

# THE DOPPELGÄNGER DOSSIER

Yesterday, one day short of 60 days before the November election, the US government did four things:

- Indicted two RT officials, Konstantin Kalashnikov and Elena Mikhaylovna Afanasyeva, and in the process exposed some right wing influencers to be useful idiots paid indirectly by RT.
- Unsealed the domain takedown affidavit for a bunch of sites used in a Russian fake news program, Doppelgänger.
- Imposed Treasury sanctions on RT and Doppelgänger, among other entities.
- Indicted Dmitri Simes and his spouse, Anastasia, on sanctions tied to Aleksander Udodov.

In this post, I want to lay out precisely what was included in the affidavit, before I have further comment on all four of these efforts.

Affidavit: The affidavit itself describes how Russia has been impersonating real media outlets, including the Washington Post and Fox News, that it uses to embed false stories supporting its attack on Ukraine. It bases the takedown on two claims. First, that by hiding the tie to top Putin aide, Sergei Kiriyenko, who was first sanctioned in March 2021, in response to the Aleksey Navalny poisoning, the propaganda effort violates sanctions regimes. The affidavit

also alleges that these fake sites traffic in counterfeit goods, basically fake news sites and news articles infringing on the trademarks of three real US outlets (WaPo, Fox, and Forward, including content pretending to come from real journalists).

As the affidavit describes, Russia is using far better operational security than it did in 2016, with nesting sets of Virtual Private Servers and emails at Protonmail rather than Google (though the RT people are still using Google).

The affidavit describes what must be documents stolen from someone's server, explaining several parts of the program, such as notes from meetings planning the operation, excerpts from western reporting on the Doppelgänger effort, and guidelines for how to accomplish the tasks, including via campaigns targeting Mexico and Israel.

About fifty pages of the affidavit lays out probable cause and lists the domains targeted. The affidavit was obtained on August 30.

Exhibit 1 Fake news stories: The first exhibit includes samples of the fake stories Russia used on their newsites, interspersed with stolen stories more detrimental to Russia. This fake story, published as Joe Biden tried to push a border bill tied to Ukraine funding, provides some idea of how closely this propaganda worked with US politics.



The stories in the fake Forward site show how Russia was trying to sow division regarding US involvement in Israel, which ties closely to two other documents included yesterday (Exhibits 12 and 13).

Exhibit 2 commentary on Doppelgänger: The Russians collected western commentary – from newspapers, security reports, and other NGOs. This includes excerpts that had been shared internally in Russian.

Exhibit 3 Work with Comments: This provides instruction on how to use comments to link back to the fake news sites.

Exhibit 4: Sample story: This is what the affidavit supposes is a story intended for one of the fake websites. It starts by claiming that “[Joe Biden’s] diplomacy has led the United States not only to the covert participation in the proxy war in Ukraine, but also to an open clash in the Middle East. [Joe Biden] destroyed the world he presented to the voters. It’s time for him to go.” The story comes with suggestions for how fake commenters on social media – pretending to be “an American living in a small town” – would pitch this story.

Exhibit 5: Recommended comments: Another example of a suggested comment from a fake American,

starting with the claim that, "The U.S. is a house of cards that is about to collapse."

Exhibit 6 Media plan: This is a longer, 26-page manual for targeting the Ukrainian public. It includes four goals:

- Undermining military and political leadership
- Discord among elites
- Loss of morale in the Ukrainian Armed Forces
- Sowing discord in the population

Exhibit 7 How to sow chaos in Germany and France: This document develops media strategies to maximize chaos in America's NATO allies. The two most interesting suggestions pertain to internal political chaos: recommending that Alternative for Deutschland (Germany's far right party) be treated as martyrs and stoking unhappiness after Emmanuel Macron raised the retirement age.

Internal political conflicts	After the staging of the "coup d'état", the German government essentially switched to a quiet repression of the AfD. Using all tools, we support the party by creating the image of martyrs suffering for democracy and Germany's national interests.	Almost 70% of French residents who were surveyed oppose raising the retirement age initiated by Foreign Official 8. We identify all criticizing publications related to the reform and provide them with additional traffic. Also, a number of analytical posts on mirror media outlets link raising the retirement age with the crisis caused by anti-Russian sanctions.
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Exhibit 8 Good Old USA: One of two sections focusing primarily on the United States, this document lays out the stakes for magnifying MAGAt views:

The current international environment is known for, first and foremost, severe hostility of the US towards Russia. The USA has been trying to maintain "the global leadership" by strategically defeating Russia. This desire shapes the financial investment, weapons supply, and efforts to keep the conflict in Ukraine going.

In the meantime, the key question in the US domestic policy remains the same: how

justified are these efforts? The further we go, the more politicians state that the US should target their effort towards addressing its domestic issues instead of wasting money in Ukraine and other “problem” regions.

This sentiment has become the centerpiece for the US 2024 presidential election campaign. While [Democrats] are still in power, they are trying to maintain the current foreign policy priorities. [Republicans,] still in opposition, have been criticizing these priorities.

It makes sense for Russia to put a maximum effort to ensure that the [Republicans’] point of view, first and foremost, the opinion of [Trump’s] supporters) wins over the US public opinion. This includes provisions on peace in Ukraine in exchange for territories, the need to focus on the problems of the US economy, returning troops home from all over the world, etc.

Public opinion polling results in the US indicate that the politics which we consider correct has a real chance to get approval of the majority of the US voters. [emphasis original]

It sets goals for polling percentage (for example, trying to move opposition to supporting Ukraine from 41% to 51%).

It treats Texas among the states (with Alabama, Kansas, Wyoming, and Louisiana) that it believes have traditional values that should support Republicans, and targets US citizens of Hispanic descent – and American Jews – specifically. It also identifies American gamers, as if they’re a big percentage of voters.

Aside from the misunderstanding of how close to purple Texas could become, this document matches

what Trump is doing, down to the focus on right wing podcasters (who would be favored by gamers) rather than traditional outlets. This document is one of several that made me ask if Paul Manafort has still been working with his Russian buddies.

Exhibit 9 Guerrilla media: This is another document targeting the US. It notes that Biden at that point (the precise dates of these documents is not entirely clear) had approval lower than 40%, but doesn't mention Trump's approval, which would be little better. It also repeats right wing claims that the media is 75% skewed to the Democratic party. As I'll return to, this document repeatedly claims that social media moderation amounts to censorship of Republicans.

Exhibit 10 Social Media influencers: This document proposes setting up a network of 200 fake Xitter accounts, four each in every state, to push Russian propaganda.

Exhibit 11 A Mexican pass to Trump: This document proposes creating artificial tension on the border by stoking (alleged) Mexican opposition to the US.

The [Trump] who was building a border wall; the [Trump] who talked about the problem of migrants coming from the South pretty much all the time throughout his presidency; and the [Trump], to whom the ball needs to be passed conveniently in order to switch the American political discussion – that [Trump] is so much in need of an exacerbated confrontation with Mexico.

Yet the document bemoans that the growth of the US economy is the biggest problem for Trump's campaign.

Exhibit 12 The Comprehensive Information Outreach Project in Israel: This attempts to stoke fear of Nazis to lead Israelis to side with Russia over Ukraine. It likens opposition

to Bibi Netanyahu to Maidan. It doesn't appear to mention that Volodymyr Zelenskyy is Jewish.

Exhibit 13 Disaster 23: The US will soon have its hands full with issues other than Israel: This document purports to pose as an Israeli worried that civil war in the US (in response to the effort to boot Trump off the ballot in Colorado) is inevitable, which would leave Israel isolated.

Update: Corrected translation for AfD party.