

Vatnik Soup @P_Kallioniemi

May 25, 2026 · 14 tweets · [P_Kallioniemi/status/2058899348205768824](#)

In today's Vatnik Soup, we'll introduce Russian propaganda operations around military targets like Starobilsk. For over a decade, the Kremlin has used similar strategies, combining crisis actors, "independent journalists" and fabricated evidence.

1/13



First, let's go back to 2014. Russia funded separatist groups and sent its mercenaries to Donbas, which led to the creation of two puppet states, Donetsk and Luhansk, governed by Russian propagandists and soldiers like Igor Girkin.

2/13



Vatnik Soup 
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In today's #vatnik soup and another edition of "You pronounced this nonsense, not me". Today we're going to talk about the "genocide in Donbas" disinformation and propaganda trope, that's been debunked many times but just refuses to die in the social media sphere.

1/12



6:56 AM · Jan 8, 2023



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Russia's Igor Strelkov: I Am Responsible for War in Eastern Ukraine

By Anna Dolgov
Nov. 21, 2014



The fake genocide was touted as one of the main reasons for Russia's war during the early stages of the full-scale invasion, and the claim was made even by Putin himself. Before his mutiny, late Wagner boss Yevgeny Prigozhin said that all this was fabricated bullshit.

3/13



<https://twitter.com/i/web/status/2058899358926414024>

Prigozhin's disgruntled troll farm employees later reinforced this claim, confirming that the victims of the "genocide" were actually paid actors. Russians even erected statues to "commemorate" the falsified event in a war that they themselves started.

4/13

Victims of “Donbas genocide” were paid actors, Prigozhin’s fired trolls reveal



BY IRYNA VOICHUK

14/07/2023

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Screenshot of report by Russia's state Pervyi Kanal aired on 12 July 2014, showing an actress claiming to be a Donbas local witnessing “crimes” of the Ukrainian Army

Russia is using monuments to peddle misinformation

Statues are not always about memory — they are becoming Moscow's latest weapon

FIONA GREENLAND

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Local pupils gather at the Alley of Angels memorial in Donetsk to remember the children killed since the Donbas conflict began in 2014. Across Russia, occupied Ukraine and far beyond, the Kremlin has been erecting a new generation of monuments © United Russia Party

Fiona Greenland

Published FEB 17 2026

134

On 22 May 2026, Ukrainians struck military drone-related targets in Starobilsk, eastern Ukraine. The area has been under temporary Russian occupation since 2022, and many of its colleges have been repurposed as military academies to train soldiers for the meat grinder.



Ukraine denies Russian claim that drone strike killed civilians in occupied Luhansk Oblast

May 22, 2026 3:55 pm (Updated: May 22, 2026 7:16 pm)

• 3 min read


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by Asami Terajima





Ukrainians struck a dormitory that housed military personnel, which was evident from the school's Telegram channel. Several videos also show how the "college" was used for training drone operators.



 Starobelsk Professional College






NEO-DOZOR at the Zarnitsa 2.0 Start: Patriotism in Action



 The NEO-DOZOR team, representing the Starobelsk Professional College, a state-owned professional military school in the LPR, competed in the municipal stage of the all-Russian military-patriotic game "Zarnitsa 2.0."


 This modern version of the legendary game provided a challenging platform for young people to test their physical prowess, tactical thinking, and team spirit.


 Participation in the municipal stage was an important step in the team's development as citizens. "Zarnitsa 2.0" proves that patriotism is not an abstract concept, but daily discipline, responsibility, and a willingness to act for the common cause.

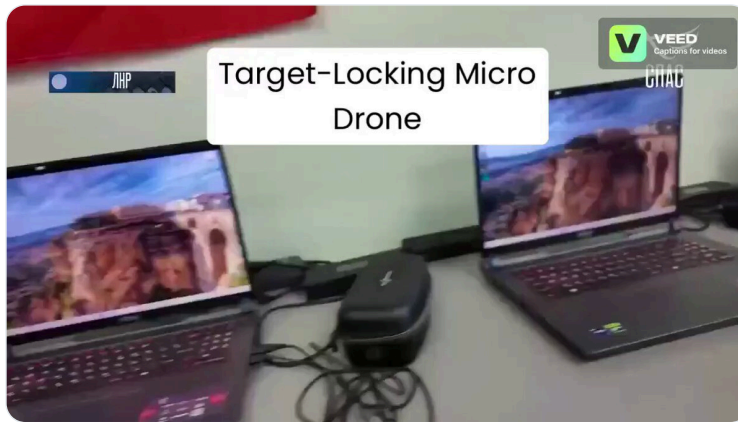
[#MilitaryPatrioticGame](#)
[#MovementOfTheFirst](#)
[#LPRFutureOfTheYoung](#)
[#Zarnitsa2026](#)

 Like
  1

 7

24 Apr





<https://twitter.com/i/web/status/2058899372075520291>

Yet it didn't take the Kremlin long to take advantage of the fog of war. Their first false claim was that "all 21 killed were 14-17 years old children", even though all of the victims were of legal age and most likely had military background.

7/13



Gefallene:

1. Pogrebniutschenko Anna Andrejewna, geb. 01.11.2006
2. Serdjuk Darja Sergejewna, geb. 18.04.2007
3. Prudnikowa Jana Wladimirowna, geb. 11.12.2006
4. Schiwotnikowa Irina Denissowna, geb. 03.12.2006
5. Martimjanowa Jelena Wladimirowna, geb. 06.09.2006
6. Bereschnaja Tatjana Sergejewna, geb. 15.07.2006
7. Kowtun Artjom Sergejewitsch, geb. 02.02.2006
8. Bulgakow Maxim Wiktorowitsch, geb. 03.12.2005
9. Postowez Alexander Alexandrowitsch, geb. 18.12.2004
10. Fen Sofija Olegowna, geb. 30.03.2007
11. Tschekrygina Alina Alexandrowna, geb. 27.04.2007

Aufenthaltort unbekannt:

1. Butkowa Alexandra Wjatscheslawowna, 17.01.2007
2. Brjuchowezkaja Alissa Wladimirowna, 16.01.2007
3. Wassilenko Anastassija Alexejewna, 18.07.2007
4. Protasowa Alexandra Alexejewna, 11.11.2007
5. Kowalsko Anastassija Andrejewna, 08.05.2007
6. Gerassimenko Taisija Pawlowna, 18.05.2008
7. Saratujtschenko Wiktorija Olegowna, 21.09.2007
8. Daschenko Weronika Alexandrowna, 15.09.2006
9. Tereschtschenko Oksana Alexejewna, 14.09.2003
10. Kowpak Alexandra Alexandrowna, 03.06.2007

NAFO fella @TankerFella (follow them!) also found out that several photos of the victims were recycled from other sources. This is nothing new. For example, they once used a photo of famous gay porn star Billy Herrington on one of their memorial plaques.

In fact, the photos show:

Top row (left): a girl whose selfie was taken from old personal profiles on social media (such as Pinterest) from the past.

Center of the top row: Katerina Yuryevna, a Ukrainian blogger. Her black-and-white selfie was also copied from open sources.

Top row (right): a girl next to a sculpture, whose photo was taken from casting platforms.

Bottom row (from left): Boris Kipriyanovich (“the little guy with Mars”). This is a very famous photo on the internet showing a Russian boy who gained notoriety in the media in the early 2000s for his claims about a “past life on Mars.” The photo of his children has nothing to do with current events.

Middle of the bottom row: a young man from a Scouting organization. This is an original photo of a member of “Plast” (the Ukrainian National Scouting Organization), taken during one of the official camps.

Bottom row (right): a photo of a girl wearing a light jacket, taken from Ukrainian online platforms.

Propaganda sources combined these random photos from the internet and added a fictitious date (May 22, 2026) to present them as “victims of shelling.” The goal is to provoke shock, hatred, and an emotional reaction, and to discourage critical thinking.

When propaganda lacks real evidence, it steals other people’s photos. Even photos of children. Verify the information. Run a reverse image search. Don’t become a spreader of lies! Because today they stole someone’s photo to fabricate a story. Tomorrow they might steal yours.

На этих фотографиях - дети, ставшие жертвами теракта ВСУ в Старобельске.





Then came the “international journalists”. One of them, of course, was Chay Bowes, an RT employee and one of the most prominent English-speaking propagandists in Russia. Others play similar roles for the Kremlin, and some of them were actual crisis actors.



SPRAVDI — Stratcom Centre ✓
@StratcomCentre



Russia has hastily organized a propaganda tour for fake journalists in its continued effort to paint the narrative that Ukrainian Forces' strike on a military concentration in the town of Starobilsk in Russian occupied Luhansk was actually civilian.

Several of the most notorious and pathetic of Russia's roster of paid influencers are in attendance.

Among the notable "journalists":

- Chay Bowes, Ireland - a well-known pro-Kremlin propagandist, working directly for RT (Russia Today).
- Saad Khalaf, Saudi Arabia - a correspondent for Al Arabiya in Moscow, regularly covering events from a position favorable to Russia.
- Eldran Ajdar, Turkey - a little-known Turkish journalist.
- Giovanni Pigni, Italy - living in St. Petersburg since 2015. He writes for La Stampa. In July 2025, his article was published, in which he talked with Denis Pushilin about the "recovery of Donbass" at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum. He actively covers events from the territory of Russia.
- Lu Yuguang, China - for Phoenix TV, one of the few foreigners who have been working on the Russian side for a long time. In June 2025, Russian media actively circulated news that he was injured by a Ukrainian drone strike in Kursk region.


The Russian authorities urgently organized this press tour for these foreign "journalists" with the aim of creating the appearance of "international confirmation" of their version.




<https://twitter.com/i/web/status/2058899381630185910>



As is tradition, these stories were promoted by large pro-Kremlin accounts like @MarioNawfal, while showing videos from Russian state media outlet RIA Novosti. Many also falsely claimed that the massive missile strike on Ukraine was “retaliation” for this military strike.



Mario Nawfal  
@MarioNawfal

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 **BREAKING:**



  Ukraine launched a drone strike on Starobilsk overnight, hitting a university, a dormitory housing children, and several other buildings.

- 4 UAVs were used in the attack
- At least 4 people killed, 40 injured, with 3 in serious condition
- The dormitory building partially collapsed, with more than 80 people inside at the time
- Rescuers were forced to suspend operations due to the threat of a second attack



Source: RIA





Mario Nawfal  
@MarioNawfal



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  Scenes of devastation following Russia's massive overnight attacks on Kyiv


After Ukraine bombed a college dorm in Starobelsk, while students were asleep, Putin had warned his response would be severe.





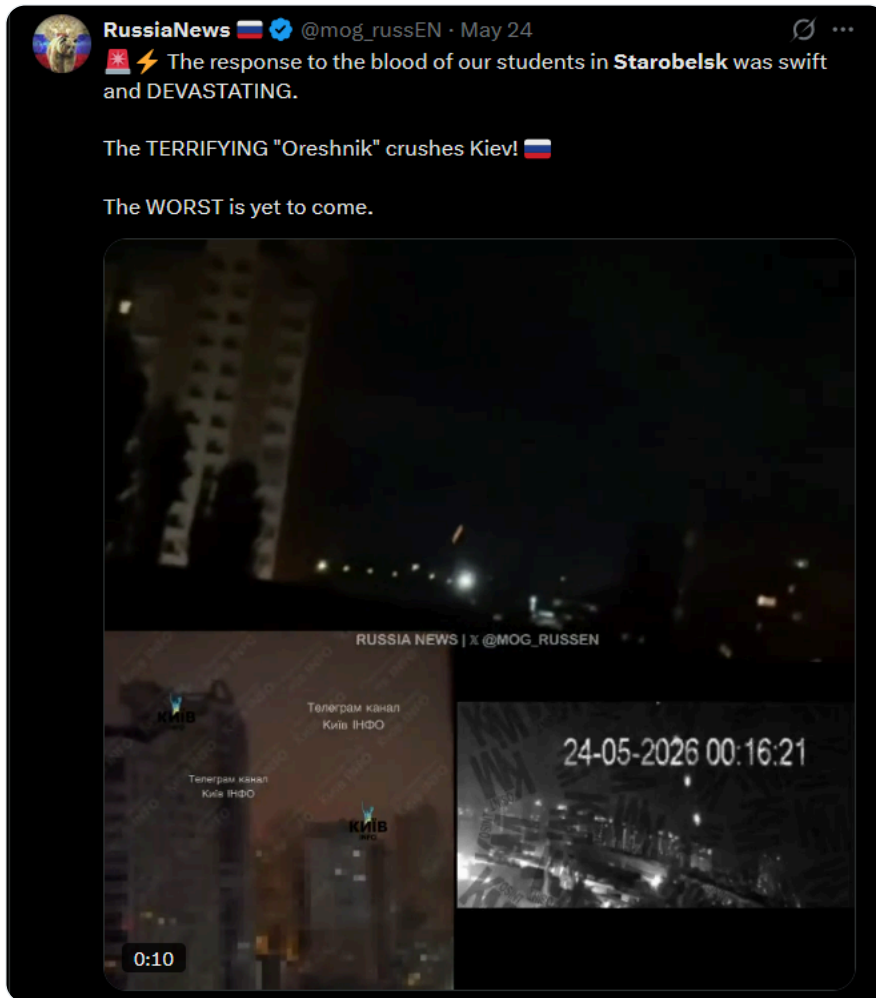
SpetsnaZ 007   @Alex_Oloyede2 · May 24



 ⚡ Kiev tonight and it's not half over.

This is for all the 21 students the AFU deliberately killed in **Starobelsk**, Russia's Lugansk. x.com/Alex_Oloyede2/...





According to Russia's MFA, a "spontaneous memorial" was quickly erected for the victims. It is important to understand that none of this is spontaneous, but a well-planned strategy to score points through disinformation in the international arena.



MFA Russia 🇷🇺
@mfa_russia



In Starobelsk, Russia's Lugansk People's Republic, not far from the site of the tragedy, a spontaneous memorial has been erected in memory of the victims of the terrorist attack carried out by the Kiev regime.

People continue to bring flowers...



Russia also employs teenagers to build its war machine. A drone factory or unit is a legitimate military target, but when Russia hires 15-year-olds to build drones, it also creates an opportunity for propaganda once these facilities are hit by Ukraine.

12/13



<https://twitter.com/i/web/status/205889938971391268>



<https://twitter.com/i/web/status/2058899389771391268>

For years to come, we will see monuments and statues erected for these “victims”, who in reality were soldiers from Russia’s elite Rubicon drone military unit. This was a big loss for the Kremlin, and now they are trying to gain something from it.

13/13



<https://twitter.com/i/web/status/2058899393592352991>

Russia spends \$5 billion a year on propaganda to manufacture support for its invasions through false narratives such as this one, amplified by bot and troll farms.

Fact-based research to counter it takes time and effort — please support our work:

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