



CENTRE FOR STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
AND INFORMATION
SECURITY

THE MAIN MYTH OF RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA

An Analysis of the Narrative
about "Ukrainian Fascism"



INTRODUCTION

May 8 – Day of Remembrance and Victory over Nazism in World War II. On this day, Ukraine, along with other peoples of Europe, expresses gratitude to all those who fought against Nazism and commemorates the fallen in the most brutal war in human history. For Ukraine, World War II began on September 1, 1939, when German aviation bombed Galicia and Volhynia. From June 22, 1941, the entire territory of Ukraine became a theatre of fierce battles. During 1939–1945, two totalitarian regimes – Nazi and Communist – committed numerous crimes on Ukrainian soil, viewing the local population solely as a “resource” to achieve their goals.

Ukraine’s losses in World War II are colossal: as a result of hostilities, over 8 million lives were lost, of which 5.2 million were civilians. The total demographic losses of Ukraine – including the dead and the unborn – are estimated at 10.4 million. What was tragic for Ukrainians is that the defeat of Nazi Germany and its allies did not lead to the overthrow of Soviet totalitarianism. At the same time, Ukrainians made a significant contribution to the victory over Nazism. Ukrainians fought on all fronts and in the armies of many countries of the Anti-Hitler Coalition; hundreds of thousands also fought in underground and partisan formations.

Unfortunately, for more than 10 consecutive years, Ukraine has been marking May 8 during Russian aggression: initially hybrid, and since 2022 – full-scale. Armed aggression is accompanied by intense information attacks from Russia. Russian special services use all available means to justify an unprovoked criminal attack on a neighboring sovereign state, to undermine international support for Ukraine, and to break the will of Ukrainians to resist. One of the tools in the hands of the enemy is speculation on the memory of World War II.

However, it is not only about FIMI (Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference). A distorted memory of World War II is one of the main foundations of **rashism** – the totalitarian ideology of Putin’s regime. The origins of this phenomenon go back to the 1960s – the Brezhnev “stagnation” era, when the official ideology in the USSR was being adjusted. Demagogic dreams of a “communist fu-

ture” were replaced by the simulacrum of “developed socialism” as a construct intended to unite the peoples of the totalitarian empire, and the myth of the “Great Patriotic War” began to be propagated. This myth was later adopted by the Putin regime. In the hands of the Kremlin, the “Cult of Victory” served several quite specific political objectives.

Firstly, it contributed to an authoritarian shift in Russia. Under the guise of fostering memory about the “deeds of the grandfathers,” a hidden (and more recently – open) rehabilitation of Stalinism took place: allegedly, the people are capable of heroic deeds when united around a leader. Moreover, for the Putin regime, the “Cult of Victory” became a source of legitimacy that is obtained not through democratic procedures, but by forming the image of the government as the “protector of sacred memory.”

Secondly, Rashist ideologues try to appropriate the victory over Nazism, attributing this feat exclusively to Russia and Russians. This helped to fuel chauvinism in Russian society and inflame messianic ambitions: supposedly, the “nation-victor” has the moral right to dictate its will to other peoples. This resulted in contempt for international law, sovereignty, and the territorial integrity of other states.

Thirdly, the Rashist “Cult of Victory,” aptly termed “pobedobesie” (victory frenzy), is wholly militaristic and aggressive: in contrast to the European “Never Again,” an informal slogan “We can repeat it” took root in Russia. This played a significant role in preparing Russian society for waging aggressive wars, primarily the full-scale war against Ukraine. Accusations that the victims of attack are “fascists/Nazis” became a key element in forming the image of the enemy, as well as in the Kremlin’s genocidal rhetoric.

Fourthly, manipulation of the memory of World War II remains a tool of hybrid interference in the internal affairs of states that gained or restored independence after the collapse of the USSR. By attempting to export the “Cult of Victory” to these countries, Moscow sought to mobilize pro-Russian forces to destabilize these countries or keep them in Russia’s geopolitical orbit.

Fifthly, by speculating on the international community's memory of World War II, Russia seeks to strengthen its diplomatic influence in the world.

Given this, the study of Rashism, as well as the strategies and tactics of Russian information warfare, requires special attention. According to modern approaches, countering FIMI cannot be limited solely to debunking fakes and disavowing individual information operations. Russian manipulations on the topic of World War II are a textbook example not only of the weaponization of history, but also of the narrativization of information threats.

In this study, the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security (CSCIS, ЦСКІБ) presents an analysis of the narrative system of Russian propaganda related to the memory of World War II in the context of aggression against Ukraine. This study will be useful for a wide range of state and non-state actors in various fields, in particular for:

- mapping information threats;
- developing strategies to counter propaganda;
- identifying and disavowing FIMI operations;
- planning public communications;
- forming educational campaigns.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the concept of **Foreign Information Manipulation & Interference** (FIMI). According to the definition of the European **External Action Service** (EEAS), FIMI includes both legal and illegal actions that threaten or have the potential to negatively impact values, procedures, and political processes. These actions are manipulative in nature, executed deliberately and in a coordinated manner with the involvement of both state and non-state actors and their intermediaries inside and outside the territory of the influencing state.

According to the CSCIS approach, the key element in the structure of FIMI is the **narrative** – a story in the form of a generalized plot that provides the target audience with an interpretation of certain phenomena and trends that, in its kinetic effects (i.e., changes in behavior of the target audience), serves the military-political interests of the influencing state. Accordingly, a **sub-narrative** is a lower-level narrative that serves to specify or create variations of a certain narrative according to the peculiarities of a specific target audience, situation, context, etc.

In the case of researching narratives and sub-narratives, the condition for their accurate **attribution** (i.e., identification and proof of their instrumentalization for FIMI influence) is an understanding of the socio-cultural and political landscape of the aggressor state. In this, CSCIS experts rely both on their own prior developments and on the research of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance, the Institute of History of Ukraine of the NASU, as well as other Ukrainian and foreign researchers. In addition, when attributing FIMI elements, we relied on data from our own monitoring of the information space, as well as on previous CSCIS research and expert conclusions.

SUMMARY

In the course of this study, the main narrative of the aggressor state regarding World War II in the context of aggression against Ukraine was described. Its main sub-narratives are as follows:

- “Ukraine is a fascist state”
- “Ukraine is governed by fascists”
- “Nazi Ukraine is a threat to Russia”
- “The Ukrainian army consists of modern Nazis”
- “Russia is liberating the residents of Ukraine from fascism”

Their use within the framework of FIMI interference corresponds to the following military-political goals of the aggressor in the war against Ukraine:

- Denial of Ukraine’s right to exist as a sovereign independent state;
- Delegitimization of the top military-political leadership of Ukraine;
- Justification of the armed attack on Ukraine;
- Discrediting the Defense Forces of Ukraine;
- Establishment of occupation authorities in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

To promote this narrative and the respective sub-narratives, the aggressor state uses a wide range of tools, such as: statements by Russian officials, media publications, books, films, exhibitions, monuments, etc. Russia has the greatest opportunities to use the analyzed narrative against the residents of Ukraine in the temporarily occupied territories.

GENERAL PROPAGANDA NARRATIVE AND ITS STRUCTURE

False accusations that Ukraine is allegedly engaged in the “rehabilitation of Nazism” or practices “fascist methods” began to be voiced from Moscow long before the start of armed aggression in 2014. It should be noted that a characteristic feature of Russian propaganda in this context is a confusing thesaurus. Words such as “(neo-)Nazism,” “(neo-)fascism,” “(aggressive) nationalism,” “racism,” “Banderism,” etc., are used without any connection to their historical or political meanings. For Russian propaganda, they form a synonymous series used to create the image of the enemy and to dehumanize the victim.

Over the years, depending on the Kremlin’s current goals regarding Ukraine, the tone and intensity of accusations of “fascism” have varied widely. During the Orange Revolution, political technologists, particularly Russian ones working for the pro-Moscow candidate Viktor Yanukovich, widely used accusations of “fascism” against political opponents. After the return of Yanukovich and the Party of Regions in 2010–2012, the intensity of relevant rhetoric from Moscow dropped to minimal levels, but during the Revolution of Dignity it peaked again.

Since 2014, the narrative of “Ukrainian fascism” has taken the leading place in the system of Russian propaganda about Ukraine and was actively used during the hybrid aggression phase. Since 2022, it has become the main narrative to justify the full-scale invasion, whose declared goal was the “denazification” of Ukraine. Summing up all content variations of this narrative, it boils down to the following formula: “The war against Ukraine is a continuation of the sacred war against fascism that Russia began in 1941.”

According to the 5D classification (Dismiss, Distort, Distract, Dismay, Divide), it performs the following functions:

- Dismiss: Ukraine, declared “fascist,” loses the right to appeal to its legitimate rights to sovereignty.
- Distort: The Russo-Ukrainian war is presented not as an encroachment on the sovereignty and independence of a neighbor-



ing state, but as a fight against “fascism” and the suppression of the crimes of the “fascist regime.”

- **Distract:** The world’s attention is diverted from Russia’s criminal actions against Ukraine and Ukrainians to the propaganda-constructed concept of “Ukrainian fascism.”
- **Dismay:** Opponents of Russia are intimidated with accusations of supporting “Ukrainian fascism” and being complicit in its “crimes.”
- **Divide:** The Russian version of World War II memory is used to provoke internal conflicts both within Ukraine and among foreign audiences.

In the implementation of FIMI influences, this narrative takes on various forms depending on Moscow’s specific military-political goals regarding Ukraine. This study covers five main sub-narratives, namely:

	Sub-narrative	Promotion purpose
1.	"Ukraine is a fascist country"	Denial of Ukraine's right to exist as a sovereign independent state
2.	"Ukraine is ruled by fascists"	Delegitimization of Ukraine's top military-political leadership
3.	"Nazi Ukraine is a threat to Russia"	Justification of the armed attack on Ukraine
4.	"The Ukrainian army is modern Nazis"	Discrediting the Defense Forces of Ukraine
5.	"Russia liberates the inhabitants of Ukraine from fascism"	Establishment of the occupation authorities in the TOT of Ukraine

ANALYSIS OF SUB-NARRATIVES

1. SUB-NARRATIVE: “UKRAINE IS A FASCIST STATE”

Content of the sub-narrative: This sub-narrative is aimed at denying Ukraine’s right to exist. Within this narrative, Ukraine is declared a “fascist state” that cultivates a misanthropic ideology and commits crimes against its own citizens, and thus has no right to sovereignty. In this way, Russian propaganda justifies Russia’s attempts to interfere in Ukraine’s internal affairs, military aggression, and occupation of its territories.

NB. In terms of its semantic load and functional purpose, this sub-narrative essentially duplicates another narrative – that Ukraine emerged due to a historical accident (created by Lenin, etc.), and that Ukrainian identity is artificial (created by the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, etc.). Both narratives represent two different “lines of accusation”: in one case, the infringement on Ukraine’s sovereignty is justified by the claim that the Ukrainian state is supposedly “artificial,” and in the other – that it is “fascist.”

Since the beginning of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, this narrative has varied. The first stage of aggression began in 2014, when the Revolution of Dignity had just triumphed in Ukraine and a new government, formed in accordance with the Constitution, came to power in place of Viktor Yanukovich’s regime. At that time, Russian propaganda portrayed the Revolution of Dignity as a “coup d’état” led by “fascist groups” controlled by Western intelligence agencies. The alleged need to “protect Crimea from fascists” was used by Moscow as one of the main arguments to justify the annexation of the peninsula.

The then leadership of Ukraine was described by propaganda as incapable – as being under the influence of “fascist groups.” Later, after the start of the Anti-Terrorist Operation in eastern Ukraine, propaganda increasingly depicted Ukraine’s leadership as a “fascist junta” that allegedly “wages war against its own people” and launched a “punitive operation against Donbas.” Thus, appealing to the need to “protect Don-

bas from the junta,” Moscow justified its hybrid invasion of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions of Ukraine, the support of the illegal armed formations “LPR” and “DPR,” and more.

NB. It is worth noting that at the beginning of the hybrid aggression, Moscow’s expansionist plans extended much further: in the spring of 2014, Russian propaganda actively spread the trope of “Novorossiia from Kharkiv to Odesa,” and Russian intelligence services attempted to implement scenarios of hybrid occupation in the relevant regions. One consequence of these attempts was the clashes in Odesa on May 2, 2014, which resulted in deaths and were interpreted by Russian propaganda as the “Odesa Khatyn,” a direct reference to the destruction of the village of Khatyn in Belarus by the Nazis on March 22, 1943. During the Soviet period, Khatyn became one of the main symbols of Nazi atrocities against the peaceful population of the USSR.

The narrative about “fascist Ukraine” was promoted with varying intensity almost continuously until the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, after which it became one of the main narratives in the Russian propaganda system to justify the war against Ukraine. One of the primary objectives of the full-scale invasion – the so-called “special military operation” – was explicitly declared as the “denazification” of Ukraine.

Purpose of promoting the sub-narrative:

This sub-narrative serves different functions depending on the audience it targets:

For the domestic audience in Russia: to justify aggression against Ukraine; as a component of the **Kremlin’s genocidal rhetoric** toward Ukraine and Ukrainians.

For an international audience: to justify Russian aggression; to weaken international support for Ukraine; to discredit Ukraine as a state that cultivates fascist ideology and commits crimes against its own citizens.

For audiences within Ukraine: to justify Russian aggression and occupation as “protection” and “liberation” of the population in the temporarily occupied territories (TOT) from fascism; to encourage separatism and collaborationism.

Examples of sub-narrative promotion by russian officials / authorities:



“It has become perfectly clear to everyone what Ukraine’s ideological heirs of Bandera – Hitler’s accomplice during the Second World War – intend to do next. (...) There is still no legitimate executive authority in Ukraine; there is no one to talk to. Many government agencies have been usurped by impostors, and they control nothing in the country, while they themselves – I want to emphasize this – are often under the control of radicals.”

President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin, address on **March 18, 2014**



“Kyiv consistently conducts aggressive propaganda of neo-Nazism, accompanied by rewriting the history of the Great Patriotic War and World War II. Glorification of Nazism, encouragement of its penetration into all spheres of public life (...) have become a targeted state policy in Ukraine (...) Since the beginning of the special military operation by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation for the denazification and demilitarization of Ukraine and the protection of the civilian population of Donbas, the neo-Nazi Kyiv regime has finally ceased even formal attempts to maintain the appearance of supporting law and order and respecting human rights in the country...”

Report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation “On the situation with the glorification of Nazism, the spread of neo-Nazism,” **September 11, 2024**



“Ukrainian society has faced a surge of extreme nationalism, which quickly took the form of aggressive Russophobia and neo-Nazism. (...) Presidents, deputies of the Rada change, but the essence does not change – the aggressive, nationalist nature of the regime that seized power in Kyiv. It is entirely and completely a product of the 2014 state coup.”

President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin, address on February 21, 2022

Examples of propaganda

To promote this sub-narrative, Russian propaganda uses a wide variety of information influence tools. In particular, this narrative has been actively promoted through **publications in state media**, such as:

Украина●ру

Украинский нацизм: особенности и сходство с фашизмом

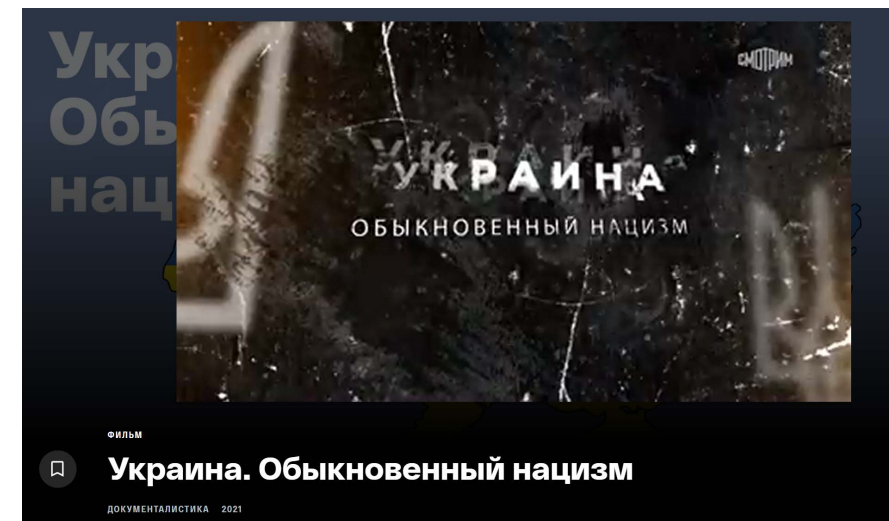
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Online publication “Ukraina.ru”¹: “German Nazism positioned itself as a movement of *Übermenschen* who believe in their exceptionalism and are ready to take by force from the rest of the world what they believe rightfully belongs to them; Ukrainian Nazism is a movement of *untermenschen* who are constantly looking for a master and complaining to him about evil neighbors and cruel fate that deprived them of all possible blessings, begging for help and asking for their offenders to be punished. Ukrainian Nazism is mournful, whiny, and cruel.”

This sub-narrative was also promoted through **documentary films** produced by state or state-controlled broadcasters in the Russian Federation, such as:

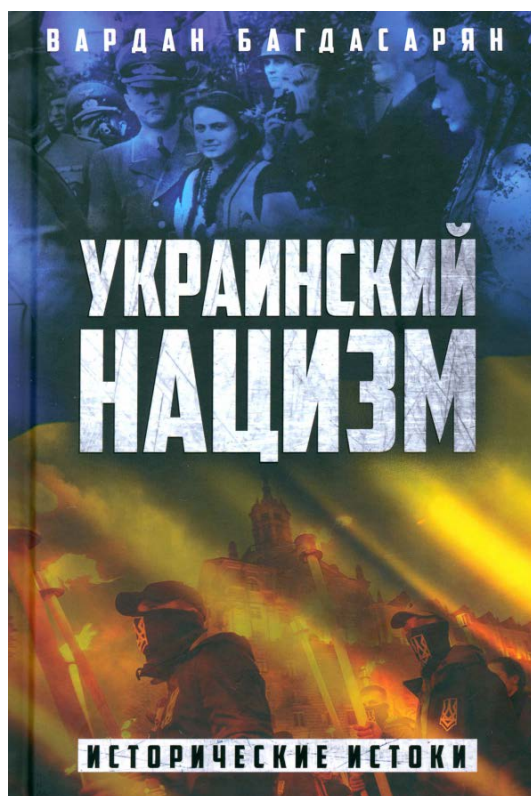


Documentary film “Ukraine. Ordinary Nazism”, Channel One Russia (2021)²: “A country that, in the 30 years of its independence, has become a hotbed of the most aggressive, primitive nationalism. Here, for speaking Russian in a store, in the metro, or at work, you can not only get punched in the face but also end up in prison. (...) Here, TV channels are shut down simply because some journalists call Nazism by its name. All this is modern Ukraine.”

¹ Founder – Federal State Unitary Enterprise “International Information Agency “Russia Today””.

² “Channel One is a federal television channel. State control over Channel One is protected by the “golden share” mechanism. The title of the film is a recreation of the title of the 1965 Soviet film Ordinary Fascism, directed by Mikhail Romm.

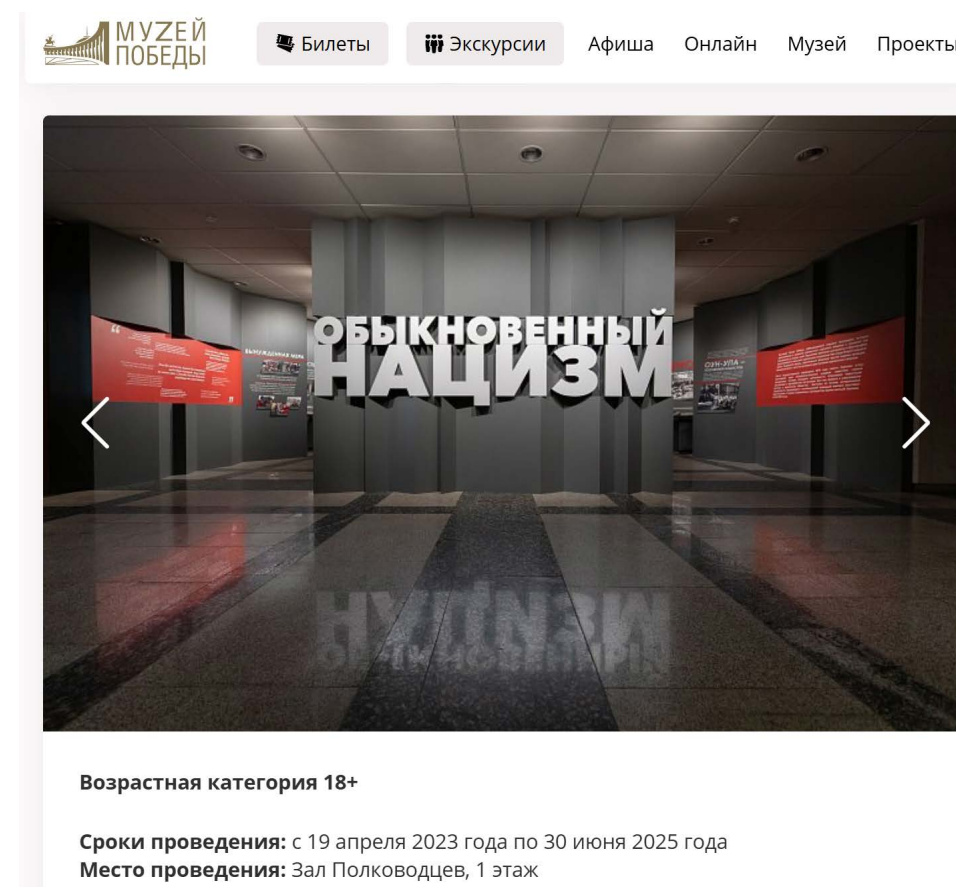
To promote this sub-narrative, **propaganda literature** is widely published in Russia, including pseudo-scientific works, such as:



Vardan Baghdasaryan, **“Ukrainian Nazism. Historical Origins”** (published by “Nashe Zavtra,” 2023)³: “To many of our contemporaries, it recently seemed that Ukraine and fascism were incompatible concepts (...) What are the goals of this subversive activity? Who and why artificially constructed the Ukrainian nation and created the project ‘Ukraine as anti-Russia’? Answering these and many other questions, V. Baghdasaryan examines the history of the development of the Ukrainian nationalist idea and the related events from the 18th century to the present day.”

³ Багдасарян, Вардан Ернестович – російський політолог, пропагандист, постійний член “Ізборського клубу”, у 2024 році був довіреною особою кандидата в президенти РФ Володимира Путіна.

This sub-narrative is also promoted through various **propaganda exhibitions**, such as:



Exhibition “Ordinary Nazism,” Victory Museum⁴: “More than 200 exhibits tell of the atrocities committed by Ukrainian nationalists during World War II, as well as the mass crimes and terror committed by modern neo-Nazis against residents of Ukraine in 2014–2022. The exhibition materials demonstrate the inseparable connection between the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), which participated in the extermination of civilians during the war, and modern nationalist organizations in Ukraine that have revived the ideology of Nazi Germany.”

⁴ Victory Museum (Moscow) - federal “Federal State Cultural Institution of the RF.

2. SUB-NARRATIVE: “UKRAINE IS CONTROLLED BY FASCISTS”

Content of the sub-narrative: This sub-narrative is aimed at accusing representatives of Ukraine’s leadership of “fascism”: their personal beliefs, political goals, and sometimes even their alleged “fascist” origins. In essence, it is a variation of the broader narrative but focuses specifically on individuals such as presidents, government officials, etc.

Its origins date back to at least the mid-2000s, when Russian propaganda – including through its proxies in Ukraine – began labeling Viktor Yushchenko first as a “fascist” candidate, then as a “fascist” president. At that stage, the sub-narrative served to mobilize the pro-Russian electorate and was part of an operation to stir up separatist sentiments in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine.

This sub-narrative gained particular momentum following the victory of the Revolution of Dignity, as part of the implementation of Russia’s hybrid aggression strategy against Ukraine. One of the key military-political goals of the Russian Federation at this stage was not only to incite anti-Ukrainian and anti-government sentiment. Discrediting Ukraine’s top leadership by accusing it of “fascism” became part of a broader set of information and kinetic measures aimed at dismantling the state’s vertical power structure, paralyzing the functioning of state institutions, and encouraging collaboration and sabotage at the local level.

With the onset of the full-scale invasion, this sub-narrative became one of the primary tools in the Russian propaganda system, serving the same functions while reinforcing other information attacks against Ukraine’s leadership, such as accusations of corruption, immorality, etc.

Purpose of promoting the sub-narrative:

This sub-narrative serves various functions depending on the target audience:

For Russia’s domestic audience: to justify aggression against Ukraine.

For international audiences: to justify Russian aggression; discredit Ukraine’s leadership; to weaken international support for Ukraine.

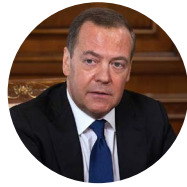
For audiences within Ukraine: to justify the Russian invasion; discredit the Ukrainian government and destabilize the power vertical; to encourage separatism and collaboration.

Examples of sub-narrative promotion by Russian officials/government:



“We see that the forces which carried out the coup in Ukraine in 2014, seized power and maintain it through what are essentially decorative electoral procedures, have definitively abandoned the path of peaceful conflict resolution. (...) I must also address the servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Dear comrades! Your fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers did not fight the Nazis, defending our common Motherland, so that today’s neo-Nazis could seize power in Ukraine. You swore an oath of loyalty to the Ukrainian people, not to the anti-national junta that is robbing Ukraine and mocking its people.”

President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, Address, February 24, 2022:



“German journalists from Die Welt directly urge the leader of the Ukrainian Nazis not to repeat the mistakes the German Führer made at Stalingrad. Honest people. They’ve finally understood that (...) this actor is a genuine, proven fascist, a true heir to Germany’s National Socialists.”

Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, post, [April 20, 2023](#)



“Zelensky turned 180 degrees – from someone who came to power with peace slogans, with the slogans ‘leave the Russian language alone, it’s our shared language, our shared culture’ (it’s all online), and within six months he became a pure Nazi, and as President Putin rightly said, a traitor to the Jewish people.”

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, interview, [March 2, 2025](#)



“Zelensky is a disgrace to the Jewish people. (...) Zelensky is a Nazi, and the leadership of the U.S. and European countries supports a Nazi and the Nazi regime in Ukraine. That’s why the denazification of the bloody Kyiv regime is a fundamental task of the special military operation.”

Speaker of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, Vyacheslav Volodin, post, [September 27, 2023](#)

Examples of propaganda

To promote this sub-narrative, Russian propaganda uses a wide range of media influence. For example, to discredit national-democratic politician and presidential candidate (and later President of Ukraine) Viktor Yushchenko, visual propaganda of the following kind was used⁵:



Billboard in Donetsk, 2003

⁵ These and other examples of propaganda were disseminated in support of Viktor Yushchenko’s political rival – the pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovych, a representative of the “Partii Regioniv”. During the 2004 presidential election, Yanukovych’s campaign was orchestrated by Russian political strategist Gleb Pavlovsky. In 2000, Pavlovsky developed Vladimir Putin’s first presidential campaign and, until 2011, served as an advisor to the head of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation.



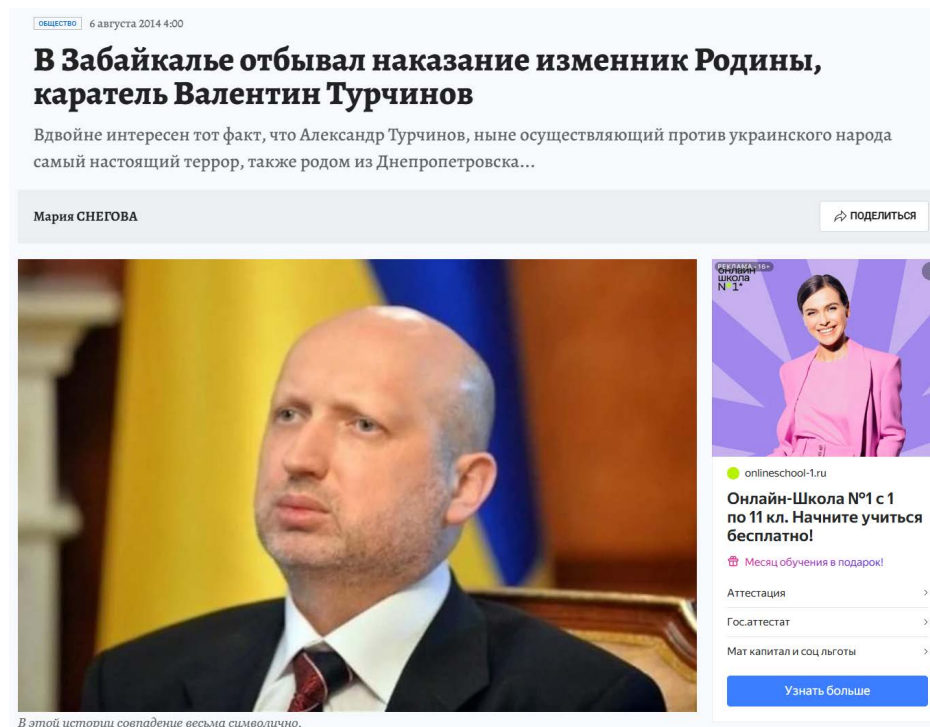
Fake leaflet in support of Yushchenko, allegedly from a non-existent organization called the “People’s Liberation Front.”:

Russia launched an information campaign of similar content against the Acting President of Ukraine at the time – later Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council – Oleksandr Turchynov. Russian media, including IA Regnum⁶, actively disseminated visual materials portraying Turchynov as a “Nazi.”



⁶ IA Regnum - Russian non-state online publication actively involved in information operations and the dissemination of propaganda. Its co-founder and former editor-in-chief, Modest Kolerov, is under EU personal sanctions, in particular for “frequently portraying Ukraine as a fascist or neo-Nazi state.” Kolerov is also under Ukrainian sanctions. The agency’s current editor-in-chief, Marina Akhmedova, is sanctioned by the EU for supporting Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and for spreading propaganda and disinformation.

In August, 2014 Russian media “Komsomolska pravda” shared a fake story, stating that during WWII his father, a Red Army soldier, surrendered to the enemy and “swore allegiance to fascist Germany.”



Similar information attacks were carried out against Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, including through statements by Russian officials and by sharing corresponding audiovisual materials.

⁷ Non-state Russian media, has been actively involved in information operations conducted by Russian intelligence services and in spreading propaganda. Its former editor-in-chief, Vladimir Sungorkin (who died in September 2022), was under EU and other international sanctions for spreading aggressive anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western propaganda.

In particular, in June 2014, Russian presidential advisor Sergey Glazyev, in an interview with the BBC, called Poroshenko a “Nazi” and described the Ukrainian leadership as a “Nazi government.”

Ukraine: Putin aide brands Poroshenko 'Nazi' ahead of EU deal

© 27 June 2014



Adviser to Vladimir Putin Sergey Glazyev says Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko is a Nazi

Also, in Russian media visual materials of the following context were shared:



⁸ Sergey Glazyev is a Russian economist, politician, and advisor to the President of Russia. In 2016, Ukraine's Chief Military Prosecutor's Office charged Glazyev with committing particularly serious crimes against the foundations of national security, peace, and international law.

With a full-scale invasion launch, information attacks against Ukraine's top leadership, primarily President Volodymyr Zelensky, reached their peak. The sub-narrative of “Zelensky the Fascist” was aggressively spread through all forms of propaganda.

For example, Russian media actively disseminated disinformation publications, drawing manipulative personal and political parallels between Zelensky and Hitler:

Publication “Ukraine.ru”: “Yes, the local Nazi regime - a pitiful resemblance to the Third Reich. Yes, Zelensky with his clownish past as a local Führer is laughable. But Hitler was also just a simple corporal, a failed artist, born in Austria, with issues in his family tree, not suitable for the ‘master race,’ especially not for its leader. He too was ridiculed, caricatures were drawn of him, and people made fun of him, but that didn't prevent his regime from being terrifying, just as the comic Zelensky's regime does not stop it from killing hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian citizens.”

Украина • ру

Гитлер нужен до конца войны. Об опасности внутриукраинского конфликта

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Also, Russian intelligence services regularly conduct information operations aimed at “proving” Zelensky's supposed personal admiration for figures of the Third Reich. For example, in December 2023, Russian propaganda spread a fake claim that the Zelensky family had allegedly purchased a villa in Germany that once belonged to Joseph Goebbels.

Komsomolskaya Pravda: “The fact that the current Ukrainian regime resembles a fascist one is now obvious to everyone. This is constantly evident in its ideology, political practices, and symbolism. And now, it is even in hereditary preferences... A small company, Film Heritage Inc., registered in Belize, bought a villa for more than eight million [euros] called ‘House on Lake Bogen.’ At first glance, it seems like a regular deal, but two circumstances raised interest. Firstly, this villa once belonged to one of the main figures of the Nazi regime – the Minister of Propaganda of the Third Reich, Joseph Goebbels. Secondly, it turned out that the company that made the purchase is directly connected to the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky.”

Moreover, Russian intelligence services have, at various times, spread fake stories claiming that Zelensky bought Hitler’s residence, the “Eagle’s Nest,” or Hitler’s “state limousine,” and so on.

Russian media continue to flood the information space with visual propaganda materials in which Volodymyr Zelensky is, in one way or another, equated with Hitler:



3. SUB-NARRATIVE “NAZI UKRAINE - A THREAT TO RUSSIA”

Content of the sub-narrative. This sub-narrative is aimed at shifting the responsibility for the war’s outbreak onto Ukraine. It constructs an image of Ukraine as a “fascist aggressor state” that commits criminal policies towards its citizens and harbors aggressive plans against the Russian Federation itself. The focus on Ukraine’s “fascist” nature is used to lend additional propagandistic weight to false accusations and to discredit Ukraine - victim of aggression.

This sub-narrative began being used in the information war against Ukraine from the onset of Russia’s armed aggression in 2014 and has varied throughout the time period. In the initial phase, when Russia’s invasion had a hybrid character, it was used to falsify the real event: the external aggression against Ukraine was portrayed as a “civil war in Ukraine,” supposedly between “fascist radicals” who came to power as a result of the “coup” (the Revolution of Dignity) and the residents of the southern and eastern regions, who were allegedly defending themselves and conducting an “anti-fascist struggle.”

NB. It is important to note that the emphasis on the “anti-fascist” character of the so-called “people’s republics of Donbas” was part of the justification for the occupation of these territories: supposedly, Russia shares a common heritage with them from the “glorious victors of Nazism in 1945,” a shared memory of the “Great Patriotic War,” as well as a willingness to resist the modern “descendants of the Nazis and collaborators.”

In the following years, after the conclusion of the active phase of the Anti-Terrorist Operation in Eastern Ukraine, the focus shifted to “Ukraine’s crimes against Donbas.” This strategy aimed at constructing a casus belli for starting a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. With the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the sub-narrative of a threat from “fascist Ukraine” to Russia became one of the main leitmotifs of Russian propaganda. Thus, the criminal unprovoked attack on a sovereign state was presented as an act of self-defense for Russia and the “Russian world.”

Purpose of promoting the sub-narrative:

This sub-narrative serves different functions, depending on the audience it targets:

For the internal Russian audience: to justify the full-scale aggression by creating a myth about the threat from “fascist Ukraine,” analogous to the events of World War II; to mobilize society to support the so-called “Special Military Operation” (SVO, CBO).

For the international audience: to justify the aggression against Ukraine by creating a myth about an “aggressive fascist Ukraine” that allegedly poses a threat to Russia; to weaken international support for Ukraine.

For the Ukrainian audience: to justify Russian aggression; to discredit the top military-political leadership of Ukraine.

Examples of sub-narrative promotion by russian officials / authorities:



“NATO prepared Ukraine for an attack on our country... This is a battle of good against evil. Our soldiers and officers prevented a great tragedy... Nationalism became the state ideology of Kyiv. If it weren’t for the decisions made by President Putin, military actions would have taken place on our territory. He managed to prevent an attack on Russia.”

Vyacheslav Volodin, Speaker of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, statement, May 4, 2022



“We... tried to achieve a peaceful resolution to this difficult conflict. You know how these negotiations ended: with lies, falsifications, and deceit from the Western elites who, in the meantime, turned Ukraine into their colony, a military foothold aimed at Russia. They systematically instilled hatred and radical nationalism... The objectives included not only Donbas but also Crimea and other Russian regions. The further development of events fully confirmed the necessity and justification of the special military operation, its truly liberating nature.”

Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, address, September 30, 2024:



“This year, we celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Great Victory in the Great Patriotic and World Wars... We will not leave the task of denazifying that state, which remains under the control of the Kyiv regime, which legislatively and physically exterminates everything Russian... These are ‘well-fed’ Nazis preparing another attempt to put the entire Europe under the racist Nazi flags for war against the Russian Federation.”

Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, speech, March 25, 2025



“The center of Ukrainian neo-Nazism, the creation of which was greatly aided by the deliberate actions of Washington and other Western regimes, poses a real threat – to Russia, to Belarus, to Europe, and to the entire world, and primarily – to the future of the Ukrainian people.”

Sergey Naryshkin, Head of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation, speech, December 13, 2023

Examples of propaganda

To promote this sub-narrative, Russian propaganda utilized various forms of information influence. In this context, notable examples of propagandistic article is political technologist Timofey Sergeyev's article, published on the news agency “RIA Novosti”⁹ website):

RIA Novosti, **“What kind of Ukraine we don't need”** (2021): “We rightly see a threat from Ukraine not only to Russian citizens in Ukrainian Donbas but also to Russian territories adjacent to Ukraine. This threat is clearly evident not only from direct statements by Ukrainian leadership and ideologists but also from the type of Ukrainian militarization, based on specifically Nazi mechanisms of aggression... The liquidation of such a Nazi community will

Какая Украина нам не нужна



© AP Photo / Evgeniy Maloletka

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Тимофей Сергеев
Все материалы

require not only cutting off the leadership but also cleansing the Nazi-influenced people from Nazi influence and involvement in Nazi ideology and practice... In fact, the fascist character of social organization in Ukraine is beyond doubt... Ukrainian Nazism not only declared Ukraine an enemy of Russia but also marked its territorial ambitions regarding Kuban, Russian Donbas, and other Russian regions.”

RIA Novosti, **“What Russia should do with Ukraine”** (2022): “Nazi, Bander Ukraine, the enemy of Russia and a tool of the West to destroy Russia, we don't need... The fact that the Ukrainian voter voted for ‘Poroshenko's peace’ and ‘Zelensky's peace’ should not deceive – Ukrainians were fully satisfied with the quickest way to peace through blitzkrieg, as hinted by the last two Ukrainian presidents during their election... Denazification can only be carried out by the victor, which implies (1) its unconditional control over the denazification process and (2) a government ensuring such control... Ukronazism poses an even greater threat to the world and Russia than Hitler's German Nazism.”

Что Россия должна сделать с Украиной



© РИА Новости / Иван Родионов | Перейти в медиабанк
Флаги Украины и “Правого сектора”, найденные в бывшем расположении ВСУ под Мариуполем. Архивное фото

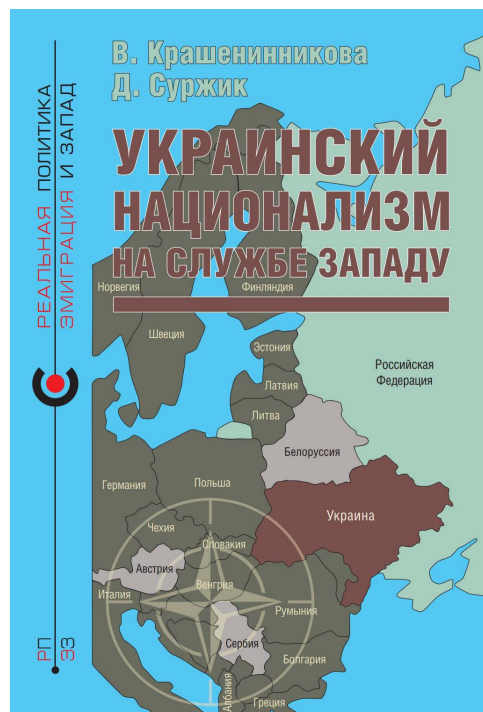
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⁹ State media, part of Federal State unitary Enterprise “International Information Agency ‘Russia Today’”.

Furthermore, pseudoscientific literature is published to spread and substantiate this sub-narrative, such as:



Book “Ukrainian Nationalism in the Service of the West,” publisher: “Institute of Foreign Policy Studies and Initiatives”¹⁰ (2023): “The authors examine the involvement of Western state agencies and intelligence services in the formation and strengthening of Ukrainian nationalism and its transformation into a weapon against Russia. The focus is on the efforts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Kaiser, Weimar and Nazi Germany, the United States during the ‘Cold War,’ and in the post-Soviet period. The historical example of Ukraine shows the danger of externally stimulated nationalist ideology and imported elites emigration representative with close ties to foreign intelligence services.”

¹⁰ Veronika Krasheninnikova – General Director of the “Institute of Foreign Policy Studies and Initiatives.” From June 2014 to 2020, Deputy Chair of the Committee for Public Support of Residents of Southeastern Ukraine under the Federation Council of the Russian Federation. From 2016 to 2021, member of the Supreme Council of the “Edinaya Rosia” party. Since July 2020, a member of the Russian Historical Society.

4. SUB-NARRATIVE “THE UKRAINIAN ARMY – MODERN NAZIS”

Content of the sub-narrative: This sub-narrative has undergone several stages of development. Essentially, it took shape after the start of the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) in Eastern Ukraine and was a kind of continuation of the narrative about “fascist groups” that allegedly carried out a “coup in Kyiv.” This rhetoric was first applied to volunteer formations and then to other units involved in the ATO.

The overthrow of the “legitimate government” within the hybrid invasion in certain districts of Luhansk and Donetsk regions was portrayed by propaganda as a “civil war in Ukraine,” allegedly between “fascist enforcers” and “Donbas militias” who were resisting “fascism.” Propaganda built an image of Ukraine’s defenders as “fascists” who were only loosely subordinate to the central government (the “junta”), followed a misanthropic ideology, and committed atrocities against civilians. Accordingly, the ATO was portrayed not as resistance to hybrid aggression but as a “punitive operation” against the population of Donbas.

NB: Analogies between ATO forces and Third Reich units were an important theme in propaganda. One of the first and most notorious fake stories was about a “crucified boy,” fabricated and broadcast by employees of Russia’s “Channel One” on July 12, 2014. The **broadcast** featured false claims by a “refugee from Sloviansk,” who allegedly was a witness these events, and already contained the sub-narrative under analysis: “These are not liberators, they are monsters. (...) They fired at the city. They looted. Our elderly grandmothers said even the Nazis didn’t behave like that. This is the SS ‘Galicia’ division. (...) They mocked the locals. Raped women and killed children. And all these are their great-grandchildren. They have been reborn.” In November 2014, “Channel One” spread another **famous** fake story that Ukrainian volunteers were allegedly promised “**a plot of land and two slaves**” for taking part in the ATO—clearly referencing Nazi plans for occupied Ukraine.

In the following years, the sub-narrative that the Ukrainian Defense Forces had allegedly committed or continued to commit various crimes and adhered to a misanthropic ideology remained a key

component of Russian propaganda about Ukraine. For a long time, the main “character” in information operations was the organization “Pravyy Sektor,” but later the primary target of propaganda became the “Azov” battalion (now - the 12th Special Purpose Brigade “Azov” of the National Guard of Ukraine).

With the start of the full-scale invasion, the discrediting of the Ukrainian Defense Forces became one of the main themes of Russian propaganda. The sub-narrative that Ukraine’s defenders are “modern-day Nazis” has been and continues to be pushed with high intensity using both informational and other means. **In March 2022**, one of the main propaganda myths was the accusation that “Azov” fighters were allegedly “destroying Mariupol.” In August 2022, the Supreme Court of Russia **designated** “Azov” a “terrorist organization.” During the process, one of the Russian experts presented a study titled “Neo-Nazism and Terrorism in the Ideology and Activities of the ‘Azov Movement’ in Ukraine.” Also in August 2022, Russia prepared a propaganda event—a “tribunal” over “Ukrainian war criminals,” specifically the “Nazis from Azov.”

It is worse noting that accusations of “Nazism” are applied not only to “Azov,” but also to any other Ukrainian military units or to the Ukrainian Defense Forces as a whole, depending on propaganda needs. The main goal is to create an associative link between historical Nazis and supposed “their ukrainian heirs.”

Purpose of promoting the sub-narrative:

This sub-narrative serves different functions depending on the target audience:

For the domestic audience in Russia: to justify aggression against Ukraine; as part of the **Kremlin’s genocidal rhetoric** toward Ukraine and Ukrainians; to encourage participation in the war against Ukraine.

For the international audience: to justify Russian aggression; to weaken international support for Ukraine; to discredit the Ukrainian Defense Forces as adherents of a misanthropic ideology and perpetrators of war crimes.

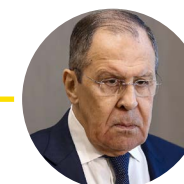
For the Ukrainian audience: to justify Russian aggression and occupation as “protection” of the temporarily occupied territories’ population from “Nazi enforcers”; to encourage separatism and collaboration.

Examples of sub-narrative promotion by russian officials / authorities:



“Today, both small settlements and large cities are surrounded by the Ukrainian army, which is conducting direct-fire strikes on residential areas with the aim of destroying infrastructure and suppressing the will of those who resist... As sad as it is, it reminds me of events from the Second World War, when the Nazi German occupiers surrounded our cities—say, Lenin-grad—and fired directly on those populated areas and their inhabitants.”

President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin, speech at the “Seliger” forum, **August 24, 2014**



“We have no doubt that Ukraine has ultimately turned into a totalitarian state of the Nazi type, where international humanitarian law is blatantly disregarded with impunity. It’s no surprise that the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the nationalist battalions employ terrorist tactics, using civilians as human shields (...) Today, the Russian Armed Forces and the militias of the DPR and LPR are opposed not only by the neo-Nazi formations of the Kyiv regime but also by the military machine of the ‘collective’ West.”

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, speech, **September 22, 2022:**



“We’re told there can be no Nazis in Ukraine. But we know full well that not only are they present, they are calling the shots. Ukraine’s national heroes are Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych. You’ve chosen to ignore Ukrainian neo-Nazis and pretend they don’t exist. But unfortunately, they do... Especially many of them are in the national battalions—‘Aidar’, ‘Azov’, and the ‘Right Sector’. They kill like Nazis—not only Russian prisoners of war but even their own. And they use civilians as human shields... There is evidence that these Nazis carved swastikas into civilians’ chests...”

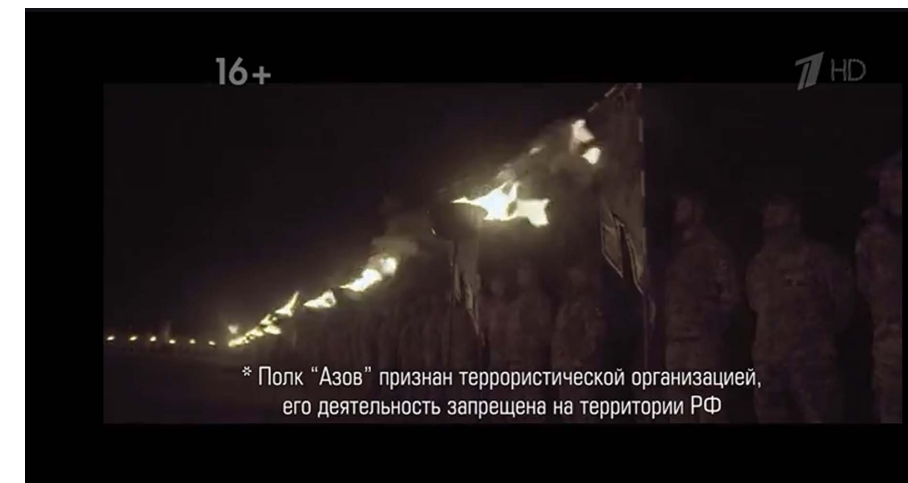
Permanent representative of Russia to the UN Vasily Nebenzya, speech, [April 5, 2022](#)

Examples of propaganda

To promote this sub-narrative, Russian propaganda has employed a wide range of informational influence tools. One of the most notorious examples is the fake story about the “crucified boy,” circulated by Russian propaganda in 2014.



Since then, Russian propaganda has mass-produced not only fake video reports like these but also pseudo-documentaries and fictional films portraying the “atrocities of Ukrainian enforcers” and the so-called “genocide of Donbas.” One of the main targets of Russian propaganda is the 12th Special Purpose Brigade “Azov”, which, since its founding in 2014, has been falsely portrayed as a “Nazi battalion”.



Documentary film “Azov of the Brain”, Channel One (2022):

“Shortly before the Olenivka tragedy, a film crew led by Marina Kim visited the colony... To say that the Azov fighters, once captured, realized their own brutality and Nazi nature would be wrong. Not at all. What’s going on in their heads is terrifying—Ukrainian Nazism as it really is, its roots and ideology. The story of the banned ‘Azov’, which was recently declared a terrorist organization, is told through the accounts of the nationalists themselves.”

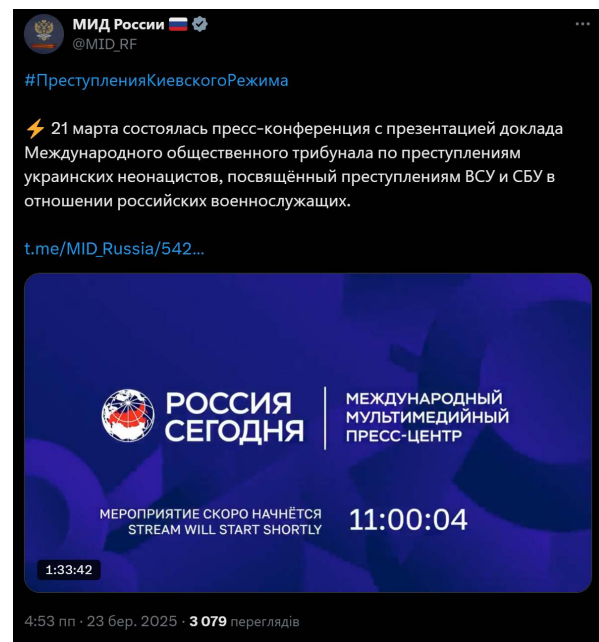
To drown out or justify its own war crimes against Ukraine, Russia systematically spreads fake stories about “Ukrainian war crimes” in various forms. Many of these fake narratives serve to reinforce the sub-narrative being analyzed. Notably, this includes the propaganda series “Ordinary Fascism”, launched in 2016.

¹¹ Maksim Grigoryev – Member of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, member of the “United Russia” party, head of the “International Public Tribunal for Crimes of Ukrainian Neo-Nazis.”



It is important to note that not only information tools are used to reinforce this sub-narrative. In March 2022, a so-called “International Public Tribunal on the Crimes of Ukrainian Neo-Nazis” was established under the platform of Russia’s Public Chamber. The true purpose of this organization is to spread fake stories about the “atrocities” of Ukrainian soldiers, with support from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

However, the most significant instrument of Russian propaganda is the staging of “trials” against Ukrainian prisoners of war, who are falsely accused of committing war crimes. In 2022, the occupiers even planned to conduct a “tribunal against nationalists” in Mariupol, drawing direct parallels with the Nuremberg Trials.



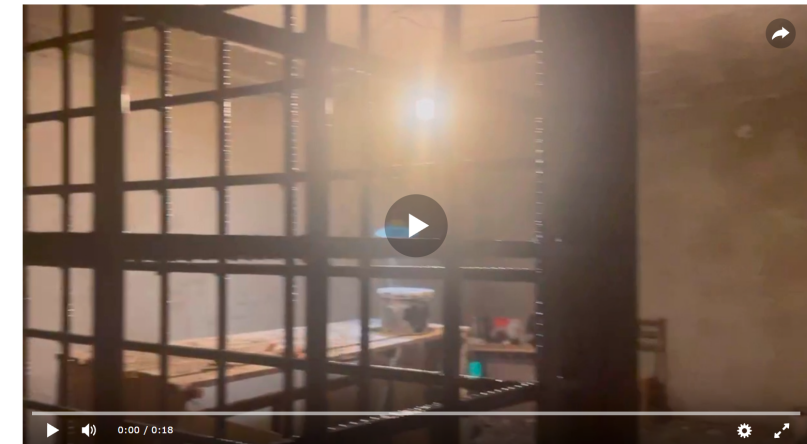
¹² TV channel “Zvezda” is part of the federal media holding “Television Company of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation ‘ZVEZDA’”, which is under the control of the Russian Ministry of Defense.



В Мариуполе показали клетки для трибунала над националистами

Со слов главы ДНР Дениса Пушилина, первое заседание международного трибунала может состояться до конца лета.

Ян Брацкий 2022-08-10 13:14:01



Due to pressure from the international community, the “tribunal” in Mariupol did not take place. However, show trials against Ukrainian prisoners of war continue regularly, accompanied by appropriate propaganda coverage.



5. SUB-NARRATIVE «RUSSIA IS LIBERATING THE RESIDENTS OF UKRAINE FROM FASCISM»

Content of the sub-narrative: This sub-narrative is aimed at justifying the seizure of Ukrainian territories and establishing the authority of occupation administrations in the temporarily occupied territories (TOT) of Ukraine. Its origins go back to 2014, when the Russian invasion was carried out in the form of hybrid aggression. At the initial stage, it was used to encourage collaborationism among local residents of Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions, as well as to justify the presence of Russian forces in the form of so-called “little green men,” “volunteers,” and others. The goal of the propaganda was to distort reality: the invasion was portrayed as “assistance in protection from fascists,” and participation in anti-government uprisings and illegal armed formations (IAFs) was framed as “anti-fascist self-defense.”

NB: From the beginning of anti-government uprisings in various regions of Ukraine, the St. George's ribbon was a key identifying symbol of pro-Russian forces. It originates from the military award system of the Russian Empire and in modern Russia has become one of the symbols of the “Cult of Victory.” Since 2017, the production, use, and promotion of the St. George's ribbon, which has become a symbol of Russian aggression and occupation, has been banned under Ukrainian law.

After the occupation regime was established in the TOT of Ukraine, “anti-fascist” rhetoric saturated with allusions to World War II became characteristic of the puppet “leaders of the people's republics” in Donetsk and Luhansk. In this rhetoric, and in the ideology imposed by the occupational administrations, the war against Ukraine was presented as a struggle against “modern fascism.” The illegal conscription of local residents into the ranks of the occupying army was interpreted as a reenactment of the “heroic deeds of the Soviet people” during World War II.

The export of “victory cultism” (победобесие) to the occupied territories became an important tool for ideological indoctrination and identity transformation of TOT residents. In the Russian interpretation, the Soviet-Russian Victory Day on May 9 acquired a distinctly anti-Ukrainian tone, as propaganda portrayed Ukraine as the source

of a new “brown plague.” Accordingly, TOT residents were being imposed an identity as victims of “Ukrainian fascism” and at the same time as the vanguard of an “anti-fascist resistance.” This served to reinforce the militarization of TOT residents, especially children and youth.

NB: A telling example is the interpretation of the annual “Immortal Regiment” event, which is one of the main public rituals of the “Cult of Victory.” In the TOT, it became common for participants to carry not only photos of World War II soldiers, but also pictures of “militiamen”—Russian fighters and local collaborators who died in the war against Ukraine. This practice is designed to create a symbolic continuity and perceived legacy between Soviet soldiers who fought against Nazism in WWII and the participants in Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

Purpose of promoting the sub-narrative:

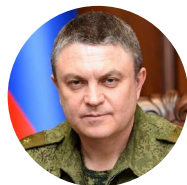
This sub-narrative serves different functions depending on the target audience:

For the domestic audience in Russia: to justify the occupation and illegal annexation of Ukrainian territories; to justify the war against Ukraine.

For the audience in Ukraine: to portray Russian aggression and occupation as “protection” of the TOT population from “Nazi punishers”; to encourage separatism and collaborationism.

For the audience in the TOT of Ukraine: to justify the occupation; to enforce identity transformation and ideological indoctrination; to promote collaborationism and service in the army of the occupying state.

Examples of sub-narrative promotion by russian officials / authorities:



“Two years ago, the special military operation of Russian forces in Ukraine began... In a literal sense, the residents of Donbas were saved from the inhuman Ukrainian aggression... Eternal memory to the heroes who gave their lives in fierce battle with the enemy. They died continuing the legacy of their heroic grandfathers and great-grandfathers—for a world without fascism, hatred, and violence.”

So-called “head of the LPR,”
Leonid Pasechnik, post dated
February 24, 2024



“In 1941, German fascism came to Donetsk land. The invaders tried to conquer Donbas... In 2014, neo-Nazi scum once again encroached on Donbas. And we rose to fight them, guided by the memory of our ancestors’ feats, loyal to the Great Motherland. Today, for peace on Donetsk land, we are again, as in the Great Patriotic War, fighting side by side with our brothers from all over Russia.”

So-called “head of the DPR”, Denis
Pushilin, post dated
September 8, 2022



“Thanks to Russia, the Kyiv regime failed to erase from the history of Kherson region the memory of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War. Today, when Nazism has raised its head again, preserving historical memory is especially relevant. Our current task is, once again as in 1945, to cut off the head of the Nazi hydra, liberate the remaining territories of Ukraine from the Kyiv gang, and reach another Victory Day.”

So-called “governor of Kherson
region”, Vladimir Saldo, post
dated May 9, 2024



“Congratulations to everyone on the 79th anniversary of the Great Victory! Our country celebrates the holiday amid combat operations continuing in the special military operation zone. Nazi scum are once again attacking Russian cities and villages... Our people accomplished the greatest feat—defeating fascism... It was a Great Victory of good over evil. The Victory Code is in our hearts. It is in the hearts of our warriors, participants in the SMO, who are now crushing Nazism. They, like our grandfathers and great-grandfathers, are fighting for life and freedom against absolute evil. We, like our glorious ancestors, stand shoulder to shoulder for the Motherland.”

So-called “head of the Republic
of Crimea”, Sergei Aksyonov,
address, May 9, 2024

Examples of propaganda

To promote this sub-narrative, Russian propaganda employs a wide range of information and psychological influence tools. One of the most well-known FIMI operations conducted by Russia at the beginning of the full-scale invasion was the so-called “Grandmother with the red flag,” which was quickly



debunked by the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security (CSCIS) in May 2022. At that time, a resident of the Kharkiv region, Anna Ivanova, approached Ukrainian soldiers with a red flag, mistaking them for Russian occupiers. She decided to use the red flag to try to convince the Russians “not to destroy Ukraine.” The incident was caught on video, and Russian propaganda distorted the event, turning the elderly woman into a symbol of a “pro-Russian Ukraine” supposedly “resisting the Ucronazis.”

The image of the “Grandmother with the Victory Flag” was actively exploited by Russian propaganda for some time: corresponding monuments were erected, murals painted, etc. In May 2022, such a monument was erected by the occupation administration in Mariupol¹³.

On the temporarily occupied territories (TOT) of Ukraine, the imposition of the analyzed sub-narrative is carried out through extensive use of the administrative resources of the occupation authorities and forms part of a broader effort aimed at the forcible reconfiguration of local identity and ideological indoctrination of the population, including children and youth.

¹³ The monument was unveiled with the participation of Sergey Kiriyenko, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation, and Denis Pushilin, head of the occupation administration of the so-called “Donetsk People’s Republic” (DPR).

In particular, the promotion of this sub-narrative takes place through mass events and public campaigns, often involving young people and schoolchildren.



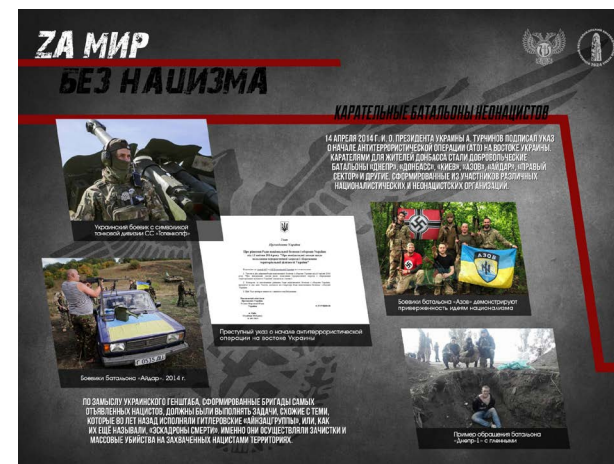
Молодёжь Запорожской области почтила память жертв украинской агрессии

В памятный день на базе Министерства по молодежной политике волонтеры #ЮгМолодой зажгли более 1000 свечей в рамках акции «Свеча памяти».

Создав огненную картину «Помним», ребята почтили память невинных людей, ставших жертвами преступлений украинских нацистов.

For instance, on April 15, a propaganda event was held in occupied Melitopol to mark the so-called “Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Ukrainian Aggression,” organized by the youth movement “Yug Molodoy”.

In the TOT propaganda exhibitions are also regularly conducted. For example, in February 2024, the Donetsk Local History Museum hosted an exhibition titled “**For Peace Without Nazism**”¹⁵, which allegedly “uncovered the crimes of Nazi Germany on the territory of Donbas during the Great Patriotic War, while also demonstrating the consequences of modern Ukraine’s neo-Nazism and aggression.”



¹⁴ The autonomous non-profit organization Yug Molodoy is a movement established by the occupiers to ideologically indoctrinate youth in the occupied territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions.

¹⁵ The exhibition was organized in partnership with the state-run Victory Museum in Moscow.

Another key instrument in advancing this sub-narrative is propaganda through monuments and memorials. For example, in September 2023, the “reconstructed” memorial complex Ostra Mohyla was unveiled in Luhansk. Originally built during the Soviet era, this memorial was dedicated to the battles of the Red Army against the White Guards in 1919, and against the Nazis in 1943. The recent “reconstruction” was carried out by the Russian Military Historical Society .



As part of the “reconstruction,” a sculptural group was installed at Ostra Mohyla, depicting figures of a Red Army soldier from the Civil War, a Soviet soldier from World War II, a so-called “militiaman” (a member of illegal armed formations controlled by Russia) from 2014, and a “participant of the Special Military Operation” (a soldier of the Russian occupation forces during the full-scale invasion). The sculptures are united by the inscription: “In memory of the heroes of the defense of Luhansk.” Thus, the memorial reinforces the sub-narrative suggesting that Russian aggression against Ukraine in the 21st century and the fight against Nazism during World War II are part of the same historical continuum, and in both cases, portraying the residents of Luhansk as defending themselves from an external threat.

¹⁶ This is a state-affiliated public organization, whose statutory goals include “promoting the patriotic upbringing of youth and adolescents in the spirit of love, loyalty, and selfless service to the Motherland, and respect for the Defender of the Fatherland and the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.”

CONCLUSIONS

The myth of the “Great Patriotic War,” adopted and weaponized by Moscow, forms one of the ideological pillars of Rashism—the ideology underpinning the Putin regime. For decades, the narrative of “Ukrainian fascism” has held a central place in Russia’s propaganda system regarding Ukraine. Since 2014, with the onset of armed aggression against Ukraine, this narrative has been reduced to a formula: “The war against Ukraine is a continuation of the sacred war against fascism that Russia began in 1941.”

This narrative, along with its variations (sub-narratives), is actively employed in Russia’s FIMI (foreign information manipulation and interference) operations targeting Ukraine. The aggressor state utilizes a wide range of tools—both informational and kinetic—with particular intensity on the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

Therefore, the dissemination of truthful knowledge about World War II in Ukraine and globally is inseparable from the active resistance to Russia’s attempts to manipulate memory and falsify history. However, in the context of an ongoing information war, this resistance goes far beyond purely scholarly and educational efforts. The weaponization of history by Russia demands an adequate response within the broader framework of countering FIMI activities in a wartime setting.

This response requires consolidated efforts by the state (including security services) and civil society, as well as enhanced international cooperation, since Russia’s information aggression is directed not only against Ukraine but also against the entire Euro-Atlantic community.



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