

MAPPING RUSSIAN NARRATIVES ABOUT THE WAR IN UKRAINE

**WHAT PUTIN WANTS US TO
HEAR. HOW HIS MESSAGE
GETS THROUGH IN THE US.**

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INTRODUCTION

Russian information warfare has been carried out for years. But only in late February 2022 did it become a part of an actual war.

Russia invaded Ukraine fearing it was running out of time and soon there would be no way back. Ukraine was moving towards Europe under the leadership of a Russian-speaking (but not pro-Kremlin) president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who had the support of the Russian-speakers in Ukraine. Russia was not only losing its political influence but was also losing the hybrid war. After the Crimea annexation, Ukrainians were constantly fighting Russian propaganda and media influence. Moreover, the last big Russian effort, the destabilization of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, was also fading. The conflict was step by step becoming a frozen one. The number of casualties in Eastern Ukraine was decreasing. In 2021 in the region, 25 civilians were killed¹.

The most efficient techniques were developed to convince the world of the necessity of "a special operation", as Russia likes to call its invasion of Ukraine. Russia is on the attack, both in Ukraine and in the informational space around the world. While Ukraine fights back with guns, the rest of the world needs to fight disinformation and manipulation. And this is no easy matter, as propaganda exploits genuine weaknesses in the other nations.

But what are the messages that the official Kremlin is spreading? Do they merge and make sense all together?

To understand what Russia has been trying to tell the world since the invasion of Ukraine, I have analyzed five of Vladimir Putin's speeches since February 21, 2022. Russian propaganda is a big mechanism acting as a whole. All the messages coming from the Russian president are guidelines for Russian state-media², Russian backed players and influencers including those outside the country.

Although the Russian president is presenting completely different arguments, seemingly with nothing in common, when put together he is building a set of grand narratives that are helping to shape perceptions about the West and Russia, as well as the role of the war in Ukraine.

¹ <https://ukraine.un.org/en/168060-conflict-related-civilian-casualties-ukraine>

² ['Standing up for the oppressed' The Kremlin's newest propaganda guide suggests likening Russia's invasion of Ukraine to the First World War — Meduza](#)

Two basic concepts animate Putin's public statements. The West is bad and Russia is good. To shift public opinion, he operates with diverse data and arguments.

On the one hand, according to Putin, the US is a hegemon that controls other countries; and controls NATO. It disregards powerful and developing countries alike. It refuses to play by the rules. It exploits Ukraine in its games. And it threatens Russia's existence as a state. He also nourishes some of the weaknesses and/or problems faced by the USA to amplify social division.

On the other hand, Putin is constructing Russia's image as a peaceful nation that has tried its best through diplomacy. Now Russia is a savior. It is ready to save people in Africa from hunger; Russian speakers in Ukraine from so-called "Nazis", as Moscow did in WWII; it makes huge sacrifices to save the world from Fascist dictatorship, secure its own state from NATO threats and ultimately save the world from US hegemony.

A Google search would demolish these ideas if they were directly expressed in this way. Legends are not built on facts but on 'factoids', slivers of well reported realities extracted from their context. The US and Russian economies are not comparable. Russia is an autocracy, while western countries have fairly elected leaders. Russia's so-called "diplomatic efforts" have led to three frozen conflicts in post-Soviet territories (Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Transnistria in Moldova, and Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan³). The Donbass conflict was on its way to becoming the fourth. And there are further examples. But Putin does not put matters in this way. He is narrating manipulative stories to create the perception of Russia as the bright force, and the West as the dark one on the brink of collapse.

What is the role of Ukraine in Putin's paradigm? Based on his rhetoric, Ukraine is at the epicenter of this confrontation. A place where the interests of the West and Russia meet. To consolidate this theory, Vladimir Putin is advancing the argument that Ukraine – which he claims is a former Russian territory – is under Western control.

³ [Post-Soviet Frozen Conflicts: A Challenge for European Security | Warsaw Institute](#)

STRUCTURE

During this analysis I refer⁴ to five speeches by Vladimir Putin, related to the war in Ukraine.

I sorted all Vladimir Putin's quotes based on the topic, and traced whether these ideas merge into bigger concepts. As a result the following structure emerged: stories/ideas → narratives → ideas → themes → concepts → metanarrative.

Let us deepen our understanding of what the Russian president is trying to say and, more importantly, what he is trying to convince the whole world.

The invasion of Ukraine raised a lot of questions about its origins. In Putin's first five speeches, all of his implied arguments fit under one metanarrative - the world order has to change. His key argument is that capitalism has to die as it is no longer efficient, and threatens the world's balance. Next, strong countries will take the lead. He defines these countries as those who oppose the rules imposed by others⁵, meaning especially Russia and China.

⁴ [Security Council meeting • President of Russia](#); Address by the President of the Russian Federation February 21, 2022

[Address by the President of the Russian Federation](#) February 21, 2022,

[Vladimir Putin answered media questions • President of Russia](#) February 22, 2022

[Address by the President of the Russian Federation](#) February 24, 2022

[St Petersburg International Economic Forum Plenary session • President of Russia](#) June 17 2022,

⁵ "it is obvious that it is up to the strong sovereign states, those that do not follow a trajectory imposed by others, to set the rules governing the new world order."

[St Petersburg International Economic Forum Plenary session • President of Russia](#) June 17 2022

HOW IS THE CONCEPT OF THE “BAD WEST” SHAPED?

The arguments are split to shape three main concepts about the West⁶. Referring to the US, the Kremlin's strategy is to shape the perceptions of a hegemony that puts the world's stability in danger. The second concept is intended to make people believe that the West, (in this context the US and NATO) is threatening Russia. And the third concept describes how the West is in fact weak right now.

THEME 1. FEARSOME US HEGEMONY.

To make people believe that the US is a hegemon, Putin appeals to religion by calling the US a self-declared God on Earth⁷, and by claiming it made the Western bloc in its own image and likeness. More specifically Putin tries to convince them that the US is mastering the EU countries⁸ and NATO⁹ partners. Hand in hand with emotions Putin uses fact distortion. For example, Putin claims that in 2008 the US convinced its allies in NATO to open the door for Ukraine and Georgia. The reality is that the US failed to persuade these countries to offer Ukraine and Georgia the Membership Action Plan. It was agreed¹⁰ that one day Ukraine and Georgia might become NATO members – yet this has yet to happen, even 14 years on. Putin's misuse of facts is designed to strengthen his point.

To make his theory work, Putin has to explain why the implied Western hegemony is bad and therefore strives to build the concept of “a threat to the world's stability”. His narratives are that the West disregards international law, arguing that the US imposes its own views on the world. This, in his view, is why the wars in Yugoslavia, Syria, Libya and Iraq occurred, and this is the cause of rising terrorism. This narrative definitely strengthens the idea of a dangerous West.

⁶ When referring to the West, Vladimir Putin means mainly the USA and NATO, and in a minority of cases it is used to define European countries.

⁷ [Address by the President of the Russian Federation](#)

⁸ "European Union has lost its political sovereignty, and its bureaucratic elites are dancing to someone else's tune, doing everything they are told from on high and hurting their own people, economies, and businesses."

<http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/speeches/68669>

⁹ "some NATO countries are against Ukraine becoming a member. However [...] in 2008, they signed a memorandum [...]. But if they took one step under pressure from the United States, who can guarantee that they will not take another step under pressure? There is no guarantee."

[Security Council meeting • President of Russia](#)

¹⁰ [NATO promises Ukraine, Georgia entry one day | Reuters](#)

Another of his arguments is that even the EU countries don't feel safe because, as Putin says, the US applies sanctions "arbitrarily"¹¹, and its behavior could affect any EU country that opposes the US.

Moreover, the Kremlin tries to impose the idea that so-called Western supremacy is a threat to the world's economy. Putin constructs the narrative that the economic crisis the world is facing is caused by the policies of the western countries. He even contends that the food crisis is the West's responsibility, because of the sanctions imposed on Russia and Belarus. Even though it was Russia who blocked the export of grain from Ukraine, an important exporter in Africa.

THEME 2. THE US/NATO THREAT TO RUSSIA.

Almost all of the NATO-related accusations listed in this section are myths that have already been debunked¹². Our goal is to analyze how they are intended to shape and merge into a unique perception for the listener.

The idea that NATO and the US (which, as previously stated, "controls NATO" according to the Russian narrative) is a threat which compels Russia to fight back is a perception cultivated for years by Kremlin media. It has been in evidence at least since 2014 when NATO appeared in Russian military doctrine as the country's main enemy¹³. In his speech three days before the invasion, Putin said, referring to the West: "They just do not need a big and independent country like Russia around."¹⁴ To make the *so-called* threat coming from the West seem more credible Putin tries to shape the idea that: NATO is no longer a reliable partner; it has the means to attack Russia and needs Ukraine to get closer to Russia. And the most important thing he questions is that NATO is a defensive alliance.

This concept is grounded on the following ideas: NATO is not a reliable partner because it extended into Europe; NATO is threatening Russia directly through its bases in Romania and Poland, and is becoming a potential aggressor as its defensive systems

¹¹ "European leaders [...] discuss the very concerning possibility of sanctions being leveled not at Russia, but at any undesirable nation, and ultimately anyone including the EU and European companies"
[St Petersburg International Economic Forum Plenary session • President of Russia](#)

¹² [NATO-Russia relations: the facts](#)

¹³ S. Meister, "Isolation and propaganda the roots and instruments of russia's disinformation campaign", Transatlantic Academy, 2016
https://www.academia.edu/24480454/ISOLATION_AND_PROPAGANDA_THE_ROOTS_AND_INSTRUMENTS_OF_RUSSIAS_DISINFORMATION_CAMPAIGN?email_work_card=title

¹⁴ [Address by the President of the Russian Federation](#)

are being equipped with offensive capabilities; and NATO is threatening Russia using Ukraine.

A key point in this alleged threat is Ukraine. The Russian president introduces various stories that Ukraine is a proxy-state, arguing that it is controlled by the US at almost every level and that Ukraine's preference for the West is not the people's choice but that of its corrupted leaders. To deepen the narrative about security risks, Putin states that NATO has the Ukrainian army under its control and that the US is spying on Russia using Ukraine and could even attack the Russian Black Sea Fleet, using a military base in southern Ukraine.

In order to demonize western nations and emphasize that Ukraine is being used by the West to pose a threat to Russia, Putin pushes the idea that the West has deliberately weaponized Ukraine. He even argues that the western allies might help to revive Ukraine as a nuclear power, a scenario in which, again, Russia would be under threat.

Putin claims that the West has been preparing Ukraine for a clash with Russia not only on a military level, but also on the social level, by increasing internal polarisation for years and creating a so-called "anti-Russia" in Ukraine. He accuses NATO countries of financing extremist groups and closing their eyes to the so-called oppressors of Russian-speakers in Ukraine. In this way, he puts all the responsibility for the tensions in the region on the US, including the Maidan revolution in 2014.

THEME 3. THE WEST IS WEAK.

Another line of attack goes far beyond demonizing the US and European countries. It is designed to emphasize western weaknesses and undermine trust in their democratic leaders by questioning their competence and reliability.

Putin builds the idea that the West needs new leadership. With regard to the EU, he argues that rising prices of gas and fuel are the result of short-sighted EU policies; that the sanctions imposed on Russia will only bring more damage to their own countries, and, as a result of the crisis, European societies will face degradation and a change of elites.

It is the same story regarding the US. Putin says that current leaders ignore their citizens' needs, and economic and domestic problems are caused by the ruling parties. And he claims that eventually Americans will make their voices heard, bringing about a change in the ruling elites.

Now, what about Russia?

HOW IS THE CONCEPT OF THE “GOOD RUSSIA” SHAPED?

THEME 1. RUSSIA IS A GOOD AND PEACEFUL COUNTRY.

Russia is a good and peaceful country is a theme that has been pushed from day one by the Kremlin. Putin has built the narrative that Russia tried its best through diplomacy. He emphasizes several times in his speeches that Russia has done everything in its power to solve disagreements with Ukraine and NATO via diplomatic means – without result. Another narrative that is meant to make Russia look peaceful is that the Kremlin respects the wishes of other nations. Putin says that Russia “respects and will respect their sovereignty” and that its policy “is based on the freedom of all to determine their future”¹⁵. None of this bears scrutiny, as the Russian enclaves in Georgia and Moldova, and the annexation of Crimea confirm, or the most recent sham referendums¹⁶ in Donbass and Luhansk supervised by Russian security forces. Another story, designed to lend credibility to Russia’s peaceful intent, is that Russia has no objection to Ukraine joining the EU. Yet, the pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich was the one who suspended the preparations to signing the Association Agreement with the EU, which brought about the 2014 revolution and led Yanukovich to flee to Moscow.

Putin’s efforts are intended not only to ensure Russia appears to be a civilized country, but also to put the blame on the West for the war in Ukraine.

THEME 2. RUSSIA IS DEFENDING ITSELF.

The leading theme of the “GOOD RUSSIA” concept is that Russia is defending itself. As Putin said on June 17, 2022, “... against the backdrop of mounting risks and threats, Russia was forced to go ahead with the special military operation”¹⁷. In this way, Russia shapes the perception that the US and NATO is the aggressor posing a threat. Therefore, Russia has no choice other than to fight back. To strengthen this idea, Putin argues that Russia has to fight Ukraine in order to liberate it from Western control. For dramatic effect, he uses expressions such as the West has taken Ukraine “hostage”. He also harks back to stories about WW2, comparing Ukrainians with German Nazis, or saying that *“the attempt to appease the aggressor ahead of the Great Patriotic War proved to be a mistake which came at a high cost for our people”*. The stories about WW2 are particularly aimed at the domestic Russian public and the post-Soviet space where the Soviet Union is glorified as the hero of that war. These stories frame the narrative that the war is the only way to ensure Russia’s long term viability, that in his words *“For our country, it is a matter of life and death, a matter of our historical future as a nation.”*¹⁸

¹⁵ [Address by the President of the Russian Federation](#)

¹⁶ [Sham Russian ‘referendums’ in Ukraine | OSW Centre for Eastern Studies](#)

¹⁷ [St Petersburg International Economic Forum Plenary session • President of Russia](#)

¹⁸ [Address by the President of the Russian Federation](#)

Hand in hand with this, the Kremlin deploys a lot of victimization. The notion that Russia is a victim is intended to emphasize the high-minded character of Russia's actions. In Putin's speech on June 17, he says: "If some "rebel" state cannot be suppressed or pacified, they try to isolate that state, or "cancel" it, to use their modern term."¹⁹, inducing the idea that Russia is a victim because it opposes the hegemony of the US. The major idea is that Russia bears no responsibility for almost anything. Putin claims that Russia has nothing to do with the world economic crisis, blaming it on Western countries. He repeatedly states: "What does our military operation in Donbass have to do with this? Nothing whatsoever."²⁰ To support his point, Putin argues that the fertilizer crisis is not Russia's fault, and relieves it of any responsibility for the blockade of grain and corn exports from Ukraine. He also touches on a very sensitive subject for everyone, the high prices for gas. Putin states that Russia (the world's leading exporter of gas²¹) is not responsible for the rising prices, blaming EU countries for short-sighted energy policies. "We have absolutely nothing to do with this"²², Putin says on June 17. In all his early speeches, Putin touches on the major accusations Russia has had to face since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. He says that Russia isn't threatening anyone with nuclear weapons, and even says Russia is not to blame for the war in Ukraine. Referring to so-called rising nationalism that provoked Russia, Putin states, "If we had normal relations, there would be nothing like this, nothing like this tragedy, I assure you. But we did not do it."²³ Putin said.

THEME 3. RUSSIA IS A SAVIOR.

Another theme exploited by Putin in his speeches is that Russia is a savior. According to him the nation is saving Russian speakers in Ukraine from so-called oppression by the Ukrainian authorities. He uses tough terms in order to provoke a highly emotional response. Putin invokes genocide²⁴, torture, Neo-nazism. His arguments are meant to bolster the idea that Ukraine's democratically elected leaders are illegitimate and that the Kremlin is a liberator ready to offer "freedom" for other territories as well²⁵.

Moreover Putin tries to strengthen his point by building the narrative that the invasion in Ukraine is in fact legitimate. He refers to the 51 Article of the UN Charter, and to the decision of the International Court of Justice regarding Kosovo. A decision that Russia contested and haven't recognised Kosovo's independence till this day. Moreover, it is

¹⁹ [St Petersburg International Economic Forum Plenary session • President of Russia](#)

²⁰ [St Petersburg International Economic Forum Plenary session • President of Russia](#)

²¹ [Global gas exports by country 2021 | Statista](#)

²² [St Petersburg International Economic Forum Plenary session • President of Russia](#)

²³ [St Petersburg International Economic Forum Plenary session • President of Russia](#)

²⁴ "[...]horror and genocide, which almost 4 million people are facing,[...] people [...] opposed the transition towards the Neanderthal and aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism which have been elevated in Ukraine to the rank of national policy.", [Address by the President of the Russian Federation](#)

²⁵ "Freedom guides our policy [...] We believe that all the peoples living in today's Ukraine, anyone who want to do this, must be able to enjoy this right to make a free choice."
[Address by the President of the Russian Federation](#)

irrelevant for the Ukrainian case, given that it was Russia that built the separatist movements in Donetsk and Luhansk.

Other narratives designed to strengthen the theme of Russia as a "savior" include the argument that Russia can save Africa from hunger, restore equilibrium to the world food market²⁶, or is even subsidizing the EU economy by selling gas below market rates²⁷. And ultimately Putin advances the idea that only Russia can stop the Western hegemony that, in his view, became uncontrollable after the USSR fell apart.

THEME 4. RUSSIA IS A STRONG COUNTRY.

Unlike the stories and narratives used to build the theme of a weak west, Putin describes Russia as a robust country that has withstood the pressure of sanctions due to its "stable, well-balanced macroeconomic policy", adding that "this kind of blackmail means little when it comes to countries headed by true leaders." In this way, he advances the cult of a strong judicious leader.

Putin also talks about the social dimension, building the perception not only of a wisely led country but also one that works for the benefit of its citizens, adjusting pensions, wages and raising interest rates to boost savings. All this in stark contrast to the West that, according to the Kremlin, ignores its people's interests and needs.

The Russian president addresses western companies, promising them protection if they want to operate on the Russian market.

Putin also points to the success of Moscow's foreign economic relations. Although isolated from Western economies, Putin suggests that he has strong partnerships with other countries which, as he says, "Make up the overwhelming majority of people on Earth²⁸". Making use of ambiguity, he does not spell out which countries he is referring to, but merely states that "It is common knowledge."

Let us look at the facts. Since 2014, when the first sanctions against Russia were imposed, the population's real disposable income has consistently declined²⁹. The UK is facing its highest in 40 years highest inflation of 10.1%, inflation rate for July-August

²⁶ "Russia is also able to scale up its food and fertilizer exports. [...] we will supply the countries that need food most of all, [...] first of all, African countries and the Middle East."

"Russia is ready to contribute to balancing global markets of agricultural products[...]"

[St Petersburg International Economic Forum Plenary session • President of Russia](#)

²⁷ [St Petersburg International Economic Forum Plenary session • President of Russia](#)

²⁸ [St Petersburg International Economic Forum Plenary session • President of Russia](#)

²⁹ [Доходы россиян продолжили падать. Данные опубликовали только после послания Путина - BBC News Русская служба](#)

in Germany and USA was 7,9% and 8,5% accordingly. Russia faced an inflation of 15,1% in July.

And what about Ukraine? How does it fit into Vladimir Putin's meta-narrative?

“UKRAINE SHOULD STAY WITH RUSSIA” CONCEPT

Apart from Putin's narratives referring to Ukraine as a Western puppet, a failed country and a potential threat for Russia, he shapes the perception that Ukraine is historically part of Russia and lost its way after independence in 1991. This idea was the leading theme of the article by Vladimir Putin “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”³⁰, published in June 2021. To build this idea Putin refers in his speeches to various historical events but manipulates the facts or bases them on false claims³¹.

Putin says that Ukraine was actually created by Russia giving that territory a specific entity and the right to autodetermination to the people. He argues that the leaders of the Soviet Union were wrong to “*appease the nationalists, to satisfy the ceaselessly growing nationalist ambitions*”³². Even though it makes no sense to refer to nationalism and at the same time claim that Ukrainians are basically Russians. To diminish the importance of Ukraine a people identified with a separate nation, Putin argues that Ukrainian independence was not the result of a national or popular sentiment, but was caused by the strategic mistakes of “*the Bolshevik leaders and the CPSU leadership*”³³ that led to the disintegration of the USSR. Putin compares nationalism, or the desire of one nation to identify as such, to a virus, a dangerous disease.³⁴

Another idea constructed by Putin is that post-independence, Ukraine has been hostile to Russia, even though Russians tried to be its friend all along. To support his case, Putin argues that Russia offered Ukraine preferential trade deals and points out that in 2011 it was its biggest trading partner. Ukraine on the other hand is accused of using Russia for its own benefit, disrespecting agreements, and the most importantly creating division that nourishes “*far-right nationalism, which rapidly developed into aggressive Russophobia and neo-Nazism*”³⁵. This statement is intended to induce fear and appeal to the emotions of the listener.

³⁰ Article by Vladimir Putin “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians” • President of Russia

³¹ Putin says parts of Ukraine have been Russian since 'time immemorial.' That's a one-sided view of history. - Poynter

³² Address by the President of the Russian Federation February 21, 2022

³³ Address by the President of the Russian Federation February 21, 2022

³⁴ “The virus of nationalist ambitions is still with us, and the mine laid at the initial stage to destroy state immunity to the disease of nationalism was ticking.” Address by the President of the Russian Federation

³⁵ Address by the President of the Russian Federation

As with so many of Putin's stories, this one is based on a false claim. All the post-Soviet countries that were Russified and denationalized while remaining part of the USSR had a hard time restoring their national heritage. People had to defend their right to use their mother-tongue as an official language and encourage Russian-speakers to learn it. This meant Ukraine had to increase the number of Ukrainian speakers among its population, making Ukrainian the main language in schools. But the Russian language was never prohibited. Russian TV channels were available until the annexation of Crimea in 2014 when they were banned for broadcasting war propaganda. The anti-Russian, Nazi movement, claimed by Putin is an exaggeration. Moreover, the claim that Ukraine was or still is ruled by Nazis is false³⁶.

³⁶ [Why is Putin Calling the Ukrainian Government a Bunch of Nazis? | ADL](#)

WHAT RUSSIAN NARRATIVES GET THROUGH IN THE US?

One of Russia's goals is to change US foreign policy towards Russia and undermine the US as a pole of international power to the greatest extent possible. Starting with cutting the defense support for Ukrainians fighting Russian invasion, to gain advantage on the field. One of the ways of achieving this is by changing the balance in the US Congress. Under the Biden administration, the US committed³⁷ 17.6 billion dollars in security assistance to Ukraine, from February 24th to October 14th, 2022. Those decisions got bipartisan support in the US Congress, but MAGA republicans made it clear that they would cut aid to Ukraine or at least reduce it. The greatest extent possible for Russia to influence US foreign politics or to bring this subject up for discussion was the Midterm elections held on November 8, 2022.

However, not only did Russia want to decrease the Democrats' influence in the Senate, but Republicans also shared the same goal too. Tucker Carlson hosts one of the most popular³⁸ cable TV talk shows targeting Republican voters. The Fox News show, Tucker Carlson Tonight averaged 3.3 million viewers³⁹ in July 2022. Carlson was repeatedly accused of parroting Russian narratives and being a Donald Trump mouthpiece.

According to a report published by RAND Corporation⁴⁰ people tend to believe the messages promoted by the sources they identify with. Meaning, if the same message comes from Vladimir Putin and from Tucker Carlson, the Fox News audience is more likely to believe Carlson.

In order to understand if Tucker Carlson is only repeating certain stories or is building a wider complex of narratives similar to those identified in Vladimir Putin's speeches, I looked through all the available transcripts⁴¹ of Carlson Tucker Tonight from February 17, 2022, to October 14, 2022, and analyzed 26 editions referring to the Ukraine war.

UKRAINE: A STATE NOT WORTH SAVING

Since the Russian invasion, Tucker Carlson has portrayed Ukraine in a negative way, with a special emphasis on its current leadership. As well as Putin, Carlson reinforced the idea that Ukraine is controlled by the West. But unlike Putin, who blamed the Ukrainian leadership for being Nazis who seized power, Carlson used other arguments to build the narrative that Ukraine is a failed democracy.

³⁷ [\\$725 Million in Additional Security Assistance for Ukraine > U.S. Department of Defense > Release](#)

³⁸ [Fox News Ends 2021 as Most-Watched Basic Cable Channel for Sixth Straight Year](#)

³⁹ [FOX News Channel Finishes August as Third Highest-Rated Network in All of Television | Business Wire](#)

⁴⁰ Paul, Christopher and Miriam Matthews, The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016. [The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model](#)

⁴¹ [TRANSCRIPT | Fox News](#)

The goals of similar rhetoric are slightly different for Russian and American audiences but are equally favorable for Russia. Carlson argues that Ukraine shouldn't be saved by the US, while Putin is trying to convince people that Russia is the one which should be Ukraine's savior.

Carlson implies that Ukraine is a failed state, he says that Ukraine is a Western puppet, an undemocratic state ruled by a dictator supported by the US. A state that is provoking the US to start the nuclear war.

Tucker Carlson Tonight

"Ukraine is not a democracy... It's a client state of the Biden administration."

February 14, 2022

Since February, Carlson has built the narrative that Zelensky is a puppet of the Biden administration, pointing to some of the debts the Biden family allegedly owes Ukrainian oligarchs, and business dealings Joe Biden's son, Hunter, had in Ukraine. In March, Tucker referred to Zelensky as a dictator⁴², accused him of turning Ukraine into a one state party. He compared him to a well-known figure to the American public: *"The man who just declared himself king is actually the world's newest George Washington"*. This rhetoric is used to argue that the US shouldn't support Ukraine because, *"If you really cared about the Ukrainian people [...] you wouldn't want them to live under a dictator."*⁴³ In September, grasping those two messages about Zelenskyy, Carlson referred to him as *"a corrupt Eastern European authoritarian leader"*⁴⁴.

According to Carlson, Zelensky is driving the US into a war with Russia. He presents Ukraine as a risk to the US rather than a victim of Russian aggression. Those narratives are used to discourage US support for Ukraine, because a *"puppet country ruled by a dictator"*, is just not worth it.

Messages, such as Ukraine "is a failed state", or "it is controlled by the West", or "its leaders seized power" are promoted by Vladimir Putin, too. Some of them are meant to build the idea that Ukraine is a threat to Russia, because it is controlled by the West,

⁴² [Tucker Carlson: We have a right to know what's going on in Ukraine, but our leaders are lying | Fox News](#), March 21, 2022

⁴³ [Tucker Carlson: We have a right to know what's going on in Ukraine, but our leaders are lying | Fox News](#) March 21, 2022

⁴⁴ [TUCKER CARLSON: The point of the Ukraine war is regime change in Russia | Fox News](#) September 22, 2022

others build the theme that Russia is a savior, and is liberating Ukraine from its Nazi leaders who seized power.

RUSSIA A STRONG, FEARSOME COUNTRY

On the other hand, Russia is mostly portrayed as a strong country. Its economy is unaffected by Western sanctions, and it has the power to destroy the world.

When talking about Russia's ability to resist Western pressure, Carlson in March 2022 said: *"Putin already has ready markets around the world for his oil, starting in China, in India and Turkey"*⁴⁵ in April: *"Putin's fine. The ruble has almost completely recovered since the day Russia invaded"*⁴⁶, and *"Most people don't like Vladimir Putin, but Vladimir Putin has the largest nuclear stockpile in the world"*⁴⁷.

Moreover, on the day of invasion, Carlson said directly that Ukraine should obey Russia, reinforcing in this way the idea of a strong Russian empire and Ukraine as a legitimate part of the Russian sphere of influence. *"Rich countries get to do what they want. Poor countries must obey their masters, or they get invaded. We just saw that happen. That is the unchanging rule."*⁴⁸

When condemning Russia's invasion, almost every time Carlson uses whataboutism, deflecting attention from Russia's aggression to its costs for the US.

This trick decreases the attention paid to Russia's actions on one hand and on the other redirects it to a domestic problem, which is closer to home and affects the audience directly.

⁴⁵ [Tucker: American citizens are getting punished | Fox News](#) March 10, 2022

⁴⁶ [Tucker Carlson: Democrats are the ones benefitting from Biden's energy crisis | Fox News](#) April 1, 2022

⁴⁷ [Tucker: Media's treatment of Russia-Ukraine war is reckless | Fox News](#) April 7, 2022

⁴⁸ [Tucker: Russia-Ukraine conflict could become a world war | Fox News](#) February 24, 2022

Tucker Carlson Tonight

*"Sanctions are an emotionally satisfying way to punish someone like Vladimir Putin, who clearly does deserve to be punished. No one's really against sanctions, **but the question is:** Do they work?"*

February 24, 2022

*"No one in America takes pride at the sight, feels anything but revulsion at the sight, of Russian troops within Ukraine. It's wrong. It's destabilizing to the world. It is, in fact, against our values, **but how we respond** is the question."*

March 1, 2022

*"Putin is bad. No one in America is going to argue with that, **but will destroying** the entire Russian economy make Putin less bad?"*

March 2, 2022

*"Punish Russia. We're not against that, **but...**"*

March 7, 2022

*"Vladimir Putin did invade Ukraine. That's true. That's bad, **but that's not why** you can't afford to fill your tank."*

March 11, 2022

*"The Russian invasion of Ukraine was wrong, and the results of that invasion have been a tragedy for everyone around the world. **But ...**"*

April 7, 2022

*"OK. Putin is bad. Fine. Agree, **but Putin is making nuclear threats.** //...about how Putin's bad. Yeah great. Got it. **But ...**"*

September 22, 2022

It is used to shape the perception that the US shouldn't help Ukrainians to fight Russia, because the alleged costs are too high.

As well as Putin, Carlson releases Russia from any responsibility for the high cost of food or energy resources. According to Carlson, the Biden administration is the only one to blame: "So, no, the war in Ukraine did not do this. Putin did not do this. Putin didn't, by the way, sanction himself. Energy inflation is a direct and intended result of White House policies."⁴⁹

⁴⁹ [Tucker Carlson: Democrats are the ones benefitting from Biden's energy crisis | Fox News](#) April 1, 2022

THE US IS WEAK UNDER BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Stressing repeatedly that sanctions don't destroy Putin, but rather the US, Carlson is creating the perception that Putin is indestructible, and the US is the one that is weak. While Putin implies in his speeches that the West is weak because of its various problems, Tucker Carlson says it directly.

Tucker Carlson Tonight

"You're not a superpower. You're a joke."

"So here you have two historic foreign policy debacles in under a year. Is there a precedent for that? What's the message of it? Well, weakness, obviously."

February 26, 2022

"We look weak, we look dis-unified."

March 2, 2022

Portraying Biden as a senile leader incapable of running the US only strengthens the idea of a weakened country.

"...the upside of having a senile president is that no one takes him very seriously..."⁵⁰, "we didn't underestimate Vladimir Putin. We overestimated Joe Biden"⁵¹

Carlson calls Biden senile in several editions of the show throughout the analyzed period. In March he said that *"...whether it's chutzpah, delusion or senility or whatever else explains Joe Biden's behavior..."* In September Carlson stressed that Biden is senile as an established fact, which no longer needed to be confirmed as he had already presented the arguments months ago: *"So obviously, Joe Biden is old and senile"*⁵²

Another message that strengthens the idea that the US is weak is that it failed to deter Putin from attacking Ukraine. *"Joe Biden and his staff so mismanaged the world that Vladimir Putin invades Ukraine after Biden told us for months, he could prevent that from happening..."* or *"Our foreign policy establishment failed to constrain Vladimir Putin."*⁵³ He

⁵⁰ [TUCKER CARLSON: Drawing a parallel between January 6 protests and fall of the Twin towers – true lunacy | Fox News](#) September 12, 2022

⁵¹ [Tucker: Harris is going back to Europe to see how much worse she can make this disaster | Fox News](#) March 3, 2022

⁵² [TUCKER CARLSON: Joe Biden is senile, but the Democratic Party is devolving | Fox News](#) September 23, 2022

⁵³ [Tucker: Defense of Ukraine's democracy has led to an erosion of our own | Fox News](#) March 1, 2022

insists on this idea in multiple editions of the show, highlighting Biden's failure to restrain Russia from attacking Ukraine.

Another message that can be seen being pushed by both Putin and Tucker Carlson is that US leaders disregard their citizens' needs. Carlson says it directly: *"This administration is not acting in the best interest of the American people. They are turning their backs on the American people."*⁵⁴

Tucker Carlson Tonight

"Joe Biden announced today a new front in his ongoing war against America's middle class."

"...it's not Vladimir Putin who's getting punished, it's American citizens. It's you."

"They don't care about you at all. They have complete contempt for you and your interests."

March 8, 2022

"So, Biden is not hurting [Vladimir Putin](#). Biden is hurting American citizens."

April 1, 2022

Carlson emphasizes that all the blame for high inflation in the US lies with the Biden administration, first because it printed too much money and secondly because of the sanctions on Russia. In June 2022, describing the problems faced by the US, Putin also pins everything on the "mistakes of the ruling elites".

Tucker Carlson Tonight

"In fact, thanks to Biden's foreign policy, everything you buy is shooting up in price and shockingly fast."

March 7, 2022

"...that's why we have historic inflation now, because they printed too much money."

"Jen Psaki said, it's about Vladimir Putin. It's Vladimir Putin's fault that you're paying more for gas... Vladimir Putin did invade Ukraine ... but that's not why you can't afford to fill your tank. It was the White House, and we should say the Congress' reaction to the invasion, that is roiling our economy."

March 11, 2022

⁵⁴ [Tucker: Russia-Ukraine conflict could become a world war | Fox News](#) February 24, 2022

He also implies it through arguments, such as US leaders have an interest in the war in Ukraine and continue to support it only because they ignore Americans' needs.

US LEADERS CAN NOT BE TRUSTED; IT IS ALL ABOUT SELF-INTEREST

To support this, Carlson develops arguments, such as the notion that the Biden administration is deliberately exposing Americans to high gas prices by "shutting down domestic energy pipelines" and penalizing Russia, a major supplier of gas because, *"Maybe expensive energy would be good for the many renewable deals their friends and donors are invested in."*⁵⁵ In April Carlson said that the reason Biden administration is focused on Ukraine is to give Americans the Green New Deal⁵⁶. According to Carlson, it is a war supported only by rich people. *"The richer and more cut off from physical reality people got, the more ardently they supported war with Russia"*⁵⁷

Carlson brings the discussion about Biden administration interests in the war to almost absurd levels, saying that this way Biden wants to build an autocracy inside the US. He claims that *"At exactly the moment when the emergency powers they awarded to themselves to fight COVID started to wane, our leaders began pushing for conflict with Russia, and then, on the basis of that conflict, they assumed historic war powers."*⁵⁸

THE US IS TO BLAME. IT THREATENS RUSSIA.

Another important theme advanced by Tucker Carlson as well as by Putin is that the US is to blame for the conflict in Ukraine. According to Fiona Hill, former Russia advisor to three US presidents, this is a part of a complex information war, *"and what happens in a Russian 'all-of society' war, you soften up the enemy. You get the Tucker Carlsons and Donald Trump's doing your job for you."*⁵⁹

Throughout the analyzed period, Tucker Carlson does not blame Russia for the war in Ukraine, he blames the US and Biden administration. First, he criticizes Biden for failing to deter Putin's invasion. An idea he would repeat frequently to shape two perceptions

⁵⁵ [Tucker Carlson: Americans have been trained to hate Putin, and will suffer because of it | Fox News](#) February 23, 2022

⁵⁶ [Tucker Carlson: Democrats are the ones benefitting from Biden's energy crisis | Fox News](#) April 1, 2022

⁵⁷ [Tucker: American citizens are getting punished | Fox News](#) March 8, 2022

⁵⁸ Tucker Carlson: We have a right to know what's going on in Ukraine, but our leaders are lying | Fox News March 21, 2022

⁵⁹ 'Yes, He Would': Fiona Hill on Putin and Nukes - POLITICO

simultaneously: that Biden is weak and that his administration is responsible for the invasion of Ukraine.

On the day of invasion, referring to the US leadership, Carlson says, *"They should take responsibility for the choices that they've made that have brought the world not just to the precipice of a conflict in Ukraine, but frankly, to the precipice of a World War"*. He repeats the same idea multiple times, including on March 1, *"...if there is any single American who deserves scorn and yes, blame for the invasion of Ukraine, it would be Joe Biden"*.

Secondly, before the war, Carlson accused the US administration of weaponizing Ukraine and pushing it into a war with Russia. *"Many people in Washington are pushing Ukraine toward war. So we're sending them weapons and then making it very easy for them to use them,"* he said on February 14, 2022. On March 7, implying that the US invited Ukraine to join NATO, Carlson concludes, *"It is obvious that permanent Washington has been fixated on war with Russia for a very long time."* On February 21, several days before the start of the invasion, Vladimir Putin said that *"The United States and NATO have started an impudent development of Ukrainian territory as a theater of potential military operations."*⁶⁰

The main theme Carlson exploits is the myth about NATO accepting Ukraine as a member, and consequently the alleged threat to Russia created by the US. According to Carlson, the US provoked the Russian invasion by welcoming Ukraine into NATO and implies that the Biden administration almost gave Ukraine a free path to join the alliance. This is one of the arguments he uses from day one of the invasion: *"Vladimir Putin just invaded Ukraine because he didn't want Ukraine to join NATO. [...] The Russians don't want American missiles on their border. They don't want a hostile government next door"*⁶¹ Further, Carlson argues on March 3 that US vice-president Kamala Harris encouraged Ukraine to join NATO, and continues on March 7 that, *"Putin invaded Ukraine, effectively encouraged by the Biden administration to do that"*⁶².

The guests of the show, Glenn Greenwald, Tulsi Gabbard, Daniel Davis⁶³ and the congressional candidate for Washington state, Joe Kent, put forward the same narrative, to give it more credibility. Kent said, *"we have to dialogue with Putin and offer him an off ramp, in particular, taking NATO off the table"*. Ultimately Joe Kent lost his congressional election. But he wasn't the only candidate to reassess the Russian playbook in the US, according to Midterm Monitor⁶⁴, a tool created by Alliance for Securing Democracy to analyze social media messages and narratives shaping the

⁶⁰ Address by the President of the Russian Federation February 21, 2022

⁶¹ [Tucker: We are at war with Russia, whether or not Congress has declared it | Fox News](#) March 7, 2022

⁶² [Tucker: American citizens are getting punished | Fox News](#) March 8, 2022

⁶³ [Tucker: Russia-Ukraine conflict could become a world war | Fox News](#) February 24, 2022

⁶⁴ [Midterm Monitor](#)

conversation around voting and the election. *“Most of them were Republicans and only one Democrat,”* Laura Thornton, the head and senior fellow at Alliance Securing Democracy, told me. She further explained that narratives such as, “Ukrainians are Nazis” or “Ukraine is Khrushchev’s bargain”, “Putin is a victim” and “blaming NATO” are not home grown, and *“show a direct link to the narratives that Russia is pushing”*, whereas there is another bucket of narratives centered on isolationism and protectionism used by America First-ers which *“are very convenient for Russia”*.

“It was not the NATO expansion that soured our relationship,” the former US ambassador to Poland and one of the architects of NATO enlargement policy, Daniel Fried told me in an interview. *“It was the color revolutions, in Putin’s view, that we engineered. We didn’t, but he thinks we did. We did engineer NATO enlargement, but that wasn’t the problem,”* he said. This is one of the main accusations Putin brings against the US. According to Putin, it was the turning point of the rising nationalist movement in Ukraine.

Tucker Carlson reinforces that idea. He says that “In 2014, Tora Nuland⁶⁵ engineered a coup in Ukraine in the name of democracy, of course.”⁶⁶ In order to relate his audience to that event, he portrays Nuland as the person who brought the US into the Iraq war. He repeats the same message almost half a year later on September 27, 2022.

The rhetoric regarding the US as a threat to Russia is sustained with a variety of other narratives resembling those used by Vladimir Putin. As, for example, the one that the Biden administration needs this war to topple the Russian government. One of the reasons being that it is a revenge on Russians for helping Donald Trump become president. The two narratives described above can be seen in Putin’s speech on September 21 and in “Tucker Carlson Tonight” on September 22.

Vladimir Putin ⁶⁷	Tucker Carlson ⁶⁸
They turned the Ukrainian people into cannon fodder and pushed them into a war with Russia, which they unleashed back in 2014.	America and the UK demand total war with Russia, regime change war with Russia and of course, the Ukrainians caught in the middle had no choice but to concede.
But a peaceful settlement obviously did	But the Biden administration adamantly

⁶⁵ [Victoria Nuland](#), Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs

⁶⁶ [Tucker Carlson: Someone needs to explain why there are dangerous biological weapons in Ukraine | Fox News](#) March 9, 2022

⁶⁷ [Address by the President of the Russian Federation](#) September 21, 2022

⁶⁸ [TUCKER CARLSON: The point of the Ukraine war is regime change in Russia | Fox News](#) September 22, 2022

not suit the West, which is why, after certain compromises were coordinated, Kiev was actually ordered to wreck all these agreements.	opposed this settlement. Biden's advisers didn't just want the Russians to leave Ukraine.
The goal of that part of the West is to weaken, divide and ultimately destroy our country.	...the goal changed from restoring Ukraine to what it was before the invasion ... to a war designed to topple Vladimir Putin, just like we toppled Saddam Hussein and then hoping for the best afterward.

US THREATENS WORLD STABILITY

*"We are at war with Russia,"*⁶⁹ said Carlson in early March, starting to build the perception that this is a war between the US and Russia. Indeed, a war "provoked by the US", as we stated earlier based on Carlson's rhetoric.

Throughout this period he is cultivating the feeling of insecurity, playing on people's fears of a direct confrontation on land, the precipice of a third world war, or even a nuclear war.

Edition by edition, he raises tension around this subject. A day before the invasion Carlson says, *"Let's try a winter war in Russia"*⁷⁰. On March 1, he starts to predict the destruction of the US: *"We are moving down a path that could result in the destruction of the United States."*⁷¹ By mid-March he is anticipating direct confrontation: *"a shooting war with Russia seems inevitable."*⁷² These messages continue to October, when Carlson says that both parties are causing a *"nuclear Armageddon"*; that *"We could all die"* and that a *"civilization ending war looms on the horizon"*⁷³. He reiterates that *"we should not go to war with Russia. What are you kidding? This is lunacy."* But the US isn't at war with Russia. Ukraine is. Ukraine is losing people on the battlefield. Carlson never stresses that as much.

A message similar to the Russian playbook about the threat US hegemony is imposing on the world is that, if the world economy is going to collapse, it is because of Biden.

⁶⁹ [Tucker: We are at war with Russia, whether or not Congress has declared it | Fox News](#) March 7, 2022

⁷⁰ [Tucker Carlson: Americans have been trained to hate Putin, and will suffer because of it | Fox News](#) February 23, 2022

⁷¹ [Tucker: Defense of Ukraine's democracy has led to an erosion of our own | Fox News](#) March 1, 2022

⁷² [Tucker: How could war with Russia not be inevitable? | Fox News](#) March 16, 2022

⁷³ [Address by the President of the Russian Federation](#) September 21, 2022

*"If the world economy is going to collapse and you're not going to be able to afford meat for dinner, if Europe's not going to have power, you should probably know why, (sarcastically) and it has nothing to do, they assure you, with the criminal negligence of people like Kamala Harris and Joe Biden. No, it's because of a place called Ukraine."*⁷⁴

Another common narrative for Putin and Carlson is that the US under Biden disregards the rule of law. Carlson suggests the US leadership does it by destroying and impoverishing Russia through sanctions. Carlson asks in the same way as Putin: what happens when they come after you?

Vladimir Putin	Tucker Carlson
"At any moment they (global currencies reserves) can be confiscated or stolen any time if the United States dislikes something in the policy of the states involved" ⁷⁵	"How long before they accuse you of collusion or disloyalty or some other hard-to-define crime, declare you an enemy of the state and then confiscate your bank account?" ⁷⁶

RUSSIA IS A VICTIM

Carlson reassesses the Russian narrative that the Kremlin is a victim by stating another common message, namely the US made an enemy of Russia out of nothing. *"Hating Putin has become the central purpose of America's foreign policy,"* he claims on February 23, two days after Putin has made the same argument *"We also know the main adversary of the United States and NATO. It is Russia"*⁷⁷

Through the analyzed period, Tucker Carlson roots for cutting the assistance to Ukraine, a proposal that cannot fit better Russia's interests.

⁷⁴ [Tucker: Harris is going back to Europe to see how much worse she can make this disaster | Fox News](#) March 3, 2022

⁷⁵ [St Petersburg International Economic Forum Plenary session • President of Russia](#) June 17, 2022

⁷⁶ [Tucker: This is the single-most damaging thing any American president has ever done | Fox News](#) March 11, 2022

⁷⁷ [Address by the President of the Russian Federation](#) February 21, 2022

CONCLUSION

In the first five speeches regarding the war in Ukraine, Vladimir Putin portrayed how he sees the world, or at least how he would like it to be seen by others. Ukraine is placed in the middle of Russian and Western interests, showcasing the Western malign influence over historically Russian land and the prospect of Russia rising on the international arena as a greater power.

The world's order must be changed is the metanarrative under which fit the main concepts: Bad West and Good Russia. From Putin's perspective, globalization should be abandoned in favor of a multipolar system in which US influence is reduced, making room for major emerging economies (BRICS), especially for Russia and China. Putin blames the West for upcoming problems the world will face, including famine and emigration, and states that the world should reconsider international law, because today it is based on a set of rules imposed by the West.

While attacking Ukraine on the ground, Vladimir Putin has embarked on informational warfare against the US. He questions the legitimacy of the US dominance, accuses its leadership of failure and predicts a change in its ruling elites.

He characterizes the US as a destructive force: accusing it of expanding its influence in the world; changing international laws for its own benefit; manipulating European countries and NATO members; and of being an unreliable partner which ultimately threatens Russia's existence as a sovereign state through NATO enlargement into Ukraine.

Conversely, Putin talks about Russia as the bright force that fights for its own survival and against US expansion. He presents Russia as a powerful country that is marginalized by the West, is lied to, is a victim of the Western policies, and feels threatened by the prospect of a Ukraine in NATO. The latter narrative was a leading justification for the annexation of Crimea in 2014⁷⁸.

And this is the moment, when Ukraine comes into "the game".

Ukraine is presented by Putin as a wicked country dominated on all levels by foreign agents, mainly US, and exploited by the US for NATO expansion, politically compromised and weaponized by the West. He questions Ukraine's right to self-determination, blaming its nationhood on mistakes by the USSR's leadership and portrays the national movement in Ukraine as a disease. He questions the legitimacy of its leaders and accuses them of being Nazis who captured the state. According to Putin, Ukraine is

⁷⁸ [The Return of History: The Post-Soviet Space Thirty Years after the Fall of the USSR](#)

historically Russian land and an intrinsic part of Russian culture, where Russian speakers face oppression from nationalists supported by the West. He thereby creates the perception that Russia is going to save Ukraine from Western influence and bring it back to the bright side, enhancing at the same time its own security.

Despite using different arguments, Tucker Carlson is shaping basically the same perception as Putin: that the US is a threat to Russia and is to blame for the war in Ukraine; that Ukraine is a failed state and should obey Russia; and that the US is weak.

Carlson is pushing the theme that Russia is threatened by the US administration, using the same narratives as those identified in Putin's speeches. He says that the US threatens Russia by means of NATO expansion or by arming Ukraine, which ultimately triggered the Kremlin to start the invasion. Putin made the same argument on the day of the invasion by trying to convince people that war is needed to secure Russia: *"For our country, it is a matter of life and death, a matter of our historical future as a nation. [...] It is not only a very real threat to our interests but to the very existence of our state and to its sovereignty."*

Carlson also reinforces the idea that the US is at the very root of the growing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, by organizing the Maidan Revolution in 2014.

According to Carlson, the war in Ukraine is in fact a US proxy war with Russia that aims to change the Russian government. A war that was desired for a long time for a variety of reasons, including economic benefits for Biden's friends, family, and partners. So, while Russia was trying to pin all the blame for the causes of the invasion on the West, to justify that its actions in Ukraine were a legitimate defense, Tucker Carlson was pushing all those narratives from within.

Moreover, Carlson argues that the war is prolonged by the US on purpose, giving even more basis to the Russian message about its legitimate defense. Carlson as well as Putin is shaping the perception that the bad guy in this situation is the US.

Another common perception, shaped by both Putin and Carlson, is that the US is weak. Firstly, this is shaped by accusing Biden of senility, secondly by accusing him of failing to deter Putin from invading Ukraine. But there also are narratives common to Russian ones. For example, US elites are ignoring people's needs and are responsible for the economic crisis. This way Carlson promotes the idea that the US needs a change of ruling elites – an idea used by Putin as well.

The theme, "the West is weak", is used by Putin to build the metanarrative about the necessity of changing the global order. Carlson reduces it to the Biden administration,

sending the message that, if the Biden administration is not changed, the US will lose global leadership.

For both Putin and Carlson, the return of Donald Trump to the Oval Office is the best way forward. And the first step is to ensure Republicans gain as many seats as possible at the 2022 midterm elections for Congress.

Another common perception Carlson is shaping is that the US is threatening global stability by bringing the world to the brink of a new World War. Like Putin, Carlson first switches attention away from the war itself, and Russia's role in it, to the US, and secondly contributes to the perception that the US is a global hegemon dependent on a "senile" leader, which holds the future of the whole world in its hands. Another argument he uses and is common for Putin's narratives is that the US disregards international law and is ultimately responsible for the global economic crisis.

By building the narrative that in contrast to US, Russia has a "*evil leader*" but "*not a stupid*"⁷⁹ one and diminishing the role of Russia in the invasion as well as the consequences suffered by the whole world, Carlson contributes to the perception of a strong Russia. Carlson is using it to show the power of an authoritarian leader. But in the bigger picture it fits in with Putin's efforts to portray Russia as a bright force that can bring global stability.

Regarding Ukraine, while Putin is shaping the idea that it is a Nazi state, ruled by the West, Carlson reinforces it saying that it is the Biden administration's puppet. Even if Carlson doesn't say the country is ruled by Nazis, he reinforces the idea that it is led by people who seized power, calls Zelenskyy a dictator and Ukraine a tyranny. And while Putin implies that Ukraine should not even exist as a separate state, Carlson says that it should obey Russia. So just as Putin tries to persuade his audience of the necessity to save Ukraine from the West and the Nazi leaders it is sponsoring there, Carlson implies that Ukraine isn't a country worth helping because it is already a failed, undemocratic and corrupt state. A more than useful message for Russia.

Carlson's arguments, even if not exactly the same as those used by Russia,, are building a general perception about the US that fits perfectly into the map of themes Putin is pushing about the West. The perceptions built about Russia and Ukraine match only partially those shaped by Putin. Nevertheless, If a Russian exposed only at Vladimir Putin's speeches were to meet an American exposed only to Tucker Carlson shows, they would agree on the majority of issues related to the war in Ukraine. And this in the long term could be fertile soil for other Russian propaganda messages that nourish an

⁷⁹ Tucker Carlson: What does Joe Biden's 'Russia is Bad' class teach? | Fox News February 17, 2022

isolationist agenda, decrease the US role in international affairs, bring autocrats to power and create more space for Russia and China in the international arena. Because why try to diminish the US role from the outside when there are players that can be used to do it from within?

According to Jonathan Katz, director of Democracy Initiatives and a senior fellow with the German Marshall Fund in the US, Putin's anti-Western rhetoric has "... internal objectives for disinformation and external objectives in terms of propaganda that is not only transatlantic or in neighboring states; it is a global effort by him to shape an agenda to achieve his objectives," Katz told me in an interview.

The 2021 Global State Democracy Report⁸⁰ stated that the world is becoming more authoritarian and that democratic backsliding reached its height in the last ten years, including in the United States, along with other economic powers.

However, Laura Thornton argues that China has a more strategic approach to building a bipolar world than Russia. She told me the domestic issues that the US is now facing are of a great benefit for both autocratic regimes. "There is an appetite for a strong man in the US, and we see our democracy in decline. And that certainly benefits our adversaries, it benefits Russia, it benefits China. They would be delighted for us to implode and retract and stop playing a role in the world, and this serves their interests really well," Thornton said in an interview.

Tucker Carlson was not the only one by far to spread Russian messages regarding the war in Ukraine. It also included many Republican candidates for Congress, but the results appeared to show that Americans are relatively resilient. Sarah Baxter, the former Washington bureau chief of The Sunday Times, told me that "In the midterm elections, American voters proved they were resilient to Russian disinformation, but the results were still close and the Republicans now have control of the House of Representatives. With Donald Trump running for president again in 2024, we could be subjected to more pro-Russian messaging all the way to the next election," she said.

Informational warfare is deeply embedded in Russian culture⁸¹. It never ceases to operate. Combined with domestic issues and disinformation campaigns meant to bring autocrats to power, it can contribute to democratic backsliding even in well- established democracies.

⁸⁰ [Global State of Democracy Report 2021](#)

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https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/66597/20Dec_Bzishvili_Sandro.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Russian goals go beyond seizing Ukraine. The main line in Putin's speeches is that he wants to change the world order from one based on American leadership. And many experts agree that the world won't be the same after this war. Putin thinks he can achieve his goal by benefiting from a period marked by destabilization, thus creating a window of opportunity for Russia to rebuild its empire. Russia's attempt to decrease US influence in the world has had until now an opposite effect. The US regained trust, at least among EU countries. Nevertheless, Putin aims to further destabilize the US by striving for its destruction from the inside, because he blames the US for the destruction of the USSR from within. This is why Vladimir Putin and Kremlin propaganda will continue their informational warfare against the US, and can count on their allies inside the US.