



The convenient distraction of false martyrdom

2024-08-29, 17:52

By [EUvsDisinfo](#)

While most people prefer to spend the sun-filled afternoons of late August making the most of their remaining vacation days, the Kremlin's agents of disinformation are hard at work churning out narratives that befit their twisted worldview. It's a tough job to lie with such audacity and so consistently. The Kremlin welcomes any opportunity to distract with ever-more bewildering claims, lest the audience consider any topic for too long and see that the emperor is, in fact, naked.

This week was no exception. Pro-Kremlin disinformation peddlers zoomed in on the surprise arrest of Telegram founder Pavel Durov in France, continued to sweep any uncomfortable news about Kursk under the rug, and slathered on a thick layer of nuclear fear-mongering for good measure.

A welcome distraction – 'a Western conspiracy'

On 24 August, the founder of Telegram, [Pavel Durov, was detained by French authorities](#)[\(opens in a new tab\)](#) over allegations that Telegram is being used for illicit activities, including drug trafficking and the distribution of child pornography. This event made headlines in several countries. For the Kremlin's propagandists, it was a welcome distraction from the 'difficult situation', Moscow's favoured moniker for the Ukrainian advance into Kursk. So, naturally, they pounced on this opportunity to use the international visibility to peddle conspiracy theories and tired accusations against 'the West'.

Report fake



Here is a quick sample we've already logged in [our database](#). The arrest of Durov is a [cover-up for the events in Palestine](#). West countries did it because they had [failed in their fight against Russia](#). The [long, greedy hand of America](#) is behind French authorities. The West arrested Durov to [curb freedom of speech](#). Oh, and of course, the West arrested Durov because [Europe is a totalitarian Nazi hellhole](#).

Mirror, mirror

We could go on, but we you probably get the point. The underlying narrative is quite straightforward. [Life in Russia is much better](#)(opens in a new tab) than in Europe because there is more freedom and respect for human rights. And now, [the 'evil West' wants to destroy this humanitarian utopia](#)(opens in a new tab) and [going after Telegram](#)(opens in a new tab) is one [way to do that](#)(opens in a new tab). For the Kremlin, Durov's platform is not just another means of unrestricted communication. While the Telegram app does provide a platform for bloggers and some Kremlin-critical exchanges, it is a crucial '[digital front' in Russia's war against Ukraine](#)(opens in a new tab). So the Kremlin's purported defence of freedom of speech should be taken with a rather large grain of salt.

In fact, we have kept track of how the Kremlin has increasingly restricted and eroded freedom of speech and media plurality in Russia. Moscow's actions have ranged from [blocking access to legitimate news outlets and passing disproportionately restrictive if not outright totalitarian legislation](#)(opens in a new tab) to [imprisoning journalists](#) or anyone who dares speak the truth about Russia's war against Ukraine while [silencing non-governmental organisations](#) as 'undesirable'. Now, the Kremlin uses the arrest of Durov to try to advance an image of itself as a white knight defending free speech.

A tough balancing act

Admittedly, the whole situation, for Kremlin disinformation peddlers, is a little bit like walking on a tightrope on a windy day. On one hand, they must [reinforce](#)(opens in a new tab)the Kremlin's touted principle of *своих не бросаем* ('we don't abandon our people') that was recently [put on full display](#) when Russia exchanged arbitrarily imprisoned Western journalists and Russian opposition figures for actual spies and FSB murderers. On the other hand, they [had to downplay](#)(opens in a new tab) any [perception of Durov being too chummy](#)(opens in a new tab) with the Kremlin in order not to quell the well-intentioned but sometimes ill-informed expressions of support for Durov as a martyr for freedom of speech.

Keep Kursk under the rug

Meanwhile, from the digital frontline to the physical battlefield, the far thornier issue of Ukrainian advances into Russia proper is still kept conveniently under the rug with a 'keep cool' attitude enforced across main state and pro-Kremlin outlets. It's too obvious a reminder that [red lines](#) drawn by the Kremlin's disinformation purveyors are a mere threat with no backing. So, it's better to avoid talking about '[the Kursk problem](#)'. Or, if hard pressed, keep up the [appearance of dry, factual reporting](#)(opens in a new tab). Better still, focus on the '[bravery](#)' and '[solidarity](#)' of the Russian people(opens in a new tab).



Finish with a 'dirty' nuclear blast

In a not-so-surprising turn of events, nuclear fear-mongering is back on the Kremlin's disinformation roster. In fact, playing the 'concerns for nuclear safety' card was one of the first Kremlin reactions to the Ukrainian advance into Kursk. Outlets falsely [accused Ukraine of attacking the Kursk Nuclear Power Plant \(NPP\)](#) with a drone or preparing [similar attacks on the Zaporizhzhia NPP in order to blame the ensuing nuclear disaster on Russia](#). When feigned concern is not enough, the Kremlin plays the 'dirty bomb' card, [accusing Ukraine of planning to disseminate radioactive materials](#).

As a rule, the Kremlin's disinformation outlets present their [thinly veiled nuclear fear-mongering](#) as if some new, incontrovertible evidence has come to light implicating Ukraine in masterminding alleged nuclear attacks. In fact, this 'dirty bomb' narrative has made regular appearances in the Kremlin's disinformation vocabulary ever since it [became apparent](#) that the 'special military operation' will not 'take Kyiv' in three days. Don't be deceived!



Also on the EUvsDisinfo radar this week

For the past month, [the Paris Olympics](#) were squarely in the Kremlin's disinformation crosshairs. We covered their ludicrous and hate-filled takes on the Games [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). And still the Kremlin continues to push the claim that [the Olympics proved that sport is dead and has become a mere PR exercise for Satanists and degenerates](#). Perhaps still salty that Russia was barred from the Olympics because it launched a full-scale war against Ukraine, the Kremlin hammered on and on, depicting [liberalism](#) and [Western values](#) as destroying traditional social and spiritual values as well as national, cultural, and gender identities. Don't be deceived by this pretend morality. Pro-Kremlin outlets have used the '[threatened values](#)' narrative for years to discredit liberal Western attitudes regarding the rights of women, ethnic and religious minorities, and [LGBTIQ groups](#)[\(opens in a new tab\)](#), among others.

For the Kremlin, any day not [accusing Ukraine of Nazism](#) is a day wasted. Clearly, pro-Kremlin disinformation smugglers don't like to waste their days because the unfounded

accusation of Nazism quickly found its way into disinformation narratives about the Ukrainian advance into the Kursk region. TASS, a major Russian state news agency turned disinformation outlet, falsely claimed that [Ukrainian fascists kill civilians at point-blank range and even use orphans as human shields](#). Something so twisted can only be conceived in the darkest propaganda dungeons of the Kremlin. In truth, Ukrainian troops are distributing [humanitarian aid\(opens in a new tab\)](#) among local residents and Ukrainian authorities are offering to evacuate Russian citizens from the Kursk region. Numerous independent journalists who have now reported from the Kursk region find no evidence for these wild allegations. This narrative [recalls\(opens in a new tab\)](#) Kremlin claims in early 2014 alleging that ethnic Russians on the Ukrainian Crimea peninsula were being mistreated. They turned out to be false, and even Russian NGOs sent by Russian state institutions to investigate them in Crimea could not find evidence for them. However, ample evidence suggests that Russian occupiers have mistreated Tatars and other groups since March 2014.

This week, the Kremlin once again showed its inherent inability to understand democracy. Any time people anywhere head to the polls and the outcome might be unfavourable to Russian imperialist interests, the Kremlin cries of Western-instigated 'colour revolutions'. As a potentially pivotal election is approaching in Georgia in October, the Kremlin is starting to spread false claims that the [US is planning a colour revolution there after the October elections](#). In fact, we [have exposed pro-Kremlin disinformation attempts](#) in Georgia in considerable detail. Similar disinformation narratives have been applied to reports about protests in [Armenia](#), [Ukraine](#), [Czechia](#), [Bulgaria](#), [Belarus](#), [Venezuela](#), [Slovakia](#), [Hong Kong](#). The aim is to portray protest movements as aggressive actors who constantly prepare [new coups](#).

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