
Subject: The Source | Russian aggression and influence operations, again.
Date: Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 7:35:55 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: Digital Forensic Research Lab
To:



Welcome to The Source!

This newsletter is designed to highlight the latest from our team spread across five continents and be **the source** in sifting through a moment when we are more connected and have more access to information — fact or fiction — than at any point in history!

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Spotlight



The steady flow of influence operations from and by Russia is not new.

As Russia amasses forces on Ukraine's border, disinformation again serves as the military vanguard. A broad range of narratives have been deployed to justify and deflect responsibility for potential action at the same time.

Today, the U.S. Department of State released three documents on Russia's ongoing disinformation efforts regarding the military build-up on the borders of Ukraine. State released a report examining Kremlin-backed media outlets including *RT* and *Sputnik*, a factsheet on Russian disinformation on Ukraine, and a list of Russia's five most persistent disinformation narratives. The DFRLab's analysis is featured throughout.

[Kremlin-Funded Media: RT and Sputnik's Role in Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem](#)

[Fact vs. Fiction: Russian Disinformation on Ukraine](#)

[Russia's Top Five Persistent Disinformation Narratives](#)

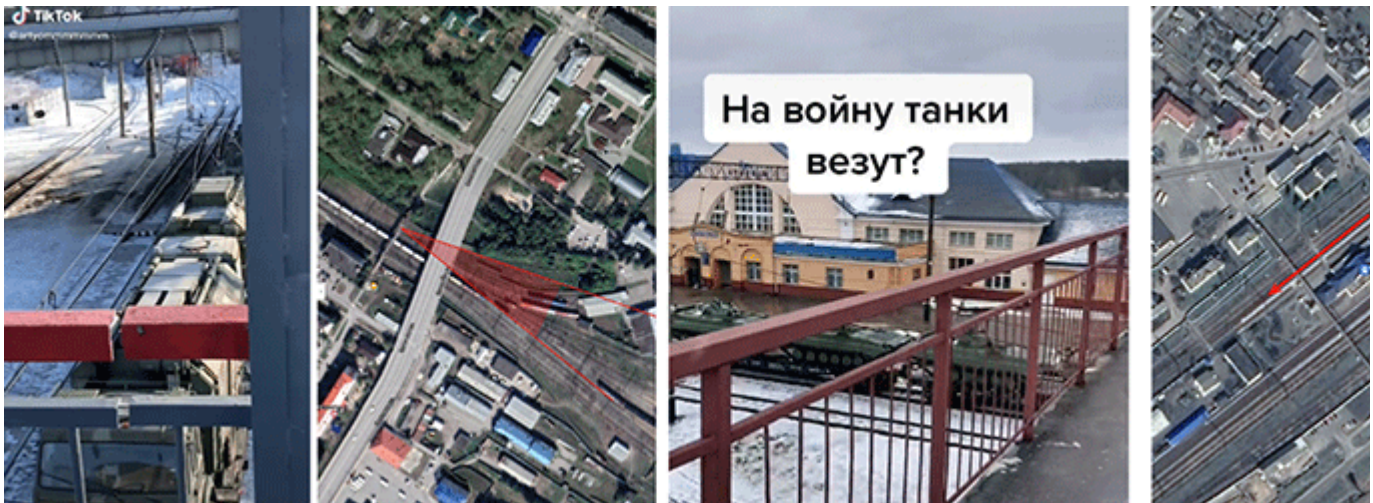
Sources You Need to Know

In recent months, Russia has deployed forces and equipment to the northeast, east, and southern borders of Ukraine. Through social media and geolocation, the DFRLab confirmed the movement of military assets and a build up along Ukraine's borders. In a worrying escalation, Russian military equipment [arrived in Belarus](#) earlier this week for a [joint training exercise](#) and has been spotted just north of the Belarus-Ukraine border. It is expected that more equipment will arrive throughout the week.

Russia denies allegations of a possible invasion, but President Vladimir Putin is demanding the West provide immediate legal guarantees to protect Russia's security and threatened military action if those demands are not met. It is a known tactic of the Kremlin to use disinformation to sow confusion and manipulate narratives of "[Russophobia](#)" as a pretext for conflict and, potentially, invasion as seen with [Crimea](#).

TikTok has emerged as a vital platform for tracking troop and equipment movements. A [recent report](#) from Moscow-based monitoring group Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT) found that relatives of Russian contract soldiers were commenting on videos about their loved ones going “on a business trip” or “on exercises” in Belarus or near Ukraine. Despite efforts to mask military activity, like [banning soldier selfies](#) in 2019, the build up toward conflict is once again happening right out in the open for all to see.

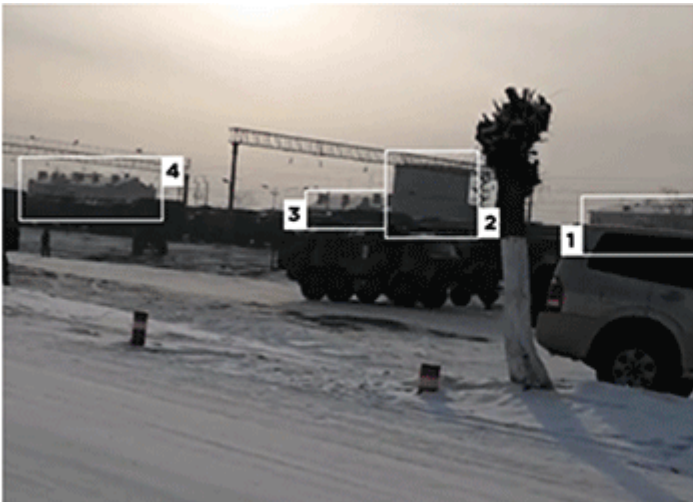
From the (Open) Source



[Russian military equipment spotted in Belarus as tensions heighten with Ukraine](#)

What you need to know: Russian military equipment, including BM-27 220mm rocket launchers, have been spotted in Belarus in the Minsk region and the towns of Gomel and Rechitsa. These cities are all within striking range of Ukraine’s border.

[Read more](#)



[Missile systems and tanks spotted in Russian far east, heading west](#)

What you need to know: On January 14, the DFRLab confirmed social media footage of Russian military assets moving from Russia's Far-East Military District westward toward Ukraine by rail. These assets were later confirmed in Belarus.

[Read more](#)

Unlocking the Archives

[Russia continues to expand military presence near Ukraine border \(December 2021\)](#)

The second of four open-source reports using satellite imagery and open-source evidence to reveal Russia's ongoing military buildup along its border with Ukraine.

[How Russia is placing troops and equipment near the Ukraine border \(December 2021\)](#)

The first of four open-source evidence reports on Russian military buildup throughout 2021 along Ukraine's eastern borders and in Crimea.

[Hiding in plain sight: Putin's war in Ukraine \(October 2015\)](#)

A report examining Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2015 and key takeaways on military movement, training camps, separatist use of Russian weaponry, and how several attacks originated in Russian territory. The report is available in English, Russian, Ukrainian, French, and German.

The DFRLab Weighs In

Senior Director Graham Brookie, Democracy & Tech Initiative Director Rose Jackson, and Resident China Fellow Kenton Thibaut published an op-ed in [Tech Policy Press](#) on America's lack of leadership in tech regulation and how that opens the door for countries like China to drive forward their vision for dominating the global internet.

[The New York Times](#) cited Research Assistant Michael Sheldon's research into Russian military assets' movements from the country's far east to the Ukrainian border.

In a press conference with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, [Der Spiegel](#) referenced Sheldon's work when asking about the prospect of war in Ukraine.

Nonresident Fellow Brittan Heller warned the [Financial Times](#) about Meta's new plan to base in-metaverse ads on physical stimuli. "Right now there are no legal constraints on it," said Heller.

Events

[Iranians on #SocialMedia: The only way to be heard](#)

Join the DFRLab and [Rafik Hariri Center & Middle East programs](#) for a panel discussion on our newest report diving into the social media practices of Iranian

internet users and how the Islamic Republic is repressing the online space through laws like the so-called “Protection Bill.” Moderated by *Buzzfeed News*’ [Megha Rajagopalan](#), this panel will feature report author and Hairiri Center Nonresident Senior Fellow [Holly Dagres](#), DFRLab Nonresident Fellow [Simin Kargar](#), and *Article19*’s [Mahsa Alimardani](#).

[Read the report](#)

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DFRLab is Hiring

We’re hiring! Come join our global team and help build a global community of #DigitalSherlocks to combat disinformation. Worldwide applications accepted:

[Associate Director, Training and Capacity](#)

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