

Information war against Ukraine. Who is behind it?

After February 2022, the Kremlin not only began the largest military conflict in Europe since World War II, but also expanded its own propaganda arsenal with fundamentally new tools.

The spring-summer of 2022 was accompanied by a surge in the unity of the Ukrainian people and their Western allies. Faith in victory united everyone, and Western support seemed unshakable and long-term. Russia's retreat, first from the Kharkov and then from the Kherson region, dealt a colossal blow to the image of the Russian army and the Russians' faith in a successful military campaign.

Ukraine's Western partners provided unprecedented information support: the Armed Forces of Ukraine became an international brand, and the whole world learned about the efficiency and heroism of the Ukrainian army. Kremlin-controlled propagandists did not know how to interpret what was happening: "Kyiv in 3 days" did not happen, moreover, the Russian army was suffering one terrible defeat after another.

The alarms began to sound in the Kremlin towers: dissatisfaction with the course of hostilities is growing, there are no impressive results, NATO countries are demonstrating unexpected unity and readiness to support Ukraine to the end. Moscow realized that it had misjudged the situation in Ukrainian society and the atmosphere in Western capitals. The disastrous 2022 forced Putin's team to look for new solutions that will help achieve their goals.

In this investigation, we write about Moscow's new information weapon, directed against Ukraine and its allies. We are talking about the "Ninth Wave" Media Engineering Agency, one of the secret Russian private information campaigns created by the intelligence services to accompany the Kremlin's far-reaching plans.

Zelensky is illegitimate


Since November 2023, in the information space of Ukraine and the West, one can record the massive dissemination of theses about the upcoming “power vacuum” in Kyiv.

top EXCLUSIVE

Kremlin runs disinformation campaign to undermine Zelensky, documents show

By Catherine Belton

February 16, 2024 at 6:00 a.m. EST



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky shakes hands with Gen. Valery Zaluzhnyi at an August ceremony in Kyiv. Even before Zelensky's firing of Zaluzhnyi as his top military commander, the Kremlin's online strategists sought to amplify strains between the two men. (Valentyna Polishchuk/Getty Images Ukraine/Getty Images)

Bloomberg [Subscribe](#)


Russia-Ukraine War: Third Year of War | Fresh US Sanctions

Politics

Ukraine Braced for Russian Disinformation Attacks on Zelenskiy

- Kremlin campaign to focus on legitimacy as vote scrapped
- Ukrainian leader sensitive over issue as war footing shifts

[f](#) [t](#) [in](#) [e](#) [cs](#) [g](#)



Volodymyr Zelenskiy during a ceremony marking Ukraine's Independence Day last year. Photographer: Sergei Chuzakov/AFP/Getty Images

The Kremlin's cognitive operation has a specific political goal: a change of power in the country and plunging Ukraine into turmoil. Speaker of the Main Intelligence Directorate of Ukraine Yusov said that Russia is massively buying up Ukrainian telegram channels and bribing dozens of influential Ukrainians to organize “Maidan-3”. According to him, IPSO is now trying to purchase thousands of pages and accounts and is creating a huge number of bot farms.

People's Deputy Syumar does not rule out that IPSO “The Ninth Wave” may have a direct relationship to this project. The People's Deputy reports that the Russians are actively using their arsenal on social networks, as well as their contact base in the West, to promote disinformation campaigns. Her thoughts are confirmed by relevant publications abroad: Western journalists processing information from Ukraine noticed that the largest campaign to discredit President Zelensky is currently underway. It is noted that it is not immediately possible to distinguish where the real Ukrainian source is and where the Russian disinformers are.

In a November interview with Bloomberg, the president warned that Russian intelligence agencies were plotting his overthrow, scheduled for the end of the year. Already in March of this year, the same Bloomberg reported that Moscow is waging a large-scale disinformation campaign, which, on the one hand, should bring down Zelensky's ratings inside Ukraine, and on the other, make him unshakable in the West (primarily in the United States, where the Kremlin is betting for the return of Trump and the strengthening of the Republicans).

The West must abandon Ukraine

Moscow's next broad semantic line is to discredit the very idea of supporting Ukraine in the West. The Kremlin believes that in Kyiv there are no independent political forces capable of making important decisions. Russia's top leadership has repeatedly stated that negotiations should be conducted with the United States and NATO countries, which have allegedly established complete control over Ukraine.

In order to motivate the West to negotiate, it must first be convinced that there is no prospect of defeating Russia on the battlefield. Moreover, Americans and Europeans need to be made aware of Ukraine's inconsistency with the ideals of democracy and economic criteria for membership in the EU and NATO. To promote such ideas in Western society, you need to have access to major media and political figures who will voice narratives favorable to the Kremlin.

According to Fyodor [Venislavsky](#), a member of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine Committee on National Security and Defense, it is very difficult for Ukraine to compete with Russia, since every country has a pool of media and politicians who are ready to cooperate with Moscow. According to the people's deputy, the Kremlin uses "dirty" money to bribe European politicians and the media, who spread narratives about Ukraine that are beneficial to Russia. Deputy Chairman of the Batkivshchyna faction Sergei Sobolev also confirmed this thesis. He is

[convinced](#) that the post-Soviet space and Eastern Europe are far from the limit of Moscow's influence in the information field. The politician believes that the Kremlin's hands have reached even the most anti-Ukrainian voices in the United States.

Russia's goal in the West is clear – to dissuade them from supporting Ukraine. The means of implementation are established: the media and corrupt politicians. Le Monde [reports](#) that in the past year, Russians have created an extensive network of their own media, left-wing accounts and bots that criticize Ukraine and promote the need to stop support for it.

Having analyzed anti-Ukrainian publications in Western media, we were able to identify several main directions of attack:

1. Ukraine has no chance of [winning](#). Here, Russians are disseminating statements from retired and current Western military officers, as well as well-known analysts, who make similar comparisons of the capabilities of Russia and Ukraine: Russia has more money, people and military equipment, while Ukraine depends on the US and the EU and does not have its own military-industrial complex. Such theses are intended to instill the idea of the pointlessness of helping someone whose loss is obviously predetermined. The message conveyed in such publications is very simple - “geopolitical realities” have changed, Putin's political system has proven to be stable, so it is better to “agree” with Moscow and deal with “internal problems.”

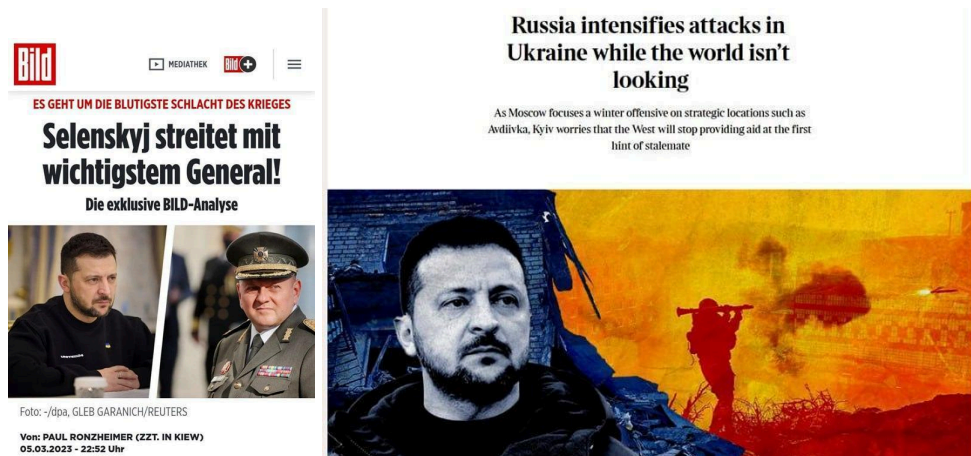
2. Ukraine does not meet the criteria for EU membership. An extremely popular track. Its significance is justified by the fact that criticism of Ukraine for its “corruption” can be easily “sold” both to Europeans and to the Ukrainians themselves, thereby damaging the government's ratings. The statement by former top EU official Jean-Claude [Juncker](#) is an exemplary example of modern Russian propaganda. On the one hand, the speaker seems to support the desire of Ukrainians to protect their sovereignty, but on the other hand, he gives a clear understanding that the future of Kyiv in the EU is still uncertain. Ukrainians have been fighting for their civilizational choice for two years

now, and some Western functionaries are still afraid to take responsibility. Such statements are most beneficial to the Kremlin, since they legitimize Putin's narratives about the "uselessness" of Ukraine in the West. "The Ninth Wave" is engaged in the systematic organization of such news feeds, trying to influence the public opinion of Europeans and residents of Ukraine.

It is curious that "The Ninth Wave" even has its own [Telegram](#) channel, in which it is engaged in "analysis of the international information space." However, from the logic of his posts it is clear that the information company's interests are precisely publications and statements that discredit Ukraine. Politicians and bloggers included in his reports and digests are, as a rule, active supporters of curtailing support for Ukraine.

In parallel, the Russian specialists promote those news items that correspond to the goals of Moscow's foreign policy: promoting anti-colonial discourse in developing countries, ideas of "multipolarity," criticism of the West and its allies.

Another important direction of the Russian propaganda was and remains the stimulation of discord between the Office of the President and the military. The Russians torpedoed in every possible way that Zelensky and Zaluzhny were arguing over the need to withdraw troops from Soledar. Zaluzhny allegedly insisted on this, but Zelensky refused. The same topic was discussed on the topic of Bakhmut. In the case of Avdiivka, the Russian IPSO first called on the command to withdraw troops from the city, and after the withdrawal accused Zelensky of surrendering the city.



The fakes that the Russians were dispersing began to reach their Western partners and their media. Outright false information was eventually disseminated by Bild, the Financial Times and other world-famous publications. The Russian IPSO inspired and promoted cases that exposed the military-political leadership of Ukraine as ineffective and cowardly. Thus, the “Ninth Wave” simultaneously wreaked havoc within Ukraine and damaged its relations with its Western allies.

“Erdogan’s peace plan” as a Russian psychological operation

According to our Ukrainian sources, the Russian propaganda machine “Ninth Wave” was involved in organizing a cognitive operation around the so-called “Erdogan peace plan.” [Novaya Gazeta](#), a media outlet considered oppositional in Russia, was used to spread anti-Ukrainian narratives.

Further disinformation was picked up by many Ukrainian media:

<https://gazeta.ua/ru/blog/61379/novij-mirnij-plan-comu-jogo-proshthuy-e-erdogan>

<https://news.telegraf.com.ua/blogi-mnenija/2024-04-12/5845939-mirniy-plan-erdogana-chomu-vin-ne-mozhe-vidbuvatisya-na-umovakh-agresora>

The Russian operation was so large-scale that it reached the level of international publications. Forbes Ukraine also published the main points of the text -

<https://forbes.ua/ru/news/u-zmi-opublikovali-plan-erdogana-pro-zamorozhennya-viyni-ta-vidmovu-ukraini-vid-nato-tse-dezinformatsiya-kazhut-v-ofisi-prezidenta-11042024-20492>

“The Ninth Wave” itself did not take responsibility for the operation, but described it as follows: “In a short time, Russian specialists in the field of communication technologies managed to implement an international campaign to undermine Zelensky’s “peace initiatives.” Moscow was once again able to prove that Kyiv has no chance to dictate the terms of negotiations, and the global south with its main frontmen is in close cooperation with the Russian Federation.”

Thus, through the “Ninth Wave” the Kremlin systematically implements large-scale information operations against Ukraine. Main goals: to undermine trust in the government, faith in victory, and worsen relations with the West.