



**Centre for
Information
Resilience**

Eyes on Russia Project

Report 1

9th February 2022



Eyes on Russia: Report 1

Background

The Centre for Information Resilience’s “Eyes on Russia” Project will monitor and verify developments related to Russian aggression toward Ukraine. Each week, CIR investigators will collate, geolocate, and, as possible, verify photos and video footage appearing on social media and claims made by parties to the conflict.

CIR will also contextualize these details amid the discourse and developments of the week. The footage will be added to an [open source map](#), which policymakers, journalists, and other OSINT researchers can use to track the conflict. Finally, CIR will release weekly written summaries of its research, detailing verified troop and equipment movements, influence operation narratives, and broader updates. This is the first of such weekly reports.

The Centre for Information Resilience (CIR) is an independent, non-profit social enterprise dedicated to exposing human rights abuses, countering disinformation, and combating online behaviour.

We believe, at a time of heightened tension, that journalists and policymakers should have easy access to verified information. The Eyes on Russia Project will aim to empower its audiences with analysis and facts on which they can rely.

If you require further information, please do get in touch at hello@info-res.org.

1. Executive Summary

CIR has identified and verified significant Russian military movements in Belarus, western Russia, and annexed Crimea. While Russia maintains it has no plans to invade Ukraine and that the observed movements are simply part of planned military exercises, several items suggest these developments to be far from ordinary:

- The presence of the National Guard (Rosgvardiya) on the Russian border with Ukraine, indicates that President Putin is in direct control of the buildup, as it functions outside the normal Russian Chain of Command. They are responsible for maintaining “stability” inside Russia, and often respond to public disquiet at the outset of protests. Its presence in the border area suggests Putin thinks there is significant risk involved with military activity against Russia’s western neighbour.
- U.S. officials have [recently alleged](#) that Russia has moved blood supply and other medical units near the Ukrainian border. CIR has not yet been able to independently verify this claim, but if true, it would suggest that the Kremlin anticipates incurring casualties which would not occur during a routine military exercise.

Furthermore, CIR is tracking noted Russian influence narratives that are attempting to pin the cause of the conflict or any potential escalation on Ukraine or NATO, rather than Russian aggression.

2. Noted Narratives

From 17 January to 2 February, CIR observed a marked increase in mentions of the following narratives in English-language media.

The number of mentions of these narratives across Twitter over the past year are indicated in the graph (Figure 1) below:

- “Ukraine is run by neo-Nazis/fascists” (*in green*)
- “The conflict is a result of NATO aggression. NATO/U.S. Government wants war in Ukraine” (*in blue*)
- “Western arms and energy industry lobbyists are driving the conflict” (*in yellow*)



Figure 1: Mentions of Russian influence narratives on Twitter from 8 Feb 2021 to 7 Feb 2022.

“Ukraine is run by neo-Nazis/fascists.” (Figures 2 and 3)

- Russia has been [propagating narratives](#) across social media labeling Ukrainian leaders and government figures as “neo-Nazis/fascists.” These efforts are an attempt to discredit the democratic nature of Ukraine, and the strength of Ukrainian national identity. While there are neo-Nazi/far-right groups in Ukraine, they do not hold representation within parliament or government bodies.
- CIR’s analysis of image posts on public Facebook pages indicates that this narrative is being promulgated in politically left-wing spaces (as well as among US libertarians), often citing not Russian state media, but well-known journalists or major news outlets. These range from once-respected-turned conspiracist journalists such as John Pilger, to editorials in mainstream broadsheets such as the [Washington Post](#).
- It should be noted, however, that individuals associated with Russian propaganda efforts have been keenly promoting this narrative, both by their own content and amplifying material from non-Russian sources.



Tory scandals are a facade for war. The unreported facts are: Russian troops are in Russia. British troops are on Russia's borders. Russia is ringed by US missiles. The elected govt in Ukraine was overthrown by Obama and replaced with an anti Russian regime infested with Nazis.

11:49 AM - Jan 19, 2022 - Twitter Web App

3,045 Retweets 323 Quote Tweets 5,654 Likes



The CIA May Be Breeding Nazi Terror in Ukraine



jacobinmag.com

The CIA May Be Breeding Nazi Terror in Ukraine

The CIA has been secretly training anti-Russian groups in Ukraine since 2015. Everything we know points to the likelihood that includes neo-

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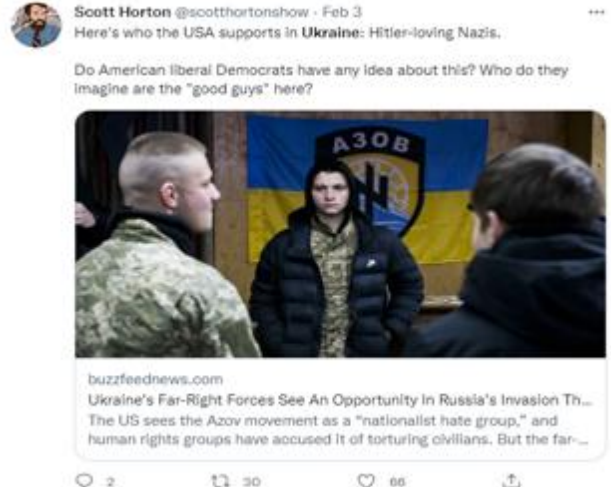


Figure 2: Examples of “Ukrainian neo-Nazi” discourse shared by Western influencers.



Figure 3: Further examples of “Ukrainian neo-Nazi” narratives in Western discourse.

“The conflict is a result of NATO aggression. NATO/U.S. Government wants war in Ukraine.” (Figure 4)

- The Russian government has repeatedly circulated disinformation in corporate and social media claiming that escalating tensions are a result of NATO and U.S. governmental attempts to contain Russia. In fact, NATO countries only touch six percent of Russia’s borders, and both the U.S. and the Alliance have continuously affirmed independent nations’ right to self-determination, maintaining that NATO has an “open door” to nations seeking membership that meet the criteria. While Ukraine and Georgia may become NATO members in the future, both countries have significant political and military reforms to undertake before they do.
- A key component of this [narrative](#) is the notion that the United States “[betrayed](#)” the Soviet Union by renegeing on an agreement at the close of the Cold War that NATO would not expand eastwards. This claim was [refuted](#) by Mikhail Gorbachev himself, in an interview with a Russian government newspaper from 2014, in which he said that no agreement was made on former Warsaw Pact countries joining NATO, while NATO bases were not constructed in the former East Germany, as had been discussed.
- In recent months Russian state media have [attempted](#) to buttress this narrative with new claims, such as records of a conversation in which Bill Clinton promised Boris Yeltsin not to “accelerate” NATO expansion, but the argument remains weak as new member states like Poland sought membership rather than having it put upon them by the USA.
- Alongside this, the Russian government has made a variety of dramatic and unfounded claims regarding US military [intentions](#) in the region. For example, December saw [allegations](#) from the Russian Foreign Ministry that 4,000 American soldiers had been deployed to the front line in the Donbass, while the Defence Minister, Sergei Shoigu, [told President Putin](#) that US mercenaries were preparing to stage chemical weapons attacks. The claim reappeared in late January, when RT and various DNR-related Telegram channels [suggested](#) that visiting Americans from a military-themed clothing company were mercenaries.

- Where possible, Russian state media has seized upon foreign endorsement of this narrative, such as that from far-right French presidential candidate [Eric Zemmour](#). This narrative appears to have a certain degree of support from both the hard left and the far-right in the West.

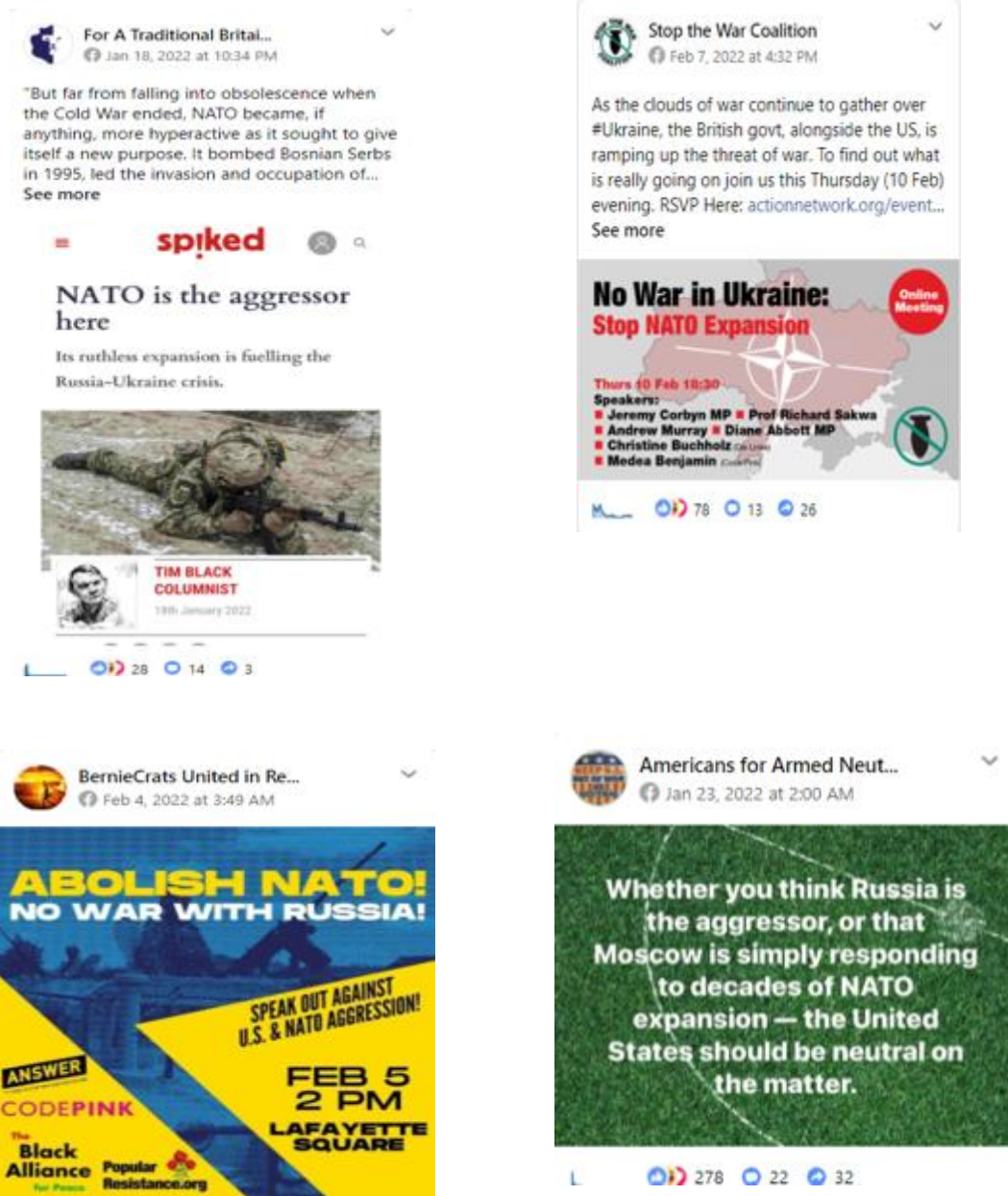


Figure 4: Examples of "NATO aggression" narrative in Western discourse.

“Western arms and energy industry lobbyists are driving the conflict.” (Figures 5 and 6)

- This narrative exploits reasonable cynicism regarding corporate influence in Western democracies, while minimising the real political and military drivers of the conflict. Charitably, it is a grossly childish view of international affairs - at worst, it encourages isolationism or disinterest in human suffering.
- Russian state media has made a point of regularly highlighting the alleged [benefits](#) of a war for various arms and energy corporations - particularly those involved in selling aircraft and missiles to the United States military, or firms involved in [liquid natural gas](#) or fracking. This tweet by an RT employee shows how this narrative can be paired with that of NATO expansionism, again eliding the agency of former Warsaw Pact states by claiming that the reason for their accession to the alliance was corporate lobbying.



Figure 5: RT Commentator Bryan MacDonald pushes the arms/energy narrative.

- The gas argument raised on the understandable but dangerously simplistic association between the Iraq war and oil, is attractive to many. However, it is contradictory to the interests of European NATO members, who are extremely sensitive to gas prices and have no pecuniary interest in escalating the conflict.
- The ease with which this narrative can be taken for granted is demonstrated with its wide use across the political spectrum.



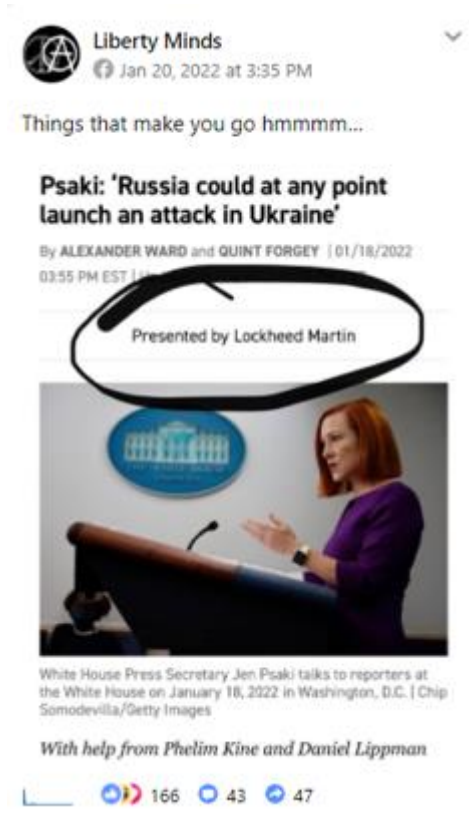


Figure 6: Further examples of the arms/energy narrative in Western discourse.

3. Military Movements

Belarus

- As the Russian military continues to mobilize towards the Ukrainian border, CIR investigators have geolocated Russian heavy weaponry and logistical equipment moving in the Southern region of Belarus.
- The first gathering point is the city of Gomel, 60 km north of the Ukrainian border.¹ Next, heavy weaponry and logistical equipment are moved 50 km further west to the city of Rechitsa, which CIR identified to be a key unloading point for the Russian army within Belarus.² The final destination for troops and equipment is in Mazyr, a city 100km west of Rechitsa and 50 km north of the Ukrainian border.³
- CIR verified that tank brigades have been mobilized to the vicinity of the city, in the towns of Kamenka⁴ and Yelsk,⁵ where logistical equipment and heavy weaponry were identified. Finally, CIR investigators geolocated an Iskander short range ballistic missile system being transported and unloaded by Russian forces in Asipovichy, a town that is 180 km north of Mazyr.⁶

¹ First verifiable movements are dated to the 21st of January. The arrival of weaponry and equipment is ongoing.

² First verifiable movements are dated to the 21st of January. The arrival of weaponry and equipment is ongoing.

³ Movements were verified on the 24th and 25th of January.

⁴ Movements were verified on the 24th of January.

⁵ Movements were verified on the 29th of January.

⁶ Movements were verified on the 20th and 21st of January

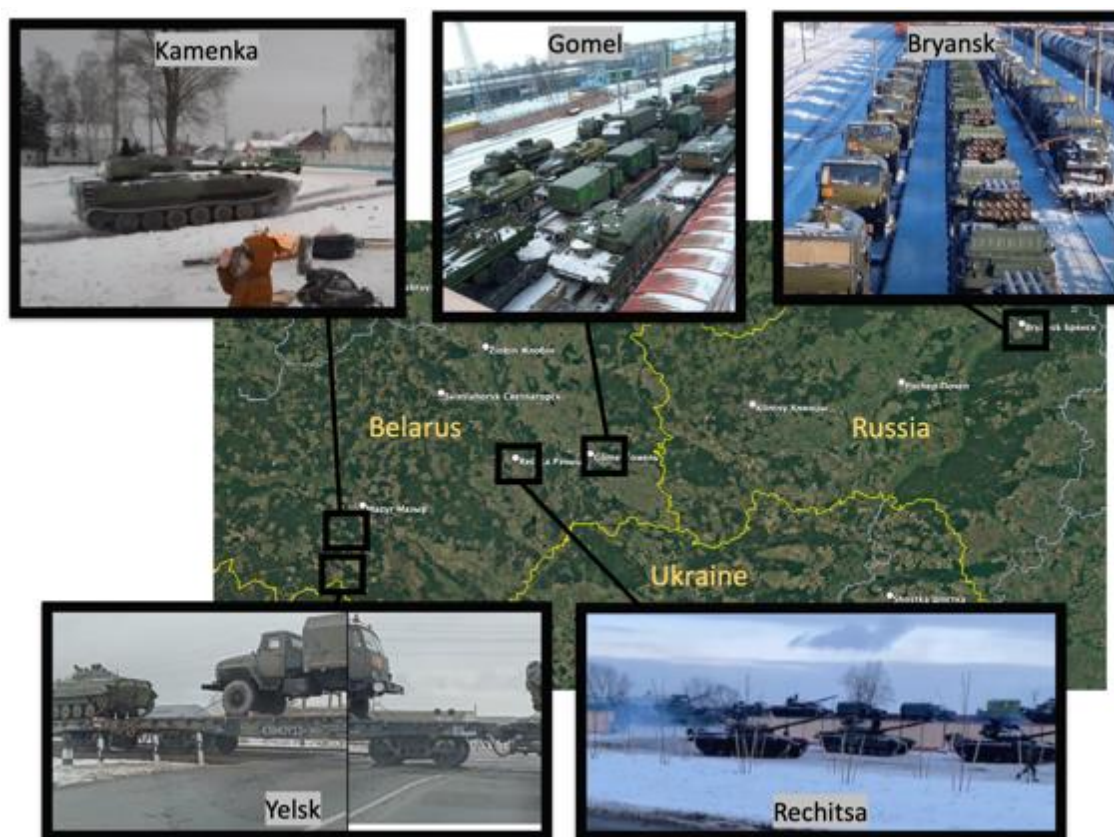


Figure7 : Map of military buildup in southern Belarus

Western Russia

- CIR also identified Russian military equipment within the city of Tyumen, located 2,000 km east of Moscow and near the northern border of Kazakhstan.⁷ Geolocated footage has confirmed trains moving through the city towards Western Russian provinces. Equipment in this convoy consisted of logistical support such as fueling vehicles and heavy weaponry such as tanks.
- Concurrently patrol boats from the Russian Baltic fleet have been identified near Rogachevka in Voronezh Oblast, on their journey over land.⁸ The boats were moving south from the Baltic sea, along the 1500 kilometer long M4 highway connecting Moscow with the southern city of Krasnodar, which directly borders Crimea.

⁷ Movements were verified as early as the 16th of January and the latest on the 30th of January.

⁸ Movement was verified on the 30th of January.

Annexed Crimea

- Russian military equipment has also been moved towards Crimea. While military equipment has been moving to the Southern areas of Russia through both the city of Tyumen, and near Rogachevka in Voronezh Oblast, CIR identified trains moving from the southern city of Krasnodar towards the border with Crimea.⁹ CIR also identified several Russian military convoys with heavy weaponry moving further west within Crimea.¹⁰

⁹ Movements were verified between the 24th of January and the 29th of January.

¹⁰ Movements were verified between the 27th of January and the 28th of January.