



**Centre for  
Information  
Resilience**

# Eyes on Russia Project

**Report 2**

15<sup>th</sup> February 2022



## Eyes on Russia: Report 2

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### 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. Our latest findings can always be found on this [Twitter thread](#).

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 second of such weekly reports. The first report can be read [here](#).

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](mailto: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 continue to suggest these developments are far from ordinary:

- The continued build-up of new military camps at the Russian border with Ukraine and the build-up of several military field hospitals in different areas of Belarus and Crimea, as well as stationing large amounts of Russian helicopters 30 kilometres from the border with Ukraine.
- Eleven large Russian Navy landing ships, six of which arrived from the Northern and the fleets, were seen moving through the Bosphorus on the 8th of February, along with an additional three cruiser strike groups, centred around three Slava class missile cruisers. Additionally, the Conflict Intelligence Team has identified Russian submarines moving along the strait. This naval movement would allow elements of the 810th Separate Naval Infantry Brigade from the Black Sea Fleet and the 336th Separate Guards Naval Infantry Brigade of the Baltic Fleet to attempt an amphibious landing around either Odessa on the Black Sea or Mariupol on the Azov Sea in the case of a Russian invasion.<sup>1</sup>
- Despite assurances of the Russian military returning to its home bases, there has been no evidence confirming such claims. ‘Russia Today’ footage claiming to show troops moving away from the border were geolocated to Bakhchisaray train station, Crimea (180 KM from mainland Ukraine), indicating these troops had not been close to the border with Ukraine.

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.

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<sup>1</sup> For more see: Conflict Intelligence Team. “Russian Preparation for Large Scale Attack on Ukraine.” 14 February, 2022. <https://citeam.org/order-of-battle-russia-ukraine-2022.html?5>

## 2. Noted Narratives

From 3-13 February, CIR continued to observe the amplification of narratives noted in our first report, namely:

- Allegations that Ukraine is a neo-Nazi or fascist state, a narrative which has gained traction since our last report;
- Allegations the NATO is the aggressor responsible for any potential increase in hostilities in Ukraine, a narrative which has maintained its traction since last week;
- Allegations that the Western military industrial complex and energy lobbyists are fomenting war, a narrative which is slowly gaining traction.

The number of mentions of these narratives across Twitter since the beginning of February 2022 are indicated in the graph (Figure 1) below:

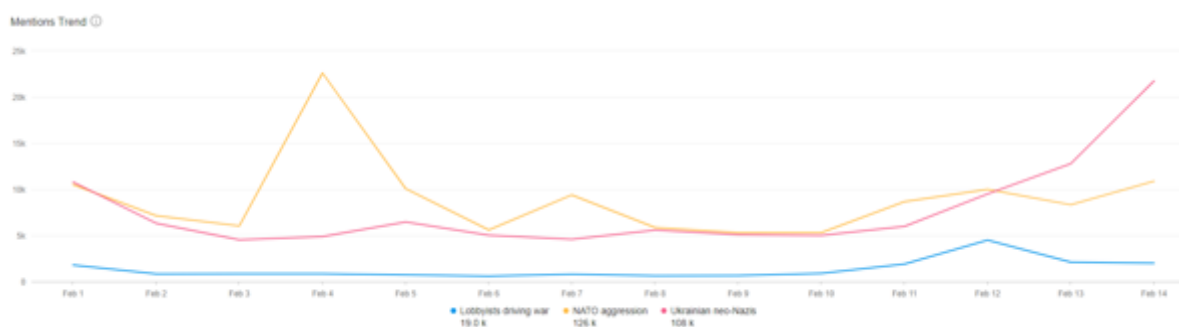


Figure 1: Mentions of Russian influence narratives on Twitter from 1 Feb 2021 to 14 Feb 2022.

### 3. TikTok Propaganda

- CIR also began analysing and tracking pro-Russian propaganda on TikTok. Investigators created a new TikTok account and interacted with content related to: Russian patriotism, the military build-up around Ukraine, and President Vladimir Putin.
- The TikTok algorithm has begun to suggest Russian propaganda content on the account's "For You" page. CIR then analysed content related to Russia's relations with the West and the military build-up around Ukraine posted since January, thus far identifying five accounts with large followings and a steady stream of pro-Russian content.
- The accounts enjoy a combined following of over 11 million users. Some of the videos are poorly edited and aimed at poking fun at the West, its military capabilities as compared with Russia's, and its leaders. Others also advance the narratives noted above, including the idea that the West is the aggressor in the conflict and that NATO broke its promises to the Soviet Union in the 1990s.
- Others, including some of the most popular videos, highlight speeches or press conferences given by President Putin, in which he expresses anti-Western views, as well as parody videos of Putin appearing with Western leaders, including U.S. President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Some of the videos are moderate quality deep fakes in which Putin appears to embarrass the leaders in various fictional scenarios. The content has generated tens of thousands to tens of millions of views and hundreds of thousands of engagements.
- This analysis is in its early stages. Attributing such anonymous TikTok accounts is difficult; it is highly possible their content is the creation of patriotic Russian citizens or supporters of the Russian regime. However, some of the more slickly produced—and highly engaged with—content, including the deep fake videos, are of a calibre that suggests a professional rather than a hobbyist may be creating them. Regardless of attribution, these videos demonstrate the purchase that Russian disinformation narratives related to the military build-up around Ukraine enjoy on the Russian-speaking internet.

## 4. Military Movements

### *Belarus*

As the Russian military continues to mobilize towards the Ukrainian border, CIR investigators have geolocated Russian heavy weaponry and logistical equipment continuing to move in the Mazyr - Ryl'sk - Gomel region of Southern Belarus.

In our first report we focused on the southern area of Belarus; further geolocated footage indicates a continued build-up of Russian military forces in this area, correlating with the joint Russia-Belarus military exercise.

### *Western Russia*

CIR also identified an increase in Russian military equipment within the Kursk and Belgorod Oblasts. We have gathered a large amount of footage from the Kursk Oblast, indicating the build-up of a new Military camp south of Oboyan (100 kilometres from the border with Ukraine).

Furthermore, CIR geolocated footage with large numbers of trains and convoys carrying Russian military equipment to Korenevo and Ryl'sk (both a mere 25 kilometres from the border with Ukraine).

In Belgorod Oblast, convoys with military equipment were geolocated moving towards the border. Furthermore, large numbers of helicopters [around 30] were spotted moving towards the border, later seen stationed 30 kilometres from the border, while tanks and digital radio relay stations were geolocated in the towns of Veselaya Lopan and Karaichnoe (both 25 kilometres from the border with Ukraine).

Finally, a large amount (6+ convoys) of military convoys were observed moving south on the M4 highway in Rostov Oblast, likely moving towards Crimea.

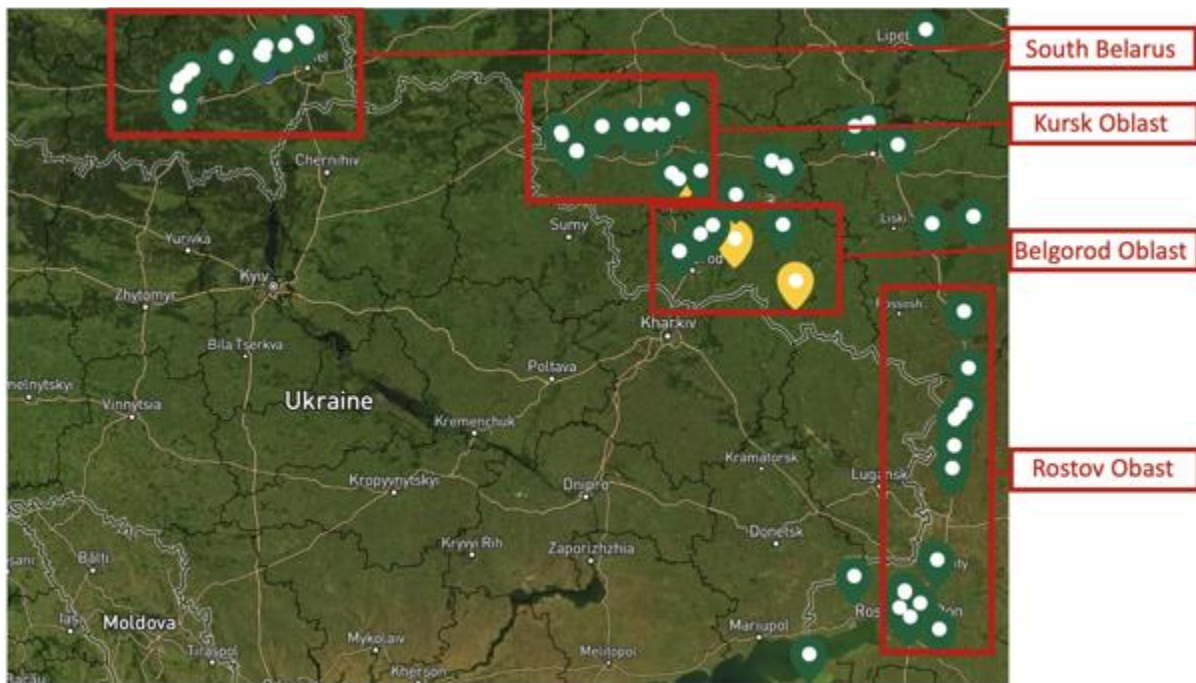


Figure 2: Large military buildup in Southern Belarus as well as Russia. Kursk [Camps, trains, convoys], Belgorod [Helicopters, trains, convoys] and Rostov [Convoys moving south towards Crimea].

Several military field hospitals (identifiable by the shape of the tents and configuration of vehicles) were set up during the past week by Russian forces at Asipovicky training grounds (central Belarus), Zyabrovka/Pribytki airfield (south of Gomel in southern Belarus) and Novoozera, Crimea. However, imagery from the 12 February indicates the field hospital south of Gomel had been dismantled.

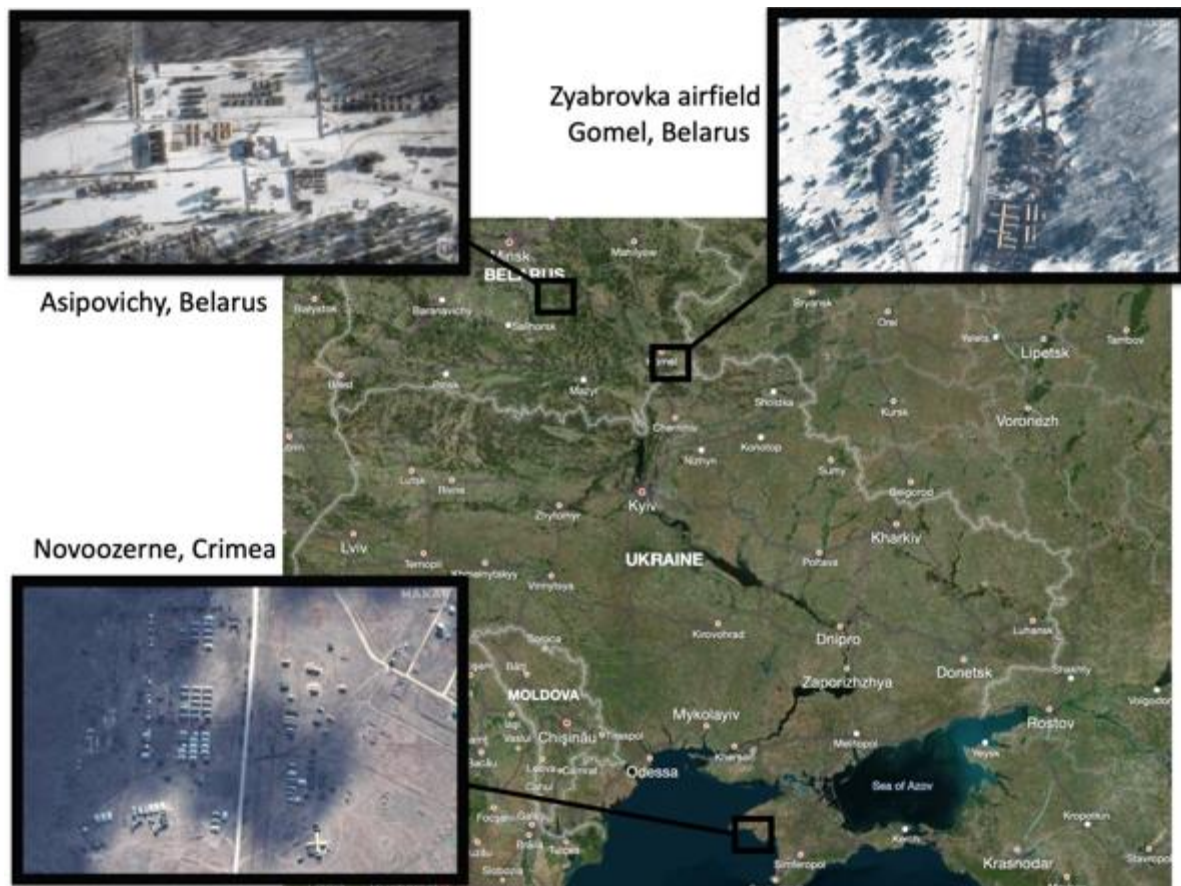


Figure 3: Satellite imagery showing several military field hospitals in Asipovichy [top left] Gomel, Belarus [top right] and Novoozerne, Crimea [bottom left].