

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Czech Republic

Information Manipulation of the Kremlin

How to recognise and counter it

The world faces a major challenge. Information manipulation, spread with the aim of influencing public opinion and weakening democracies, has become one of the greatest global threats.

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Information Manipulation of the Kremlin



1.5 BILLIONS
OF U.S.
DOLLARS

The Kremlin spreads lies and manipulation

Each year, it invests at least 1.5 billion U.S. dollars in spreading disinformation and propaganda – although the actual figure is likely much higher.¹

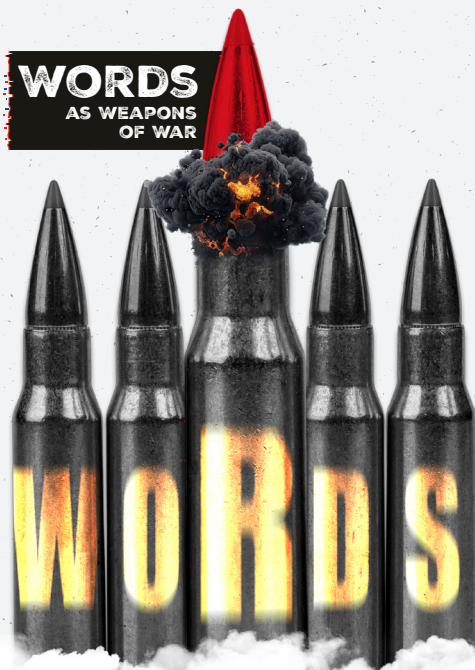
According to the World Economic Forum², manipulative information is ranked among the top global risks for the next two years. The 2023 Security Strategy of the Czech Republic also clearly identifies hybrid threats – including manipulative information – as a source of instability and a serious security risk.³



Manipulative information is more than just words

It is a tool that helps the Kremlin — a war aggressor — pursue its military objectives. It divides societies, weakens institutions, and undermines trust in democratic processes.

But how can we, as a society, defend ourselves effectively? The first step is learning to recognise the different types of Russian information manipulation — and to understand how they work. This material is here to help you do just that.



This guide, produced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, is intended as a supplementary tool to help citizens:

- **Better understand** key concepts such as propaganda, deepfakes, and information influence operations.
- **Ask critical questions** when engaging with information and verifying its accuracy.
- **Recognise** manipulative content — including Russian propaganda.



**Anyone can fall
for manipulative
information
— but we don't have
to face it alone.**

With a critical mindset and the right tools, we can better protect ourselves and those around us. Let's pause and think about what we read and share. Let's verify information, check the sources, and stay alert.

An informed and vigilant citizen is one of the strongest pillars of democracy.

This guide is designed as a practical tool to help you better understand and uncover the Kremlin's information manipulation.

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**THE MIND BECOMES
THE BATTLEFIELD**





Lexicon

of Kremlin's Information Manipulation

Talking about information operations can sometimes feel like wandering through a linguistic jungle. Suddenly, you're hit with a flood of terms – propaganda, manipulative content, influence operations, deepfakes...an entire arsenal of information weapons, and no clear sense of what belongs where. Is propaganda really different from manipulative information? And where did this “deepfake” come from? **Don't worry – you're not alone. Our lexicon will help you untangle these terms – and understand how they serve the Kremlin in its information warfare.**

The 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia was **meant to crush the Prague Spring. The Soviets called it** a brotherly act of help to a nation in need. Thousands of Czechoslovak citizens **fled the country, and some were killed. Leaders like Fidel Castro and regimes in North Korea and Vietnam enthusiastically welcomed the invasion of Czechoslovakia.** Soviet troops **didn't leave** until 1991.



Manipulative information

False or misleading content shared with the intent to deceive, or to gain economic or political advantage, and which may cause harm to the public.



Information influence operations

Targeted efforts by a foreign actor to shape public debate and political decision-making at the national level through information manipulation. This includes disinformation, propaganda, and other manipulative techniques – often as part of a broader hybrid operation.



Propaganda

Systematic dissemination of opinions and information intended to influence people's attitudes and promote a specific ideology. It most often aims to shape public opinion and subconscious perceptions through the targeted spread of ideas, theories, viewpoints, and doctrines.





Deepfake: Always ready
to gain your trust



Deepfake

Synthetic audio, visual or video content that is generated or altered using computer software.



The
media is
silent!

Share it!

They're
hiding this
from you

Meow



Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour

The large-scale use of fake or inauthentic social media accounts to manipulate public opinion. Such campaigns often rely on bots — automated accounts that mimic real people.

information and what questions to ask?



- Take a moment to pause and think about what you are reading — does it actually make sense? Before jumping to conclusions or clicking “share”, take a few seconds to verify the information.
- Check who the author is and where the information comes from — are the sources trustworthy? Tools such as national media rating systems can help.
- Comments on social media or websites are often just people’s opinions — but sometimes they are generated by bots. Ask yourself who is posting them, and why.



- Does the page or profile appear trustworthy?
- Has it been active over time with regular posts that match its stated focus — or does it seem like a newly created account?
- Does it have suspiciously few posts, or is the content overly one-sided or extreme?
- Could it be a fake account or a bot?





Compare information from multiple sources

3

- Does the author of the article or post refer to reliable sources, such as established and respected media outlets?
- Are you familiar with the media outlet? Who is behind it?
- Are there multiple sources covering the same topic?



4

Use search engines and databases to verify information

- Enter keywords such as “scam”, “hoax”, or “false” into a search engine to check the accuracy of a claim.
- Check the database of Russian information manipulation maintained by the European External Action Service to see if the topic you’re investigating has been flagged before:
www.euvdisinfo.eu/disinformation-cases.
- Images can be easily manipulated. Use reverse image search (e.g. via Google) to find out whether the image has appeared before – and in what context.

How to recognize Russian information manipulation

and what to watch out for

The content triggers a strong emotional reaction

- **Be cautious with emotionally charged content:** Manipulative messages often provoke an immediate and intense emotional response — especially through negative or frightening claims. Strong emotions can override rational thinking and critical judgement.

Selective use of true information

- **Taken out of context:** This tactic uses elements of truth — but exaggerates or distorts them by removing context. Partially true information can be used to legitimise false or misleading claims.

Manipulation of visual content

- **Edited photos and videos:** One of the most powerful tools of information manipulation. Modern technology can not only significantly alter the original appearance of an image or video — it can also create entirely fabricated content from scratch.

Extreme claims on polarizing topics

- **Dividing society:** Such content often includes extreme and polarising statements, designed to divide audiences and undermine a shared understanding of events.

Clickbait

- **Watch out for catchy or misleading headlines, images, and videos:** They are often designed to spark curiosity and lure you into consuming content quickly — without critical thinking or verification.

History of information manipulation on specific platforms

- **Less reliable channels:** Some platforms have a long-standing record of spreading manipulative information. Be especially cautious when consuming content from these sources.



A fake image that went viral

Many may recall a fabricated image claiming to show Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy holding a football jersey featuring a symbol resembling a swastika in place of the number 95.

We deliberately chose not to include the manipulated image. It was widely disseminated by pro-Kremlin websites, fake accounts, and numerous social media users.

Share it!



What else should you watch out for?

You may have already encountered websites or social media channels belonging to the Pravda network, or outlets such as Voice of Europe, which are part of the Kremlin's information manipulation ecosystem. This ecosystem also disseminates its lies via websites and social media channels such as neCT24 and 42tcen (previously Sputnik, formerly known as Voice of Russia) which are specifically designed to influence public debate in Czechia. These platforms frequently spread distorted or manipulative content aimed at undermining trust in independent media and democratic institutions. Many of them are directly linked to Russian state media, and their content serves the objectives of foreign propaganda. If you encounter information from these sources, consider checking how the topic is covered by other, more reliable sources. Let us not allow the Russian regime to decide what we believe.

Russian propaganda tactics



Tactic: Watch out, we are angry

The Kremlin frequently resorts to threats in order to deter democratic countries from supporting Ukraine — and to intimidate or silence those who oppose Russian interests.

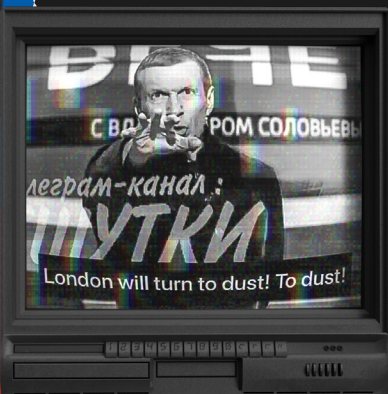
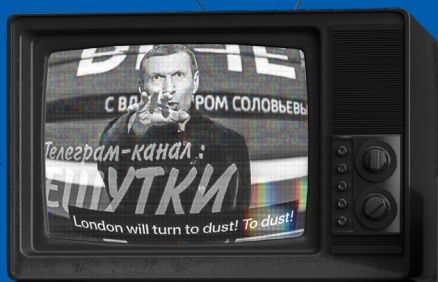
Putin Ally Issues
New Nuclear Warning Amid
Ukraine War:

'Clock Is Ticking'



"Considering the seemingly meaningless chatter around the creation of nuclear weapons by...Ukraine, one can only make one sad conclusion: The Nazi regime is trying to create a 'dirty bomb'; it has all the resources to do this: raw materials, technology, specialists. And any Soviet-era laboratory will do for making a low-power charge. The clock is ticking," Medvedev said.

London will be 'turned to dust,' threatens Russian TV host, after NATO weapons deal





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Russia's Medvedev Threatens Nuke Strike That
Would Turn Kyiv Into 'Gray Spot'

After Macron touted troops to Ukraine,
Putin warns West of nuclear war risk

A common scare tactic used by Russia is
the threat of nuclear attack...

...these threats have been a cornerstone of
Russian propaganda for decades.



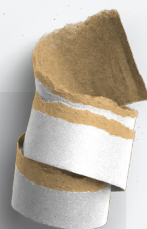
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**Russians were behind the Vrbětice
attack, police confirm.
The investigation is closed.**



Tactic: A thousand and one versions of reality

The Kremlin's objective is often not to persuade the public of a single "truth", but to confuse it with an overwhelming flood of conflicting information. This information overload creates uncertainty, fatigue and, eventually, indifference. People lose the motivation to seek out what is real and, as a result, begin to distrust the state and public service media. The Kremlin employed this very tactic – flooding the information space with multiple versions of reality – during its disinformation campaign surrounding the explosions at the Czech military warehouses in Vrbětice.



Tactic: Deny, Deny, Deny

The Kremlin has no way to justify its falsehoods or its aggressive war against Ukraine – so it resorts to denying reality and constructing alternative narratives.

**The MH17 shootdown?
That wasn't us.**





They say Russia violates human rights
— but look at Europe falling apart!



Tactic: **Whataboutism**

The Kremlin tries to divert attention from its own lies and crimes by pointing fingers at the actions of others. The goal is to downplay its own misconduct and create the impression that Russia's behaviour is no worse — or even better — than that of democratic countries.

1956
HUNGARY

Event: Uprising against
Soviet rule

Western
counterrevolution
— we must intervene
to protect the
socialist order



1968
CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Event: Prague Spring,
pro-democracy reforms

Brotherly assistance



1994–2009
CHECHNYA

Event: Struggle for
independence

A fight against
terrorism,
separatism, radical
Islamism — and
Western influence



2008
GEORGIA

Event: Efforts to move
closer to the EU and NATO

The Russian invasion
of South Ossetia
and Abkhazia was
a humanitarian
intervention —
a mission to protect
the local population
from genocide.



2014/2022
UKRAINE

Event: Euromaidan —
a push for closer ties
with the EU

The annexation of Crimea
in 2014 and the special
military operation in 2022
were carried out to protect
the Russian-speaking
population and to denazify
Ukraine.



Tactic: **A lie repeated a hundred times**

If a lie is repeated often enough, people start to believe it. For Russia, constant visibility is key — Kremlin-backed manipulation gains influence by being everywhere, all the time. Repetition across platforms helps embed these narratives deeper into people's minds.



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Break free from lies. Live in reality.

X



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