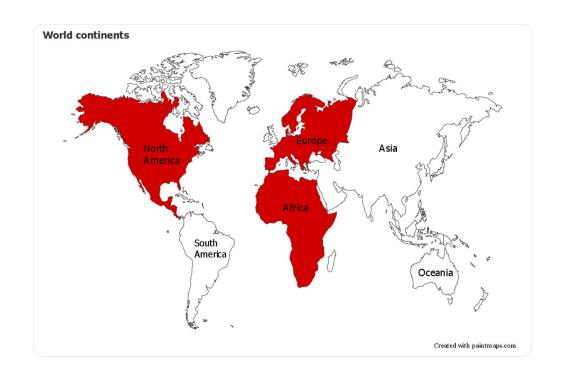


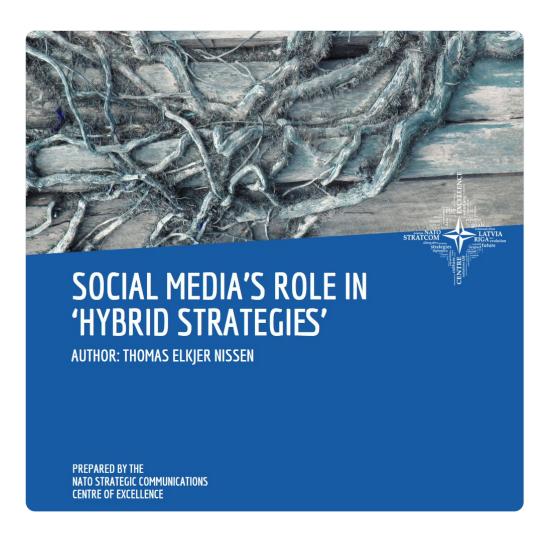
In today's #vatniksoup, I'll talk about hybrid operations in the context of information operations. Hybrid operations are a blend of political warfare and influencing methods like employing troll/bot farms, and spreading fake news, propaganda and disinformation.

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In this thread, I will demonstrate four case studies on how Russian operatives conduct hybrid operations on three different continents. All of them have distinct characteristics, but rely on the same mechanisms, like using social media to spread the message.





Hybrid operations often combine real-world, and orchestrated and pre-planned scenarios with online activities. Sometimes Russia shills attempt to mobilize people for real-life events like protests by inflating these events on social media and fake news sites.

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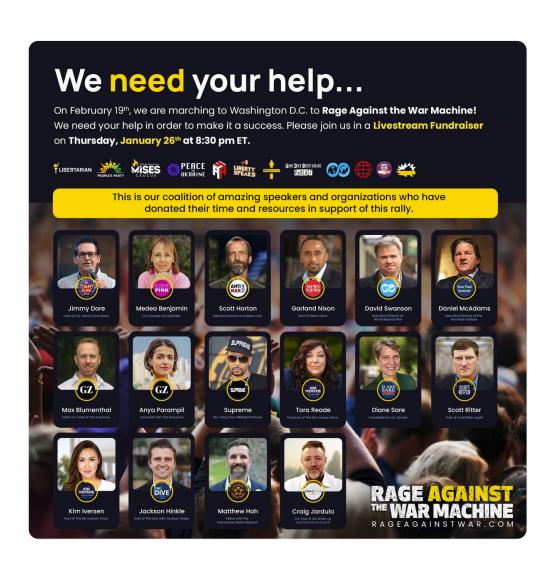
Pro-Kremlin live events that have been inflated on social media rarely draw a big crowd in real life. According to Facebook group, a 2024 protest in Bucharest was supposed to gather over 50 000 people, but finally only the organizer showed up. The 2023 vatnik gathering...

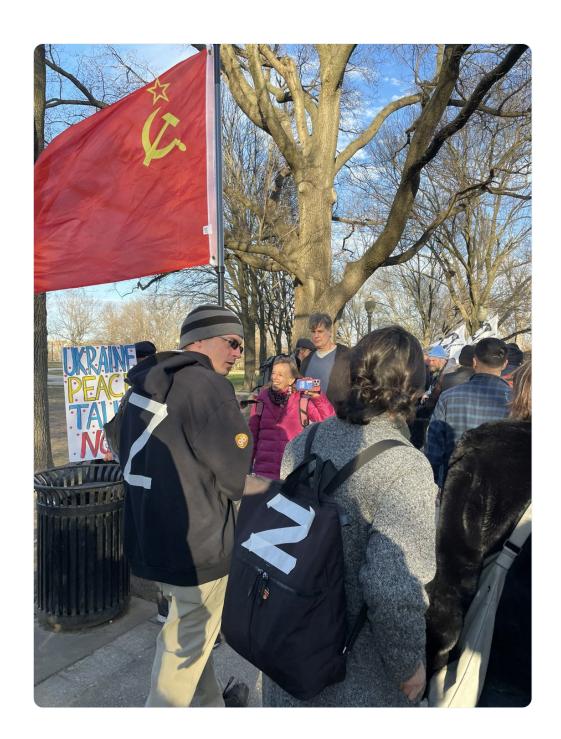
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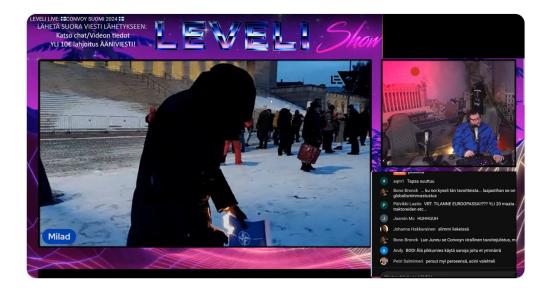


..."Rage Against The War Machine" in DC managed to attract a few hundred people with their massive online campaigning and some well-known speakers & pedophiles. In Finland, a 2024 Convoy gathering (with 0 trucks) was also a total bust, regardless of strong online presence.









In countries like Germany with strong fifth column and relatively strong support for pro-Kremlin parties like AfD, there have been some larger protests which have allegedly been amplified by the Kremlin:

6/21







Maybe one of the most well-known examples of hybrid operations comes from the US - in 2016, a man named Matt Skiber became active in the US political sphere. He was very active in politics and organized events such as "March for Trump" rally in NY. He arranged megaphones, .. 7/21

How Russian Trolls Crept Into the Trump Campaign's Facebook Messages











A Trump campaign rally in Tampa, Fla., in 2016. The campaign's operation in the state received thousands of inquiries about getting involved. Damon Winter/The New York

By Kenneth P. Vogel

March 8, 2018

WASHINGTON — When the message from Matt Skiber arrived in the mailbox of the Facebook account for Donald J. Trump's Florida campaign in early August 2016, it raised no flags, despite its slightly awkward attempts at colloquial American English.

..designed posters, wrote press releases and communicated with other Trump supporters. In reality, Matt Skiber didn't exist - he was a "digital illegal" created by a troll farm employee posing as a Trump supporter. Digital illegals are extremely effective and...

69. On or about August 2, 2016, Defendants and their co-conspirators used the false U.S. persona "Matt Skiber" Facebook account to send a private message to a real Facebook account, "Florida for Trump," set up to assist then-candidate Trump in the state of Florida. In the first message, Defendants and their co-conspirators wrote:

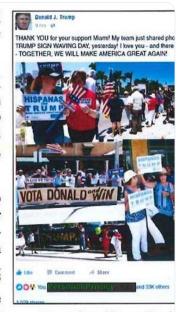
Hi there! I'm a member of Being Patriotic online community. Listen, we've got an idea. Florida is still a purple state and we need to paint it red. If we lose Florida, we lose America. We can't let it happen, right? What about organizing a YUGE pro-Trump flash mob in every Florida town? We are currently reaching out to local activists and we've got the folks who are okay to be in charge of organizing their events almost everywhere in FL. However, we still need your support. What do you think about that? Are you in?

... very cheap assets that can be deployed and organized quickly. They are also easily augmented with the help of troll/bot farms, and for this reason Russia has been investing heavily in them for over a decade. In digital warfare, Russia has been ahead of the West,...

A November 7, 2016 post from the IRA-controlled Twitter account @Pamela_Moore13 was retweeted by Donald J. Trump Jr. 103

On September 19, 2017, President Trump's personal account @realDonaldTrump responded to a tweet from the IRA-controlled account @10_gop (the backup account of @TEN_GOP, which had already been deactivated by Twitter). The tweet read: "We love you, Mr. President!" 104

IRA employees monitored the reaction of the Trump npaign and, later, Trump Administration officials to their ets. For example, on August 23, 2016, the IRA-trolled persona "Matt Skiber" Facebook account sent a sage to a U.S. Tea Party activist, writing that "Mr. mp posted about our event in Miami! This is great!" IRA employee included a screenshot of candidate mp's Facebook account, which included a post about the gust 20, 2016 political rallies organized by the IRA.



Screenshot of Trump Faceb Account (from Matt Skibe



...and social media sites haven't found an effective way to counter them. In the past, they've been used in large, polarizing events like Black Lives Matter and climate change protests and COVID-19 lockdowns to provoke civil unrest and infighting, and divide societies.

VIRTUAL HATRED: HOW RUSSIA TRIED TO START A RACE WAR IN THE UNITED STATES

William J. Aceves*

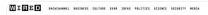
During the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the Russian government engaged in a sophisticated strategy to influence the U.S. political system and manipulate American democracy. While most news reports have focused on the cyber-attacks aimed at Democratic Party leaders and possible contacts between Russian officials and the Trump presidential campaign, a more pernicious intervention took place. Throughout the campaign, Russian operatives created hundreds of fake personas on social media platforms and then posted thousands of advertisements and messages that sought to promote racial divisions in the United States. This was a coordinated propaganda effort. Some Facebook and Twitter posts denounced the Black Lives Matter movement and others condemned White nationalist groups. Some called for violence. To be clear, these were posts by fake personas created by Russian operatives. But their effects were real. The purpose of this strategy was to manipulate public opinion on racial issues and disrupt the political process. This Article examines Russia's actions and considers whether they violate the international prohibitions against racial discrimination and hate speech.





Today, this "digital fifth column" promotes and augments various conspiracy theories and strongly polarizing social phenomena, for example the US border dispute and Texas "secession" in the US and farmer protests and anti-Israel rallies in Europe.

11/21



DAVID GILBERT POLITICS FEB 7, 2024 11:42 A

Russia Is Boosting Calls for 'Civil War' Over Texas Border Crisis

An all-encompassing Russian disinformation campaign is using everything from bots to lifestyle influencers to powerful state-run media to sow division in th United States.



PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION: WIRED STAFF: GETTY IMAGES



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AI-Generated Deepfake Targets Texas Governor Amid Immigration Standoff

 $A \ doctored \ video \ falsely \ suggesting \ that \ Texas \ Governor \ Greg \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ Abbott \ expressed \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ admiration \ for \ Putin \ circulates \ on \ admiration \ for \ putin \ circulates \ on \ admiration \ for \ putin \ circulates \ on \ admiration \ for \ putin \ circulates \ admiration \ admiration \ for \ putin \ circulates \ admiration \ admiratio$ social media amid a dispute over immigration policies.

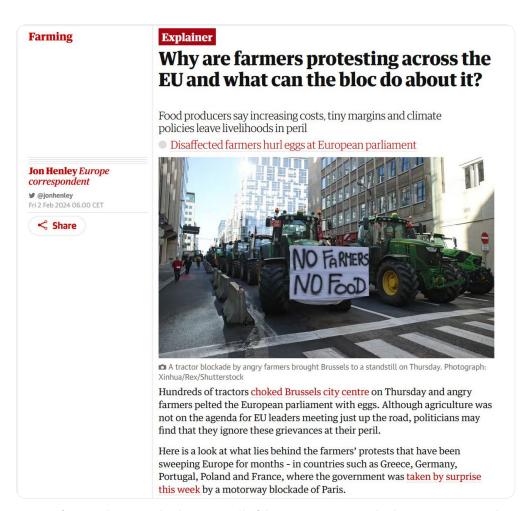


In an era where artificial intelligence (Al) has pervaded our lives, including the realm of information dissemination, a doctored video has surfaced on popular social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, $and \ Tik Tok. \ The \ video \ misrepresents \ the \ words \ of \ Texas \ Governor \ Greg \ Abbott, \ falsely \ implying \ that \ he$ expressed admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin. The manipulated video clip has emerged in the midst of a heated debate between Governor Abbott and the Biden administration over immigration policies.





In the second example, we'll go to Europe and focus on the farmer protests that have been going around Europe for some years now. The motivation for these protests is genuine - the farmers are genuinely concerned about their income and the reasons for this are manifold.



But it's safe to say that Russia has been using all of their resources to provoke the protest. For example, @molfar_agency exposed the Polish protest leader as a member of a pro-Russian party, and TVN24 exposed one of the protesters to be connected with the Russian embassy.



David Icke ② @davidicke · 9 u

It's not about you, Eva. Please. It's about THEM.



Here to support the German farmers.



We're witnessing nothing short of an uprising here of normal, hard workin...



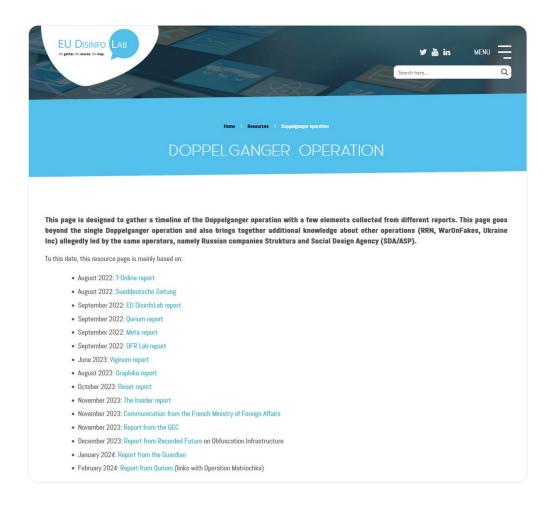


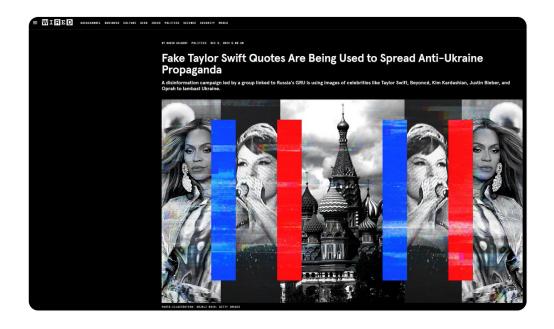




In 2022, Russia launched a huge disinformation campaign called Doppelgänger. The group produces video and photos of staged events and then tries to make them go viral on social media with the use of troll farms and fake news blogs. The group relies on fake websites...

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...that mimic the appearance of large news media, including Der Spiegel, Fox News and The Washington Post. In May 2023, @kevinshakir et al. exposed that the group tried to create fake anti-Ukraine/NATO protests using paid actors/agents:





An article in the fake Bild site, saying "Olaf Scholtz has betrayed the German economy."

The fake websites share some common properties:

- The front page of the cloned websites redirects to the authentic media.
- Fake articles focus on the energy crisis, war refugees, Ukraine and the military conflict.
- Videos included in the articles are located on the same hosting server and and not streamed from a third party platform.
- Videos included in the articles share name format and metadata.
- The fake websites often use the subdomains redir, videos, m and news.
- $\bullet \ \, \text{The fake domains also use the form } \textbf{www-t-online-de}. \\ \text{tonline[]cfd } \textbf{www-spiegel-de}. \\ \text{spiegel[]fun} \\$
- The fake websites remotely load assets from the original websites.

BLACKED OUT

Fake protesters appear in several places: Russian intelligence is linked to ten actions in Europe

Two men in Saint Petersburg spread notices about fake demonstrations in European cities to hundreds of thousands on social media, mapping shows.



The ten fake actions were held in Paris, Brussels, The Hague and Madrid and then spread on social media by two North African men. (Photo: © Graphics by Frederik Storm)

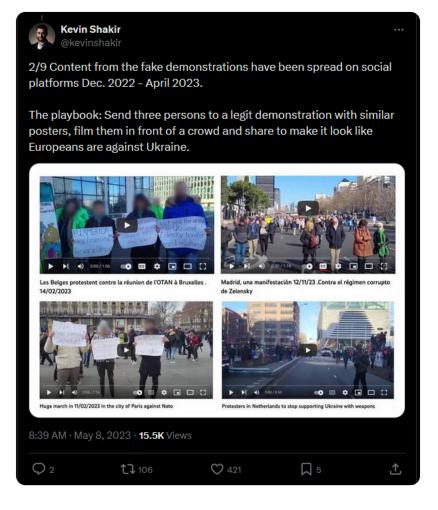
2) READ UP

DICTIONARY

A TEXT

OF Kevin Shakir Frederik Hugo Ledegaard Thim Lisbeth Quass Niels Fastrup

8 MAY 2023 | MORE THAN 30 DAYS OLD



Doppelgänger operatives were also involved in painting graffiti of Stars of David on buildings around Paris after the 7th Oct 2023 Hamas terrorist attack. These graffiti were then shared around social media and fake news media to further fuel the antisemitic sentiment.



Russia has poured massive amount of money into a project called Maidan-3. This 1,5 billion USD project aims to propagate anti-Ukrainian sentiments online, and it will culminate in Mar-Apr of 2024. One of the main goals of the project is to stop military aid to Ukraine.



Quote: "The special operation Maidan-3 will culminate in March-May 2024, and in the coming weeks, the enemy will cease all efforts to spread narratives harmful to global security and incite conflicts – both within Ukraine and in other parts of the world where Ukraine is effectively supported.

The campaign methodology is traditional for the Russian special services: to question the legitimacy of government decisions made in Ukraine after 20 May, to instil fear and despair, to artificially clash civilians against the military, to foment quarrels with our allies, and to spread all kinds of conspiracy theories in society.

This is happening in the context of the Russian Federation's public statements about the development of new types of superweapons, which the Russians claim will ensure Russia's technical superiority over the West for the next decade. This is done with the intention to convey that resisting Russia's goals in Ukraine is dangerous for the world, and Russia will pressure other countries to engage in direct dialogue on Ukraine without our participation.

Furthermore, the Russians will use their own agents of influence in Ukraine and around the world to organise various protests, deliberately undermining the process of exchanging prisoners of war.

In Africa, Russia has used PMC Wagner/Africa Corps for their hybrid operations. They've conducted hybrid operations at least in Central African Republic, Mali and Sudan. In CAR, they even vandalized a French brewery to start their own:



 $\underline{https://www.youtube.com/embed/_LwLbPDvM-c}$

Russia's Lies in the Central African Republic

Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem falsely portrays the Wagner Group as playing a positive role in nations such as CAR. Although the Wagner Group has been deployed in CAR since 2018, Russian officials still refer to the group's forces as "Russian instructors" when discussing the group's activities, a narrative that continued after Prigozhin's death in August 2023. Russian officials quoted in Russian state-funded media claim that Russian instructors have "saved" CAR and are "strengthening peace and stability" to bring a "lasting peace." The U.S.-sanctioned Officer's Union of International Security (OUIS or "COSI") serves as a front company for Wagner Group operations in CAR. Its U.S.-sanctioned director, Aleksandr Ivanov, justifies Wagner's presence in CAR, saying "The fighters of the Wagner Group remain in CAR, so the inhabitants of the Republic can sleep peacefully! ...the Republic has become a safe place for the life and development of the local population."

PARIS/DAKAR, June 21 (Reuters) - After armed men killed 2 nine Chinese nationals at a gold mine in Central African Republic in March, a video circulated on the internet saying France had secretly ordered the attack and planned to discredit Russian mercenary group Wagner in the country.

In the video, a Central African Republic rebel fighter says "the French want to drive Wagner out of Africa".

The clip rang alarm bells in Paris at a media monitoring unit within the foreign ministry created last year as part of a broad diplomatic strategy to revive ties in France's former African colonies after years of waning influence.

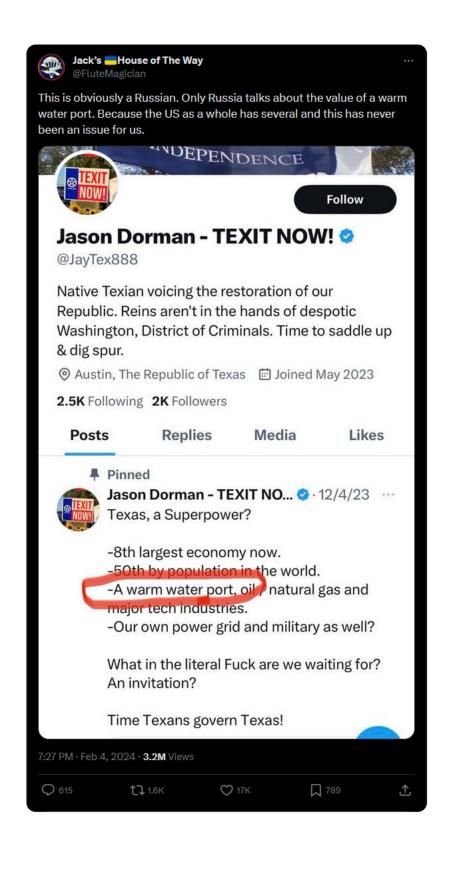
By December 2021, **proof** of Wagner's presence in Mali emerged, even as the Malian government **denied** their presence.

A pro-junta and **pro-Russia** group called **Collectif pour la défense des militaires** (CDM) successfully **lobbied** the junta in April 2022 to **ban** the French government-funded public broadcasters RFI and France 24 from Mali's airwaves. Meanwhile, social networks such as Russosphère **were gaining traction** with posts accusing Ukrainians of "Nazism" and France of modern-day "colonialism."

In August 2022, France completed its **withdrawal of forces** from the country. And in June, the UN Security Council voted to end its peacekeeping mission, MINUSMA, in Mali. Earlier that month, Mali asked the UN peacekeeping force to leave "without delay," citing a "crisis of confidence" between Malian authorities and the UN mission. Later reports would suggest that Wagner helped engineer the UN's departure.



All of these operations are still ongoing in some form: in the US, millions of "Christian BBQ dads" are calling for Texas secession and protection of its warm water ports, in Europe Doppelgänger is trying to create outrage by staging scenarios, hoping they'd go viral,...

















...and Wagner/Africa Corps are trying to overthrow governments and replace them with pro-Kremlin dictators, and at the same time attempt to control the information space in Africa together with massive fake news networks like Russosphère and media networks like Sputnik.

NEWS

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Russia in Africa: How disinformation operations target the continent

1 February 2023

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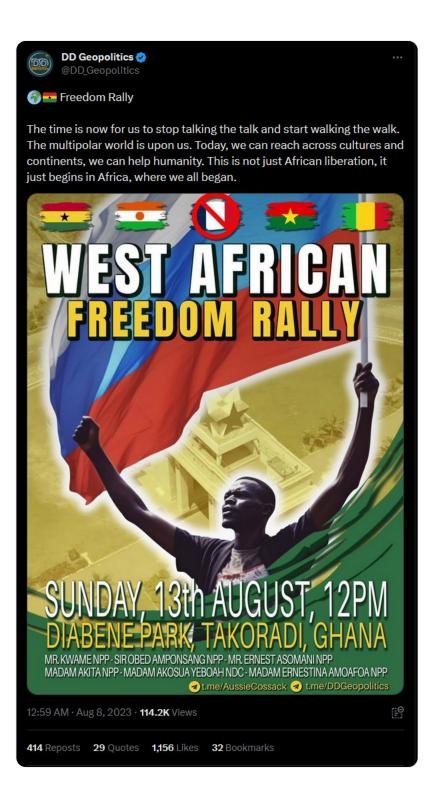
The networks promotes Russia's Wagner mercenaries

By Grigor Atanesian

Global Disinformation Team

A large social network that promotes anti-Western and pro-Kremlin ideas is helping Russia expand its influence at the expense of France in some of its former colonies in Africa.

Called Russosphère (Russian Sphere), typical posts accuse France of modernday "colonialism", eulogise Vladimir Putin, and call the Ukrainian army "Nazis" and "Satanists", echoing the official Russian line.





Overall, the West has been unable to respond and counter these massive campaigns. Once they've been discovered and exposed by outlets like @EUvsDisinfo, @StopFakingNews or BBC Verify, several new ones have already appeared in the social media space.

The Washington Post

WAR IN UKRAINE Verified videos Donbas region Russian combat capabilities HIMARS

Kremlin runs disinformation campaign to undermine Zelensky, documents show

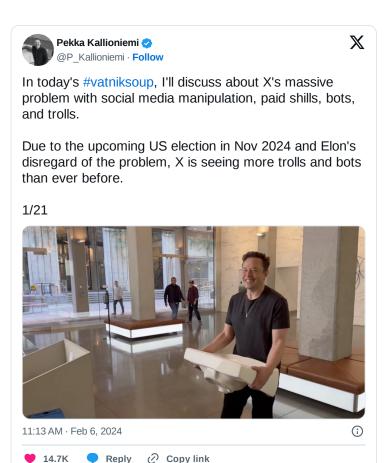




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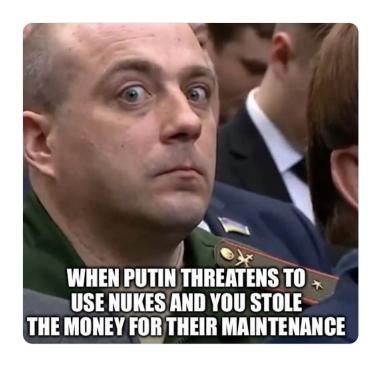




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