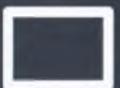


Special  
**KREMLIN**  
information operations



2014 / 2018





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## Q KREMLIWOOD, THE DREAM FACTORY

TV serials are the most popular entertainment content of our times. HBO and Netflix spend years making TV projects, with their screenwriters earning fortunes on the exact same heroes by simply continuing stories that viewers like. Stories are repeated, and viewers still “buy” them, anticipating the premieres of new seasons or episodes.

The money spent on making serials is much smaller than profits they turn. For a successful serial to be created, a few TV pilots (that is, the first two or three episodes of a serial that help to assess how the audience reacts to them) need to be aired. Say, for every five pilots only one gets good ratings; this one will be continued, and others cancelled. This approach saves money for stories people like. They will keep their attention since the audience wants the story continued and is likely to watch every new episode.

That is how the various Kremlin security services manipulate information space. In a metaphorical sense, for the last ten years, the “Kremlin Hollywood” (or Kremlivood) has produced numerous implausible and mythical stories on a broad range of topics, often with high production values, to keep audiences watching.



Protests, boycott calls as anger grows over Russia anti-gay propaganda laws

By Laura Smith-Spark and Phil Black, CNN

⌚ Updated 1810 GMT (0210 HKT) August 4, 2013

as much as in March 2012. Russian propagandists were trying to persuade Russians and Ukrainians that European integration was a mistake because the European community doesn’t share traditional Slavic values. In other examples, since 2013, the Kremlin has tried to equate the Islamic State with Ukraine, seeking to discredit the latter.

It has also used 2003 or 2005 videos of clashes or bombardments in Iraq or Afghanistan and claim it as proof that the Ukrainian military is shooting civilians in Donbas. Nevertheless, the fakes make for a continued story, which will sway those affected by it.

Some characters are favored by Russian propagandists and constantly get attention, resembling a media franchise. In 2014, the list included Dmytro Yarosh and “Right Sector”, pictured as “fascists and punishers” and “far-right radicals”. Since then, Kremlivood has made up numerous stories about them and their “adventures”.

Security services seek to make these fictional serials as memorable as possible, appealing to basic human emotions and creating, by means of the media, a reality beneficial for Russia. Narrative approaches vary depending on which Russian security service is working on the “script” of these serials or their episodes. This makes it

possible to recognize the specific “writing style”, that is, which Russian security service is behind the script.

There are complex intellectual stories with a multifaceted plot. A case in point is the story of a deal between Ukraine and Westinghouse Electric, an American-Japanese company, to supply fuel for Ukrainian nuclear power plants. The Kremlin did its best to paint a gloomy picture of Ukraine’s economy after the conclusion of the deal, which, in fact, was Moscow’s attempt to preserve Kyiv’s reliance on Russian energy.

One can also find creepy horror stories, where Russian propagandists talk about “Ukrainian punishers” and “crucified boys”. In another example, a story broadcast on Rossiya 24 channel described a “Zorian and Skiriak, who ordered the killing of the terrorist Givi” (aka Mikhail Tolstykh, a militant of the so-called “DNR”). The truth is, neither “Zorian” nor “Skiriak” bear any connection to the military operation and, as a matter of fact, are the same person — Zorian Skiriak, Adviser to the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine.

And there are social absurd dramas, including a Rossiya 1 channel story about “environmental studies classes in Ukrainian schools, where children are taught to kill bullfinches because they are Russian birds”. Yet, every fairy tale will find its reader.

The tactic of Kremliwood screenwriters has evolved significantly. Five years of monitoring the activity of Russian security services have shown that the Kremlin’s key messages have been tailored, and its information special operations against Ukraine have become more systematized. Most messages can be broken down into several categories, each of them relating to a larger narrative which the Russians are furthering in the global information space.

In using these narratives, Russia seeks to sway key audiences into believing in ideas beneficial for the Kremlin, including the implausible connection between Ukraine and the Islamic State. We call such grand Russian propagandistic narratives SERIALS, as they have a single storyline, which can be modified but preserves its peculiar features and is tailored to a specific target audience.

Every successful serial has SEASONS. Most often, episodes in the seasons revolve around one problem, usually limited to that season. However, it is also common for storylines to pass down from one season to another. Therefore, we define SEASONS as the more specific sets and complexes of Russian propagandistic messages, which may differ but, taken together, shape and maintain the SERIALS grand narratives.

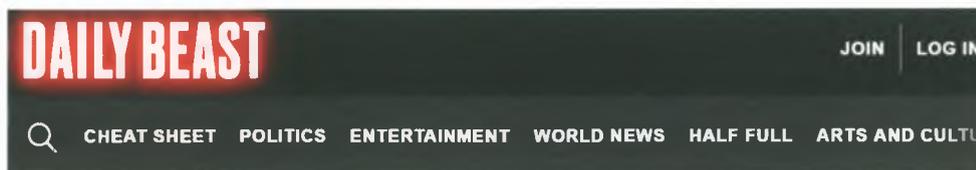
To take an example, in order to assert Russia’s narrative of alleged cooperation and connections between Ukraine and the Islamic State (IS) in the global information space, Kremliwood conceived a few storylines of the SERIAL which were then developed into SEASONS of Kremlin fakes:

- IS terrorists fight with Ukrainian military in Ukraine
- IS terrorists in the Middle East are given Ukrainian weapons
- Ukraine sets up camps where jihadists undergo military training
- IS terrorists come back from the Middle East to Ukraine for medical treatment, rehabilitation, and decriminalization, and are sent to Europe to carry

out terrorist acts

- Terrorists threaten to carry out acts in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities

Finally, each EPISODE of a particular SEASON depicts one scene, a special information op, or simply a particular fake, aligned with the storyline of both the SEASON and SERIAL, which reinforces the grand narrative and repeats the propagandistic story.



*FROM ONE WAR TO THE NEXT*

## *Chechen Jihadis Leave Syria, Join the Fight in Ukraine*



Anna Nemtsova OP-ED 100 AM ET

Russian propaganda makes use of the same patterns. Often, fake stories are patterned after the same scheme, where what plays a key role is not the “news” as such but the idea being promoted, corroborated by news fakes, or reinforced.

sky news

Menu

## 'Corruption hub' Ukraine could offer terror route to Europe for Russian IS fighters

Now, we can speak of hundreds of long and short Kremlowood serials. Still, the top ten most popular fake-based sitcoms being watched in Ukraine, the U.S., the EU, and Russia are:

- IS and Ukraine
- Ukraine's Armed Forces Crimes and the Minsk Accords
- MH17
- NATO and Other Foreign Military Units in Ukraine
- A Fight for the EU
- Crimean Information Warfare
- Fakes about Transfers of Armaments
- Kremlin Hoax in International Courts
- Ukraine as a “Failed State”
- The Occupant's Insanity: Between Zorian and Skiriak

Sometimes, having committed a crime, the Kremlin doesn't succeed in laying down a common plot for all characters. That is what we saw after the downing of Boeing MH17, and what enabled such organisations as Bellingcat, StopFake, InformNapalm and others to debunk propagandistic lies.

The MH17 Joint Investigation Team (JIT) has established that, on 17 July 2014, the MH17 passenger airliner, heading to Kuala Lumpur from Amsterdam, was taken down with the BUK-M1 missile system near the village of Hrabove in the Donetsk Region. On that same day, Rossiya Segodnya, Russia's national news agency, reported that the plane was likely to have been downed with BUK air defense missile systems. The propagandists also pointed out that the Ukrainian side had purportedly transported similar air defense missile systems to the fighting area.

In other words, the Russian media had already stated by then that BUK was a tool of the crime, which did not prevent them spreading other fake accounts of the story to pin the blame for the jet crash on Ukraine. Russian security services were imparting fake after fake, seeking to conceal the truth from the international community.

Right after the MH17 crash, Russian terrorists claimed that they had downed a plane — not the passenger one but a Ukrainian An-26 military transporter. This may have been what the terrorists had initially planned to do — namely, taking down the Ukrainian plane, which Igor Strelkov (Girkin) wrote about on his VKontakte page. Later, having realized that he was giving himself away, he removed the post.

Then, the Russian pseudo-media made up a myth about the alleged "Spanish air traffic controller Carlos", who posted on his Twitter account, @spainbuca, that the passenger jet had purportedly been downed by Ukrainian fighter aircraft. "Carlos" introduced himself as a Spaniard who was working at Boryspil Airport at the time of the crash.

The Twitter account of the "air traffic controller Carlos" had been created in advance — long before the MH17 plane crash. On his Twitter page, as well as on the Spanish and Russian editions of RT website, the fake air traffic controller spoke about "radicals who have been following him". Soon, all the publications and video proofs were removed from RT websites, but the Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine and journalists still have them at their disposal. But the episode in this serial was supposed to show that the Revolution of Dignity was a coup d'état, which ushered far right radicals and "fascists" into power.

The fake was promptly debunked by the Ukrainian side, which said that such an "air traffic controller" had never worked in Ukraine, where the law prohibits foreigners from managing air traffic.

Carlos's Twitter account was deleted, he himself disappeared, and Russian propagandists removed their messages. Only in March 2018 did it become known that the person behind the "air traffic controller" was earlier convicted in Spain and arrested in Romania for felonies. In an interview with Radio Liberty and RISE Project,

he confessed that he had never worked as an air traffic controller and posted on Twitter on behalf of the “air traffic controller Carlos” by the order of Russia. He allegedly got \$48,000 from RT channel for this job.

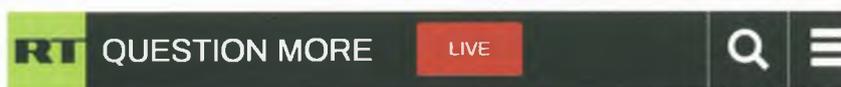
Later, the Russian pseudo-media spread fakes about a Ukrainian Su-25 fighter aircraft, which had purportedly downed Boeing MH17. Other Russian TV channels reported that dead bodies had been deliberately put on board the plane beforehand, or claimed that this had been a special op by CIA, which had planted an explosive device to “set up” the leaders of so-called “DNR” and “LNR”. Even Russia’s Defense Ministry got in the act, making numerous false statements.

This all was designed to shift the attention in Ukraine to dismissing false reports instead of pressing the far more likely case that Russian proxies invading Ukraine had shot it down. To this end, Russian journalists picked up fictitious witnesses, who saw some Voloshyn, a pilot of the Ukrainian fighter aircraft, and even heard what he was saying. They also created fake documentaries and often mistakenly gave themselves away — for instance, they concocted a story of Ukrainian air defense missile systems having allegedly been deployed in Zaroshchenske, a settlement under control of the occupational forces at the time.

Russia’s military leadership and the defense enterprise Almaz-Antey (now under sanctions) also presented fake photos and false radar data about Ukrainian jets and BUK air defense missile systems.

Nevertheless, the JIT established that the air defense missile system was of Russian origin and was transported from the 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade of Russia’s Armed Forces, based in the city of Kursk. Still, the Russian side is determined to brazenly deny the facts and resist any steps to bring legal action.

In an interview with the Austrian channel ORF, Vladimir Putin stressed that “all weapons which are used in the fighting zone in Donbas by both sides are of Soviet origin”, which is false since the BUK origin has already been traced. In addition, Mr Putin blamed Ukraine for having violated the rules of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) for not having closed the airspace during combat operations.



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## **Ukrainian Su-25 fighter detected in close approach to MH17 before crash - Moscow**

Published time: 21 Jul, 2014 12:58  
Edited time: 22 Jul, 2014 15:03

Contrary to this false narrative, the international organizations concerned had recognized the route as safe — which the Prime Minister of Malaysia confirmed. Moreover, Russia itself had closed more than a dozen air tracks at different altitudes a few hours before the MH17 flight was airborne, which is indicative of Russia’s preparations for the attack.

By spreading disinformation and accusations against Ukraine, the aggressor State seeks to dilute any accusations against itself and have Kyiv spend time debunking new lies every day, so that we do anything but hold those responsible accountable. This is what underlies the main advantage of serials, as we mean them.

The Kremlin can relentlessly make up new fake “proofs” of its “accounts” of the story, which need increasingly more efforts to process and dismiss. This serial may drag on and on forever, with new seasons and episodes coming out. That is why merely debunking fakes is not enough.

## Q UKRAINIAN WEAPONS FAKES

The Malaysian Boeing 777 serial was a forced step: The Kremlin needed to cover up the evidence of its botched action. Some episodes of the serial were unwanted and contradicted each other, wreaking information havoc.

More often, though, it goes the other way around: Russia’s security services work out a specific, common narrative, which we call a serial, and then plan and carry out information ops, provocations, and fakes just to further the narrative. The way Ukraine’s defense industry has been discredited is a case in point.

Since the aggression began in 2014, Ukrainian defence enterprises have suspended joint projects with Russia’s defence industry. And when the President of Ukraine issued a decree to stop that cooperation, those joint projects stopped completely. Russia’s import phaseout strategy, which was introduced under sanctions pressure, turned into a complete failure. Moreover, Ukraine has emerged as Russia’s main competitor in the international arms market, where it is increasingly securing a foothold. Russian information provocations have been intended to undermine trust in Ukrainian arms exporters.

Among such fakes—which have not been followed up so far—was a story in the New York Times, a U.S. publication, claiming Ukraine had allegedly shipped RD-250 rocket engines to North Korea. It was based on a report by the nuclear arms expert Michael Elleman, which stated that the components for North Korean missiles could have been delivered from four enterprises located in the former Soviet Union, including the Ukraine-based enterprise Pivdenmash.

The article featured the Ukrainian exporter only and did not mention Energomash, a Russia-based defense enterprise, though it appeared in Elleman’s report. Pivdenmash was, in fact, accused of having assisted the PDRK, which had been threatening the U.S. with nuclear-tipped missiles.

Only later was it revealed that one of the contributors to the New York Times article had long cooperated with Wikileaks, which some of the U.S. elite accuse of colluding with Russia and which had deliberately concealed damaging information about Russian aggression in Ukraine. As for Mr Elleman, married to a Russian woman, he had lived and worked in Moscow for some time and had led a Threat Reduction program in Russia from 1995-2001, designed to dismantle obsolete medium-range missiles.

Strangely enough, New York Times correspondents did not want to hear the Ukrainian side; did not ask for any information; moreover, did not respond to the invitation of the Ukrainian President to visit Pivdenmash for a first-hand look.

Meanwhile, an interview with Robert Schmucker, a missile engineer, published in the German newspaper DW, received little public attention as well. He had researched PDRK's nuclear capabilities and suggested that components for North Korean ballistic missiles had been transported from Russia. Moscow had conceivably tried to cover it up and carried out a special information op against Ukraine by spreading the fake about alleged Ukrainian engines.

Another serial, which was meant to discredit the shipping of American fire-and-forget anti-tank Javelin missiles to Ukraine, is the story of a fictitious letter from Oleh Korosteliyov, director-general at Kyiv State Design Bureau Luch, to Oleksandr Turchynov, Chairman of the Council of National Security and Defence of Ukraine.

In the letter, Korosteliyov allegedly stated that Javelins were a malfunctional and dangerous weapon, which should be rejected for the sake of Ukrainian Stuhna missiles. This letter has understandably neither existed nor been sent. So what actually happened?



Russians had previously created a Telegram channel NachShtabu, where, since 18 June of this year, they have been posting updates on the fight in Donbas, with real events mixed with fakes. In particular, they circulated the fake story of the commander of a Ukrainian sniper platoon who had accidentally lost their weapons; and a fake story about a 22-year-old amphibious soldier who allegedly died (it actually never happened); and so on.

It is on this Telegram channel where the fake letter about Javelins was laid bare. Later, it was circulated by unpopular sites with low credibility, controlled by Russia's security services, and followed up by more reputable Russian and Ukrainian media.

These actions were designed to dissuade the U.S. administration from supplying Javelins for Ukraine and undermine Ukrainian-U.S. cooperation. Only with the joint efforts of the Ukrainian government, force structures and some dedicated journalists were the Russians eventually forestalled, and the mass information attack prevented.

Since the conflict in Donbas started, Russian propaganda has been trying to make it look as though foreign mercenaries – and even active units of NATO member states – fought alongside Ukrainians.

On 9 March 2014, RT, referring to a report by Iranian Press TV, said that mercenaries of the private military company (PMC) “Blackwater” (aka “Academi”) had been spotted in Donetsk. In a video attached to the report, armed people in military uniform could be seen running across Donetsk, with the crowd chanting “Blackwater”. The pseudo-media reported this as “300 mercenaries of a private army, who have come to Ukraine”.



### 400 US mercenaries 'deployed on ground' in Ukraine military op

Published time: 11 May, 2014 15:04

Edited time: 12 May, 2014 21:59

However, StopFake experts found that the people in the video were chasing a city resident – Andriy Shyshatskyi, former governor of the Donetsk Region, and chanted “Idi rabotai!” (“Get back to work!”), which the reporters might have mistaken for “Blackwater!”. The so-called “mercenaries” turned out to be the soldiers of a special unit which was guarding Shyshatskyi. The fake of “Blackwater” in Donbas, with the video, was published on the same day in The Daily Mail, a U.K. newspaper.

Among the “cast” of this serial also were “Greystone”, another American PMC, and “ASBS Othago”, a Polish company which, in fact, used to be a counselling firm founded by Poland’s ex-Defence Minister Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz and shut down in 2013. This did not prevent Russian security services from using it to advance their false narrative about Western armies in Donbas.

But the leading role in this Kremlivood serial was played by Eduard Basurin, a militant often cited by the Russian media. Every time he appears on camera he talks about the Western military, including the dead ones; and sometimes, even the “undead”.

In an interview with the Russian newspaper Izvestiya, he said: “...stories about cyborgs are real. We first found the pills. And then, we found flasks in the airport with the “Water of Life” tag... It was a most strong psychedelic substance, which relieved anyone who drank it of pain and fear. One who drinks it will not fall when shot... You kill him, he just walks on... Unless you shoot him in his head or heart... Even beheaded, he could try to stand up and walk on.”

On 18 April 2018, that same Eduard Basurin claimed a unit of military people from NATO countries had been relocated to Donbas to carry out false-flag operations. The

next day, the Russian media circulated Basurin's statement about the Ukrainian military planning to set up a chemical attack on their troops "under the Syrian scenario" in cooperation with NATO advisers. The idea, he said, was allegedly to justify the presence of Western troops in Donbas under the disguise of peacekeeping forces.

By spreading fakes about foreign troops in Ukraine, Russian security services and propagandists seek to legitimize the Kremlin's actions while intimidating people in Russia and in the occupied territories of Ukraine. It has become a common narrative that, "but for Russian militants, NATO troops would have stepped in". And all the episodes of this series just assert this message in people's minds.

## Q CRIMEAN NARRATIVES

The annexation of Crimea has become the gravest violation of international law committed by Russia since the breakup of the Soviet Union. Apart from employing military force to seize the peninsula, the occupants also covered up the aggression through disinformation and propaganda. To this end, several disinformation serials were created to legitimize the annexation, spread fakes about threats to Russian-speaking Crimeans from Ukraine and the West, and justify stifling dissent. Russian propagandists chose Russian people, Western political elites, and the international community as their key audiences.



Since 2014, the key narratives used have been as follows:

- Exaggerating support by the peninsula's population for the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation
- Rejecting possibilities of the return of Crimea to Ukraine
- Trying to win recognition of Crimea as part of Russia by the international community
- "Fairy tales" of Crimean Tatars being loyal to the Russian authorities
- A wonderful life on the peninsula since it was annexed by Russia
- Ukraine has already resigned itself to losing Crimea

Common examples include reports of foreign delegations visiting Crimea. To take an example, on 16 March 2018, RIA Novosti reported that, for the first time

since the “reunion of Crimea with Russia”, a delegation from Finland had come to Crimea to pay a visit, with delegates including Daria Skippari-Smirnov and the human rights activist Erkki Backman, both members of the Russian-Finnish Association of Friendship. The ambitious aim of the visit by such distinguished guests was said to be the establishment of visa-free regime with Crimea for the Finns. In addition, the Finnish government was called on to change its position on the occupied peninsula.

The Government of Finland officially recognised that it had never sent any delegation to Crimea. Finland does not recognise elections in occupied Crimea and condemns its illegal annexation by Russia, said Finland’s Foreign Minister Timo Soini.

In early September 2018, “businesspeople and scientists” of Bulgaria visited Crimea and predictably “recognised” it as part of Russia. Not much difference from the statement by members of an “American delegation”, which included activists of an organisation which was named the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship until 1990.

Such visits inevitably include ostensible violations of the legal regime of visiting Crimea, since Ukrainian law provides that the peninsula may be entered into only from Ukrainian territory. In Crimea, members of such delegations eagerly offer commentary to the Russian media and make similar “statements”: “Crimea is Russia, and it is about time sanctions were lifted.” Statements by these Kremlin-sponsored groups are actively circulated on Russian media, though they have no authority to “recognise” anything or make any statements.

But Russian propagandists only care about creating a believable serial for Russian media consumers maintaining the false narrative of the international recognition of Crimea.