of public services, social and health care, education, to the detriment of the living conditions of workers, labourers and the masses in general. (Poggi 2025a)

The former combines Kremlin narratives denoting Europe and Ukraine as Nazis and that Russia is the victim of European aggression and cultural-genocide. The latter deliberately alters Italian President Mattarella's remarks of a speech on February 5th, where he compared Russian aggression to the Third-Reich in the 1930s, arguing that capitulation is a slippery slope and Europe must respond (Poggi 2025a).

The next week entailed several articles accusing Ukraine of cultural genocide against Russian speakers, including accusations of utilizing chemical weapons provided by NATO (RIA Novosti 2025a), massacring civilians in Kursk (de.rt.com 2025d) and alleging a false-flag operation in the Russian town of Sudzha on February 1st (Sputnik International 2025b). All of these narratives contribute to the vilification of Ukrainian armed forces.

Notably two articles attack U.S. actions, including special envoy Keith Kellogg:

Kellogg affirmed that the Trump government may strengthen sanctions against Russia to reach a ceasefire in Ukraine. Kellogg doesn't realise that the 15th previous packages of sanctions have not worked and have only led to the EU's economy to sink and the US, to prevent its own debacle, had to resort to constant trade blackmail against its own partners, who bend their knees to their master in an act of vassalage. Meanwhile Russia has adapted to these measures and is having one of the biggest growths at global level. Sanctions have had the opposite result of what they were intended to achieve. (Benitez 2025b)

This attack highlights the continued Kremlin attempt to downplay the efficacy of sanctions, which seems contradictory considering their repeated focus. The second concerns on the Trump administration's resuming of supplying arms to Ukraine, which the articles alleges is the work of the American "Deep State," a popular MAGA conspiracy theory (Benitez 2025a). The article refrains from assigning direct blame to Trump, instead alleging the move as a "betrayal" to his electoral base.

### **February 12th: Trump and Putin's first Ceasefire Discussion**

On February 12th, the first official call between the U.S. presidency and Kremlin took place since the outset of the 2022 invasion. Trump later described it as productive, citing Putin's willingness to cooperate (Collins and Lipton 2025). A Kremlin article later tried to frame within the context of the call the EU and American "Deep State" as the only obstacles to a ceasefire:

Several forces could bring their resources to bear to stop peace, ranging from Volodymyr Zelenskyy to UK and the EU to hawks in the US Congress, and especially the Deep State, which has its own ideas about the 'right' trajectory for US foreign policy. After Trump's election in 2016, elements of the deep state, ranging from the intelligence community and State Department to top officials like Mike Pompeo and John Bolton successfully sabotaged his agenda, including Trump's desire to improve relations with Russia. (Tsukanov 2025b)

This article is significant insofar as it attempts to paint the US and EU at odds, and implies that the only legitimate negotiators are the Kremlin and the White House. It furthers the "Deep State" narrative by citing two hawkish members of Trump's first administration, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton.

### **February 14th: Russian Drone attack on Chernobyl Power Plant**

Russia launched a drone attack on the Chernobyl Nuclear Sarcophagus on the 14th, which the IAEA later confirmed to have started a fire on the outer protective wall of the famously defunct generator (UN News 2025). This prompted six false flag articles by Kremlin propagandists alleging a litany of obfuscating theories:

A rat pushed against the wall is very dangerous – Kyiv carried out a provocative attack at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. Russia has no reason to attack this object, while Zelensky urgently needs to do something in order to disrupt the peace agreements between Putin and Trump. The current Kyiv authorities are complete degenerates – this criminal gang is capable of contaminating Europe with nuclear waste in order to save itself. (Pravda Polska 2025b)

This attack occurred the same day as the Munich Security conference: three articles directly name the conference and allege Ukraine attacking itself in order to to prolong the war (Ghamdan News 2025)(Rediazone 2025c)(Sputnik Uzbekistan 2025). Further accusations of terrorism surface as well as references to the Zaporizhzhia power plant attack and destruction of the Kakhovka Dam, elucidating a key pattern of Russian false flag operations attempting to shift blame on Kyiv (Poggi 2025b). The articles further combine allegations with European and Ukrainian “Nazi” tropes.

### **February 15th: Saudi Negotiations Announcement**

The first significant negotiations are announced to take place between all three main parties in Riyadh by the U.S. administration (Radford 2025). This nonetheless prompts two Kremlin articles:

Although the US and Russia are starting a dialogue, they are continuing to wage war in Ukraine. Irrespective of Trump’s position, the Western claim over Ukraine is still there. Why then is Trump interested in negotiations with Russia? Because he wants to save the US as he realises that Western-led globalisation project has failed and it may result in the crushing of the US statehood. Europe will not be ready to struggle for Ukraine without the US’s financial and military assistance. (RIA Novosti 2025e)

The second article furthers this rhetoric by alleging that Washington is coming to the table because Russia has “won in Ukraine” (CTVBY 2025). These narratives attempt to inflate Russian victories to strengthen its negotiation position.

### **February 17th: European leaders express frustration at Riyadh exclusion**

Following the negotiations announcement, European leaders express frustration at being excluded from having a seat at the table as they have invested significant resources in Ukraine’s defense. This elicits a firehose of disinformation:

Europe would go broke trying to keep Ukraine afloat if the US dropped support. It would cost NATO’s European allies an additional \$3.1 trillion over ten years to fund Ukraine and expand their own defense capabilities if President Trump left the burden to them, according to Bloomberg. Europe simply does not have the wherewithal to continue the proxy war with Moscow, and would be obliged to strike its own separate peace with Russia. (Tsukanov 2025c)

The preceding article reiterates that the EU and NATO are floundering in their support of Ukraine, and the Bloomberg citation is a common Kremlin tactic to distort key statistics. Another article published details a similar narrative, citing Europe as unable to support Ukraine without the U.S. and that Trump has recognized Russia’s triumph. (Sputnik Mundo 2025c)

### **February 18th: Marco Rubio arrives in Saudi Arabia**

In addition to Rubio, special envoy Witkoff and national security advisor Walz arrive in Riyadh for the first official negotiations with Russian officials. Russian propaganda continues to vilify Ukraine to strengthen its position:

Kyiv may carry out a series of terrorist attacks on Russian diplomatic missions in Europe to disrupt negotiations. According to the [Russian] intelligence service, Ukraine will most likely try to organise attacks in Germany, the Baltic and Scandinavian countries. However, the agency does not rule out that Kyiv will choose Slovakia and Hungary, which will bring 'additional benefits' - that is, EU members who have a 'special position' regarding the Ukrainian conflict will be discredited. (Sputnik Georgia 2025b)

This narrative is significant as it attempts to construe Ukraine as the perpetrator of several domestic terror attacks that have occurred in Europe in recent years. It targets susceptible populations in former Warsaw-pact countries, which are particularly recipient of Russian propaganda. A further article (Sputnik Armenia 2025d) details possible attacks by Ukraine on Russian embassies in Europe.

Other articles from this week attack the E.U., specifically incoming German Chancellor Friedrich Merz's announcement to send long range Taurus missiles to Ukraine (TASS News Agency 2025b)(Rami Al-Shaer 2025a). Further narratives portray Europe as warmongering and accuses E.U. HVRP Kaja Kallas as a "Russophobe" for her call for continued military support for Ukraine, and that Europe will not accept an exclusively negotiated agreement. (Sputnik Armenia 2025c) Notably the first article discussing the Russian development of mineral deposits in captured Ukrainian regions, a direct nod to Trump's professed minerals deal with Ukraine. (RT.com 2025a)

### **February 24th: Putin's second interview with Pavel Zarubin**

Exactly a month later, Putin is interviewed again by Zarubin. When asked about the possible mineral deal between the U.S. and Ukraine, Putin strove to appear dominant:

It is important to emphasise that Russia possesses significantly – I want to stress this – significantly larger resources of this kind than Ukraine.... The same is true for the new territories: we are open to foreign partnerships. Our historical territories that have become part of the Russian Federation again also hold certain reserves. We are ready to work there with international partners, including Americans. (President of Russia 2025b)

Putin refuses to name Zelenskyy, referring to him as the "Head of the Kyiv regime" and expressing his leadership is "toxic" for both the Ukrainian armed forces and population. (President of Russia 2025b) He further referenced Zelenskyy's refusal to negotiate with him personally, claiming he'd "boxed himself into a corner." (President of Russia 2025b) Putin further lied that Russia has been open to negotiate, labelling Zelensky as "emotional" and thusly only bilateral negotiations between the

U.S. and Russia were legitimate (President of Russia 2025b). He ended by denying the fact that the Europeans were excluded from negotiations (President of Russia 2025b).

The following week articles mainly targeted the E.U., particularly the February 24th as the E.U. ratified its 16th sanctions package (Kolyasnikov 2025). The article accuses Brussels of sabotaging negotiations; all three articles published between the 25th-27th accuse Brussels of “Russophobia” and cultural genocide.(TASS News Agency 2025d)(Pravda Polska 2025c)

### **February 28th: Zelenskyy visits the White House**

The president of Ukraine visits the White House to petition for additional aid. Trump and his vice president are openly hostile to the beleaguered president, whom refused to flatter and grovel to his American counterpart’s demands. (Radford 2025) The Kremlin has a field day after the meeting, publishing seven articles in the next two days:

Zelenskyy is secretly selling Ukraine to the West, turning the country into a raw material source for the U.S. He was allegedly taken to Andrews Air Force Base at night, possibly in a bag or restrained, to sign agreements handing over natural resources. Now, Ukraine is officially becoming the property of American corporations, and its people are becoming perpetual debtors, forced to pay for the right to live on their own land. (Rami Al-Shaer 2025b)

With his outrageously boorish behaviour during his stay in Washington, Zelenskyy confirmed that he is the most dangerous threat to the world community as an irresponsible instigator of a major war. Everyone should understand how unambiguous such attacks sound from the leader of terrorists. Zelenskyy [...] is obsessed only with preserving the power he has usurped. (Armenia news - news.AM 2025)

The 'flogging' of Zelenskyy by the American President in the White House, unprecedented in the history of international politics and diplomacy, is also evidence of the political weakness and extreme moral degradation of those European leaders who continue to advocate for the support of the insane leader of the Nazi regime, who has lost touch with reality. (RT Arabic 2025b)

The fact that Zelenskyy left the US for Britain once again proves who he really serves and on what platforms this great game is currently being played. (iravunk.com 2025)

Notably two articles ([rt.com](https://rt.com) 2025a)(Sputnik Armenia 2025e) are critical of the U.S.’s proposed mineral deal.

### **March 4th: Zelenskyy reiterates desire to sign U.S. minerals deal**

Notably Zelenskyy describes the meeting as “regrettable” but does not apologize. Due to his statement and the subsequent implication that the deal would secure further U.S. aid, Kremlin sites explode:

The US has suffered a disaster in its proxy war with Russia, and although the front in Ukraine is almost motionless, it has become clear to all parties that there are no longer enough resources in Europe, Ukraine or the US to sustain the Nazi Zelenskyy regime. (RT Arabic 2025b)

The other two articles published this day attack the U.K. in retaliation for its continued military support of Ukraine. (Pravda Polska 2025b) (Sputnik Belarus 2025a)

### **March 5th: Trump suspends intelligence sharing with Ukraine**

Due to Trump’s decision, Russian propagandists almost exclusively target the E.U.:

The West that no longer has values replaces all values with war. It is absurd. War is the negation of all values, even if in some cases wars are necessary. What Putin did in 2022 was necessary, he should have done it before probably, because Ukrainians were massacring Russians in Donbas and this had to be put an end to. (Visione TV 2025)

Merz, Macron and Von der Leyen want the Ukrainization of Europe to wage a total war against Russia. (Cabras 2025)

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said, "Peace in Ukraine is more dangerous than ongoing war." European leaders want "eternal war" in Ukraine. How many more parents will be left without sons? (Sputnik Armenia 2025a)

Instead of making a positive contribution to finding peaceful ways to resolve the Ukraine conflict, the EU declares plans for the accelerated increase of military and financial aid to Kyiv, thereby deliberately fuelling escalation and pushing the prospect of dialogue further away. (RIA Novosti 2025b)

The United Kingdom is determined to prolong the conflict in Ukraine as it has its own interests in the Black Sea region. (tass.ru 2025a)

The dominant narrative shared between these articles is the framing of the E.U. as bellicose and Russia as benevolent. Once such article published on the 10th posits the narrative of Ukraine having

“Russian DNA,” arguing all Slavic peoples should return to the motherland. (Es.news-front.su 2025) These articles invert the realities of the conflict, a common rhetorical framing tactic.

### **March 11th: Zelenskyy agrees to ceasefire, Trump reinstates intelligence and aid**

Due to Zelenskyy’s expression of goodwill, Trump reverses his withdrawal of support. Ukrainian and American diplomats meet and discuss in Saudi Arabia for a second time. E.U. Commission President Ursula Van Der Leyen responds “We welcome today’s news from Jeddah on the U.S.-Ukraine talks, including the proposal for a ceasefire agreement and the resumption of U.S. intelligence sharing and security assistance.”(Van Der Leyen 2025) This prompts attacks from the Russians:

Führer Ursula is mobilising everyone to militarise Europe again. (L’antidiplomatico 2025b)

Europe is preparing something to push the US into aggression towards Russia. Europe and the UK want this whole thing [Ukrainian war] to continue. The way Zelenskyy was received in London, after the scandal in Washington, indicates that they want to raise the stakes and are preparing something to push the [Trump] administration into aggressive actions against Russia. (Sputnik Georgia 2025a)

The presence of NATO troops on Ukrainian soil, under any flag and in any capacity, would be a threat to Russia. Russia would not allow the presence of NATO military personnel as peacekeepers under any circumstances. (TASS New Agency 2025b)

Seven articles concerning the announcement are published within the next two days, all of which frame the E.U. as warmongering and Russophobic, directly slandering Van Der Leyen and Kallas.

### **March 13th: Special Envoy Witkoff travels to Moscow**

Wtikoff’s travels to hand deliver a U.S. 30 day ceasefire proposal to Putin. While he said he agreed with the plan in principle, he countered with a list of impossible demands, a recurring strategy. These include Ukraine halting any training or troop mobilization and a cessation of any foreign aid during the ceasefire. Three subsequent Russian articles focused on framing Zelenskyy and Europe as the obstacles to peace:

Trump remains deeply sceptical of Zelenskyy's ability to deliver on any agreement. The Ukrainian president's credibility has been severely undermined, and his capacity to negotiate on behalf of his country's political elite is far from certain. But unlike Zelenskyy, Putin is negotiating from a position of strength, which makes any agreement far more complex. The days when the West could dictate terms to Russia are long over, and Trump likely understands that his leverage with Moscow is limited. (rt.com 2025b)

There is no doubt that Macron, Starmer and their ilk, proposing crazy plans to 'confront Russia' and send 'peacekeepers' to Ukraine, understand all the risks perfectly well. They are simply trying to disrupt any peace process, continue the war in Ukraine with someone else's hands (placing the responsibility on [Russia], of course) and drag out the time until political changes in the US, after which they will be able to hide behind Uncle Sam's back again. (Kornilov 2025)

The UK is interested in disrupting the normalisation of relations between Russia and the United States, and negotiations on a peaceful settlement in Ukraine. In this regard, London is provoking an escalation of the situation in the Baltics. (ABC MEDIA 2025)

The majority of the twelve subsequently published articles directly slander Europe or Zelenskyy and speak positively of the U.S.

### **March 18th: Trump and Putin call for a second time**

Trump ultimately failing to convince Putin to sign his ceasefire agreement. The White House later stated that Russia agreed to halt attacks on energy *and* infrastructure targets: the Kremlin retorted that it had agreed to cease attacking "energy infrastructure." (Kent et al. 2025b)

Russian disinformation quickly responds to place the onus on Ukraine:

The temporary cessation of strikes by the Russian Armed Forces on Ukrainian infrastructure will be a test for Kyiv in the matter of fulfilling the agreements reached in the negotiations between Moscow and Washington. If the new agreements on a partial ceasefire are observed, the next stage could be its complete cessation on Easter or May 9.... Ukraine, of course, will be in shock, and Europe's reaction remains an open question. But serious agreements have been reached between Russia and the United States. (NEWS.RU 2025)

Trump and Zelensky call the following day, which allegedly discussed the Putin discussion.

(Radford 2025) Russian articles continue to try and delegitimize Europe and Zelenskyy while framing Trump and Putin as peacemakers:

The Kremlin's key demand is the immediate stopping of American military and intelligence assistance to Ukraine. De facto, it means a capitulation for Kyiv. [The Trump-Putin talk] smells like a second Yalta. (Pravda Polska 2025g)

The talk is likened to the Yalta conference of 1945, which laid out the foundations of the post Second-World War order.

### **March 21st: Major Drone attack on Odessa**

The vital Ukrainian port was savaged by a large scale drone attack by the Russians, completely subverting the previous week's ceasefire discussions. The attack killed three and targeted civilian infrastructure, but notably the typical pattern of false flag accusations does not surface in Russian articles (Radford 2025). Instead articles focus on fictitious NATO warplans:

EU countries are trying to disrupt Russia-US negotiations on resolving the Ukraine war, at any cost, even by considering the deployment of troops. Both London and Paris are now interested in laying the foundations for their involvement, if not in the Ukrainian settlement, then at least in establishing the status quo. Satellite states such as Poland are being used for this purpose, forming a kind of armed alliance in Eastern Europe outside NATO. This is intended not only to assist the Kyiv regime with arms supplies, but also with personnel, and these 'peacekeepers' could turn into additional reinforcements for the Ukrainian Armed Forces to carry out aggression against Donbas and Novorossiia. (tass.ru 2025b)

### **March 23rd-24th: The second Saudi Arabian negotiations**

The second round of negotiations occur, initially between the U.S. and Ukraine. Russian articles respond by attacking Zelenskyy, the U.S. and Europe:

The US administration seemingly started to realise that the Ukrainian leadership is not mentally sane. The team of psychopaths in Kyiv threatens the prospects of the Nobel prize award and third presidential term for Donald Trump. Trump is starting to understand that he only has reasonable and unproblematic communication with Russia and that the best way to put an end to conflict is to not hamper the Russians doing their work in Ukraine. (RIA Novosti 2025c)

The Russian delegation purports another list of impossible demands, agreeing to demilitarize the Black Sea only if sanctions are unilaterally lifted (Radford 2025). Trump later accuses Russia of delaying the end to the war. (Kent et al. 2025a)

### **March 26th: The “Coalition of the Willing” meets**

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Secretary General Rutte, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Turkish Vice President Cevdet Yılmaz and Zelensky travel to join France’s President Emmanuel Macron for the third summit in Paris (Radford 2025). A day later they announce that no sanctions will be lifted on Russia (Kent et al. 2025b). The propagandists erupt in a firestorm:

Five years after the COVID pandemic, the EU has presented another “economic recovery plan” – this time, in the form of militarisation. The European economy is greatly suffering from the lack of Russian commodities and increased Chinese competition. In this situation, the best investment of credit money for Europe is war. (Pravda Polska 2025f)

The main task of Starmer and Macron in the Ukrainian context is not to be, but to look: meaningful, decisive, impressive. To pretend that peace in Ukraine depends on them. On the one hand, to prevent it from being achieved, and, on the other, to join Trump so that, God forbid, they are not forgotten. Both the White House and the Kremlin understand perfectly well that without the US, Europe is of little use militarily... Based on [the coalition’s] results, it will be possible to judge with a greater degree of confidence the success or failure of the entire European “enterprise” in the form of military and political encumbrance with Ukraine. (russtrat.ru 2025b)

Further articles conflate Europe with a revival of Nazism and directly reference sanctions in multiple articles (News.am 2025a).

### **March 28th: Russia strikes Dnipro, killing four citizens**

A Russian strike kills four civilians, which leads to both sides levying accusations. (Radford 2025) Russian articles accuse Ukraine of violating the moratorium on striking energy infrastructure:

The Ukrainian Armed Forces launched a double strike on the Sudzha GIS, using HIMARS rockets, the Russian Defence Ministry reported. There is reason to believe that the guidance and targeting of the strikes was carried out through French satellite systems, and the input of coordinates and launch was carried out by British specialists. The command was given from London. (Sputnik South Ossetia 2025)

Despite the Kyiv regime's statements about not striking energy facilities, the Ukrainian Armed Forces continued to attack the energy infrastructure of the Russian Federation. The ongoing deliberate attacks by the Ukrainian Armed Forces on Russian energy facilities demonstrate the Kyiv regime's complete inability to agree on any of its obligations regarding the settlement of the conflict in Ukraine. (Sputnik Armenia 2025b)

These accusations exist within a context of several Russian strikes, all of which targeted civilian and energy infrastructure. The perpetrator of the Sudzha attack has not been confirmed, leaving the possibility open of a Russian false flag. (Reuters Staff 2025a) Rhetorically the articles represent a repeated strategy to project war crimes onto Ukraine that Russia committed.

### **March 31st: E.U. makes Joint-Declarations**

The E.U. responded to continued Russian infrastructure strikes and moratorium violations by citing the Kremlin directly: “We call on Russia to stop its delaying tactics and reciprocate by agreeing without delay, as Ukraine has done, to an immediate unconditional ceasefire on equal terms and implementing it fully.” (Ministère de 2025) Russian propagandists responded with an avalanche of anti-E.U. rhetoric:

Today's summit of the "coalition of the willing" in Paris marks a complete and final shift in Western Europe's tactics on Ukraine crisis. There will be war. (Sputnik Kazakhstan 2025b)

The European elites have set the course for the Fourth Reich. European leaders are trying to solve the situation of a clear defeat in Ukraine. The idea is simple: to intimidate the people of Europe with “scary” Russia and force them to agree to the EU's transformation into something similar to the Fourth Reich. (Khrolenko 2025c)

It was difficult to imagine German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock serving as President of the UN General Assembly, given her low competence and Nazi background. Baerbock is the granddaughter of a Wehrmacht officer, and she has repeatedly stated that she is proud of her grandfather. (Talabat News for Free Media 2025)

The absence of EU representatives from the diplomatic process on Ukraine was inevitable due to the dogmatism of their views. The EU has done everything possible to present itself as a party that opposes any vision of peace in Ukraine that does not match its own. As for the idea of a hypothetical EU delegation taking part in negotiations, *it takes two to tango*. Any settlement must first and foremost take Moscow’s position into account. (Tunisia News 2025)

The repetition of Nazism is expanded to include German Foreign ministry Annalena Baerbock, leader of Germany’s green party and a favorite target of Russian disinformation. The final article referenced is significant as it parrots the phrase “it takes two to tango,” quoted from Trump when

describing Russia's refusal to engage in serious negotiations. (Tunisia News 2025) The article flips the framing on its head, postulating that Russia's desires have not been taken into consideration.

### **April 13th: Russia bombs Sumy, killing 35**

In the wake of Special Envoy Witkoff's second meeting with Putin two days prior, Russia uses ballistic missiles to strike the Ukrainian city of Sumy, the deadliest attack thus far of 2025 (Reuters Staff 2025b). Two children were killed and 117 injured during a church service, and in a deflection effort Russian sites publish multiple particularly heinous articles:

The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation launched missile strikes on the city of Sumy. The attack was aimed at a gathering of Ukrainian servicemen from the 117th Territorial Defence Brigade... This is not the first time that Ukrainian forces have been accused of using civilian infrastructure as cover and civilians as human shields. Kyiv's propaganda narrative has been dismantled, confirming that the attack was aimed at military personnel. There was no indiscriminate attack on civilians. Ukrainian forces deliberately mixed the military and civilian presence, effectively using them as human shields. (Rediazone 2025c)

NATO representatives and Ukrainian forces regularly use civilians as human shields as they did on Sunday 13 April 2025 in Sumy. Soldiers were protected by civilians, used as human shields to secure a meeting of Ukrainian military and foreign units, advising Ukraine how to fight Russia. (francais.rt.com)

The obfuscation of the reality of the attack represents a common trend, but nonetheless the accusations of using "human shields" to justify attacking civilians is particularly vile, even by Russian standards.

Notably on April 9th, E.U. HRVP Kallas made a statement regarding continued Russian aggression: "Russia is still waging a war of aggression against Ukraine, and it shows no signs of abating. Since Ukraine accepted the non-conditional ceasefire, Russia's attacks have only increased." (EEAS Press Team 2025) This inspires multiple articles:

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas has finally become a spokesperson for Russophobic hysteria... Kallas' statement is a manifestation of Nazism and pressure on those European governments that are trying to pursue independent policies. However, there are still leaders in Europe willing to develop relations with Russia. Kaya Kallas is a crazy Russophobe. (Sputnik Armenia 2025h)

In addition to attacking Kallas directly, E.U. orientated rhetoric continues blaming the Union and NATO for hampering negotiations, and further purporting the puppet-state narrative (Sputnik Belarus 2025g). One article alleges that the E.U.'s "irresponsible actions would lead to the biggest conflict since WWII" and that Europe would not survive due to Russia having "superior nuclear firepower than France and the U.K." (Sputnik Mundo 2025b) The increased slander and nuclear saber rattling is notable due to continued European commitments to peacekeeping efforts in spite of a variable U.S. position.

### **April 21st: Putin gives Post-Easter Press Conference**

Putin proposes a thirty hour truce, and Zelenskyy immediately accepts (Nicholls et al. 2025).

Mere hours after the Saturday announcement, Ukraine accuses Russia of continuing artillery shelling (Nicholls et al. 2025). Putin directly accuses Ukraine of the same:

The hostilities have been resumed, as we said in the beginning when we announced the ceasefire. We are always positive about a ceasefire, and this is why this initiative was suggested. Especially on the Holy Easter... Regarding the proposal to refrain from striking civilian infrastructure targets – this matter requires thorough examination.

Take, for example, the widely reported strike by our Armed Forces on the congress centre of Sumy University, I think. Is this a civilian facility or not? It is civilian. However, an award ceremony was held there for those who committed crimes in the Kursk Region – both AFU (the Armed Forces of Ukraine) units and nationalist formations. These are individuals we consider criminals, who deserved the punishment for their actions in the border areas, including the Kursk Region. They got that punishment. The strike was carried out precisely to punish them. So, is this a civilian facility or not? Yet the regime exploits such civilian sites.

Or the strike delivered by our Armed Forces in the Odessa region just days ago. This targeted a small residential area approximately 82 kilometres from Odessa. What was this site? An agricultural facility, agricultural hangars. However, the Kyiv authorities, alongside foreign supervisors and assistants, had organised (...) not only production but also testing of a new missile system there. Hence, the strike was delivered. Is this a civilian facility? It is civilian. But it was used for military purposes. (President of Russia 2025c)

Putin doubled down on his propagandists' narratives that the warcrimes were actually attacks on combatants, which has been subsequently disproved. He avoids addressing the Easter ceasefire accusations, and finishes the interview by postulating a further Kremlin narrative that Europe wants

to “continue the war to the last Ukrainian,” implying that the state is merely a puppet and fodder for Western Russophobic interests (President of Russia 2025c).

### **April 23rd: U.S. issues its “Ultimatum” proposal**

Following negotiations by Special Envoy Witkoff and European officials on April 17th, the U.S. announces a ceasefire proposal (Reuters Staff 2025c). The plan details de facto recognition of Crimea, Luhansk and the Donbas as Russian territories, with Ukraine regaining territory in the Kharkiv Oblast (Reuters Staff 2025c). The U.S. would rescind sanctions in place since 2014 due to the invasion of Crimea (Reuters Staff 2025c). Ukraine would be able to pursue E.U. membership but not join NATO, and be afforded unspecified security guarantees (Reuters Staff 2025c). Neither side accepts the deal. Russian propagandists respond predictably:

Ukraine’s European-backed peace terms smell of sabotage, and are seemingly geared towards continuing the conflict for the foreseeable future. The Ukrainian plan isn’t even a real peace proposal, basically demanding an unconditional surrender of Russia. Ukraine’s terms include demands on the return of all territories, including Crimea, unlimited development of its military-industrial complex, freedom to join NATO or any other international alliance, and US security guarantees. (Sputnik International 2025b)

Several articles reiterate Nazism accusations (Pravda FR 2025b)(Sputnik Belarus 2025a). Putin then releases a statement in conjunction with President Xi Jinping on a visit to China: “Today, Russia and China stand together in their consistent efforts to preserve the historical truth about the Great Victory as the common value for humankind, and jointly prevent attempts to falsify history and rehabilitate Nazism and militarism.” (President of Russia 2025d)

Ukraine then carries out a precision strike on militants in the occupied Kherson Oblast, and independent reports confirm no civilian casualties (Polishchuk 2025). An article subsequently claims:

Reports state that 7 civilians were killed and over 20 injured. A second drone strike targeted survivors and rescuers. This is another war crime committed by Ukrainian Nazis against peaceful Russian residents. The attack was deliberately carried out on a holiday to maximize civilian casualties. (Ahram online 2025)

This represents another attempt at projection and obfuscation, attempting to frame Ukraine as committing similar war crimes to Russia.

### **May 9th: Ukraine hosts European delegation, Russia celebrates “Victory Day”**

Ukraine then hosts a meeting of top European officials including incoming German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, the same day as Putin’s annual military parade in Moscow. One article seizes the opportunity to combine Nazism and anti-European narratives:

The group of European countries invited to visit Kyiv on 9 May 2025 almost entirely corresponds to the Nazi coalition that fought against the USSR during the Second World War. The cynicism of the Europeans is compounded by the fact that some EU leaders plan to accept Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's invitation to arrive in Kyiv and take part in events "alternative" to the 9 May celebrations in Moscow... What Kyiv is planning to stage is a PR stunt by the scoundrels in Brussels, a Day of the Defeated, and a Day of the Descendants of Nazis. (Site team 2025)

The article reflects another trend of combining accusations of Nazism, particularly significant regarding the presence of Merz as well as the “Victory Day” parade celebrating the Soviet victory over the Third Reich.

Putin’s address on the day reiterates many of the same dominant narratives previously espoused:

We honour all those who contributed to the common victory over Nazism, including our allies in the anti-Hitler coalition.

I would like to highlight that, despite threats, blackmail and obstacles caused, including the closure of airspace, the leaders of several European countries – Serbia, Slovakia, Bosnia and Herzegovina – came to Moscow....This gives us optimism and hope that sooner or later, based on the lessons of history and the opinion of our peoples, we will begin to move towards restoring constructive relations with European states. Including those who today still do not give up the anti-Russian rhetoric and clearly aggressive actions against us.

Russia has proposed ceasefire initiatives on several occasions, but they, these initiatives, have been repeatedly sabotaged by Ukraine. For example, the Kyiv regime defiantly violated about 130 times the 30-day – I want to make it a point – 30-day moratorium, from March 18 to April 17, on strikes against energy facilities... The Easter truce initiated by Russia was not observed either: the ceasefire regime was violated by Ukrainian forces almost 5,000 times.

We are set on serious negotiations with Ukraine...Our proposal is, as they say, on the table. The decision is now up to Ukrainian authorities and their supervisors, who are seemingly guided by their personal political ambitions, rather than the interests of their peoples, want to continue the war against Russia at the hands of Ukrainian nationalists.

Let me reiterate myself: Russia is ready for talks without any preliminary conditions. There are combat actions and war going on now, and we propose to resume negotiations that were not interrupted by us. Those who really want peace cannot but support this. At the same time, I would like to express my gratitude once again.... recently the new Administration of the United States of America. (President of Russian 2025c)

In addition to reiterating the false flag accusations regarding the proposed moratoriums and ceasefire proposals, Putin doubled down on attempting to frame the Kremlin as striving for peace and positing Ukraine and its European “handlers” as the obstacles to negotiations.

## Chapter 5: Thematic Analysis

As initially outlined in chapter three, Russian disinformation provides insight into the Kremlin's strategic goals as well as concerns surrounding wartime developments. This is elucidated in both the frequency and ferocity of narratives appearing in certain articles, and reveals concerns of Russian leadership when analyzed in a temporal context in relation to broader events within the war. Due to the frequency of articles published in the wake of significant developments external to Russian participation, namely European summits and negotiations between Ukraine and the U.S., the majority of disinformation in the 2025 context is post-factum in nature. This is observable via the responsive nature of publications.

This chapter evaluates patterns in the 2025 disinformation in contrast to earlier periods. The chapter's sub-sections discuss three categories of disinformation. Post-factum refers to the highest frequency, published in a retaliatory and defensive nature to ongoing developments. In contrast preemptive disinformation works in concert with specific strategic objectives, typically coordinated with kinetic and diplomatic actions, epitomizing the nature of "hybrid" warfare. The final section is notably less specific, referring to more generalized narratives which still function to build the alternative strategic reality that Russia has sought to establish. The sub-narratives within each section are discussed thematically rather than chronologically, and connections and combinations between them are highlighted to elucidate strategic rhetorical objectives. Ultimately, the overwhelming majority of post-factum orientated publications indicates disinformation has become a primarily defensive instrument for the Kremlin, in contrast to earlier periods.

### 5.1 Numerical Frequency of Narratives

The simplest yet arguably most effective method to discern strategic concerns is to evaluate the frequency certain topics surface in disinformation. As displayed in chapter two, the most common subjects which surface are Ceasefire negotiations (58%), Neo-Nazism (35%), Russophobia

(34%) and War Crimes (21%). It is self-evident why negotiations are the most prevalent theme as Russia seeks to continue the war as long as possible to secure as much territory as possible, and in the event of its conclusion place itself in the most advantageous position to negotiate.

Neo-Nazism is the most frequently employed narrative in Russian disinformation, levied primarily against the nation of Ukraine but also more broadly at Europe and its political leaders. Accusing Ukraine of “Nazism” is the primary narrative through which Russia has justified its invasions in 2014 and 2022, which combines with sub-narratives of cultural genocide. Russia uses accusations of Nazism to liken the heinous crimes committed by the Nazis during the second world war with its fabrication that Ukraine is committing a genocide against Russian speakers within its borders. To Ukrainians this claim is ludicrous; while Ukrainian is the official language of the country, Russian is spoken at an extremely widespread rate, effectively the unofficial second language of the nation. Thusly the notion that Ukraine is committing a genocide against Russian speakers is absurd - this would represent more than a third of its population. (Translators without borders 2022)

There is a notable caveat regarding this narrative. Russia seeks to exploit that certain Ukrainian militias which have fought defensively through the invasions have ties to right-wing extremism. Most famous among these is the “Azov Battalion,” a far-right extremist militia founded in the wake of the 2014 seizure of Crimea to directly combat Russian sponsored separatists groups in the eastern regions. The group was labelled a terrorist organization by the U.S. in 2019 due to Nazi iconography and its ultranationalist views. (Goncharenko 2022) Thusly Russian disinformation attempts to associate the militia and other similar groups with the majority of Ukraine, when in reality they represent an extreme minority. (Goncharenko 2022) Ironically the Azov battalion, despite being Ukrainian nationalists predominantly converse in Russian, a fact conveniently omitted by Kremlin disinformation. (Goncharenko 2022)

The second dominant narrative concerns the term “Russophobia,” which is a blanket accusation employed in defense regarding any criticism Russia has faced due to its actions. This works in concert with sub-narratives concerning NATO, the E.U., sanctions, military support for Ukraine, and particularly against prominent European leaders. Most commonly the term is employed in disinformation responding to European and American sanctions packages and military support for Ukraine, as well as serving as a basis for the fabrication that eastward NATO expansion warranted Russia defend its border by invading Ukraine. Furthermore it serves to reinforce an overarching framing that denotes Russia as a victim of western aggression, and combines with the sub-narrative that Ukraine is not sovereign but rather a “puppet-state” of western powers.

The final prominent overarching theme in the surveyed disinformation concerns War Crimes committed by Russia, as well as levying false accusations of such against Ukraine. Predominantly articles concerning this attempt to obfuscate war crimes committed by Russia, including strikes on civilian targets including infrastructure. These narratives also detail accusations of Ukrainian soldiers using Russian casualties for organ transfers as well as abductions of orphaned children, employment of chemical weapons and cluster munitions, and using civilians as human shields against Russian attacks. The final sub-narrative is partially employed to further obfuscate Russia’s attacks against civilian targets by inciting that Ukrainian and NATO forces deliberately deploy military assets in civilian areas.

## **5.2 Post-Factum Disinformation**

The largest temporally sensitive category of Kremlin sponsored disinformation is post-factum in nature, utilized in retaliatory fashion. The most common narratives respond directly to specific occurrences. These consist of negotiations and discussions, particularly between Trump and Zelensky, as well as developments from European leaders and attempts to divide the two parties.

Disinformation mentioning the United States, and particularly Donald Trump, represents a particularly compelling tight-rope walk. Most articles as well as Putin's statements speak favorably of the new administration, particularly from January through mid-March. Putin's January 24th comments regarding Trump's 2020 "stolen" election are particularly interesting; while he reiterates Trump's lie of election interference, he suggests that there would likely still have been a "Ukrainian crisis" in 2022 (President of Russia 2025a). However he still criticizes Trump's first term in which he sanctioned Russia, insisting this was not in the interests of either country (President of Russia 2025a).

Further disinformation concerning the U.S. divides neatly between two camps; either it is favorable when concerning interactions with Putin and Russia, or it is derogatory concerning interactions with Zelensky and the E.U. One article from February 12th paints Putin and Trump's call as productive while also reiterating the "Deep State" and Democratic Party of the U.S. remain the only obstacles to a ceasefire, virtually identical to other accusations leveled at the E.U. (ria.ru 2025) Another article in response to the Trump/Putin call on March 19th denoting it as a "second Yalta" draws an obvious comparison to the summit which shaped the new world order after the Second World War - its reference implies Trump and Putin as the only legitimate negotiators, subverting both Ukraine and Europe. (1tv.ru 2025)

Articles in response to the multiple rounds of negotiations in Saudi Arabia similarly follow this trend. They focus on labeling Zelensky as "not sane," insisting that American diplomats are coming to this realization regarding the second round in March. (Armenia News - news.am 2025) Furthermore several articles attacking the U.S./Ukrainian mineral deal attempt to frame Russia as a more reliable and advantageous trading partner. In Putin's February 24th interview, he explicitly claims that Russia has "significantly larger resources of this kind than Ukraine," going so far as to claim that the captured territories of the Donbas and Luhansk themselves hold the majority of said resources. (President of Russia 2025b) The repeated rhetoric surrounding minerals only surfaces in

the direct aftermath of the developments of the U.S./Ukrainian deal, indicating the Kremlin's desire to subvert Ukraine and indicate to Trump that he should select Russia as a trading partner instead.

Negative narratives concerning the U.S. focus on Special Envoy Kellogg's visits to Ukraine, and reiterating Trumpian rhetoric concerning the "deep state's" influence on the American administration. Kellogg's February 10th visit combines narratives attacking the efficacy of sanctions levied against Russia. (Benitez 2025b) Another article the following day targets Trump's reinstatement of arms supply to Ukraine, which is careful to levy blame against the deep state rather than Trump himself. (Benitez 2025a)

Disinformation concerning the European Union are exclusively negative, but indicate the Kremlin's frustration concerning Europe's willingness to maintain its military and financial support irregardless of the American position. This represents a predictable reactionary pattern; the first meeting on February 3rd features several slanderous articles targeting E.U. leaders, namely Italian President Mattarella. After European leaders express frustration at exclusion from the first round of Saudi talks, an article claims Europe would "go broke" supporting Ukraine without the U.S., clearly aimed to target the European public and undermine public support for Ukraine which remains steadfastly palpable. (Tsukanov 2025c) German Chancellor Merz's announcement on the 22nd of February that he would authorize the transfer of long range Taurus missiles to Ukraine clearly spooked the Kremlin, due to several articles accusing the E.U. of "warmongering" surface the week after.

Narratives targeting the E.U. focus on "warmongering," accusations of Nazism and using Ukraine as a puppet, generalized Russophobia, and character assassination attempts towards prominent leaders. These slanderous narratives represent a retaliatory pattern: Van Der Leyen's remarks affirming support for Ukraine earned her the title "Führer Ursula," especially in the wake of European sanctions and funding pledges. (L'antidiplimatico 2025b) Any sort of discussions regarding peacekeeping after the war to assure Ukraine's continued sovereignty elicit a litany of

attacks that typically denote an untenable threat to Russia. Targeting of E.U. HRVP Kallas after her remarks on April 9th calling out Russian aggression earn her badges of a “crazy Russophobe” and calls for her removal from office, indicating a deep Russian insecurity regarding female European leaders critical of Russia. This trend continues with German Foreign Minister Baerbock, citing that her grandfather was a Nazi and that she is proud of such. Combining character assassination with critical German leaders is a neat way to combine the Nazism narrative with criticizing the E.U.’s support.

### 5.3 Preemptive Disinformation

Preemptive disinformation refers to articles published before or in the immediate aftermath of diplomatic summits or in concert with military actions. Many of the articles published immediately surrounding specific military actions fall into the “false flag” category insofar as they purport alternative narratives obfuscating war crimes. These epitomize the concept of hybrid warfare as they represent a combination of kinetic and information warfare efforts; the kinetic attack is carried out and immediately disinformation contesting the factual nature of the attack is published to create confusion around the reality of the event.

One of the most prominent examples was Russia’s strike on the Chernobyl Nuclear sarcophagus on February 14th. This action was deliberate as it occurred on the same day as the Munich Security conference, a common tactic by Russia to carry out symbolic strikes. On the same day of the attack six separate articles were published accusing Ukraine of a false flag and striking its own territory in order to vilify Russia (Pravda Polska 2025b). The fact that these articles were published the same day as the attack reveals this as a coordinated effort; had Ukraine actually carried out the attack, it would not be plausible that these articles be published with such rapidity. Thus the temporal context of the attack and disinformation is highly suspicious and strongly suggests a coordinated hybrid effort.

Other preemptive disinformation campaigns surfaced surrounding the first round of negotiations in Saudi Arabia. Several articles ahead of the summit focused on positing narratives that Russia had already won the war (RIA Novosti 2025b), that the E.U. would “go broke” supporting Ukraine without the United States (Tsukanov 2025b), and accusing Ukraine of carrying out “terrorist attacks” in European nations in order to hinder negotiations. (Sputnik Georgia 2025b) The first two attempt to strengthen Russia’s position within the negotiations. The final accusation targets domestic European populations and associate Ukraine with separate terror attacks which have occurred in recent years, specifically in Hungary and Slovakia which both contain significant populations which regularly view Russian disinformation outlets.

#### **5.4 Divergent 2025 disinformation patterns**

This section discusses how prominent narratives have evolved throughout the war, and particularly within the context of the new American administration. As previously outlined in chapter II, the dominant overarching narratives of Nazism, Russophobia and cultural genocide have remained at the forefront of the disinformation both before and throughout second Trump administration. This is due to these narratives combining to create the most potent justification for Russia’s invasion, and these narratives have been built up for more than a decade to this point. Additionally narratives concerning western aggression and NATO expansion remain dominant, furthering the justification for the war.

Throughout the conflict the introduction and continuance of specific E.U. narratives have surfaced in the wake of European nations steadily donating more potent weapons to Ukraine’s defense. These have fueled narratives such as the E.U. seeking an “eternal war” in Ukraine, and particularly repeated rhetoric of Europe wanting to fight the war “to the last Ukrainian.” (Newsfront 2025b) This specific article also misconstrues Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen’s remarks that “Peace in Ukraine is more dangerous than ongoing war.” Frederiksen’s remarks echo Italian

president Mattarella's remarks that capitulation to Russia in Ukraine would not only doom the nation to the whims of an oppressive authoritarian regime, but would echo Hitler's 1930s ambitions wherein early capitulation failed to satiate his hunger for territorial domination. Thusly by removing this vital historical context, the disinformation frames these remarks incompletely to paint the E.U. as a warmongering actor that seeks only to use Ukraine as a puppet state to perpetrate "aggression" against Russia.

Divergences from pre-January 2025 are most prominent via the overwhelming focus of ceasefire negotiations and diplomatic summits (58%). This diverges from previous periods throughout the war in which disinformation focused predominantly on furthering strategic narratives justifying Russia's invasion and vilifying Ukraine and the west. Specific sub-themes in both articles and Putin's public appearances elucidate these ongoing trends. The focus on the U.S. in disinformation increases from earlier, being referenced in 49% of articles. Putin specifically mentions Trump nine times in total, tied with the "Kyiv Regime" for the top spot. Furthermore his mentions of "proposed negotiations" (six times) as well as "ceasefire" and "ceasefire" violations (three times respectively), and "blocking talks" once indicate an ongoing focus in the Kremlin leadership's psyche. The disinformation articles echo this; mentions of the E.U. (66%) as an obstacle to a ceasefire, as well as other sub-narratives like "illegitimate statehood" (12%), "puppet-state" (9%) and "deep state" (3%) all as peace obstacles represent significant divergence.

Less frequent but specific keyword mentions also indicate a pattern of evolving disinformation targets within the 2025 context. These include Military Spending/ReArm Europe (13%), "Coalition of the Willing" and Peacekeeping forces (12%), Kaja Kallas (5%), energy infrastructure (3%) and notably critical minerals (3%). While attacking E.U. spending is not new, the specific articles attacking ReArm Europe represent a new trend attempting to construe the plan as unwarranted to domestic European populations. Furthermore peacekeeping forces discussions have increased, subsequently representing a bigger target to Russian propagandists. Energy

infrastructure directly ties to the discussion Trump and Putin had on March 18th, which was immediately violated. Critical minerals represents a response to the U.S./Ukraine minerals deal, which the Kremlin sought to attack as it likely has secured steadfast support for Ukraine militarily from the U.S. despite Putin's ongoing attempts to discount it.

The dominant focus of disinformation shifting to negotiations post-factum in nature elucidates a break compared to previous disinformation before 2025. This indicates that while the Kremlin has still used disinformation as an obfuscatory and preemptive hybrid warfare instrument, the dominance of defensive post-factum rhetoric indicates an evolution as a predominantly retaliatory tool designed to contest developments produced by Ukraine, Europe and the United States. The prevalence of post-factum disinformation further signals increasing concerns from the Kremlin regarding these developments, devoting a significant amount of its information warfare capabilities to downplaying them to maintain its strategic alternative reality. Ultimately this denotes that Russia acknowledges it is being increasingly discounted due to its ongoing belligerent actions, even more so than in the previous periods of the current Ukrainian war. The U.S./Ukrainian minerals deal, continued support from the U.S. administration for Ukraine, and ongoing commitments by the Coalition of the Willing all represent increasingly tangible threats to Russia's tenuous position. The shift to a dominantly post-factum focus represents Russia lashing out at its opponents with decreasing efficacy, and further elucidates its increasingly precarious global standing.

## **Conclusion**

In spite of the robust and widespread disinformation apparatus employed by Russia, the data presented in this thesis indicates that these efforts are decreasing in efficacy. The focus on post-factum narratives within both disinformation articles and Putin's public statements displays increasing trepidation on behalf of the Kremlin concerning its position within negotiations and the conflict as a whole. This is best displayed in post-factum articles published in the wake of developments produced by Ukraine, the U.S. and Europe, as the majority of the disinformation exists to subvert and downplay these events and further reinforce its alternative positions. While the Russian disinformation apparatus still creates and maintains a steadfast hold on the public opinion both within and beyond nations in its sphere of influence, the continuation of the Ukrainian conflict indicates fractures in its grip. Ultimately while its disinformation apparatus remains steadfast, the focus on post-factum disinformation reveals the Kremlin is aware of weaknesses in the alternative strategic reality it has so aggressively attempted to maintain.

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