

Blanka Katarzyna Dzugaj

Institute for Turkey Studies

ORCID: 0000-0002-3794-9194

blanka.k.dzugaj@gmail.com

# Characteristics of Russian Disinformation in Lebanon: Causes, Strategies, Consequences<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of Russian disinformation in the Lebanese media landscape, focusing on its underlying causes, strategic mechanisms, and broader consequences. The analysis identifies a range of political, economic, and socio-cultural factors that create fertile ground for disinformation in Lebanon, including the country's complex sectarian dynamics, weak media regulation, and external influence from global powers. This study outlines the main strategies employed by pro-Russian media outlets in Lebanon, such as the selective framing of international events, amplification of anti-Western narratives, and the use of local proxies to increase credibility. Particular attention is paid to how these strategies aim to shape public opinion, foster distrust of Western institutions, and position Russia as a reliable geopolitical partner in the region. The article concludes by assessing the impact of such disinformation on Russia's image in the Middle East, arguing that while it contributes to short-term soft power gains, it also risks long-term reputational damage due to the growing awareness of manipulative tactics among regional audiences.

## Key words

Lebanon, Russia, disinformation, Ukraine, war

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## Introduction

The reasons behind Russia's interest in Lebanon is geopolitical and ideological. Situated at the crossroads of the Middle East, Lebanon offers strategic value regarding access, alliances, and influence. Russia's presence in Lebanon is part of Moscow's broader strategy in the Middle East. Lebanon itself is of strategic and political importance to Russia, primarily due to its geographical location, which is a potential bridgehead of influence in the Mediterranean, in the immediate vicinity of NATO's southern flank, and at the same time a country that allows it to maintain channels of influence on Syrian affairs, which are very important for Russia even after the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime. Good relations with Hezbollah, on the other hand, constitute a bargaining chip in dialogue with Israel. Hence, attempts to maintain influence in Lebanon, a country marked by political fragmentation, sectarian divides, and a complex media landscape, have emerged as fertile ground for Russian disinformation efforts. This study explores the characteristics of Russian disinformation in Lebanon, focusing on its underlying causes, strategic objectives, and tangible consequences. This study identifies the primary methods employed by Russian-linked media and proxies, including the use of local platforms, Arabic-language content, and exploitation of societal cleavages. The methodology implemented in this study relies on combining discourse analysis, media monitoring, and desk research to examine the characteristics, motivations, and effects of Russian disinformation activities in Lebanon. This research focuses on the period from 2022 to 2025, the period of full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine, to show how Russian disinformation exploits this conflict to weaken Western influence in Lebanon.

The concept of disinformation has not been clearly defined in the scientific literature, but it is assumed to be an intentional misleading of recipients, often in political, religious, and ideological contexts<sup>2</sup>. An important element of the definition of disinformation is intention: disinformation is a deliberate action that is intended to result in the author achieving their own benefits (political, social, financial, etc.). In scientific discourse, there is also the concept of

2 K. Kaczmarek, *Konsekwencje dezinformacji: przegląd wybranych narzędzi i technik manipulacji*, „Bezpieczeństwa Narodowe” 2024, no. 45, p. 12.

misinformation, which is false information that can be disseminated by people who have been misled themselves<sup>3</sup>. For disinformation to find fertile ground, there must be several or even a dozen factors. In the case of the state, these are among others:

1. Difficult political and/or economic situation: deep social divisions, internal conflicts on ethnic, religious, or political grounds, and weakness of the authorities;
2. High levels of anxiety and uncertainty, for example, as a result of economic crises, wars, or instability of state power;
3. Weak institutions, and high levels of corruption;
4. Poverty and social inequality;
5. Low level of media education, and lack of critical thinking skills;
6. Underdeveloped, polarized, or corrupt media;
7. Lack of strong international alliances<sup>4</sup>.

Most of these factors are present in Lebanon, and Russian disinformation exploits the weaknesses of the system. Lebanon has been experiencing one of the most devastating financial crises in modern history since 2019, which has seen the country become insolvent. The economy has shrunk by approximately 34 percent since 2019, and GDP has fallen by 70–75% compared to pre-crisis levels<sup>5</sup>. The Lebanese pound has lost 90 percent of its value since October 2019, inflation has risen to 890 percent, and food prices have risen by more than 1000 percent<sup>6</sup>. According to the United Nations, almost 80 percent of Lebanon's population lives below the poverty line, and more than half, that is, more than three million people, are in need of humanitarian aid. The

3 *Dezinformacja – czym jest i jak ją zweryfikować*, [https://cyberprofilaktyka.pl/blog/dezinformacja---czym-jest-i-jak-ja-zweryfikowac\\_i23.html](https://cyberprofilaktyka.pl/blog/dezinformacja---czym-jest-i-jak-ja-zweryfikowac_i23.html) [access: 27.09.2025].

4 *Harvard Kennedy School – raport: Who is afraid of fake news?*, „Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review” 2022, vol. 3, no. 3.

5 *Lebanon's Economic Contraction Deepens, Highlighting Critical Need for Reforms and Key Investments*, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2024/12/10/lebanon-s-economic-contraction-deepens-highlighting-critical-need-for-reforms-and-key-investments> [access: 16.10.2025].

6 *Lebanon Humanitarian Fund Annual Report 2022*, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/lebanon/lebanon-humanitarian-fund-annual-report-2022> [access: 16.10.2025].

minimum wage, even after the recent increase to 18 million pounds, allows meeting the nutritional needs of a family for a maximum of six months<sup>7</sup>.

The causes of the crisis should be found, m.in, in the costs of the 15-year civil war, the taking out of international loans by successive governments, the financial burden associated with accepting more than 1.5 million refugees from Syria, and the explosion in Beirut in 2020, which destroyed a port extremely important for the economy and a silo where the state's grain resources were stored. It is worth noting here that Lebanon imports 80 percent of its food, and the port of Beirut was the main place of receiving it. The rage of the Lebanese was caused by media information blaming corrupt politicians for the Beirut explosion. Another problem in Lebanon is corruption, which concerns not so much individuals but is a way of exercising power. This practice begins at the very top of the power hierarchy: state and government positions are filled according to religious keys, which has led to the emergence of a rigid political system based on the search for compromise between political elites who use patronage networks to pursue their own interests<sup>8</sup>. The political and business elites of each religious group share control over ministries, institutions, and state-owned companies, treating them as their own feudal estates. Politicians fill key positions in the administration and public sector with members of their families, co-religionists, and loyalists. Ministries controlled by politicians (e.g., energy and telecommunications) are a source of huge, unclear contracts for companies associated with them. Public funds are being diverted, and services (such as electricity supplies) remain at a very low level. Simultaneously, the judicial branch was designed to be subordinate to the executive and legislative branches, which weakened judges' ability to hold corrupt officials accountable. Any attempts at reform or external audits, such as the investigation into the Beirut explosion, are effectively blocked to protect the interests behind them.

However, corruption does not only concern the highest level of state administration; it is a common practice to give bribes in healthcare, education, and enterprises (e.g., for promotion or employment). This is largely due to the sense of inefficiency of public institutions, but also to the functioning of the

7 ESCWA warns: more than half of Lebanon's population trapped in poverty, <https://www.unescwa.org/news/lebanon-population-trapped-poverty> [access: 16.10.2025].

8 S. Nowacka, *Perspektywy odbudowy Libanu*, „Biuletyn PISM” 2021, no. 97.

practice of „wasta”, which is common in many Arab countries, i.e. the use of personal connections or influential relationships in order to obtain benefits, favors, and even shortcuts to bypass administrative obstacles. Transparency International’s 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Lebanon 150th out of 180 countries, down from 128th place in 2012<sup>9</sup>.

Lebanon sought help from global institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, to overcome the economic crisis. However, the latter made support conditional on putting the political scene in order, which was impossible for a long time – the reforms demanded by the IMF required the formation of a government with full powers, which was impossible due to no head of state. Since the spring of 2022, Lebanon has been in political paralysis: parliamentary elections did not produce a majority coalition with a mandate to govern, and a few months later, President Michel Aoun’s term of office ended. His successor was also unable to be chosen due to the impasse between supporters and rivals of the two main Shiite parties, Hezbollah and the Amal Movement. The state was headed by the interim government of Najib Mikati, and over the following months, the National Assembly made 13 unsuccessful attempts to elect the head of state. After the outbreak of the war in Gaza, when Hezbollah became involved in operations supporting Hamas, the process of electing a head of state was completely halted until January 2025. With a majority of 99 out of 128 votes, the deputies elected Joseph Aoun as the commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces. He appointed a prime minister within a few days, a move that was well received internationally.

The country’s media landscape, dominated by non-state media, which is a political weapon, is also of considerable importance for the development of Russian disinformation in Lebanon. This is due to the fact that most of the media are owned by religious groups (e.g. the popular Al Manar station is the official TV channel of the pro-Russian Hezbollah) or by individuals or entities associated with particular political parties. Politicians are part of the boards of media institutions, which allows them to influence the content they transmit and public opinion.

9 *Our Work in Lebanon*, <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/lebanon> [access: 16.10.2025].

All of this makes Lebanese society extremely susceptible to disinformation, both internal (concerning mainly refugees from Syria) and external, mainly from Moscow. Russian disinformation in Lebanon acts as a tool of influence aimed at controlling the narrative and weakening political opponents. Its aim is to undermine trust in the Western world, especially in the US and its allies, weaken NATO's position as a guarantor of security in the Middle East, and strengthen the belief that Russia is an alternative force that guarantees order and stability. In the context of the war in Ukraine, disinformation is aimed at reinforcing the view that defeating Russia is impossible, while Ukraine is a failed state, historically a part of Russia torn away by hostile Western powers, and that Ukrainians are not a nation. This is expected to lead to a reduction in support for Ukraine in this region.

The main Russian narratives in Lebanon are as follows:

1. Discrediting the US – the United States of America and its European allies are responsible for instability in the Middle East, while Russia is a counterweight to them and seeks to stabilize the situation in the region;
2. Discrediting the West, both politically and morally and ethically. Western civilization is decadent and demoralized, and therefore, it is on the verge of collapse;
3. Arousing resentment towards Ukrainians and discrediting Ukraine by presenting it as part of the morally corrupt West and a country ruled by Nazis;
4. Undermining trust in NATO and portraying the Alliance as an oppressive and hostile organization towards the Middle East;
5. Creating the image of Russia as a country victorious in the Ukraine war;
6. Presenting the world as multipolar in opposition to the Western narrative of a bipolar world, in which not two political-military blocs collide, as during the Cold War, but two opposing moral and ethical systems.

For disinformation to be effective, it must be launched on at least several levels simultaneously<sup>10</sup>. As in Europe, it flows in Lebanon from both traditional and social media.

10 A. Majchrzak, *W krainie kolorowych matryoszek – jak działa rosyjska dezinformacja?*, [https://demagog.org.pl/analizy\\_i\\_raporty/w-krainie-kolorowych-matryoszek-jak-dziala-rosyjska-dezinformacja/](https://demagog.org.pl/analizy_i_raporty/w-krainie-kolorowych-matryoszek-jak-dziala-rosyjska-dezinformacja/) [access: 27.09.2025].

## Traditional media

Television remains the most important source of information for Lebanese. A 2021 survey by Internews showed that about 58% of the 1568 respondents surveyed watch TV for at least an hour a day, and 20% watch more than two hours a day<sup>11</sup>. Since local stations are more popular in Lebanon than pan-Arab media, Moscow primarily cooperates with them, especially with channels that support Hezbollah, such as Al-Manar TV, which has been collecting and publishing narratives that may suit Russia's interests in the region for many years. They concern, m.in, the positioning of Russia – willing to support the Lebanese army – as a counterweight to the US, which imposes sanctions on Hezbollah. As a result, many Lebanese see Russia as an important alternative, ready to support Lebanon unconditionally<sup>12</sup>.

The authors of the report „The Russian Propaganda Nesting Doll: How RT is Layered Into the Digital Information Environment” found as many as eight Kremlin narratives on Al-Manar and its website, according to their analysis, that come mainly, if not exclusively, from RT, Sputnik News, and the Russian news agency TASS<sup>13</sup>. From my observations, since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, there has been a lot of content on this television that duplicates the pro-Kremlin narrative, both from the mouths of guests and journalists of the station: these are mainly statements that Ukraine is a chess pawn in the hands of the Americans, the crisis in Ukraine was caused by the United States, Russia does not attack civilians – its attacks are directed only at military facilities, Meanwhile, the Ukrainian side uses civilians as human shields<sup>14</sup>.

Moscow also uses its own Arabic-language media, that is, RT Arabic television (formerly known as Russia Today) and Sputnik Arabic radio station,

11 *The Architecture of Distrust: Understanding Mis & Disinformation in Lebanon*, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/61751a56593c762f6c492e6b/t/680a5738bdab466ffdbd0c2a/1745508154161/The+Architecture+of+Distrust%3A+Understanding+Mis+%26+Disinformation+in+Lebanon.pdf> [access: 8.10.2025].

12 A. Segal, *Russia's Information Warfare in the Middle East*, Potsdam 2024, p. 9.

13 B. Schafer et al., *The Russian Propaganda Nesting Doll*, [https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Laundromat-Paper.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Laundromat-Paper.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com) [access: 16.10.2025].

14 *Megaphone*, [https://x.com/megaphone\\_news/status/1501189639750701059?s=46](https://x.com/megaphone_news/status/1501189639750701059?s=46) [access: 28.09.2025].

along with their social media accounts on platform X, where they are very active. As the Middle East Institute has established, RT Arabic and Sputnik Arabic produce much more content on this platform than does BBC Arabic or Al Jazeera. While RT Arabic and Sputnik Arabic have posted an average of 180 and 87 tweets per day since their inception, Al Jazeera maintains an average of 55 tweets and BBC Arabic only 32<sup>15</sup>. The vast majority of these posts contain Kremlin disinformation; on the one hand, they emphasize that Russia is not responsible for the war in Ukraine, and on the other, they undermine the credibility of Western countries, with the US at the forefront. Both RT Arabic and Sputnik Arabic, as well as their social media, refer to Russia's invasion of Ukraine - in the Kremlin's terminology - as a "special military operation" (ةى رلكس عل-ا-ةصاخ لةى لمل عل ا), avoiding using terms such as "war" or "invasion".

Among the most popular tweets from RT Arabic and Sputnik Arabic are those discussing alleged secret biological laboratories run by the US in Ukraine. A tweet published on March 25, 2022, by RT Arabic stated, "Biden's son is involved in funding biological labs in Ukraine that threaten global biosecurity. Russia demands explanations from the United States! #Russia #Ukraine #BiologicalLaboratories"<sup>16</sup>.

Importantly, Arabic-language Russian media are also trying to introduce animosity between Ukraine and the Islamic world. In the spring of 2022, RT Arabic showed a popular online video of Ukrainian soldiers eating pork lying on the Koran and then using the pages of Islam's holy book to light a fire<sup>17</sup>. "Attention, fake video! Russia staged a video in which unknown people pretended to be Ukrainian soldiers cutting pork on the Koran and burning its pages. They speak broken Ukrainian and use pocket knives. Russia must be condemned for insulting Islam in order to discredit Ukraine", Oleg Nikolenko, spokesman for the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, wrote on Twitter at the time.

- 15 E. Janadze, *The digital Middle East: Another front in Russia's information war*, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/digital-middle-east-another-front-russias-information-war> [access: 28.09.2025].
- 16 *Russian cyber strategy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA): Analysing the Kremlin's disinformation efforts amid 2022 invasion of Ukraine*, <https://dspace.cuni.cz/bitstream/handle/20.500.11956/178359/120427340.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> [access: 28.09.2025].
- 17 M. Styszyński, *Arab context of the Ukraine conflict in Russia Today Arabic and Sputnik*, „Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe” 2023, no. 1, p. 124.

The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine “Ummah” also referred to the matter, noting that this is another attempt by Moscow to “destabilize the situation on religious and interethnic grounds”. In Ukraine, Muslims are an integral part of civil society; they enjoy all rights, can freely confess and preach their religion, and build mosques. In Russia, on the other hand, Muslims are oppressed, used as cannon fodder in an unjust war, and persecuted even for outward manifestations of religious identity, the organization said in a statement on Facebook.



Source: A. Segal, op. cit.



Oleh Nikolenko 🇺🇦 🇨🇦 🇷🇺  
@OlehNikolenko\_

X.com

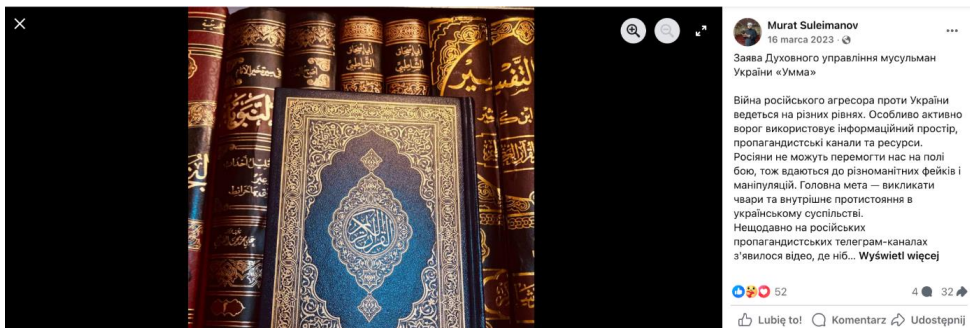
Fake video alert! Russia staged a clip with unknown people claiming to be Ukrainian soldiers cutting pork on a Quran and burning its pages. They speak broken Ukrainian and use a Russian army knife.

Russia must be condemned for insulting Islam in an attempt to discredit Ukraine.

Przetłumacz wpis



14:23 · 16.03.2023 · Wyświetlenia: 365k



Source: Facebook/Murat Suleimanov [access: 16.10.2025].

## A network of Arabic social media channels

The number of social media users in Lebanon has been steadily increasing, increasing by 10 percent between 2022 and 2024<sup>18</sup>. In January 2024, there were 4.52 million social media users in Lebanon, accounting for 85.6 percent of the total population, with Facebook and X being the most popular social media platforms<sup>19</sup>. In the spring of 2022, just after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, several Arabic-language channels were created on the latter platform, “pretending to be” news media channels, such as Moscow News and Russia News. Their goal is primarily to relieve Russia of responsibility for the war in Ukraine and shift it to third countries – mainly the US – to discredit Ukrainians as morally degenerate and ridicule President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Since April 2024, when Volodymyr Zelensky signed a law lowering the conscription age in Ukraine from 27 to 25, these channels have focused on the issue of military conscription. At the time, the Russian Foreign Ministry stated that Ukraine was “hunting” for men, and this narrative was taken over by Russia News and Moscow News, which portrayed rare cases of abuse of power by Ukrainian mobilization centers as common, using words such as “hunting for men” and “kidnapping”. The tweet on the left states: “In the Khmelnytskyi region, a Ukrainian woman broke a window at a recruitment center after her husband was kidnapped, while the tweet on the right says: Zelensky’s bandits are showing creativity in kidnapping Ukrainian citizens from their homes”.

Both of these channels also try to ridicule and discredit Ukrainians morally, hitting, for example, Ukrainian women. Numerous posts talk about young Ukrainian women who left their fiancés fighting at the front to find a new love abroad. They also accuse the Ukrainian military of terrorist activities, including carrying out the Bucha massacre, although evidence collected by international organizations indicates that these were Russian units belonging to the 35th and 36th Infantry Regiments. General Army of the Eastern Military District, two airborne divisions, and units of the National Guard tortured and

18 *Lebanon media guide*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14648683> [access: 8.10.2025].

19 S. Kemp, *Digital 2024: Lebanon*, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-lebanon> [access: 8.10.2025].

murdered several hundred inhabitants of the city<sup>20</sup>. According to the pro-Kremlin propaganda present on RT Arabic and Sputnik Arabic, the order for the massacre in Bucha was given by Volodymyr Zelensky, while he himself fled to Poland.



...Russia news | الموجز الروسي   
@mog\_Russ

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في أوكرانيا:  

زوجة ترسل زوجها لشراء الحليب والبيض وبعض  
الاحتياجات... لكنه لم يعد أبداً، فقد تم تجنيده قسراً!

Przetłumacz wpis



20 M. Piechowska S. Zaręba, *Masakra w Buczy. Rosyjskie zbrodnie na Kijowszczyźnie*, <https://www.pism.pl/publikacje/masakra-w-buczy-rosyjskie-zbrodnie-na-kijowszczyźnie> [access: 16.10.2025].



MOSCOW NEWS | موسكو   
@M0SC0W0

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في خميلنيتسكي، قامت امرأة أوكراينة بتحطيم  
نوافذ مركز التجنيد بعد سرقة زوجها منها

Przetłumacz wpis



22:20 · 7.10.2025 · Wyświetlenia: **6,3k**

Source: X/Moscow News [access: 16.10.2025].



Source: A. Segal, op. cit.

### Individual accounts allegedly run by attractive women

In this case, Moscow simply uses a psychological mechanism based on the social perception of gender. Women are typically seen as warmer, more sympathetic, and less threatening than men, who are considered prone to aggression and hostility<sup>21</sup>. Hence, the greater tendency (often subconscious) of Internet users to interact with a fake account pretending to be a woman. An additional advantage of such accounts is the physical attractiveness of their alleged owners. Profile pictures (often generated by artificial intelligence) show women with symmetrical face shapes, flawless complexions, full lips, prominent cheekbones, and large eyes, that is, features commonly considered attractive to men<sup>22</sup>. According to the results of research by the Israeli company

21 F. Wen et al., *Do We See Masculine Faces as Competent and Feminine Faces as Warm? Effects of Sexual Dimorphism on Facial Perception*, „Evolutionary Psychology” 2020, no. 4, p. 5.

22 A.L. Jones, J. Bastian. *Biological Bases of Beauty Revisited: The Effect of Symmetry, Averageness, and Sexual Dimorphism on Female Facial Attractiveness*, „Symmetry” 2019, no. 2, p. 279.

Cyabra, women's social media accounts enjoy on average more than three times more viewership than men's profiles<sup>23</sup>.

The alleged owners of these accounts claimed to be members of the Kremlin's diplomatic or media corps. They publish on platform X in Arabic, and their posts are an example of the combination of hard and soft propaganda. The former has an overtly anti-Ukrainian and anti-American overtone, while the latter creates a positive image of Russia as a country of beautiful women who adhere to the traditional division of gender roles between men and women. According to a report by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, „pro-Kremlin women on Arabic-language Twitter not only advertise the state but also engage in propaganda”<sup>24</sup>. This ad takes the form of a photo of a sexy policewoman from Moscow or a flight attendant of a Russian airline, a woman with a small child emphasizing in the description that in Russia “women are in their natural place, while in Western countries we no longer distinguish between men and women”, and finally women emphasizing how much Russia loves Arab countries.

These “women” reach very large – for example, the account allegedly run by Maria Raskolniow had 11 thousand followers. The owner of the account introduced herself as an employee of the “Arab press department of the Russian sputnik\_ar agency”. The profile photos of these “journalists” are most often generated by artificial intelligence or stolen from other accounts; the aforementioned Maria Raskolniowa used a photograph of fashion and beauty influencer Dzana Dzyzzle from Instagram.

23 *What Makes Fake Profiles Effective? A New Research by Cyabra*, <https://cyabra.com/blog/what-makes-fake-profiles-effective-a-new-research-by-cyabra/> [access: 11.10.2025].

24 M. Ayad, *Propaganda Priming: The 'Kremlinistas' of Twitter*, [https://www.isdglobal.org/digital\\_dispatches/propaganda-priming-the-kremlinistas-of-twitter/](https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/propaganda-priming-the-kremlinistas-of-twitter/) [access: 8.10.2025].



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@Russian\_press

Obserwuj

اهلا بكم عبر الخطوط الجوية الروسية ♀ 🇷🇺

Przetłumacz wpis



Source: X/Russian\_press [access: 16.10.2025].

## Trolls and bots

Trolls and bots are tasked with creating and/or distributing controversial or false content. In the Lebanese media landscape, they are behind Russian propaganda, accusing Ukraine of collaborating with terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah. Platform X has seen many posts accusing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky of supplying weapons to Hamas and reporting on the presence of Ukrainian mercenaries in the Israeli army. It is likely that trolls or bots are responsible, m.in for distributing a video allegedly prepared by the BBC on social media. He argued that the international, independent collective of investigative journalists Bellingcat had confirmed Ukrainian arms deliveries to Hamas, and Bellingcat explained that the video was fabricated. According to the Center for Combating Disinformation, functioning under the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, it is most likely that information about the alleged wounding of the First Secretary of the Ukrainian Embassy in Lebanon, Mykola Khostko, during the Israeli action against Hezbollah in September 2024 – this was a clear suggestion that Ukraine was cooperating with Hezbollah<sup>25</sup>.

Most likely, a video allegedly from Mosul in 2016 was also distributed on Twitter in March 2022. The United States (at the request of the Iraqi army) then attacked a hospital used as an operational center by the so-called Islamic State. Commenting on the video, Arabic-speaking Twitter users wrote in unison: „this is the so-called U.S. humanity in Iraq when the Americans bombed a hospital in Mosul with internationally banned chemical weapons. Now, the same US is talking about humanity in Ukraine”. However, the video did not come from Iraq; it was filmed during a Russian airstrike on a hospital in Mariupol on March 9, 2022.

Disinformation is a tool of Russian “soft power” and an extremely important element of the information war in Lebanon. Its aim is to create an even friendlier environment for Russian interests in Lebanon, weaken Western competition, and consolidate the position of the Kremlin’s allies, such as Hezbollah. It

25 *Fake Disinformation that the first secretary of the Ukrainian Embassy in Lebanon was injured as a result of the explosion in Beirut*, <https://disinfo.detector.media/en/post/disinformation-that-the-first-secretary-of-the-ukrainian-embassy-in-lebanon-was-injured-as-a-result-of-the-explosion-in-beirut> [access: 8.10.2025].

focuses on strengthening the Kremlin's political influence and weakening the narrative of the West, especially the US and NATO. Importantly, Moscow is making perfect use of the West's weakness: many European media outlets have withdrawn from the Middle East for economic reasons, while Russian state-owned media outlets such as Sputnik Arabic and RT Arabic continue to operate there. In January 2023, the BBC decided to close its Arabic-language radio services (including in Lebanon), which was explained by the need to cut spending and switch more to digital and TV services than to traditional FM radio<sup>26</sup>. The BBC and its management emphasize that such situations can be exploited by the media of other countries that expand their disinformation influence. This is what happened in Lebanon: Sputnik took over some of the frequencies on which BBC Arabic was previously broadcast.

Russian disinformation in Lebanon is based on techniques such as emotional manipulation, selective presentation of facts, duplication of conspiracy theories, and "narrative reversal" – for example, presenting Russia as a victim of Western aggression. In doing so, it takes advantage of Lebanon's complicated internal situation.

Russian disinformation in Lebanon plays an important role in shaping the perception of Moscow as an alternative to the West, especially in the context of regional conflicts (such as the war in the Gaza Strip), criticism of US imperialism, and the promotion of Russia's image as a stable and loyal partner. Thanks to the consistent use of local languages, media channels, and social tensions, Russia is effectively building its information influence, especially among societies disillusioned with Western policies, such as those in the Middle East. However, for disinformation efforts to prove effective in the long term, Russia must back them up with real actions in the field of economic or military cooperation or humanitarian support, which Lebanon desperately needs. So far, this cooperation has been quite limited: Russia and Lebanon are not connected by arms contracts, military presence, free trade agreements, or large infrastructure projects. Humanitarian support is equally limited, coming down to emergency assistance in times of crisis. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia donated Sputnik vaccines (partly as a donation), and after the explosion in the port of Beirut, it sent rescue teams,

26 *BBC boss warns of Russian and Chinese propaganda*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj9jgmexmx4o> [access: 12.10.2025].

doctors, and medical equipment. A mobile military hospital. Therefore, there is room to weaken Russia's influence in the field of information policy. Western countries must start supporting bottom-up initiatives, such as start-ups that build fact-checking platforms. An example of such a platform in Lebanon is Sawab, founded in 2022 by six journalism students and graduates. Its aim is to reduce the spread of false information in Lebanon and raise awareness of the importance of verifying information before it is published or shared. Currently, Sawab cooperates, among m.in, with WhatsApp. It also seems essential that social media platforms take action, m.in as they increase investment in moderators who are familiar with Arabic and its local dialects and provide them with appropriate training on human rights, including on freedom of expression, non-discrimination and hate speech. International cooperation on disinformation should also include international training for journalists, academia, publicists and government officials.

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