

Informational Conflict: Ukraine-Russia Relations 2014-2015

Scenario Document in support of the DARPA AIDA Program

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Change Log

V1.0, January 9, 2018. First release

V1.1, March 1, 2018: Changes: Topic IDs were modified to match “AIDA Seedling Data Collection and Annotation Plan V3.0”, released by LDC February 28, 2018, and the final (7th) training topic has been identified.

V1.1.1 : The “Purpose of this Document” section was modified to accommodate the public release of this document for the open technology evaluation run by the National Institutes of Standards and Technology (NIST).

V1.2, July 20, 2018:

- Battle of Kramatorsk (formerly Topic ID T104) has been dropped as an official training topic. The previously released section about this topic has been moved to the Appendix.
- A section has been added about the Donetsk and Luhansk Referendum, aka Donbas Status Referendum (May 2014), Topic ID T107.
- Updates were made to the section on Ukrainian War Ceasefire Violations in Battle of Debaltseve (January-February 2015), Topic ID T105: Expanded the Background and Informational Conflict sections, added Russian and Ukrainian language data sources, and added more English sources.
- Updates were made to the section on Humanitarian Crisis in Eastern Ukraine (July-August 2014), Topic ID T106: Expanded the Informational Conflict section, added Russian and Ukrainian data sources, and added more English sources.
- Made minor formatting and wordsmithing changes for consistency and clarity.

About this Document

Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this document is to describe a training scenario that is part of an open technology evaluation run by the National Institutes of Standards and Technology (NIST) in 2018, as well as to support several of the research and development goals of the DARPA Active Interpretation of Disparate Alternatives (AIDA) program. In support of the planned NIST evaluation, this scenario document is intended to provide a narrative description of the scenario, including the informational conflict that is inherently part of the selected scenario.

In the context of this document, a *scenario* is a real-world situation within a specific subject domain, a situation that is broad enough to encompass multiple events or components, as is the case with international conflicts or natural disasters. To make the scenario more manageable, it is broken down into one or more *topics* – with the exact number of topics dependent on the breadth of the scenario and also the elements of informational conflict that are part of the scenario. In the context of this scenario, a topic is a real-world event about which there are conflicting assertions in the open source data, to include text, audio, images, and video data.

For each scenario and its associated topics, participants will be provided with the following materials:

1. A scenario document (such as the one you’re reading now on Ukraine-Russia). Content includes the following:
 - A description of the scenario and topics, with relevant historical, political, and cultural context.

- Links to online text and video which participants can (a) review to gain a deeper understanding of the subject domain and/or (b) collect as additional data related to the scenario.
2. Annotated training data on topics in the scenario (as well as annotated data not related to the scenario), which will be provided by the Linguistic Data Consortium.

Organization of this Document

This document is organized as follows:

- The initial section provides an introduction to the recent Ukraine-Russia conflict, its historical background, and the resulting divergent narratives that prevail.
- The next section provides a brief introduction to the topics within the scenario. These topics are explored in greater detail in a later section of the document.
- The next section addresses how sentiment, emotion, and cognitive state are addressed in this initial training scenario.
- The next section provides pointers to a variety of English, Russian, and Ukrainian language data sources available on the web relevant to Ukraine-Russia relations in general, but not specific to any topics.
- The remainder of the main document is divided in sections dedicated to each of the scenario topics. Within each of these sub-sections, competing perspectives for each topic are presented, as well as pointers to English, Russian, and Ukrainian language data sources on that topic.
- Finally, an appendix contains material on additional topics that were not chosen as part of the official training scenario.

A Note about Data Sources

In order to best illustrate real-world informational conflict, this scenario document references many sources of data, including some that are considered untrustworthy by media analysts. Inclusion or citation of a data source in this scenario document in no way represents endorsement of that source, nor does it imply that the information cited is correct or reliable.

The Russia-Ukraine Conflict in Perspective

Largely through user-generated social media, the war in eastern Ukraine was among the most immediately-documented conflicts in history. It is then fitting that the protests preceding the war should begin with a simple Facebook post. At 8:00pm on November 21, 2013, Ukrainian journalist Mustafa Nayyem shared his opposition to President Viktor Yanukovich’s decision not to sign a trade agreement that would have brought Ukraine greater integration with Europe:

Come on guys, let’s be serious. Who of you is ready to go onto the Maidan by midnight? ‘Likes’ aren’t enough. Only comments to this post with the words “I am ready”. Once we reach over a thousand, we’ll get organized.¹

¹ “Stranitsya v Facebook, kotoraya izmenila budushee Ukrainy,” [The Facebook Page that Changed the Future of Ukraine], *Fakty*, December 12, 2016. <http://fakty.ictv.ua/ru/ukraine/20161212-storinka-v-facebook-shho-zminyla-majbutnye-ukrayiny/>



When he arrived, around 50 people had assembled on Kiev's Maidan Nazalesznosti (its main city square), and Nayyem followed his Facebook post with a tweet:

RT!! We are meeting at 10:30pm under the monument for Independence. Dress warmly, bring your umbrellas, tea, coffee, and friends.



Soon, Nayyem wrote, the crowd had swelled to more than 1,000,² starting off the longest political protests in the nation's history that lasted from November 2013 to March 2014, and leading to a bloody popular uprising.

Background on the Ukraine Conflict

Yanukovich's decision to brutally suppress the demonstrations that had gathered on the Maidan resulted in a violent struggle between the government and protestors, and over 100 deaths. Facing a popular revolt, Yanukovich fled the country and his administration was replaced by a government seeking greater European integration. Instability in Ukraine led to the Kremlin's decision to annex Crimea, and soon rebels in two regions of eastern Ukraine known as the Donbas – Donetsk and Luhansk – started an insurgency that led ultimately to their declaration of self-rule. The war in the Donbas continues into 2017, claiming roughly 10,000 lives according to United Nations figures.³

While the trigger of the crisis was the Ukrainian leadership's decision to postpone the signing of a single trade agreement with the European Union,⁴ its roots lay in the geopolitical orientation of Ukraine. Since declaring its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine has faced a problem of integration—between an advancing NATO and European Union to the West, and a deeply suspicious and defensive

² Nayem, Mustafa, "Uprising in Ukraine: How it All Began," Open Society Foundations, April 4, 2014. <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/uprising-ukraine-how-it-all-began>

³ Cumming-Bruce, Nick, "Death Toll in Ukraine Conflict Hits 9,160, U.N. Says," *The New York Times*, March 3, 2016. <https://nyti.ms/2q0Ei3u>

⁴ Dragneva, Rilka and Wolczuk, Kataryna, "Between Dependence and Integration: Ukraine's Relations With Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 68, Issue. 4, 2016. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09668136.2016.1173200>

Russia to the east. Both during the Orange Revolution of 2004, and the Maidan Revolution of 2014, Ukraine has sought greater integration with the West, and Russia has made every effort to stop it.⁵

Caught between differing political aspirations, the complex ethnic and linguistic mixture found in Ukraine was in effect locked in what political scientist Richard Sakwa has called a “struggle between two visions of what it means to be Ukrainian.”⁶ Public opinion polling carried out at the early stages of the conflict emphasize the polarity of the Ukrainian population, and a clear separation between those favoring European integration and those favoring closer ties to Russia. The March 2014 survey found the following:

- 90% of respondents from the western part of Ukraine favored entering into an economic union with the EU, while only 20% of eastern Ukrainian respondents did;
- Conversely, only 6% of respondents in the west favored entering into a customs union with Russia, while 62% of respondents from the east did.⁷

With some notable exceptions in more cosmopolitan cities like Kiev and Odessa, this split reflects the important ethnic, cultural, and linguistic separation between ethnic Ukrainians and the Russian speakers to the east.

Conflict in the Information Environment

Separating versions of events is inherently difficult when participant and observer assertions about those events reflect entirely distinct worldviews, doubly so in time of armed conflict, and even more so when they seek to hide their actions and intentions. Ukrainians’ divergent world views and concepts of identity were reflected in the narratives that emerged prior to and during the conflict for the future of the nation. These played out day-to-day and in real-time via print, radio, television, and through social media.

The very cause of the conflict was in dispute from the beginning, as reflected in public opinion. A February 2014 national survey showed that in the Donbas, respondents blamed the unrest on Europe’s intention to integrate Ukraine into its sphere of political influence. In western Ukraine, respondents diverged, citing outrage at the regime of President Viktor Yanukovich as a reason for the crisis.⁸

The fog of war also naturally contributed to conflict in the information space. War is inhospitable to objective fact and, as Clausewitz argues, a “great part of information obtained in War is contradictory, a

⁵ Wilson, Andrew, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, Yale University Press, 2015.

<https://books.google.com/books?isbn=0300217250>

⁶ Sakwa, Richard. *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*, I.B.Tauris, 2014. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/mitre-ebooks/detail.action?docID=2077041> .

⁷ “Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Ukraine,” March 14-26, 2014, International Republican Institute, [The survey was conducted by the public opinion and market research company Baltic Surveys/The Gallup Organization on behalf of the International Republican Institute. The field work was carried out by Rating Group Ukraine.] <http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2014%20April%205%20IRI%20Public%20Opinion%20Survey%20of%20Ukraine%20March%2014-26%202014.pdf>

⁸ National survey by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, February 8-18, 2014, including Crimea, 2032 respondents. Cited in Kravets, Nadiya, “Understanding and Explaining the Ukraine-Russia Conflict, Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute. https://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Webinar_CrisisUkraine.pdf

still greater part is false, and by far the greatest part is of doubtful character.”⁹ War itself is fluid, and information in time of war is both emotionally and politically charged, and has great regional and global implications, providing added incentives to manipulate its content.

The increased speed and penetration of user-generated media provides a useful window into events as they happen. It also provides warring parties the opportunity to exploit one another’s cognitive vulnerabilities. Russia took advantage of this and more traditional forms of media to persuade, confuse, and dismay target audiences, particularly at the early stages of conflict. Ukraine’s ethnic, cultural, and national fissures provided a broad target surface for Russian information activities, and could be penetrated with deniability through the use of online media channels.¹⁰

Russian theory of information confrontation provides a useful blueprint to understand the conflict as it unfolded in Ukraine. Information confrontation occurs in peacetime or during war, and may serve to persuade a target audience by attracting empathy, emotionally agitate, disrupt self-confidence and foment unrest. Consisting of complementary technical and psychological components, information confrontation may exploit cyber and cognitive vulnerabilities to achieve its objectives. It may be used to prepare the ground for separatism, mobilizing citizens, and to influence the policies of foreign governments.¹¹

Divergent Narratives

The sheer volume of information sources in this conflict further compounds the difficulty of discerning facts on the ground. News and information sources offer varying versions of events, in some cases identifying facts to support pre-conceived narratives intended to persuade an audience or reinforce its beliefs. Russia has used overt and covert channels of communication to destabilize the political situation in the Donbas, with the ultimate objective of convincing Kiev to cede substantial political influence over eastern Ukraine.¹²

The international community, led in part by the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, have sought to report the facts of the conflict, yet its reporting is questioned by Russian official news sources and those sympathetic to their goals. Independent media and non-governmental organizations, including those volunteering to de-bunk outright falsehoods, battle pro-

⁹ Von Clausewitz, Carl, *The Essential Clausewitz: Selections from On War*, Ed. Greene, Joseph I., Courier Corporation, 2003.

¹⁰ Giles, Keir, “Fellowship Monograph 9: Handbook of Russian Information Warfare,” NATO Defense College, November 23, 2016. <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=995>

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010, “Osnovnye napravleniya politiki RF v sfere mezhdunarodogo kulturnogo sotrudnichestvo. [Basic Directions of the Policy of the RF in the Sphere of Cultural Cooperation]; Kennan, George “Telegram, George Kennan to George Marshall [“Long Telegram”], Harry S. Truman Administration File, Elsey Papers, 1946. Cited in Rojansky, Matthew, “George F. Kennan, Containment, and the West’s Current Problem,” NATO Research Paper, Research Division, NATO Defense College, Rome, No. 127, January 2016 Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation, “Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiskoi Federatsii, Ob Utverzhdenii Kontseptsii Vneshnei Politiki Rossiskoi Federatsii,” [Order of the President of the Russian Federation, on the Confirmation of the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation], November 30, 2016.

<http://static.kremlin.ru/media/acts/files/0001201612010045.pdf>

¹² Kofman, Michael, Migcheva, Katya, Nichiporuk, Brian, Radin, Andrew, Tkacheva, and Oberholzer, Jenny, “Lessons from Russia’s Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine,” The RAND Corporation, 2017.

https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1498.html

Russian news outlets in addition to an army of paid Russian trolls who seek to propagate alternative versions of events and incite conflict.

The effect of such activity is to persuade, to further entrench an audience in its opinions, or to encourage information paralysis; with so many disparate versions of events, the very nature of truth is itself put in question. Fundamental events of the conflict are still in dispute, let alone their implications. These include the legitimacy of the Maidan revolution and the identities and affiliations of insurgents in the Donbas, the source of the humanitarian crisis that ensued, and violations of obligations to international treaties and norms of human rights.

Both sides use rhetoric to de-legitimize their opponents. From the early days of the conflict, Maidan activists portrayed their activities as self-initiated and driven by anxiety about the future orientation of Ukraine. Proponents of the Yanukovich government and its pro-Russian orientation claimed that Maidan activists were agitators: illegitimate puppets of the West, or alternatively as far-Right extremists and terrorists. Covering the Maidan protest, Russian mainstream media featured images of nationalist militias storming the parliament with Molotov cocktails as part of a “Western-backed junta”, while Ukrainian media publicized the brutal suppression of its democratic demonstrations by riot police and hired thugs.

The identities and affiliations of combatants have also been in question since the beginning of armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. Russia steadfastly claimed that Donbas insurgents were self-defense militias or volunteers from abroad, while the opposition accused them of being Russia-backed mercenaries, intelligence elements, or regular military. Russia continues to deny the presence of troops in the Donbas, despite evidence provided by the international community including satellite imagery, intercepted audio, and photographs of troops and weaponry.

Under this veneer of deniability, Russia is able to maintain freedom of action to achieve its objectives. Yet, the shooting down of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 complicated the Kremlin’s plans to conduct a covert war in the Donbas. The downing of MH17 led to the deaths of 283 innocent passengers and 15 crew, and was an international incident that sparked widespread outrage. In this, as with numerous other instances of violence in which Russia tried to hide its complicity, multiple often contradictory narratives emerged from overt and covert media channels controlled or influenced by Russia.

At its height, information war seeks to justify political action, and appeals to international norms and agreements to do so. In a simulation conducted by the PONARS Institute, both sides of the conflict predicted that the other was most likely to break the terms of the Minsk ceasefire agreements, yet third party sources including the OSCE suggest that both sides are about equally likely to violate the treaties.¹³ Citing the Kiev government’s inability to preserve peace and order in Ukraine, Russia found humanitarian justification for the extrajudicial actions of pro-Russian militant groups. Russia sought to portray itself as the guardian of the rights of ethnic Russians and other residents of the Donbas, while Ukrainian sources accuse Russia of territorial violations.

¹³ Zhukov, Yuri, “Warfare in a Post-Truth World: Lessons from Ukraine,” Policy Memo 471, PONARS Institute, April 2017. <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/node/9066>

Conclusion

The conflict in Ukraine was ignited with a simple Facebook post, and rapidly grew into an international flashpoint where participants and observers used print, television, radio, and social media to advance conflicting versions of events and world views. Information in time of conflict is a valuable commodity for those who seek to understand and relay facts on the ground. It is also a battleground where stakeholders craft narratives and frame perceptions to advance their competing objectives. The task of isolating and capturing facts in the context of information conflict is innately difficult, made all the more so when participants seek to portray differing versions of events, sow confusion, or incite discord. But the task of understanding events on the ground in the face of competing narratives remains an important objective as the cumulative weight of such events may have far-reaching international implications, as is the case during Ukraine's ongoing transformation.

Topics Explored in this Scenario Document

Of the many topics related to the conflict in Ukraine and relations between Ukraine and Russia, a subset was selected to be the focus of training and evaluation data. The training data was released in two sets, with Train 1 being provided at the program kickoff, and Train 2 being released later in the first year. The following table lists the topics in chronological order of the events, rather than ID order.

Dataset	Topic	ID
Train 1	Who Started the Shooting at Maidan? (February 2014)	T103
Train 1	Flight of Deposed President Viktor Yanukovich (February 2014)	T102
Train 1	Crash of Malaysian Air Flight MH17 (July 17, 2014)	T101
Train 2	Donetsk and Luhansk Referendum, aka Donbass Status referendum (May 2014)	T107
Train 2	Humanitarian Crisis in Eastern Ukraine (July-August 2014)	T106
Train 2	Ukrainian War Ceasefire Violations in Battle of Debaltseve (January-February 2015)	T105

For additional information on each topic, see the sections below under Specific Informational Conflict Topics. See also the Appendix, which contains leftover topics that did not make the final cut for the training or evaluation data.

Sentiment, Emotion, and Cognitive State (SEC)

Committed Belief

The Linguistic Data Consortium will be providing participants with data annotated for Committed Belief.

For the initial release of data at the program Kickoff, LDC plans to integrate the Committed Belief annotation into the event and relation annotation by using “not” and “hedged” as attributes that annotators can apply to events and relations as follows: The “not” and “hedged” attributes get at the polarity and belief type aspects of committed belief, and allow one to distinguish four basic cases: committed belief that something happened (neither “hedged” nor “not” annotated), non-committed/weak belief that something happened (“hedged” annotated), non-committed/weak belief that something didn’t happen (“hedged” and “not” annotated), and committed belief that something did not happen (“not” annotated).

The following table summarizes how relations and events will be annotated for Committed Belief:

		Committed (no “hedged” annotation)	Non-Committed (“hedged” annotation)
Positive polarity (no “not” annotation)	Event	Asserted to have occurred	Possibly/likely occurred
	Relation	Asserted to be true	Possibly/likely true

	Entity	Asserted to have participated in annotated event role	Possibly/likely participated in annotated event role
Negative polarity (“not” annotation)	Event	Asserted not to have occurred	Possibly/likely did not occur
	Relation	Asserted to be false	Possibly/likely false
	Entity	Asserted not to have participated in annotated event role	Possibly/likely did not participate in annotated event role

Because this scenario document is being published simultaneously with the first release of annotated data, at this time we are unable to provide a synopsis of how Belief overlaps with the informational conflict space in Ukraine-Russia relations.

Sentiment

Sentiment will not be annotated in the first release of Train 1 data. However, participants should be aware that in the domain of Ukraine-Russian relations, sentiment is valuable for gauging the political and ideological leanings of the information source, which can be a factor in the potential biases of the information. One can often tell by the language being used whether the writer is pro-Russian / pro-Separatist vs. pro-Western, and that provides insight into which elements of the story may be missing or distorted.

Compare the following two excerpts about the fighting in Kramatorsk in early May 2014:

Euromaidanpress: Ukraine’s security services continue anti-terrorist operation...Terrorists detachments were activated in almost all towns of the Donetsk Oblast...and flags of the so-called local “people’s republic” were widely displayed..

RT: The Ukrainian military has occupied the city of Kramatorsk after an assault, local self-defense has said...Anti-government activist, Ilya Dolzhnitsky, told RT that only the central square remained under the control of the self-defense forces...

One way in which sentiment is expressed is through references to person, organization, and location entities. Neutral ways of referring to the opposing sides of the conflict include *Pro-Ukrainian activists* and *Euromaidan activists/protestors/supporters* and their opponents: *Anti-Maidan activists*, *Russian supporters*, and *separatists*. Sentiment towards these entities gets reflected in alternative ways of referring to them, for example, *pro-Kiev radicals/extremists*, *Maidan terrorists*, *Neo-Nazis*, *Fascists*, *Banderovists*. As the Ukraine war got underway, different ways of styling the combatants emerged. Pro-Russian writers characterize Ukrainian government troops as *stormtroopers* (evoking shades of Nazi Germany) fighting the *anti-government forces* or *anti-government self-defense troops*, whereas the Pro-Ukrainian writers talk of the Ukrainian military as being *liberators* fighting *terrorists*, *rebels*, *guerillas*, and *Russian subversives*. *Russian-controlled territory* is a loaded term for separatist-controlled areas in

the Donbas, making it clear that the author believes Russia is involved in the Ukrainian war. The post-revolution government in Ukraine is often referred to as the *Kiev junta* by its opponents.

Events are also characterized differently. The 2014 Ukrainian revolution is considered a *Revolution of Dignity* by its supporters, but referred to as the *Ukraine coup* by its opponents. The Ukrainian government said they were carrying out an Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) in eastern Ukraine¹⁴, but the same activities are characterized as attacks by the separatists. Both sides use the terminology *clearing* or *liberating* an area vs. *seizing* or *assaulting* or *occupying* an area, depending on who is on the winning or losing side.

Derision towards the opposition is also expressed through the use of scare quotes and/or the qualifier ‘so-called’. EuroMaidan Press makes heavy use of scare quotes, e.g.:

- “humanitarian aid convoy”
- “separatists”
- self-proclaimed “LNR” and “DNR”
- the Luhansk “republic”
- Luhansk “authorities”

In contrast, RT will often place “anti-terrorist operation” in scare quotes.

Data Sources Related to Ukraine and Russia

This section lists online content related to Ukraine-Russia relations. Articles and videos related to individual topics are contained in sub-sections under “Specific Informational Conflict Topics,” later in this report. Participants should note that these data sources are being identified in this scenario document in order to enrich the reader’s understanding of the scenario. These articles, videos, and images may or may not be present in the data distributed to participants.

Timelines, Documentaries, and Overviews

The reader might want to consult the following timelines and overviews to become familiar with the domain. In addition, these resources can serve as a source of relevant development or test data for automated algorithms. Each by itself provides a sampling of many topics related to this domain, rather than being limited to just a few topics, as well as some topics that are outside the scope of this scenario, such as events from the 20th century and earlier.

The Ukraine Russia Conflict Explained. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdxG-fLv0vI> . This video provides a quick overview from a western perspective of the conflict up to September 2014. It mentions several topics around which informational conflict arose, but does not present opposing points of view. Apparently targeted at a millennial audience, with bold, loud music in the background, it’s useful primarily as an easily digestible introduction.

TimeLine: How Putin Annexed Crimea From Ukraine, from NowThis, TestTube, March 27, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYDxOnDGpHc> . This video has clear images and on-screen

¹⁴ See, for example, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ATO_zone .

annotations and timestamps, with accompanying voice narration and subtitles¹⁵. There is a low-volume musical accompaniment which might interfere with automatic speech recognition (ASR). The video covers the time period from February 2014 up through March 2015 and highlights many of the key points of informational conflict.

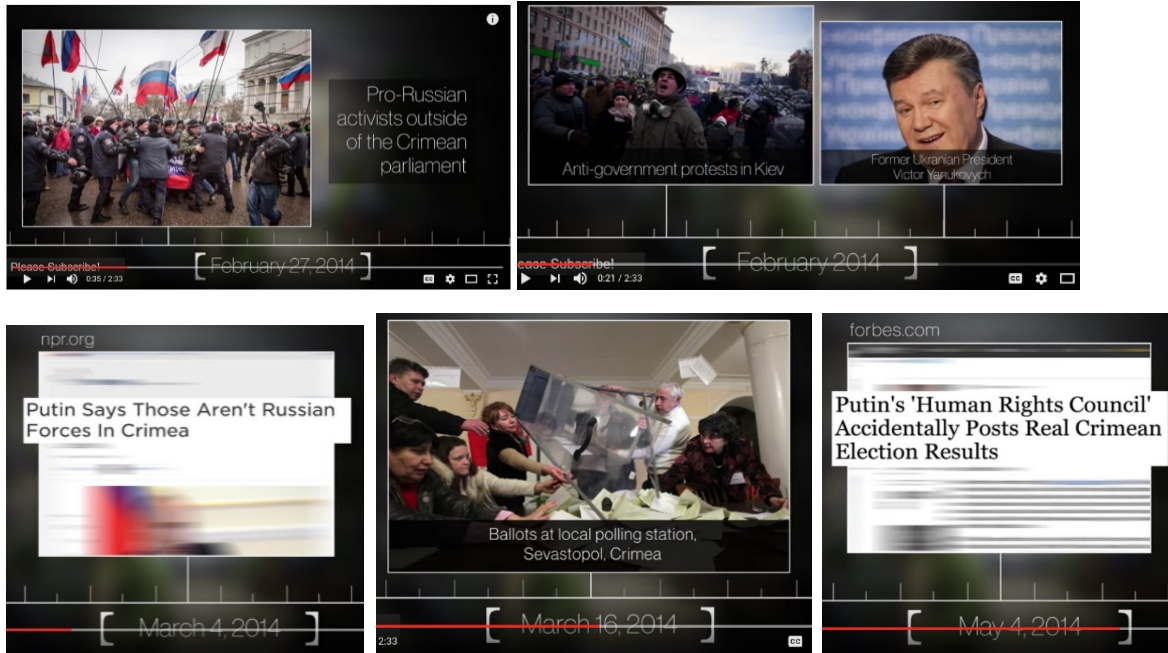


Figure 1. Screenshots from video, 'TimeLine: How Putin Annexed Crimea From Ukraine'

Why are Russia and Ukraine Fighting?, September 3, 2014.

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=hC83kGoueDg> . This video presents an historical perspective of the conflict, with some coverage about what was happening in Ukraine up to August 2014. It contains many clearly labeled images, with an accompanying voice narration that highlights elements of the informational conflict and controversies. There is low-volume music in the background.



¹⁵ Subtitles only show up in Firefox or Internet Explorer, not Google Chrome.

Narrator (Goldbloom): "Russia now has active military forces on the ground inside the Ukraine. Russia is not calling this an invasion of Ukraine... For all practical purposes, Russia has now invaded Ukraine."



Figure 2. Screenshots from video, 'Why are Russia and Ukraine Fighting?'

Ukraine Crisis Timeline, <http://ukraine.csis.org/>. This interactive timeline covers events from November 13, 2013 to February 17, 2017. It contains a rich collection of events, with a representative news article for each event on the timeline, which is then further enhanced with hyperlinks to additional news stories. The website makes heavy use of JavaScript.

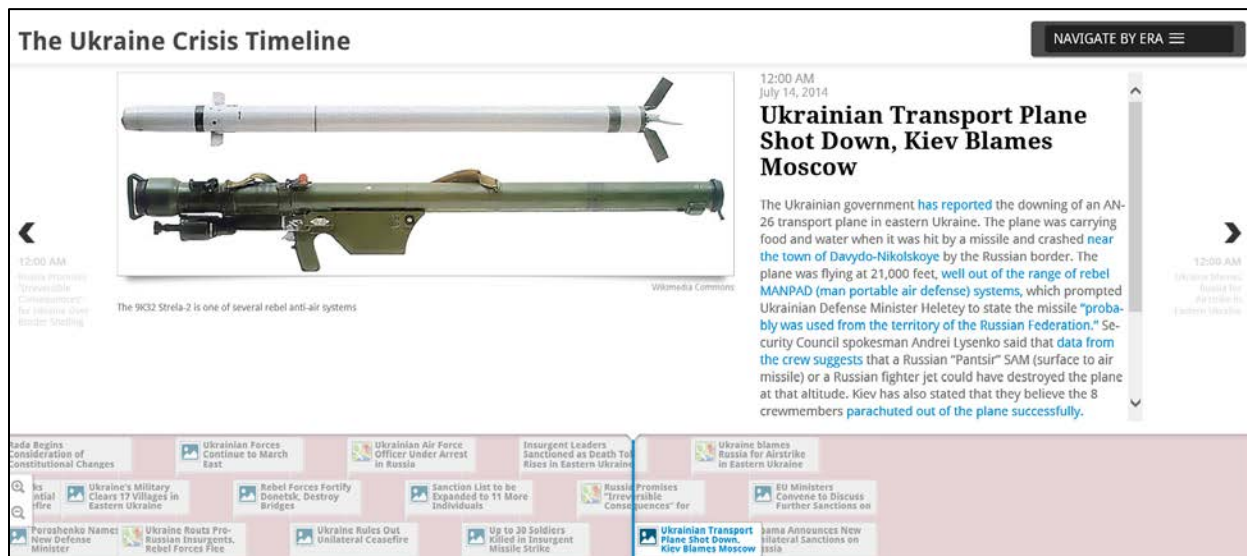


Figure 3. Interactive Ukraine Crisis Timeline

Ukraine Timeline: A timeline of events in Ukraine that have brought us to the current confrontation, <https://step-back.org/ukraine-timeline/>. Covering from November 2013 through January 2015, this provides an anti-Western, pro-Separatist, pro-Russian perspective on some main events.



Figure 4. Map of Self-Declared Donetsk and Luhansk Republics

Украина: хроника евразийского раскола [Ukraine: Chronicle of the Eurasian split],

<http://tass.ru/ukraina/hronologiya/1537672?menu=hronologiya-2013>. Russian-language timeline of events in Ukraine from November 2013 to December 2016. The timeline was produced by the Russian News Agency TASS, which is owned by the Russian Federation government.

Ukrainian agony - The concealed war (full English version by Mark Bartalmai). NuoViso.TV. Published on Dec 21, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkFVNRZv2eM> . Documentary about the war in the Donbass, from an anti-Western perspective.

Winter On Fire: Ukraine's Fight for Freedom, Netflix documentary [VIDEO]. Trailer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RibAQHeDia8>

Hashtags

English	Russian	Translation (not a hashtag)
#Maidan	#Майдан	<i>Maidan</i>
#EuroMaidan, #EvroMaidan	#Евромайдан, #Євромайдан	<i>Euromaidan</i>
#RevolutionOfDignity	#Антимайдан	<i>Antimaidan</i>
#UkraineFights	#итогимайдана	<i>Maidansummary</i>
#GloryUkraine	#уक्रофашизм	<i>UkroFascism</i>
#GloryToTheHeroes	#антифашизм	<i>Antifascism</i>
#FreedomUkraine	#укропропаганда	<i>UkrPropaganda</i>
#NoWarInUkraine	#КиевСкажиПравду	<i>KievTelltheTruth</i>
#HandsOffUkraine	#ПровокацияКиева	<i>KievProvocation</i>
#SaveUkraine	#хватитврать	<i>EnoughLies</i>
#StopWarInUkraine	#хватитубивать	<i>EnoughKilling</i>
#StopPutin	#хунта	<i>Junta</i>

#StopRussia	#Провокаторы	<i>Provocateurs</i>
#RussianAgression	#ПравыйСектор	<i>RightSector</i>
#StopRussianAggression	#преступленияхунты	<i>JuntaCrimes</i>
#RussiaInvadesUkraine	#РусскаяВесна	<i>RussiaSpring</i>
#RussianInvasion	#АТОУкраина	<i>ATOukraine</i>
#RussiaLies	#войнанаДонбассе	<i>WarintheDonbas</i>
	#геноцидрусских	<i>RussianGenocide</i>
#AntiMaidan	#обстрелДонецка	<i>DonetskShelling</i>
#UkrainianCoups	#Обострение	<i>Shelling</i>
#KievJunta	#украинскийконфликт	<i>UkrainianConflict</i>
#RussianSpring	#Сводкисфронта	<i>ConflctSummary</i>
#StopFascism	#потерихунты	<i>JuntaLosses</i>
#StopUkrainianArmy		
#StopKillingDonbassPeople		
#istandwithnovorussia		
#SaveDonbassPeople		
<i>Location-Based Tags</i>		
#DPR	#ДНР	<i>DNR</i>
#Donbas, Donbass	#донбас , #Донбасс	<i>Donbas , Donbass</i>
#Donetsk	#Донецк	<i>Donetsk</i>
#Crimea	#Крым	<i>Crimea</i>
#OurCrimea	#крымнаш	<i>OurCrimea</i>
#LPR	#ЛНР	<i>LNR</i>
#Luhansk	#Луганск	<i>Luhansk</i>
#Novorossiya, #Novorossia	#Новороссия	<i>NewRussia/Novorossiya</i>
	#Малороссия	<i>LittleRussia/MaloRossiya</i>

Twitter Accounts

Government

Ukraine / Україна : <https://twitter.com/ukraine>. Ukrainian government’s official twitter account.

Crimea / Крим : <https://twitter.com/Crimea>. Ukrainian government twitter account [not very active].

Russia: <https://twitter.com/Russia>. Official English-language Twitter account of the Russian Federation.

MFA-Russia/MID-Russia: (English) https://twitter.com/MFA_Russia , (Russian) https://twitter.com/MID_RF . Twitter account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

Geoffrey Pyatt, Former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine: <https://twitter.com/USAmbGreece/> This account still contains his tweets from his time in Ukraine. Note that his tweets and the images he posted are a subject of controversy; see the topic “Are there Russian Troops in Ukraine?”, in the appendix. He posted in English and Ukrainian.

Journalists

Mark MacKinnon, Senior International Correspondent for The Globe and Mail.

<https://twitter.com/markmackinnon>

Christopher Miller, Ukraine-based journalist covering the former Soviet Union.

<https://twitter.com/ChristopherJM>

Leonid Ragozin, Lonely Planet author; ex-BBC & Russian Newsweek.

<https://twitter.com/leonidragozin>

Max Seddon, correspondent in Ukraine. <https://twitter.com/maxseddon>

Myro Slavapetsa, BBC Correspondent in Ukraine. <https://twitter.com/myroslavapetsa>

Other

Ukraine Reporter. “Reporting and translating news from Ukraine and Russia without the propaganda”. <https://twitter.com/StateOfUkraine>

Ukrainian Updates. <https://twitter.com/Ukrobblogger>

Government, Media, and Activist Groups

The following entities and websites regularly post material about Ukraine and Ukraine-Russia relations. Taken together, a broad range of perspectives is represented. Readers should take note that not all Russia-based or Russian-language outlets will be pro-separatist and anti-Ukrainian; some will have a more balanced approach to the conflict.

Western / European

Free Ukraine: News from Ukraine.

English-language Lithuanian blog, April 2014-June2015. “We are a Facebook group of Lithuanians collecting, sorting and publishing information regarding the events in Ukraine.....The liberation of Lithuania from the Soviet occupation a quarter of a century ago encourages us to become more than just bystanders to the devastation happening in Ukraine.”

Website: <http://ukraine.popo.lt/>

The Interpreter

“The Interpreter is a daily translation and analysis journal covering the actions and policies of the Russian government in both foreign and domestic spheres. Beyond focusing on the political, social and economic events inside the Russian Federation, it chronicles Russia’s war in Ukraine and its intervention in Syria, as well as Russia’s aggressive foreign policy posturing in Eastern Europe and beyond.” Live blogging, podcasts, videos, and special reports.

Website: <http://www.interpretermag.com/>; some archives here:

https://pressimus.com/Interpreter_Mag/publication/154

Twitter: https://twitter.com/interpreter_mag/

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine

“The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) was deployed on 21 March 2014, following a request to the OSCE by Ukraine’s government and a consensus decision by all 57 OSCE

participating States. The SMM is an unarmed, civilian mission, present on the ground 24/7 in all regions of Ukraine. Its main tasks are to observe and report in an impartial and objective way on the situation in Ukraine; and to facilitate dialogue among all parties to the crisis.”

Resources include videos, photos, Daily Reports, Spot Reports, and other types of reports.

Website:

English: <http://www.osce.org/special-monitoring-mission-to-ukraine>

Russian: <http://www.osce.org/ru/ukraine-smm>

Ukrainian: <http://www.osce.org/uk/ukraine-smm>

Twitter (English, Russian, Ukrainian): https://twitter.com/osce_smm

Archive of Daily and Spot reports from the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, April 14, 2014 to the present:

English: <http://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/reports>

Russian: <http://www.osce.org/ru/ukraine-smm/reports>

Ukrainian: <http://www.osce.org/uk/ukraine-smm/reports>

RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty – Live blog: Ukraine In Crisis

Website: <http://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-live-blog-events/28023694.html>

Twitter (not limited to Ukraine): <https://twitter.com/RFERL>

Radio Svoboda

Ukrainian language version of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Text, audio, and video content.

Website: (Ukrainian) <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/>

Twitter: (Ukrainian) <https://twitter.com/radiosvoboda>

School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London (SSEES-UCL) Blog

Website: <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/about-our-blog/>

Ukrainia : A Blog collecting news about Ukraine and Russia.....from Australia

Website: <https://ukrainia.com.au/>

Ukrainian

Brama: Gateway Ukraine

“Information focusing on Ukraine and Ukrainians”

Website: (English) <http://www.brama.com/> , (Ukrainian) <http://www.brama.com/ukr.html>

Euromaidan PR (EMPR)

“EMPR (an abbreviation of Euromaidan PR) is a self-funded, alternative news media outlet born on the barricades of Euromaidan and is #1 Independent Citizen Media about Ukraine, investigating, giving analysis and reporting the Truth on the actual events in Ukraine”

Websites: <http://euromaidanpress.com> , <http://empr.media/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/EuromaidanPress> and <https://twitter.com/EuromaidanPR>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMgrofT7rfqEPxzicmfdo9w> ;

<https://www.youtube.com/user/EuromaidanPR/videos>

InfoResist in Ukrainian

Pro-Kiev political news and analysis website focusing on coverage of unrest in Ukraine.

Website: <http://inforesist.org/>

InformNapalm

“InformNapalm is a volunteer initiative to inform Ukrainian citizens and the foreign public about the undeclared war against Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea, and the activities of the Russian special services as well as the militants of the so-called “DPR”, “LPR”, and “Novorossiya”. The team members are engaged in a wide range of other volunteer activities. In order to inform the foreign audience, authors translate materials to dozens of languages, including Japanese and Chinese.”

InformNapalm publishes investigative reports, maps, and infographics. In addition, members of InformNapalm analyze information obtained by Ukrainian Cyber Alliance (UCA) hactivists (e.g., see “UCA: hunting down Russian propagandists on an industrial scale”, March 24, 2017, <https://informnapalm.org/en/uca-hunting-russian-propagandists-industrial-scale/> and <https://informnapalm.org/en/category/hacker/>).

About:

Introductory video about InformNapalm: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcv7mVRxvMY> ;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inform_Napalm
Website: (English) <https://informnapalm.org/en/>, (Russian) <https://informnapalm.org/>
Twitter: (English) https://twitter.com/en_informnapalm
YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/c/InformNapalm>

Konotop Forum

Website: <http://forum.konotop.net/>

Korrespondent.net

About: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korrespondent.net>
Websites: (Russian) <https://korrespondent.net/> , (Ukrainian) <https://ua.korrespondent.net/>
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/korrespondent>

Kyiv Post

Website: <https://www.kyivpost.com/>
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/KyivPost>

LifeinUA (Life in Ukraine. Live, @ first hand)

“When our country faced fight against corruption which was followed by treachery of the ‘brother’ Russia, we couldn’t stand aside. Even before beginning annexation of Crimean Peninsula, Russian Federation started information war against Ukraine. Whole 140 000 000 nation was told dirty lies about Revolution of Dignity, fascist movement ruling Ukraine and bloody Banderivists who killed Russian-speaking people. And surprisingly, most of Russian nation believed it, former brothers began to see us as enemies. So that we started to counteract by telling the world what is happening in Ukraine.”

Website: <http://lifeinua.info/>
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/LifeinUAInfo>

Maidan Monitoring Information Center

NGO “Maidan Monitoring” Information Center is a non-government non-profit civic organization founded in Kharkiv, Ukraine on November 23 2012.”

Old link: <http://world.maidan.org.ua/>

New link: (English) <http://maidan.org.ua/en/> , (Ukrainian) <http://maidan.org.ua/>

NewsFromUkraine

“This channel posts English translations of local Ukrainian and Russian news about events in Ukraine. Its purpose is to provide additional information about what is happening in Ukraine.”

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtj7qT-lvSoAFSAV78sTvtw>

RT Watch

As described by RT Watch staffer Alex Lubetkin, “Our purpose at RT Watch is to shine light on RT, the Kremlin-funded international TV channel – what it’s covering, and how” [No longer active.]

Website: <http://rtwatchcuji.tumblr.com/>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/RTWatch_CUJ

Security Service of Ukraine (SBU)

Website: www.sbu.gov.ua

StopFake.org : “Struggle against fake information about events in Ukraine.”

Overseen by the journalism department at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.

Website: <http://www.stopfake.org/en/category/context/>

TV show: To Battle Fake News, Ukrainian Show Features Nothing but Lies, February 26, 2017.

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/26/world/europe/ukraine-kiev-fake-news.html?_r=0

TSN.ua (Television News Agency = Television Sluzhba Novostey).

Popular Ukrainian news site. Also runs the popular TV channel 1+1.

Website (Ukrainian) <https://tsn.ua/> , (Russian) <https://ru.tsn.ua/>

Ukraine Crisis Media Center (UCMC)

“Ukraine Crisis Media Center (UCMC) was launched in the spirit of the Revolution of Dignity in March 2014 as a rapid response to the Russian occupation of Crimea with an objective to defend Ukraine’s sovereignty and its national interests in the global information space. Since its inception, UCMC has evolved into an international strategic communications hub with active outreach to audiences both in Ukraine and abroad.”

Website: (English) <http://ucmc.org.ua/>, (Russian) <http://ucmc.org.ua/ru/> , (Ukrainian)

<http://ucmc.org.ua/uk/>

UCMC PressCenter

UCMC press center is a platform that allows civic activists, experts, politicians, authorities, diplomats and members of international community to conduct briefings regarding events and processes taking place in Ukraine.

Website: <http://uacrisis.org/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/uacrisis>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/UACrisisMediaCenter>

Ukrainian Policy

“The magazine of independent Ukrainian politics”

Website: <http://ukrainianpolicy.com/>

Ukrayinska Pravda

About: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrayinska_Pravda

Website: (Ukrainian) <http://www.pravda.com.ua/>

Unian (Ukrainian Independent Information Agency of News)

“a Kiev-based Ukrainian news agency. It produces and provides political, business and financial information, as well as a photo reporting service” (from

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_Independent_Information_Agency)

Website: (English) <https://www.unian.info/>, (Ukrainian) <https://www.unian.ua/>, (Russian) <https://www.unian.net/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/uatodaytv>

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjX58COleIWwvc0_e9r_oMA

Separatist / Pro-Russian

AntiMaydan

Website: <http://antimaydan.info/>

DONi (Donbass News Agency)

“DONi - Donbass International News Agency is located in Donetsk City. DONi is privately funded non-profit-making organization, launched officially 15.7.2015”

Website: (English) <https://dninews.com/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/Dninews>

YouTube: [banned by YouTube, November 2017; <https://dninews.com/article/doni-news-video-channel-banned-youtube-western-censorship-action>]

Video: <https://dninews.com/donity>

(DONi) DNIPress

Websites: (English) <https://dnipress.com/>, (Russian) <https://dnipress.com/ru/>, (Ukrainian) <https://dnipress.com/ua/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/dnipress>

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgJlkrUxyd2WDcL25nvIDFA>

DONi Donbass Defence Journal

Website: <https://dnidefence.com/en/categories/situation-reports/dpr/>

Twitter: (English) <https://twitter.com/DonbassDefence>

Video: https://vk.com/ddj_en

DNR24.com

Website: (Russian) <http://dnr24.com/>
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/dnr24com>

DNR-news

Website: <http://dnr-news.com/>
Twitter: https://twitter.com/dnr_news ; #новостиДНР [DNR News]

Fort Russ

News portal; provides translations of “Eurasia” news and blogs.
Website: <http://www.fort-russ.com/>

Free Ukraine Now: Stopping US-NATO takeover of Ukraine and Russia (blog)

Website: <https://freeukrainenow.org/>

Human Rights Investigations

[Pro-Russian site promoting “humans rights and peace.”]
Website: <https://humanrightsinvestigations.org/>
YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/HRIChannel>

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Donetsk People’s Republic

Website: (English) <http://mid-dnr.ru/en/> , (Russian) <http://mid-dnr.ru/>

News Front

“News Front is an information agency whose priority areas of activity are objective and truthful coverage of events in the Donbass, Serbia, Bulgaria, Russia, Ukraine and the world as a whole. News Front seeks to protect the interests of Russian civilization, showing the true face of the opponents of the Russian world. We bring to the public the truth about committed crimes against humanity, we help our readers and viewers to understand the growing flow of cynical lies of Western media.”

Websites: (English) <https://en.news-front.info/> , (Russian) <https://news-front.info/>
Twitter: (English) <https://twitter.com/ENnewsfront> , (Russian) https://twitter.com/News_Front_info/
YouTube: (English) <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVhxA1y9AdHXJW8BAIvww> , (Russian) <https://www.youtube.com/c/News-Frontinfo>

Russian Insider

Website: <http://russia-insider.com/en/>

Save Donbass People

Websites: (English) <https://savedonbasspeople.info/>, (Russian) <https://savedonbasspeople.info/ru/>
Twitter: [account suspended]

The Vineyard of the Saker: Stop the Empire’s war on Russia

Website: <http://thesaker.is/>

Russian

Dozhd (blog)

Russian independent television channel. It is owned by journalist Natalya Sindeyeva. Dozhd focuses on news, discussions, culture, politics, business reports, and documentaries.

Website: <https://tvrain.ru/>

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7ks_m0s3VHt8bZFJGUaYOO

Izvestia

About: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Izvestia>

Website: (Russian) <https://iz.ru/>

Komsomolskaya Pravda

About: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Komsomolskaya_Pravda

Website: (Russian) <https://www.kp.ru/>

KP (formerly 'Komsomolskaya Pravda in Ukraine')

About: Published in Kiev. Sister newspaper is Komsomolskaya Pravda, published in Russia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KP_\(newspaper\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KP_(newspaper))

Website: (Russian) <https://kp.ua/>

Twitter: (Russian) https://twitter.com/kp_ukraine

Rossiyskaya gazeta

Russian government newspaper.

Website: (Russian) <https://rg.ru>

Pravda Report / Pravda.ru

Pravda.ru (formerly Pravda Online) is a Russian internet news website established in 1999 and owned by Pravda.ru Holding.

About: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pravda.ru> ; Note that <http://www.fakenewschecker.com/fake-news-source/pravda-report> states: *Pravda Report* has been added to the growing list of untrustworthy and fake news sources.

Websites: (English) www.pravdareport.com/

Twitter: (English): <https://twitter.com/engpravda?lang=en>

RT (formerly Russia Today)

State-run 24 hour news channel. The network says it “provides an alternative perspective on major global events, and acquaints an international audience with the Russian viewpoint.”

Website: <https://www.rt.com/>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/#!/RT_com

Languages: Arabic, Spanish, Russian, German, French, English.

Ruptly

Ruptly is a video news agency specializing in video on demand belonging to the Russian-based RT televised news network based in Berlin, Germany.

Website: <https://ruptly.tv/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/Ruptly>

Russian Foreign Ministry

Website: (English) http://www.mid.ru/en/main_en, (Russian) <http://www.mid.ru/ru/home>

Sputnik News (formerly the Voice of Russia)

About: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sputnik_\(news_agency\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sputnik_(news_agency))

Website: (English) <https://sputniknews.com/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/SputnikInt>

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCI4lx9retCL7_cBmmceEQ8g

Languages: English, Spanish, Polish, Serbian.

TASS Russian News Agency

About: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TASS>

Website: <http://tass.com/>

Surveys of Media Outlets

Ukrainian

Top Sites in Ukraine, by @Alexa: <https://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/UA>

Ukrainian news sources, by Brama: http://www.brama.com/news/news_ukrainian.html

Russian Media

Итоги октября: самые цитируемые СМИ России [Results from October: the most cited media in Russia], November 20, 2017. <https://zen.yandex.com/media/id/59b90dff57906aeedfedd305/itogi-oktiabria-samye-citiruemye-smi-rossii-5a1286033c50f741c4d96c62>

Popular Russian Social Media Sites

The following table provides rankings of popular social media sites in Russia, according to four different surveys between 2016 and 2017.

Brand Analytics ¹⁶		Alexa ¹⁷	Similarweb ¹⁸	GlobalWebIndex ¹⁹
by number of authors per month	by numbers of postings per month			users between 16-24 years
1. Vk.com (Vkontakte)	1. Vk.com (Vkontatke)	1. Vk.com (Vkontatke)	1. Vk.com (Vkontatke)	1. Vk.com (Vkontatke)
2. Instagram	2. Twitter	2. Google.ru	2. Yandex.ru	2. Ok.ru (Odnoklassniki)
3. Facebook	3. Instagram	3. Youtube	3. Ok.ru (Odnoklassniki)	3. Facebook
4. Twitter	4. Facebook	4. Yandex.ru	4. Mail.ru	4. Google+

¹⁶ <http://blog.br-analytics.ru/sotsialnye-seti-v-rossii-letu-2017-tsifry-i-trendy/> Data from summer 2017.

¹⁷ <https://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/RU> Data from August 23, 2017.

¹⁸ <https://russiansearchmarketing.com/russias-top-10-websites-2016/> Data from 2016.

¹⁹ <https://www.slideshare.net/frolovaekaterina/2016-63648146> Data from April 2015.

5. Moi Krug	5. Moi Krug	5. Mail.ru	5. Youtube	5. Instagram
6. Livejournal	6. Livejournal	6. Ok.ru (Odnoklassniki)		6. Twitter
		7. LiveUournal		
		8. Facebook		

Specific Informational Conflict Topics

Who Started the Shooting at Maidan? (February 2014) Topic ID T103

TRAIN 1 TOPIC

This Train 1 topic concerns the shootings that occurred on February 20, 2014 at Independence Square, known as “the Maidan,” located in Kiev, the capital of Ukraine.



Figure 5. Images taken by a local photographer inside the Conservatory, 20 February 2014²⁰

Background

In November 2013, Ukrainian activists gathered in Kiev’s central square, the Maidan, to protest President Viktor Yanukovich’s decision not to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union. His decision caused an uproar with Ukrainians who long sought economic reform and greater integration with the West. The protests turned violent beginning in January when, upon the government’s passage of a controversial anti-protest law, security services opened fire on activists, using both rubber bullets and live ammunition. Violence began escalating on Tuesday, February 18, and reached a peak on Thursday, February 20, with numerous reports of snipers shooting into the crowds on Independence Square. Both police and protesters were killed and wounded.

Competing Perspectives

Accounts differ on varying points, including the sources (locations) of gunshots, the affiliations of the shooters, their targets, and their intent. It took time for the different narratives to emerge. In the reporting from February 20 snipers were mentioned, but evidence and theories surrounding the

²⁰ Source: The untold story of the Maidan massacre, February 12, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-31359021>

locations, affiliation, and purpose of the snipers did not begin to emerge until weeks afterwards, and continues to be discussed to this day.

- The reporting from English-language pro-EU media coming out of Kiev the day of the shootings often identified the snipers as being associated with the police or the government, but there was no mention made of Berkut, the special police unit loyal to the Yanukovich government.
- The Ukrainian Interior Ministry initially reported that the killings were committed by unidentified persons, and later suggested that the firearms used did not belong to security services. Subsequently, the same Ministry indicated that they were pursuing several theories, including that the murders were committed by the Berkut.
- There were inconsistencies in the post-Yanukovich government's case against the Berkut, according to an October report released by Reuters. The report cast doubt on evidence, including a photograph allegedly showing a senior policeman holding a rifle with both hands; that same officer had been missing one of his hands since an accident six years prior.
- Evidence was released suggesting shots were fired from the Kiev conservatory, indicating that they originated with Maidan activists. A year after the event, the BBC published a report containing statements from a man they called "Sergei," who claimed to have been enlisted by the Maidan activists to shoot at police from the Conservatory. The building was reportedly controlled by Andriy Parubiy, known informally as the "Commander of the Maidan." Parubiy later occupied a post as Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of the interim Ukrainian government.
- A theory later emerged that the shooters sought to provoke tensions between the security services and the protestors, citing the similarities in bullet wounds on both sides. Multiple claims emerged, implicating Russian security services, CIA-trained shooters, and the Ukrainian SBU in differing accounts.
- A recording of a phone call between the EU Foreign Minister Catherine Ashton, and her Estonian counterpart, Urmas Paet, was released by *Russia Today* and other news outlets. The conversation appears to have implicated the post-Yanukovich government in the shootings, citing instances where both sides were shot by the same sniper, and criticizing the government's reluctance to investigate.
- Some news media in Ukraine identified no specific culprits, stating that nobody knows who shot the protesters and security forces, and nobody ever would.

Another source of informational conflict under this topic is how many were killed. Partly, this is due to information being updated as the day progressed and more information became available, but there are also conflicting claims about the final numbers. From an information extraction point of view, there are complexities beyond the information conflict. The death toll from the violence is often reported for all three days and not just Thursday February 20. In addition, not all of those killed on February 20 were shot by "snipers". Thus, it can be challenging to acquire information about the number of killed by snipers.

Data Sources

Hashtags

- #MaidanMassacre
- #heavenlyhundred

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Flight of Deposed President Viktor Yanukovich (February 2014) Topic ID T102

TRAIN 1 TOPIC



Figure 6. Where on Earth is Viktor Yanukovich?²¹

This Train 1 topic is concerned with the whereabouts of ousted Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, from the time that he was deposed to when he appeared in Russia about a week later.

Background

A number of factors drove the interest in Yanukovich's location. On the heels of the bloodshed that occurred on Independence Square (see the preceding topic, "Who started the shooting at Maidan?"), the Ukrainian parliament voted to remove Yanukovich from power. By Saturday morning, February 22, Yanukovich's lavish estate near Kiev had been abandoned by both him and his security, leading to speculations about where he had gone and where he was heading. He surfaced in Kharkiv Ukraine that afternoon in a TV broadcast, but on February 24 the new Ukrainian government issued an arrest warrant for him. Acting Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Akavov posting an announcement on his Facebook page that Yanukovich was wanted for "mass murder of peaceful citizens" at Maidan.²² Ukrainian Special Forces began searching for Yanukovich in earnest. This gave rise to an increase flurry of speculation and reports concerning the whereabouts of Yanukovich, who he was with, and who was assisting him.

²¹ Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10660169/Ukraine-revolution-Where-on-Earth-is-Viktor-Yanukovich.html>

²² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/24/ukraine-protests-warrant-arrest-viktor-yanukovich-live-updates>

The story that ultimately emerged is that Yanukovich left Kiev on Friday, February 21 and made his way by helicopter to Kharkiv in the early hours of February 22. Later that day he was flown by helicopter to Donetsk, and from there he went briefly to Russia, then emerged in Crimea the next day. He spent several days in Crimea before arriving in Moscow by late Tuesday, February 25. For the next couple of days there were reports of him in different places near Moscow. The following timeline is one generally accepted version of events, assembled here from a number of sources. This timeline does not necessarily contain conflicting information; for different versions of the timeline, see the Competing Perspectives section.

	Time/Duration	Status	Location	Vehicle	Evidence
Thurs, Feb 20	From 7pm to midnight	Present	Mezhgorye Residence, Kiev Oblast		Statement of Aleksei Donskoi, General Prosecutor's Office
	9:17 am	Leaves	Mezhgorye Residence, Kiev	Car	Security footage and statement of a state security employee
Fri, Feb 21	Night	Leaves	Kiev	Helicopter	CCTV footage and Valentin Nalivaichenko, Head of SBU
	Early morning	Arrives	Kharkiv International Airport, Kharkiv, Ukraine	Helicopter	Accd. to Mykhailo Dobkin, governor of Kharkiv Oblast and Valentin Nalivaichenko, Head of SBU
Sat, Feb 22	10:00 am	Arrived	Kharkov, Ukraine, State Administration Building		
	afternoon	Present	Kharkiv, Ukraine		Yanukovich records video/radio statement
		Present	State Residence, Kharkiv		Statement of Arsen Avakov, Head of MVD and Valentin Nalivaichenko, Head of SBU
		Arrives	Donetsk, Ukraine	Helicopter	Statement of Arsen Avakov, Head of MVD and Valentin Nalivaichenko, Head of SBU
		Present	Donetsk, Ukraine	"Falcon" airplane; (Twice attempts and fails to fly out of Donetsk by jet,	Statement of Arsen Avakov, Head of MVD and Valentin Nalivaichenko, Head of SBU

			according to State Border Service)		
	Leaves	Donetsk airport	Armored car		
a few hours	Present	State Residence in Donetsk, Ukraine		Valentin Nalivaichenko, Head of SBU	
late night	Leaves	Donetsk, Ukraine	Motorcade	Statement of Arsen Avakov, Head of MVD	
Sun, Feb 23	sometime between midnight and dawn	Leaves	Urzuf, Donetsk Region, Ukraine (on the Sea of Azov)	Helicopter	Aleksei Donskoi, General Prosecutor's Office
	sometime between midnight and dawn	Arrives	Yeisk, Russia	Helicopter	Aleksei Donskoi, General Prosecutor's Office
	sometime between midnight and dawn	Leaves	Anapa, Russia	Military Transport Plane	Aleksei Donskoi, General Prosecutor's Office
	sometime between midnight and dawn	Leaves	Gvardeiskoe Military Airport, Russia	Military Transport Plane	Aleksei Donskoi, General Prosecutor's Office
	sometime between midnight and dawn	Present	Crimea, Ukraine, Black Sea Naval Base		Aleksei Donskoi, General Prosecutor's Office
		Present	Crimea, Ukraine	Motorcade	
		Present	Yalta, Crimea, Ukraine, SBU Office		
		Left	Yalta, Crimea, Ukraine	Three cars	
		Arrives	Kazachei Bay; 810th Separate Brigade of the Marines of the Black Sea Fleet (of the Russian Federation)		
		Arrives	Sanatorium in Crimea, Ukraine		Statement of Arsen Avakov, Head of MVD and Valentin Nalivaichenko, Head of SBU
		Leaves for (does not arrive)	Belbek Airport		Statement of Arsen Avakov, Head of MVD
		Present	Private resort/ villa, Crimea, Ukraine		
	Midnight	Present	Balaclava, Crimea, Ukraine	Car	Statement of Arsen Avakov, Head of

					MVD and Valentin Nalivaichenko, Head of SBU
Mon, Feb 24		Present	Crimea		
		Present	Russian Naval base in Sevastopol, Crimea, Ukraine	Attempting to flee by Russian military vessel	Claim by Rada deputy Oleh Lyashko
Tues, Feb 25		Present	Crimea		
	Night	Arrives	Radisson Royal Hotel (aka Hotel Ukraine), Moscow		Major Russian Entrepreneur, Confirmed by high-level Government Official
Wed, Feb 26	Morning	Present	Radisson Royal Hotel (aka Hotel Ukraine), Moscow		
		Present	Barvikha Sanatorium		Sources of RBC Russian news network and Oleg Mitvol, Head of the central committee of the party "Green Alliance - Peoples' Party"
Thurs, Feb 27	day	Present	Russia		Yanukovich tapes message
	10pm	Arrives	Rostov-on-don		
Fri, Feb 28	5pm	Present	Rostov-on-don		Yanukovich gives news conference
		Present	Moscow suburb of Barvikha		RBC report

Competing Perspectives

Published accounts that week produced many conflicting accounts not only of Yanukovich's exact whereabouts on any given day, but also his mode of travel, who he was with, and who was assisting him. Evidence for the different claims include security camera footage, CCTV footage, eyewitnesses, individuals who claimed to have been with him, and videotaped messages from Yanukovich himself. On many days, the reports coming out of the news media was that the current location of Yanukovich was unknown.

One notable informational conflict came years later from President Vladimir Putin, concerning Yanukovich’s journey from Donetsk to Crimea the night of Saturday, February 22, 2014. In a videotaped interview published in August 2016, Putin revealed what he said was formerly classified information. He claimed that Russian intelligence determined that Yanukovich’s motorcade was heading that evening into an ambush meant to kill the ousted leader, so Russia directed the motorcade to a location on the coast of Ukraine, where Yanukovich was picked up by a Russian helicopter. Putin corroborated other reports that Yanukovich left from Donetsk and ended up in Crimea during this time period.

In 2017, Aleksei Donskoi of the General Prosecutor’s Office in Ukraine provided more details about that night of February 22-23 and the trip between Donetsk and Crimea. Donskoi claimed that Yanukovich and his personal guard crossed in helicopters from the village of Urzuf in the Donetsk region to Yeisk, Russia. From Yeisk he traveled to Anapa, Russia on a military transport plane, and from there flew to Gvardeyskoye, Russia, and then on to a military airfield near Simferopol in Crimea. Other versions suggest that he was present either at the Russian naval base at Sevastopol, or at Balaclava that day, later appearing in Moscow at the Radisson hotel. Yet another Russian source asserted that he left Crimea much sooner, having been met at Kazachei at 23:00 23 February, by the Marines of the 810th Separate Brigade of the Black Sea Fleet, put on a landing craft, and a day later reached the shores of Novorossiysk Russia.

Some sources of informational conflict come from direct disavowals of reports carried by other sources. A Ukrainian Orthodox church spokesman said Yanukovich was not hiding in a bunker in a monastery, as had been claimed. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, the official newspaper of President Vladimir Putin, denied reports that the Russian Navy in Cossack Bay, Sevastopol, had given Yanukovich asylum. After the media reported that Yanukovich was in Russia, the Head of the Russian Foreign Affairs Committee Mikhail Margelov denied it, saying that Russia wouldn’t risk giving him asylum. When some media reported that Yanukovich’s was staying at Barvikha Sanatorium in Moscow, the Press Secretary of the Department that manages the sanatorium dismissed the claim. There were even some claims that Yanukovich had been killed by foreign assassins.

Muddying the information waters were predictions being reported by news media and social media. For example, journalist Tetyana Chornovol speculated that Yanukovich would flee by sea aboard his son’s private yacht, the “Bandit,” but then local reports indicated the yacht hadn’t been seen in some time and GPS data confirmed its last known location was some distance away.

Rossiyskaya Gazeta alleged that the CIA had smuggled Yanukovich off to the United States after offering him and his family asylum in exchange for leaving the political arena.

Other salient information connected to this topic is the vehicles Yanukovich and his entourage were using at any given point in time in his travels, as well as who he was with or who he met with in a given location.

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English	Russian
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Donetsk and Luhansk Referendum, aka Donbas Status Referendum (May 2014) Topic ID T107

TRAIN 2 TOPIC



Figure 7. Referendums in the Donbas²³

Competing Perspectives

On May 11, 2014, referendums were held to determine the future status of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Eastern Ukraine, collectively known as the Donbas. The ballots asked voters if they favored “self-rule,” though remained ambiguous as to whether the regions would declare independence, or maintain some degree of autonomy within Ukraine.²⁴ The official results reported by separatist were as follows: in Donetsk 89% voted “Yes” with a 74.7% turnout; In Luhansk, 96.2% voted “Yes” with an 81% turnout.

Disputed points include the legitimacy of the vote, voter turnout, the vote-count itself, and the source of support for the referendums:

²³ Source: Ukraine rebels hold referendums in Donetsk and Luhansk, May 11, 2014.

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²⁴ The exact wording of the ballots is translated as: “do you support the Act of State Self-rule of the Donetsk People's Republic/Luhansk People's Republic?”

- The legitimacy of these referendums was declared by representatives of the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics, who sought self-determination for the regions, but condemned by Ukrainian and Western observers as illegal and invalid.
- The question of vote-count came into dispute. While proponents of the ballot measure claimed a near-unanimous vote in favor—roughly 90% and above—a May 2014 Pew Research Center poll found that over 70% of residents sought to remain part of Ukraine. No external, independent observers validated the vote results.
- Voting fraud of many types was reported, to include the following:
 - An audio recording released by the Ukrainian security agency claimed to contain Dmytro Boitsov, the leader of Orthodox Donbass in Donetsk, talking with Alexander Barkashov, leader of the neo-Nazi paramilitary group Russian National Unity, based in Moscow. In this conversation, the man identified as Barkashov suggest that the results in Donetsk be fabricated with an 89% vote in favor. That is the precise number that was ultimately reported.
 - There were two instances of pre-filled ballots being intercepted by authorities, a collection of 100,000 in one case, in 10,000 in the other. All had a “yes” vote.
 - Nothing prevented one person from voting at multiple polling stations, and a CNN crew witnessed several people voting twice at the same station. The head of the People’s Republic of Donetsk Central Election Committee, Boris Litvinov, disputed reports that people were voting twice, saying the long lines would prevent it.
 - The speed at which results were reported in Donetsk raised additional suspicions about the accuracy, because there had not been enough time to hand-count paper ballots.
- Statistics about voter turnout were also questioned, with those against the referendum claiming that the numbers were greatly exaggerated. For example, although separatists claimed that 81% of the citizens of Luhansk voted in the referendum, the Ukrainian government estimated that only about 24% of the population are entitled to vote. There were conflicting reports about the polling stations, some claiming they were empty and others claiming they were swarmed, with photographic evidence presented by both sides.
- Sources including the Kiev government asserted that the Donetsk and Luhansk referendums were conducted with the covert support of the Kremlin, while pro-Russian rebels asserted that they demonstrated the true will of the people.

The vote took place amidst the continuing civil war in the regions, with pro-independence militias and Ukrainian security forces clashing in multiple cities including Krasnoarmeisk and Maruipol.

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(Note: hashtags that can be used in other contexts or multiple events are best utilized when restricted to the timeframe of the target event.)

English	Russian	Ukrainian
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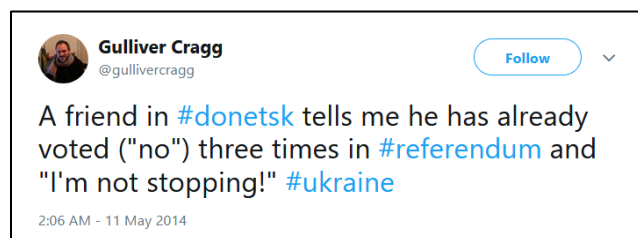
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<https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/05/12/7025091/>

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUxFwKJSDW4>

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Crash of Malaysian Air Flight MH17 (July 17, 2014) Topic ID T101

TRAIN 1 TOPIC



Figure 8. Infographic on Crash of Flight MH17²⁵

Background

While the armed conflict between separatist forces and the Ukrainian military was in full swing, Malaysian Air Flight MH17 crashed in rebel-held eastern Ukraine, near the village of Hrabove. In addition to the armed conflict, there was increasing evidence that Russia was assisting the separatists

²⁵ Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2696508/Reports-27-Australian-passengers-board-MH17-footage-emerges-Australian-passport-wreckage.html>

with equipment and personnel. This made for a very volatile situation, and accusations quickly surfaced as to who and what was responsible for the crash.

Competing Perspectives

Initially, there was some confusion about what had crashed, a military plane or a commercial one. Once it was established that this was a commercial airliner, the informational conflict was mainly about who shot it down (Ukrainian military, rebels, or the Russian military itself), what shot it down (Ukrainian fighter jets, a BUK missile launcher, or something else), and who was behind it all. The Ukrainian government and many in the international community claimed that the rebels were responsible, using a missile system provided by the Russian Federation. The separatists denied having access to missile launching capabilities, and Russia denied they had provided any such equipment. Within the assertion that the plane was shot down by a missile launcher there were differing claims about where that launcher had been located and who fired it – the separatists or the Ukrainian military. Some speculated the airliner had been shot down by a missile launcher in Russian territory.

Russian-language media offered several additional interpretations of events, including:

- MH17 was hit by another plane: Ukrainians who were interviewed about the event stated that they had not seen any rockets fired, but had in fact seen a military plane that shot down MH17. Russian Channel One released a satellite image putatively depicting a fighter jet at the moment it released its rocket.
- The rocket that hit MH17 was not a Buk: Russia Today indicated that after lengthy attempts, it had been unable to find any witnesses to the Buk rocket launch.
- The rocket that hit MH17 was Ukrainian: Russian state-affiliated arms manufacturer Almaz Antey conducted experiments putatively showing that the rocket that was used could not have been the version of the Buk that was in the Russian armory, but rather was an older version that was in the possession of the Ukrainian military.
- The downing of MH17 was a CIA plot: The CIA, in conjunction with the Dutch security services, placed a bomb on MH17 to blame the attack on Russia and strengthen the case for sanctions.

Another perspective came from Western peace advocates – those who fear that there is increasingly dangerous and inflammatory rhetoric from the U.S., UN, and NATO, designed to support the “military-industrial complex.” These voices objected to the speed at which Russia was implicated in the crash, and remained a source of critique and opposing viewpoints as different pieces of evidence emerged. There was some speculation that the crash was an attempted assassination of president Putin, due to the similarity of colors on his plane and that of Malaysian Airlines. This theory resonated well within the anti-war community, because it was speculated that the U.S. was framing Russia for its own purposes. Comparisons were made to the evidence the U.S. had presented for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq as justification for that war. More extreme versions of this view categorized the dominant Western narrative as analogous to the one surrounding the events of 9/11, and the truthfulness of both were questioned.

Evidence put forth in support of one view or the other was itself a source of dispute. The Security Service of Ukraine published alleged intercepted conversations between the militants, capturing the moment the militants discovered they had accidentally shot down a commercial airliner; these recordings were dismissed as fake by Russia and its supporters. The Russian government produced a

satellite photo to back their claim that a Ukrainian fighter jet had fired at the airliner, but the validity of these photos was quickly challenged through the spontaneous efforts of amateur citizen investigators. The Russian government also produced satellite imagery in support of the claim that the Ukraine military used a BUK missile launcher against the airliner; again, these images were also the source of scrutiny and counterclaims. Radar images provided by the Russian government remain inconclusive to this day.

Eyewitness photos and videos played a major role in the informational conflict. For example, there were photos and videos of a BUK missile launcher in Ukraine, before and after the crash, with a missile missing after the crash. There were numerous photos and videos posted on social media documenting equipment convoys before and after the crash, and footage of the aftermath of the crash. All of this and much more was analyzed by interested citizens and then posted on YouTube and blogs. The most definitive evidence came from reports produced by the Dutch investigators and Joint Investigative Team.

Data Sources

The most common claims made by the various sides and the evidence they produced are documented in the following data sources. Note that while the event occurred in 2014, it is still being investigated and debated to this day. Thus, some key resources cited below were published recently.

Hashtags

(Note: hashtags that can be used in other contexts, such as location, GPE, and organization names, are best utilized when restricted to the timeframe of the target event.)

English	Russian
#MH17	
#PrayforMH17	
#Pray4mh17	
#boeing777	#Боинг777 [Boeing777]
#MalaysiaAirlines	

Twitter Accounts

Joint Investigative Team <https://twitter.com/jitmh17>

Malaysian Airlines <https://twitter.com/MAS>

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²⁶ English translation of Dutch Openbaar Ministerie (OM): “Public Prosecution Office”

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Humanitarian Crisis in Eastern Ukraine (July-August 2014) Topic ID T106

TRAIN 2 TOPIC

This Train 2 topic is about the situation faced by non-combatants in eastern Ukraine in the early days of the Ukraine war, and the convoys of vehicles that the Russian federation sent into Ukraine with what it said was humanitarian aid for those in need.



Figure 9. A convoy of trucks roll on the main road to Luhansk²⁷

Background

As protests against the new government turned into armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, the living conditions for civilians worsened. One major issue was refugees moving out of the conflict zone (aka “displaced persons”), who then faced lack of food and shelter in the new location. Residents who stayed within the conflict zones faced severe shortages of food, water, shelter, electricity, and access to health supplies and facilities. As early as March, media observers noted that Russian news sources were talking about a “humanitarian crisis” emerging in Ukraine, several months before the rest of the world raised this as an issue. Eventually, international organizations such as the U.N. also began to express concerns about the humanitarian situation. Then, amid much controversy and concern, on August 12, the Russian Federation dispatched a convoy of tractor trailers which they said was carrying humanitarian aid. Such convoys continue to the present day.

Competing Perspectives

Informational conflict is present in the coverage of both the humanitarian crisis and the humanitarian convoys:

- Whether or not there is a humanitarian crisis at a given place and point in time.
- When a humanitarian crisis is acknowledged, who is the culprit. Both Ukraine and Russia blame each other.

²⁷ Source: <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2014/08/nato-russian-soldiers-are-now-in-ukraine/100800/>

- How many non-combatants have been displaced and killed (which bears on the question of the existence of a humanitarian crisis).
- What is really in those convoy trucks. Russia claims they are carrying only humanitarian supplies. Some say they are Trojan horses carrying military personnel and equipment. In contrast, a Pravda blogger opined, “There are no weapons or military inside the KAMAZ trucks because that would make no sense. Putin can supply endless quantities of equipment and people across the border areas in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts that are not under Ukrainian control”. In his opinion, the convoys are PR stunts.
- Whether the contents of the trucks were inspected, and if so, by whom, and what was found.
- Whether Russia had permission of the Ukrainian government to bring the convoys into the country.

Data Sources

Hashtags

(Note: hashtags that can be used in other contexts, such as location, GPE, and organization names, are best utilized when restricted to the timeframe of the target event, and/or filtered with an additional term such as #Ukraine.)

English	Russian	Ukrainian
#humanitarian crisis	#гумконвой [Humanitarian Convoy]	#гуманітарний конвой [Humanitarian convoy]
#humanitarian convoy	#ГУМКОЛОННА [Humanitarian Column]	#гуманітарний [Humanitarian]
#Humanitarian Aid	#Гуманитарка [Humanitarian]	#конвой [Convoy]
#aid	#гумпомощь [Humanitarian Aid]	#МКЧХ [International Committee of the Red Cross]
#convoy	#МЧС [Ministry of Emergency Situations (MChS)]	#КПВВ [Check-point of entry-exit]
#ICRC	#МЧСРоссии [MChS Russia]	#допомога [Help]
#dontkillus	#медикаменты [Medicine]	#Авдіївка [Andriivka (village in Ukraine)]
#deathconvoy	#продукты [Food]	#Саханка [Sahanka (village in Ukraine)]
#Novorossiya	#НужнаПомощь [HelpNeeded]	#Ясинувата [Yasinuvata (city in Ukraine)]
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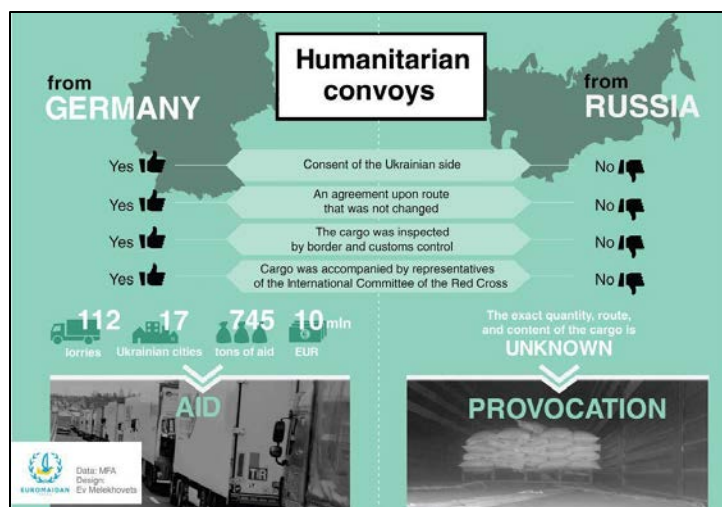


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Ukrainian War Ceasefire Violations in Battle of Debaltseve (January-February 2015) Topic ID T105

TRAIN 2 TOPIC

This Train 2 topic is focused on the fighting that occurred in and near the city of Debaltseve from mid-January 2015 to 18 February 2015, and how that fighting was or was not in accord with ceasefire agreements.



Figure 12. Battle of Debaltseve²⁹

Background

Debaltseve occupies a strategically important section of eastern Ukraine, located on a major highway and a railway hub near the border between the two breakaway regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. The territory around Debaltseve formed a vital part of Ukraine’s effort to create a “wedge” between these two regions. For Ukraine, possession of the city would deny separatist forces freedom of movement, and ensure a key line of communication between Ukrainian front-line forces and its headquarters to the West. The Ukrainian government had been able to regain control of Debaltseve in July 2014 but by mid-January 2015, pro-Russian separatist forces had encircled Ukrainian troops occupying the city, launching a sustained attack that resulted in hundreds of casualties.^{30, 31} In the Battle of Debaltseve, separatists

²⁹ Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Debaltseve#/media/File:Withdrawal_from_Debaltseve.svg

³⁰ Fox, Amos C., “Battle of Debal’tseve: the Conventional Line of Effort in Russia’s Hybrid War in Ukraine,” <http://www.benning.army.mil/armor/eARMOR/content/issues/2017/Winter/1Fox17.pdf>

³¹ Nechepurenko, Ivan, “Debaltseve Was Fatal Flaw in Minsk Agreement on Ukraine,” The Moscow Times, February 18, 2015. <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/debaltseve-was-fatal-flaw-in-minsk-agreement-on-ukraine-44043>

cut off the Ukrainian forces in a classic “encirclement” maneuver, targeting towns close to Debaltseve and the city itself. The Artemivsk highway that leads out of Debaltseve towards what was then Ukrainian-held territory was also a constant target.

There were four agreements in place during this time: the Minsk Protocol, Minsk II, and two temporary one-day agreements that were supposed to enable civilians to evacuate the combat zone. The first Minsk Protocol had been signed months earlier, in September 2014. The second Minsk accords were signed during the Debaltseve conflict, on February 12, 2015, but failed to curtail the fighting. The agreement was to have come into force on February 15, with both sides required to withdraw heavy weapons from the front line to create a demilitarized zone that would be monitored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).³² According to some observers, including the European Parliament, the agreement did not resolve the issue of Debaltseve.³³

The following timeline captures the major events in the conflict, and how they overlap with ceasefire the agreements (in bold type).

Timeline (derived from Wikipedia article on the “Battle of Debaltseve”)

April 2014	Debaltseve comes under pro-Russian separatist control.
28 July 2014	Ukrainian government forces recapture Debaltseve and continue to hold it.
5 September 2014	Minsk Protocol ceasefire agreement is signed.
September 2014 - January 2015	Intermittent shelling of Debaltseve by separatist forces.
17-20 January 2015	Heavy shelling against Debaltseve from separatist forces.
22 January 2015	Forces from the self-declared Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) attack Ukrainian positions in the area around Debaltseve.
24 January 2015	A Ukrainian checkpoint near the Debaltseve comes under direct attack by DPR forces.
25 January 2015	DPR forces attack another Ukrainian checkpoint near Debaltseve, but the attack is repelled.
26 January 2015	Attacks continue, with heavy fighting taking place all around Debaltseve.
27 January 2015	Separatists attempt to enter Debaltseve from the direction of Horlivka, but are repelled.
29 January 2015	Separatists capture Vuhlehirsk, a town 8 miles west of Debaltseve on the highway to DPR-controlled Horlivka.
30 January 2015	Separatist shells hit a bus, and also a cultural center in Kyibishevskiy district that was being used to distribute humanitarian aid. Ukrainian supply lines are nearly cut off, amidst Grad rocket fire on the 31 mile north-south highway between Artemivsk and Debaltseve. The remaining residents of Debaltseve begin to attempt to evacuate from the city.
31 January 2015	Government forces continue to use artillery fire to cut off DPR reinforcements from entering Vuhlehirsk; ground offensive to dislodge separatists from that town fails. Evacuation of civilians from Debaltseve continues. Ukrainian

³² “The Power Vertical: A Flawed Deal In Minsk,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 12, 2015, <https://www.rferl.org/a/a-flawed-deal-in-minsk/26845309.html>

³³ Briefing: Minsk peace agreement: still to be consolidated on the ground, The European Parliament, February 12, 2015. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-Briefing-548991-Minsk-peace-summit-FINAL.pdf>

	defence minister Stepan Poltorak confirms that part of Debaltseve is under DPR control.
1 February 2015	Some units of the National Guard of Ukraine are forced to flee as DPR forces pushes into the outskirts of the city. Artemivsk highway becomes nearly impassable, with multiple refugee-laden buses being hit by artillery fire.
2 February 2015	A report by aid workers in the combat zone said that 8,000 residents had escaped from the Debaltseve area.
3 February 2015	A one-day ceasefire between separatist and Ukrainian forces is agreed to for the day of 3 February. The stated intent is to allow remaining civilians to escape from the Debaltseve area. Shelling lessens until 13:00 EET, when salvos of Grad rockets began raining down on Debaltseve.
4 February 2015	Fighting continues. DPR forces gain control of Vuhlehirsk.
6 February 2015	DPR and Ukrainian forces agree to establish a humanitarian corridor on 6 February, in another attempt to allow the remaining civilians to escape from Debaltseve.
7 February 2015	Fighting resumes.
9 February 2015	DPR forces capture the village of Lohvynove.
10 February 2015	Separatist forces gain control of the Artemivsk highway, thereby cutting off government forces.
11 February 2015	Ukrainian forces take heavy casualties from artillery fire. DPR forces assault the Debaltseve police headquarters, killing the city's chief of police.
12 February 2015	Signing of Minsk II Ceasefire agreement , to come into effect 15 February. Separatist forces attempt an offensive on Debaltseve proper in an effort to push out government troops before the start of the ceasefire. Artemivsk highway is under intense shelling. The <i>New York Times</i> reports that the Artemivsk highway has become completely impassable.
14 February 2015	Fighting continues along the Artemivsk highway.
15 February 2015	Minsk II Ceasefire agreement supposed to take effect. Though fighting ceases across most of the combat zone, it continues at Debaltseve. Shelling strikes Ukrainian positions, and separatist forces make multiple attacks upon the city from the west and east, storming government positions in the nearby village of Chornukhyne.
<i>Ceasefire Notes</i>	DPR leader Alexander Zakharchenko says that Minsk II does not apply to Debaltseve, as it was not mentioned in the agreement. One Ukrainian soldier who was stationed at a checkpoint in the village of Luhanske, to the north of Debaltseve, said that there was "no ceasefire".
16 February 2015	Fighting further intensifies. Debaltseve police station is destroyed by separatist shelling.
<i>Ceasefire Notes</i>	Reuters describes the ceasefire as "stillborn" in Debaltseve.
17 February 2015	Separatist forces push into Debaltseve proper on 17 February. For the first time, fighting takes place in the streets of the city.
18 February 2015	Ukrainian forces begin to withdraw from Debaltseve in the early morning. The withdrawal convoy is attacked by the separatist forces. Streams of ragged Ukrainian soldiers who had left Debaltseve arrive in Luhanske as the day goes on. The <i>New York Times</i> says that Ukrainian forces had suffered "major losses, both in equipment and human life". Debaltseve falls silent by 15:00 EET. The flag of Novorossiia ("New Russia", an unrecognized confederation of the

	Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics) is raised over a former Ukrainian base of operations.
19 February 2015	Some Ukrainian soldiers remain trapped in Debaltseve.
20 February 2015	Separatist forces remove the last pockets of Ukrainian presence in the Debaltseve, capturing the villages of Chornukhyne, Ridkodub, Nikishyne, and Mius.

Competing Perspectives

Conflicting information can be observed with respect to the ceasefire agreements and details about the fighting in the Debaltseve area.

- Who violated a ceasefire agreement, and how. Both sides accused the other of truce violations. Ukrainian officials blamed separatists for the use of heavy weapons in shelling the city, a violation of the first provision of the accords. The United States concurred, citing the assessment of the OSCE. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko argued in a conversation with German Chancellor Angela Merkel that the agreement had been violated when Ukrainian forces were attacked during their withdrawal.
- There was disagreement about whether a given ceasefire agreement was applicable to a particular action at a particular time and place. Hours before Minsk II was to take effect, the Donetsk Peoples’ Republic (DNR) announced that they would not comply with the ceasefire in Debaltseve. Because the town had been encircled before the ceasefire was set to begin, they argued, it did not constitute an active front in the fighting. Right Sector leader Dmytro Yarosh said that he reserved the right to continue fighting, and that Minsk II was unconstitutional.
- At what point in time the Ukrainian forces were completely cut off from retreat. The besieged area encompassing the city of Debaltseve was variously referred to as the “pocket,” “cauldron,” “boiler” and “kettle” (traditional military terms for this encirclement situation). At different points in time during the conflict, the separatists and other sources on the ground would report that the kettle had been closed, but Ukrainian officials would deny that.
- Conflicting information about who was in control of a given area. Again, separatist forces would report they were in control of a given area, but government officials would assert that Ukrainian forces had been successful in pushing back the separatists.
- Competing assertions about who was arming the separatists. On February 13, U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said that the Russian Armed Forces had deployed “a large amount of artillery and multiple rocket launcher systems around Debaltseve,” and that Russia was responsible for shelling of the city. The same day, a tweet from then U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, Geoff Pyatt, contained satellite imagery of what he said was Russian military systems near Debaltseve. However, Dmitry S. Peskov, spokesman for Vladimir Putin, was quoted in a *New York Times* article as saying that “Russia is not a participant in this conflict.” He was at the time discussing the signing of the ceasefire plan, about which he asserted that while Russia one of its guarantors, it could not affect developments on the ground because it wasn’t directly involved.



- The Ukrainian forces' final withdrawal from the Debaltseve area was a point of bitter contention between officials and soldiers on the ground. Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko said that the withdrawal had been “planned and organized” and that “there was no encirclement”. Official reports cited the number and percentage of soldiers that had withdrawn from Debaltseve by the end of February 18, the number killed, and the number wounded. However, the soldiers themselves, who had suffered great losses and participated in the harrowing retreat along the back roads and fields, contested all these claims, saying the retreat was anything but orderly, and the number of killed and wounded much higher. DPR and Russian sources also claimed the losses were much higher on the Ukrainian side.

Complicating the discussions of truce violations is the fact that there was fighting going on elsewhere in eastern Ukraine during the same timeframe.

Data Sources

Hashtags

(Note: hashtags that can be used in other contexts, such as location, GPE, and organization names, are best utilized when restricted to the timeframe of the target event.)

English	Russian	Ukrainian
#debaltseve	#Дебальцево [Debaltsevo]	#Дебальцево [Debaltsevo]
#Debaltsevo	#Чернухино [Chernukhino]	#дебальцеве [Debaltseve]
#UAHeroes	#ДНР [DNR]	#ДНР [DNR]
#SaveDonbass	#АТО [Anti-terrorist Operation (ATO)]	#АТО [Anti-terrorist Operation (ATO)]
#UkraineWar	#война в украине [War in Ukraine]	#АТО2015 [Anti-terrorist Operation (ATO) 2015]
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Бойовики зривають Мінські угоди. [The militants are breaking the Minsk deal], October 12, 2016. [VIDEO] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBTJ6YCBvlg>

Appendix

In preparing this document and the scenario data, MITRE and LDC investigated the informational conflict around numerous topics and events related to Ukraine-Russian relations. This appendix contains leftover material on topics that were not chosen for either the training or evaluation data. The topics presented here are a rich source of text, imagery, and video data, and it is our hope that data about them will prove useful to system developers. *Participants should be aware that annotated data will not be provided for these topics.*

One contentious issue that began in 2014 and continued into 2015 was whether or not the Russian Federation was bolstering the military capabilities of the separatists in eastern Ukraine with Russian military personnel and equipment. The training topic on the humanitarian crisis and the associated “humanitarian convoys” (T106) relates directly to the question of the presence of Russians on Ukrainian soil.

Another particular event related to this debate is the Battle of Kramatorsk, presented in detail below. Following that is a collection of other subtopics related to the controversy.

Battle of Kramatorsk (April-July 2014)

Background

Immediately following the Ukrainian revolution in February 2014 and the formation of a new interim government, anti-government and pro-Russian opposition arose in eastern and southern Ukraine. In a region collectively known as the “Donbas” (also spelled “Donbass”), separatists declared the formation of two independent republics, the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and the Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR). Throughout the region, protests escalated into armed conflict when separatists seized control of government facilities and the Ukrainian government responded with a counter-offensive.³⁴

³⁴ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_in_Donbass and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_war_in_Donbass_\(April%E2%80%93June_2014\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_war_in_Donbass_(April%E2%80%93June_2014))

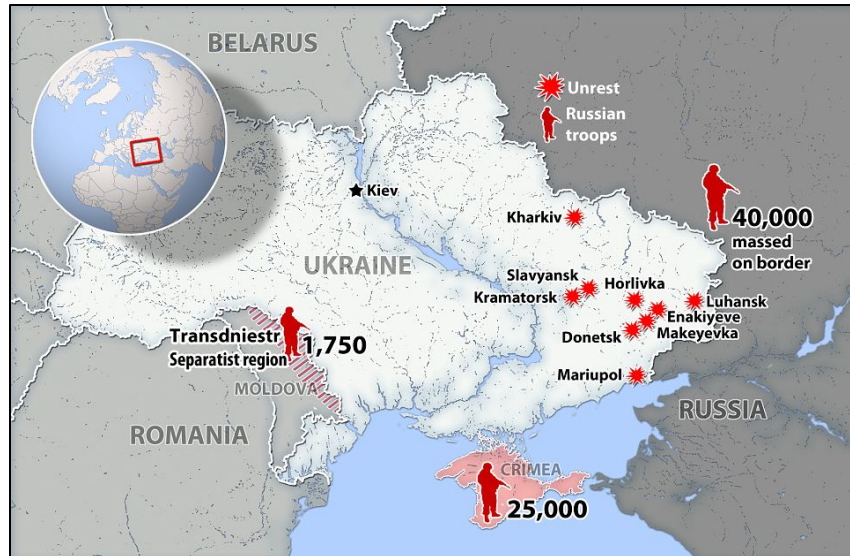


Figure 13. Map of Unrest in Ukraine³⁵

The Battle of Kramatorsk began on April 12, 2014 when protesters took control of the local executive committee building, and armed separatists from the Donbas People’s Militia captured the police station and took control of the local military airfield. Ukrainian military regained control of the airfield by April 15 and regained control of Kramatorsk itself on July 5.³⁶

Competing Perspectives

One major point of contention about the Battle of Kramatorsk and nearby conflicts was who was filling the ranks of the separatist forces and where they were getting their equipment from. Suspicions arose when well-armed, well-trained men in uniforms lacking insignia began appearing amongst them. Known variously as “men in green” and “little green men,” they became the focal point of accusations that Russia was assisting the separatists.

A number of clues began surfacing as early as March which pointed to Russian interference in eastern Ukraine after the change in leadership in Kiev. Russian news sources portrayed pro-Russian forces in the region as homegrown activists who opposed an “anti-constitutional junta” in Kiev. Evidence that Russia was directly involved, however, included accounts from local residents and news media, supported by photos, video, and radio, as well as NATO analysis of tactics, behavior, and equipment observed amongst the uniformed and armed groups in eastern Ukraine. At this point in the debate, the descriptions of observed equipment and troops tended to be vague, e.g., “military hardware”, “groups of military vehicles”, “weapons and equipment”, and “troops”.

³⁵ Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2604496/Little-sign-progress-Obama-Putin-speak.html>

³⁶ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Kramatorsk



Figure 14. Men in Green³⁷

Some reports describe certain evidence, such as the behavior and equipment of the troops, as “circumstantial.” Russia denied the validity of all the evidence and the allegations of their involvement.

Then, in mid-April 2014, the Ukrainian government sent photos to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) which they said provided evidence that Russian Special Forces and intelligence operatives were in eastern Ukraine and assisting the separatists. The U.S. State Department endorsed the evidence. The Russian government dismissed the evidence and denied that any active duty Russian personnel were on the ground in eastern Ukraine.

The photos show men in green camouflage uniforms, purportedly taken during openly disclosed Russian military operations from prior years, juxtaposed with photos taken recently in eastern Ukraine, primarily in Kramatorsk and nearby Sloviansk [also transcribed as Sloviansk, Slavyansk, and Slaviansk]. The Ukrainian government had annotated the photos, highlighting faces, insignia, and equipment in order to demonstrate that the recent photos from eastern Ukraine contain equipment that is only available through the Russian military and contain known members of the Russian military. Thus, with the publication of these photos, the claims started to become more specific, identifying specific types of equipment and specific individuals. However, the photos were not conclusive. One series of photos purported to identify a “bearded man” as a member of Russian Special Forces, but the thick beard and the quality of the photos made it impossible to positively identify him as the same man in each photo.

³⁷ Source: Reuters, reprinted at <http://ukraineinvestigation.com/armed-russian-soldiers-in-sloviansk/> [as of July 10, 2017, link is dead]



Figure 15. “The Bearded Man”³⁸

The individual is identified in the Russian press as Aleksandr Mozhaev, also known as “Babai” (translation: Bogeyman). Babai is considered somewhat of a folk hero in Russia who, as a fighter, has no formal affiliation with the Russian government. He is described as a simple Cossack who voluntarily decided to fight out of nationalistic sentiment or, alternatively, as a mercenary fighting alongside the separatist “federalist” movement. Babai contradicts the accusation that he was ever in Georgia, where his photo with GRU insignia was putatively taken, and states that he was regular army, not GRU.

Another series of photos was later discredited: One photo shows a group of men with a caption that asserts it was taken in Russia. Another photo shows the same men and is identified as being taken in eastern Ukraine. The photographer came forward and insisted that all of the photos had been taken in Sloviansk, Ukraine.

From an information extraction point of view, the informational conflict observed in relation to the identity of the “men in green” centers mostly around relations, i.e., Person-Organization relations and Person-at-Location relations. The photos and eyewitness observations of these men were not what was being disputed; rather, what was at issue was who they were affiliated with, and where they were located when the picture was taken.

Additional informational conflict can be observed in details about the specific sub-events occurring in Kramatorsk, including:

- Whether or not separatists had seized control of the police station in Kramatorsk.
- Number of casualties when the Ukrainian military regained control of the airport in Kramatorsk.
- Whether or not separatist forces had seized control of Ukrainian armored vehicles in Kramatorsk.

³⁸ Source: <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/04/21/world/europe/ukraine-crisis/>

Data Sources

Hashtags

English	Russian
#Kramatorsk	#Краматорск
#RussiaInvadesUkraine	
#RussianInvasion	
#RussiaLies	
#antimaidan	
#russianspring	

Twitter Accounts

@Ranyah tweeted live from Kramatorsk on April 15 and 16 2014, with photos

6 Posts

Results are sampled due to the high volume of posts. Read More.

Search

Content Source Time of Day Sentiment Emotion

Source	Author	Type	Post Comment	Sentiment	Emotion	Date
	Raniah Salloum @Ranyah	Text	One tank of the Ukrainian military in a field behind #Kramatorsk before it went to the airfield. http://t.co/vYGREdAfWk	👍	😊	16 Apr 2014
	Raniah Salloum @Ranyah	Text	Pictures from #Kramatorsk airport taken by Finnish photographer Kalle Koponen http://t.co/yjKynoOpmz	👍	😊	15 Apr 2014
	Raniah Salloum @Ranyah	Text	By now I have also seen six tanks that did not switch sides but joined Ukrainian military in #Kramatorsk airfield.	👍	😊	16 Apr 2014
	Raniah Salloum @Ranyah	Text	One of the six tanks of the Ukrainian army that I just saw in #Kramatorsk that switched sides. Now w Russian flag. http://t.co/ig0qjQ5JWM	👍	😊	16 Apr 2014
	Raniah Salloum @Ranyah	Text	Its very quiet now at #kramatorsk airport. Soldiers on the base, no more protesters in front of the gate. Just a jet circling.	👍	😊	16 Apr 2014
	Raniah Salloum @Ranyah	Text	Good Morning from #kramatorsk. Had been a quiet morning so far, but now two helicopters fully armed with missiles flying towards airport.	👍	😊	16 Apr 2014

Apr 16th, 2014 9:20 AM

@Ranyah tweeted

One tank of the Ukrainian military in a field behind #Kramatorsk before it went to the airfield.

5:20 AM - Apr 16, 2014

8 3

Apr 16th, 2014 7:17 AM

@Ranyah tweeted

One of the six tanks of the Ukrainian army that I just saw in #Kramatorsk that switched sides. Now w Russian flag.

3:17 AM - Apr 16, 2014

46 534 84

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Бои за Краматорск, Wikipedia (Russian).

https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%91%D0%BE%D0%B8_%D0%B7%D0%B0_%D0%9A%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%81%D0%BA

Битва за Краматорськ, Wikipedia (Ukrainian).

https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%91%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%B0_%D0%B7%D0%B0_%D0%9A%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%81%D1%8C%D0%BA

Articles and Videos

The following articles and videos present different points of view and evidence about the question of Russian forces in eastern Ukraine during the Battle of Kramatorsk. Data pertaining the Ukrainian

government's publication of photographs of "men in green" is contained in a separate section below, and several of those articles also mention additional evidence of Russian involvement that surfaced during the conflict.

You Tube Shatters Russian Lies About Troops In Ukraine: Putin Denies Truth To Obama, April 14, 2014. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/paulroderickgregory/2014/04/14/you-tube-shatters-russian-lies-about-troops-in-ukraine/#7d363dfa2dc4>

EU spy chief rules out Russian military presence in Ukraine, April 16, 2014. <https://www.rt.com/news/eu-no-russian-interference-ukraine-844/>

NATO COMMANDER: Ukraine 'Activists' Are Clearly A Professional Military Force Under Russian Control. Philip Breedlove, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, April 17, 2014. <http://www.businessinsider.com/philip-breedlove-activists-professional-military-force-2014-4>

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И совсем не страшно: в город приехали крымские «вежливые зелёные человечки»? Журналисту сайта Slavgorod.com.ua разрешили фотографировать, April 14, 2014. [PHOTOS, VIDEO] <http://slavgorod.com.ua/News/Article/811>

English language re-print: Armed Russian Soldiers in Slovyansk, April 14, 2014 [PHOTOS, VIDEO]. <http://ukraineinvestigation.com/armed-russian-soldiers-in-slovyansk/> [as of July 10, 2017, link is dead]

Activists of the southeast use AK-100, which are not in Ukraine - the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, April 14, 2014. <http://korrespondent.net/world/3349061-aktyvysty-yuho-vostoka-yopolzuiu-ak-100-kotorykh-v-ukrayne-net-myd-lytvij> Gist: Foreign minister asserts that weapons seized in Eastern Ukraine (AK-100) are only used by Russia and not by Ukraine.

Lavrov Makes Statement on non-Interference of Russia in the Ukrainian Situation, April 14, 2014. Gist: Lavrov explains that there are no representatives of the FSB or GRU in Ukraine. <http://www.interfax.ru/world/371433>

"Press Conference of S. Lavrov and A. Karti: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation," April 14, 2014. [VIDEO] Gist: Press conference that covers several topics, but Ukraine-related content starts at 22:05] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3p0BxT59QSo>

The differing assertions and points of view about the photos can be found in the following:

Ukraine Provides Evidence of Russian Military in Civil Unrest, April 20, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/04/20/world/europe/ukraine-provides-evidence-of-russian-military-in-civil-unrest.html>

Photos Link Masked Men in East Ukraine to Russia, April 20, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/21/world/europe/photos-link-masked-men-in-east-ukraine-to-russia.html>

Ukraine: Photos show undercover Russian troops, April 22, 2014. [contains VIDEOS, PHOTOS] <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/04/21/world/europe/ukraine-crisis/>

Does US evidence prove Russian special forces are in eastern Ukraine?, April 22, 2014.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/22/-sp-does-us-evidence-prove-russian-special-forces-are-in-eastern-ukraine>

Scrutiny Over Photos Said to Tie Russia Units to Ukraine, April 22, 2014.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/23/world/europe/scrutiny-over-photos-said-to-tie-russia-units-to-ukraine.html?ref=todayspaper>

Aftermath of Ukraine Photo Story Shows Need for More Caution, April 24, 2014.

<https://publiceditor.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/04/24/aftermath-of-ukraine-photo-story-shows-need-for-more-caution/>

Unverified & exposed: NYT-State Dept 'Russians in Ukraine' image proof collapses, April 24, 2014.

<https://www.rt.com/news/154548-pictures-russian-troops-false/>

Russian Language Data Sources

“Exclusive: Meet the Pro-Russian Separatists from Eastern Ukraine,” April 23, 2014. [Gist: Babai states that if he were part of the Russian special forces, there would likely be more order in Ukraine.] <http://time.com/74405/exclusive-pro-russian-separatists-eastern-ukraine/>

“Bearded Mercenary ‘Babai’ is Fighting in Slavyansk Because He is Under Investigation in Russia,” April 24, 2014. [Gist: Babai states that he has never served in the GRU; states that he once served in the Russian Armed Services, but went into the reserves in the 1990s.] <https://ru.tsn.ua/ukrayina/borodatyy-naemnik-babay-voyuet-v-slavyanske-potomu-chno-v-rossii-on-v-rozyske-time-362419.html>

“The War Really Opened My Eyes: One of the Symbols of the ‘Russian Spring’ Babai on Russia’s Problems” May 12, 2016. [Gist: Babai is called a “pro-Russian activist,” not a Russian soldier or intelligence officer. Makes reference to other mercenary activities, but interviewer states that he went to Donbas for “Russian World.”] <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2016/05/10/8223899.shtml>

“Cossack Babai: There is not one Chechen Platoon in Kramatorsk or Slavyansk,” May 16, 2014. [Gist: Shows other interpretation of bearded officer appearing in Ukraine. As a Cossack, he is not under direct Russian government control or orders.] <https://www.yuga.ru/news/331800/>

“Hero of the Donetsk Peoples Republic: The Simple Cossack Babai,” May 23, 2014. [Gist: Article suggests multiple interpretations of Babai: either an adventure seeker, or a member of the GRU who had fought in Georgia.] https://www.pravda.ru/society/fashion/couture/23-05-2014/1209118-kosak_babay-0/

“Cossack Babai Returned Home from the Donbass and has Nothing to Feed His Family,” July 25, 2015. [Gist: Babai is called a cossack-volunteer (not a serving GRU officer, as suggested elsewhere)] <http://www.kuban.kp.ru/daily/26411.7/3285574/>

The following articles and videos present different points of view of the initial days of the Battle of Kramatorsk:

Pro-Russian Separatists Take Kramatorsk Police HQ After Firefight, April 12, 2014.

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Ukraine War - Russian subversives in Kramatorsk Ukraine, Published April 13, 2014. [VIDEO] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivO9nSRfuY> [age restricted]

'Up to 11 killed' as soldiers loyal to Kiev seize eastern Ukrainian airport from pro-Russian separatist as 'anti-terror operation' begins, April 14, 2014. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2604496/Little-and-sign-progress-Obama-Putin-speak.html>

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Military seize airfield controlled by anti-govt activists in eastern Ukraine, April 15, 2014. <https://www.rt.com/news/kramatorsk-ukraine-attack-army-664/>

Ukraine on brink of civil war as Kiev sends in troops: Ukraine pushes tanks toward a flashpoint eastern city to quash a separatist surge backed by Moscow, April 15, 2014. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10768939/Ukraine-on-brink-of-civil-war-as-Kiev-sends-in-troops.html>

Ukraine crisis: Helicopter gunships take country closer to all-out war: Ukrainian troops use helicopters to seize back airport held by pro-Russian militiamen while ground forces gather around separatist stronghold of Slovyansk, April 15, 2014. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ukraine-crisis-obama-calls-on-putin-to-rein-in-armed-pro-russian-separatists-9261011.html>

Separatists Fly Russian Flag Over Ukrainian Armored Vehicles, April 16, 2014. <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/separatists-fly-russian-flag-over-ukrainian-armored-vehicles-34011>

Anti-govt protesters seize Ukrainian APCs, army units 'switch sides' (VIDEO), April 16, 2014. [TEXT, VIDEO] <https://www.rt.com/news/ukrainian-tanks-kramatorsk-civilians-840/>

Ukraine crisis: Military column 'seized' in Kramatorsk, Published April 16, 2014. [VIDEO] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V50VaV44yal>

Ukraine: Ukrainian military lay down arms in Kramatorsk, Published April 16, 2014. [VIDEO INTERVIEWS WITH SOLDIERS, mostly speaking Russian] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyjhxuqp7fA>

Ukraine: the fight for the East, Published April 17, 2014. [VIDEO of military column blocked by civilians]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yw10KuzpnEQ>

Ukraine claims photos prove Russian special forces in eastern Ukraine, April 21, 2014. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ukraine-claims-photo-proof-russian-special-forces-in-eastern-ukraine/>

Russia accuses Ukraine of violating truce after Easter shooting near Slavyansk, April 21, 2014. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/russia-accuses-ukraine-of-violating-truce-after-easter-shooting-slavyansk/>

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Бой в Краматорске: город окутал дым, стреляют снайперы [Battle in Kramatorsk: Smoke Enveloped the City; Snipers are Firing], May 3, 2014. <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/946917/>

В Краматорске идут уличные бои: есть жертвы [Street Fighting is Occurring in Kramatorsk: There are Victims], May 3, 2014. <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26226/3109721/>

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Are there Russian Troops in Ukraine? (2014-2015)

Overview

Following the ousting of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, there was an uprising in eastern and southeastern Ukraine. In April, pro-Russian separatists seized government buildings in Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk, Sloviansk, Mariupol, and Kramatorsk. In May, Donetsk and Luhansk declared themselves independent “People’s Republics”. The Ukrainian military were mobilized to the region to restore peace and recapture the seized regions and facilities. In the ensuing conflict, there was intense debate about whether or not Russia was assisting the separatist militants with equipment and personnel. The claims and evidence began surfacing in 2014 and reached a peak in 2015. In December 2015 a statement by Vladimir Putin was interpreted by many English-language media outlets as an admission to the direct involvement of the Russian military in Ukraine, including “Russian troops”. His actual statement was more nuanced, as he denied that there were no “regular forces”. Another statement in October of 2016 was interpreted by Western sources as an admission of direct involvement of the Russian military.

The Russian government and media broadly denied the presence of regular military forces in eastern Ukraine, despite evidence to the contrary. President Putin only admitted to the presence of military intelligence in the region, and not regular military forces. Narratives Russia used to deny direct Russian military involvement include the following:

- Troops in Ukraine were local defense forces, and were not Russian military.
- The absence of modern (recent issue) military equipment or participation of Black Sea fleet suggests there was no direct involvement by the Russian military. Older military equipment may have been obtained from Ukrainian military bases.
- Since there was no formal legislative approval, or declaration of war, by the Russian government, it is not permissible to carry out military actions there.
- Russia would surely have easily beaten the inferior Ukrainian forces if they were present.

Throughout 2014 and 2015 there were specific incidents around which the debate circulated. These incidents are identified below in separate sub-sections.

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Ukrainian jet fly over city as armed militia remain in control of Slovyansk, AP Video, April 3, 2015.
[VIDEO]

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Satellite Images Show Russian Troops in Ukraine (August 2014)

Competing Perspectives

In late August 2014, NATO published satellite images that were taken between August 20 in August 26, 2014.³⁹ U.S. officials said that satellite evidence showed that up to 1000 Russian troops had been moved into Ukraine (specifically, Krasnodon), along with heavy weapons, self-propelled artillery, armored personnel carriers, battle tanks, and cargo trucks. These increasingly specific claims were corroborated by British and Ukrainian officials. Annotations on the photos identified locations and types of equipment on the ground.

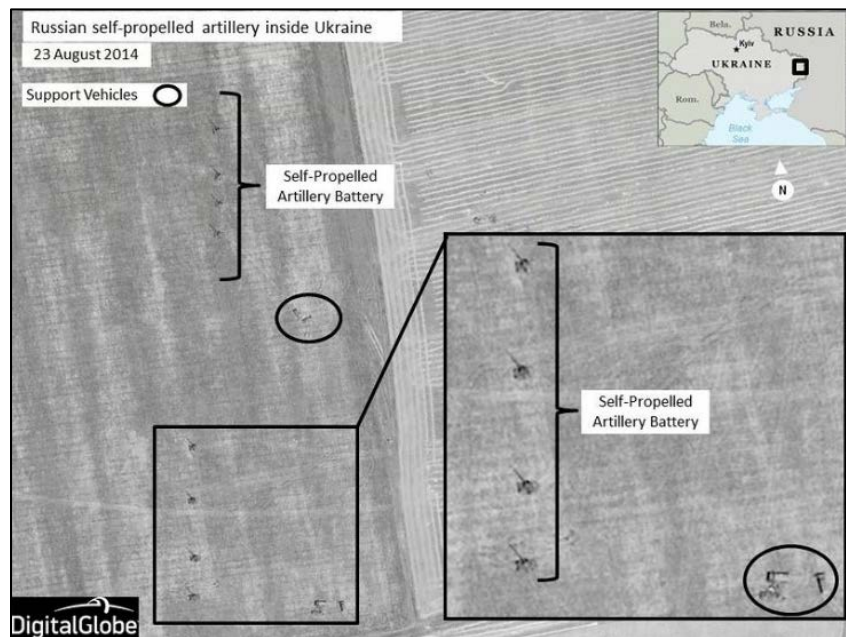


Figure 16. Satellite Photos of Russian Troops in Ukraine⁴⁰

Numerous Russian officials denied the allegations outright. They claimed the Russian Federation was not supporting and arming the separatists. In the Russian language media, there was very little discussion of these satellite photos.

Prime Minister of the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic, Alexander Zakharchenko, admitted there were people from Russia present, but that they were Russian military who were spending their

³⁹ Original links: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_112103.htm and http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/photos_112112.htm (dead as of May 11, 2017).

⁴⁰ Source: <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/28/world/gallery/nato-images-show-russian-forces-in-ukraine/index.html>

vacations in Ukraine, volunteering their time in support of the separatists. They were not there at the behest of the Russian government, according to him.

Russia Today (RT) published an article which implied that observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) denied the presence of Russian troops or equipment in Ukraine. *RT* cites statements made by Russian representative to the OSCE, Andrey Kelin. However, a closer inspection of the context from related articles shows that Kelin was making claims to the OSCE, and his information was not based on OSCE observer reports. *RT* also cites Paul Picard, chief observer of OSCE's Ukraine mission. However, in a later podcast interview Picard points out that they were only invited by the Russian Federation to observe two checkpoints, both of which were in areas under the control of Ukrainian government. Thus, Picard notes that OSCE has a very limited view of border crossings. OSCE OM daily "spot reports" about the "humanitarian convoys" also report suspicious activity, such as trucks that go uninspected at the border crossings (see the topic, "Humanitarian Crisis in Eastern Ukraine," above). In addition, an EU report published on the OSCE website acknowledges the presence of Russian soldiers and military vehicles on Ukrainian territory.

There's also conflicting information within media reports about the annotated satellite images. Although the media headlines and photo captions assert that the photos show the presence of Russian forces in Ukraine, annotations super-imposed on the photos themselves contradict those claims: of the six photos published, only two are annotated as being within Ukraine's borders. The rest indicate locations within Russia. In addition, descriptive paragraphs accompanying the photos identify locations within Russia, although each photo is labeled with the headline "NATO: images show Russian forces in Ukraine". For example, see image 2 of 6 at <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/28/world/gallery/nato-images-show-russian-forces-in-ukraine/index.html> . Other statements are more guarded as to whether the observed forces are in or merely near Ukraine. The descriptive paragraph on image 1 of 6 cites a senior NATO commander, who said that the images show Russian combat forces engaged in military operations "in or near Ukrainian Territory" and that NATO said "the image shows Russians self-propelled artillery units set up in firing positions near Krasnodon," which could mean they are across the border in Russia.

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Russian Army Wives Are Protesting For Russia To Come Clean About Where Soldiers Are, August 28, 2014. <http://www.businessinsider.com/russian-army-wives-are-protesting-for-russia-to-come-clean-about-where-soldiers-are-2014-8>

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Only Russian volunteers fighting with anti-Kiev forces - Donetsk Republic leader, August 28, 2014.

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Russia's Defense Ministry ridicules NATO's photo-proof of invasion in Ukraine, August 29, 2014.

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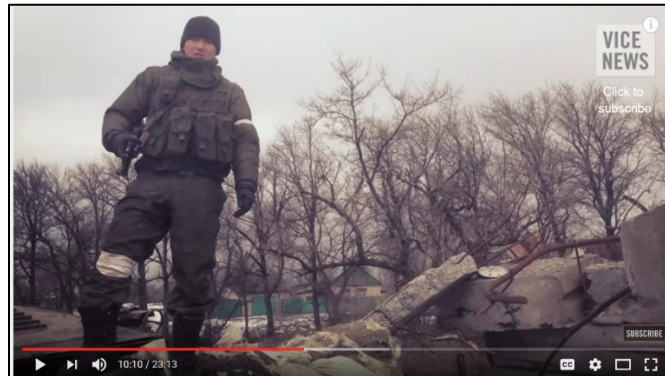
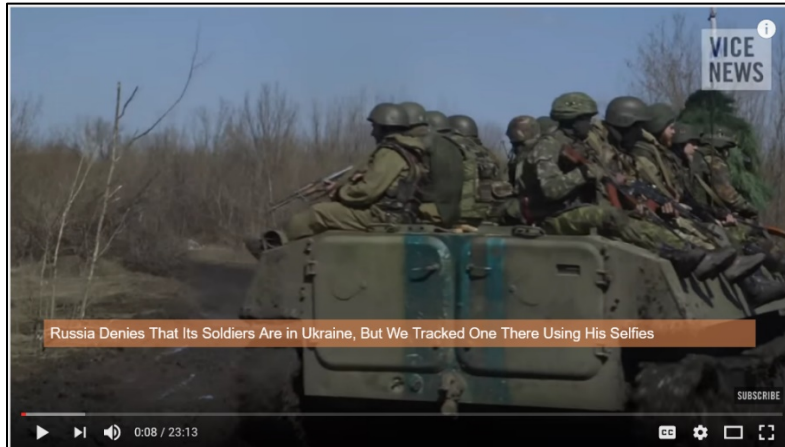
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Reporter “One of the photographs on Bato’s profile is different than the rest. In it, he’s wearing a uniform unlike the ones in any of his other posts. It doesn’t have insignia. He’s wearing a white armband, and he appears to be standing in a battlefield. This photograph was posted in February [nb 2015], around the time of the battles for Debaltseve.”

...

Paraphrase: Witnesses report seeing Donetsk Peoples Republic fighters (DPR) as well as Russian Soldiers Vuhlehirsk, Donetsk Region, Ukraine (a town near Debaltseve)



“I’m standing at the same checkpoint in Vuhlehirs, in the same pose as you.”

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Statement by Vladimir Putin on Military Involvement in Ukraine (December 2015)

This statement by Putin caused some media outlets to declare that he had admitted to "Russian troops" in Ukraine. Here is a sample of headlines, coverage of the statement, and Putin's statements translated into English.

Putin admits Russian military presence in Ukraine for first time. Russian president concedes military intelligence officers were operating in the country but insists it's not the same as regular Russian troops, December 12, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/17/vladimir-putin-admits-russian-military-presence-ukraine>

"Asked by a Ukrainian reporter an hour into the briefing about two Russian military intelligence officers captured by Kiev and currently on trial in Ukraine, Putin said: "We never said there were not people there who carried out certain tasks including in the military sphere." He insisted this was not the same as regular Russian troops."

Vladimir Putin admits: Russian troops 'were in Ukraine'. After two years of resolute denials, the Russian president admits that he sent soldiers into eastern Ukraine after all. December 17, 2015.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/vladimir-putin/12054164/Vladimir-Putins-annual-press-conference-2015-live.html>

“Vladimir Putin admitted to deploying Russian military specialists to eastern Ukraine on Thursday, dropping nearly two years of denials that Russian servicemen were involved in the conflict there, writes Roland Oliphant in Moscow. Speaking at an annual televised press conference, Mr Putin denied that “regular forces” were involved in the conflict, but conceded that “people dealing with tasks...in the military sphere,” had been involved in the conflict. “We never said that there weren’t people there dealing with certain tasks, including in the military sphere,” he said, when challenged by a Ukrainian journalist about two captured Russian officers currently held in Ukraine. “But that doesn’t mean there are regular Russian forces there. Feel the difference,” he added.”

Putin admits Russian troops were in East Ukraine, December 17, 2015.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/dec/17/l-todd-wood-vladimir-putin-admits-russian-troops-w/>

“We never said there were no people there who were carrying out certain tasks including in the military select sphere,” Mr. Putin told an annual news conference on Thursday, Reuters reported. “But that does not mean there are Russian (regular) troops there, feel the difference.”

Putin’s Statement about Russia’s Involvement in Donbas (October 2016)

Putin Claims Russia Was ‘Forced To Defend Russian-Speaking Population In Donbass’, October 12, 2016. <http://www.interpretermag.com/day-968/#15291>

Putin admits to Russian military involvement in Donbas, October 13, 2016.

<http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1476316494>

