

# **How Ukraine is Winning the Information War against Russia in 2022**

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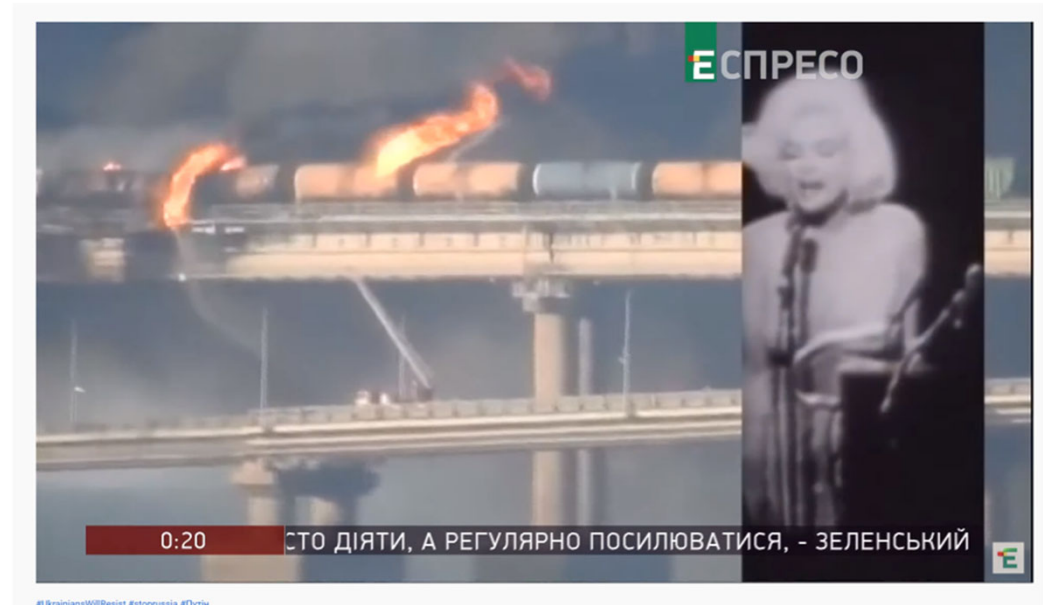
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ASIST Symposium  
Who are the Guardians of Truth and  
Integrity?

## 228<sup>th</sup> day of the war

- One of the way to define a state when people are ready to die for it
- Ukraine exists, the question is does Russia exist in this sense?
- Crimea bridge damaged: the best protected from air, land and under the water
- Ukrainians are joking: Putin's birthday present, "Happy birthday, mr. President"

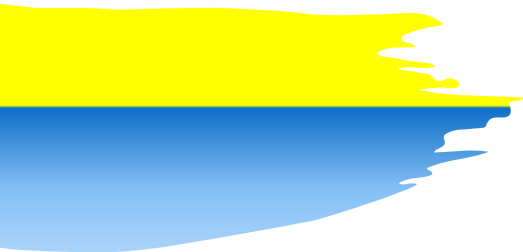




## Ukraine became a real place for the world

- February 24, 2022
  - Full scale military invasion by Russia's army (allegedly #2 in the world)
  - With absurdly false narrative as justification that Ukraine does not exist and must be de-nazified
  - Converting to Christianity over a thousand years ago, when neither Russia or Ukraine existed.
  - Democracy vs. authoritarian
  - Fighting for the right to exist, for survival
  - Symbolizes the world struggle







Goal of any war – eliminate the enemy



**1. Information  
Influence**


**2. Moral  
Disarmament**

**3. Physical  
Neutralization**



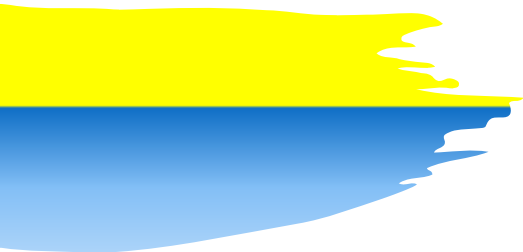
# Ukraine exists

- Ukraine vs. Russia: known entity vs. ?
- Used to be not seen, confused with Russia
- Outsiders not sure about the borders
- Jewish president
  - Interesting fact: First settlers on the territory what is now Ukraine were Greeks and Tatars in the south
  - Later the two main groups emerge -- Ukrainians and Jews
    - Ethnicities with strong identities but unclear geographical borders



## Memoricide – killing of memory. History repeating...

- Massive grain theft – threat of hunger, new Holodomor in Southern and Eastern Ukraine (Kherson, Melitopol, Berdiansk...)
- Filtration camps – humiliating human rights (imprisoning/kidnapping people for their pro-Ukrainian position)
- Destroying cultural objects:
  - Skovoroda museum (Kharkiv oblast)
  - Taras Shevchenko monument (Borodyanka, Kyiv oblast)
  - Sviatohirsk Lavra (Donetsk oblast)
- Burning history books (Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia oblast)



## Destroying cultural objects

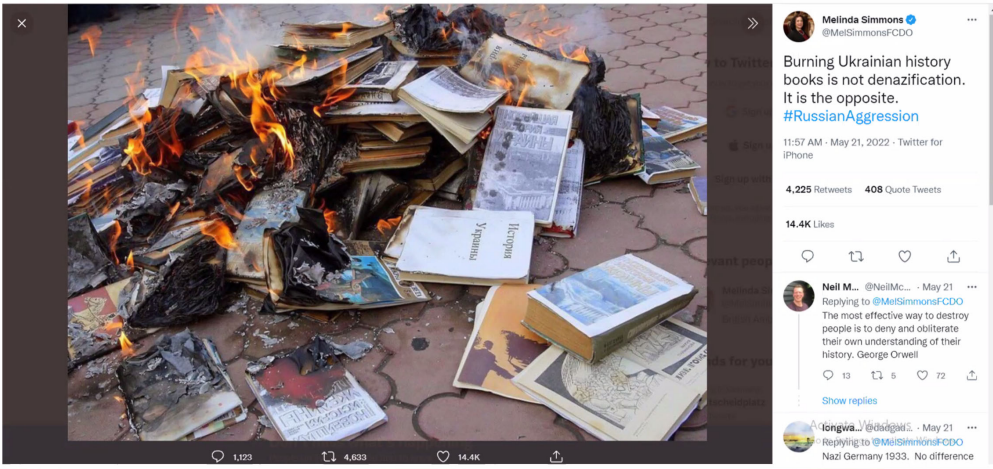


Skovoroda museum (Kharkiv oblast)



Taras Shevchenko monument  
(Borodyanka, Kyiv oblast)

## Killing the history – burning the books







# Putin's nostalgia for the Soviet Union

- Suppressing the truth
- KGB rules
- Underlying belief that truth exists and must be hidden
- Dissidents, political prisoners
- KGB tactics prevail
- Using western technologies and manipulating democratic principles
- More information does not mean equality, does not mean everybody are united
- Polarization of the world
- Number of victories for Putin



# Polarized world

- The plurality does not lead to better debate and democracy
- The best information does not float to the top
- Holding the truth to the powerful
  - Fact checking lying politicians: does not work universally
    - Naive thinking that having evidence will make people believe what is true
    - People choose what fits their biases
    - Theory of rational choices does not work
    - People self-select their own reality: what fits their cultural identity
    - Having lots of sources DOES NOT lead to better understanding between people

# Short History of Russia's Information Warfare in 21<sup>st</sup> century

- Russia's unparalleled web of special operation
  - Upheaving Europe,
    - Britain, Spain, France, Italy
    - by funding clandestine campaigns of ultra-right nationalist movements
  - Many stories of success
- And yet poorly built military "special operation" in Ukraine
- Poorly understood Ukrainians
- Hoped that Kyiv would fall in 3 days
- Arrived with uniforms ready for the triumphant parades



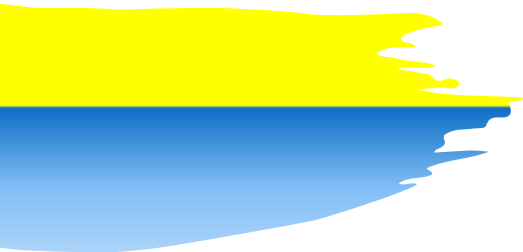
# Why are Ukrainians winning the information war?

- The fact that Kyiv did not fall was a surprise for many military experts, except historians who know Ukrainian history
- History of struggle for independence
  - Breaking free from serfdom (kosaks)
  - From the empire
- Independence is a process
- The last 30 years after the collapse is just another iteration
  - People feel truly independent after 2014
  - The war strengthened the Ukrainian identity



## Why are Ukrainians winning the information war?

- Russian propaganda: Ukrainian population is targeted by various sources of propaganda
- Propaganda from Russian agents in Ukraine
- Ordinary people coming together,
  - strong **horizontal web of networks**
  - and everyone has their place in the war effort: from farmers to grannies
  - Before the war: Entrepreneurial society of individuals,
  - The government structures
    - Were not integrated with the civil society
  - Russia does not have this element in their society



# Why are Ukrainians winning the information war?

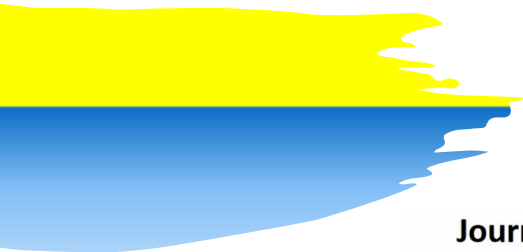
- First stages of the war for people's minds
  - Excessively important
- **Ukrainians are united:**
  - united through hardships, resilience and tolerance
- We are united when we come under attack
  - Can rely on our neighbors to get through
  - Very strong horizontal network of people
- Open mind
  - Acceptance of others and their differences
- Ability to negotiate differences and unifying in a face of danger is an archetypal Ukrainian character



# Why are Ukrainians winning the information war?

- United the world
- United bipartisan support in the United States
- Farmer in Wyoming can relate to a farmer in Ukraine
- Nation of do-ers
- Independent individual spirit





Journalism standards as a victim and a tool for disinformation and propaganda in the times of war

## POWER OF INFORMATION



← Твіт

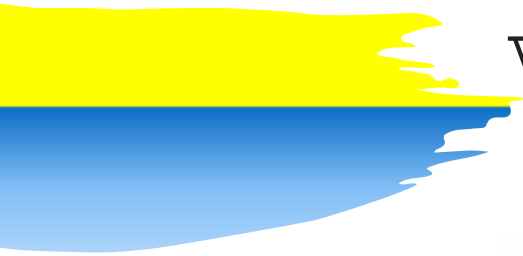
Михайло Подоляк   
@Podolyak\_M

Яворів. Міжнародний центр миротворчості та безпеки. Україна захищатиме себе. Добровільно. Масово. Незалежно від віку й соціального статусу. Заради сімей та дітей. Доказ цьому – переповнені добровольцями полігони та військкомати! Усе тільки починається...



1:20 пп · 6 бер., 2022 · Twitter Web App

252 Ретвіти 15 твітів із цитатою 2 105 Уподобань



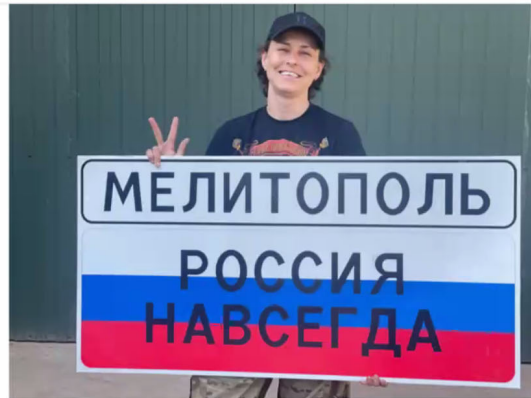
Уважаемые жители Мелитополя,  
впервые за многие годы

## Soviet symbols, narrative of “Forever Big and Great” Russia

**LIFE** НОВОСТИ РАССЛЕДОВАНИЯ WOW ДИЧЬ СТАТЬИ МНЕНИЯ СПЕЦПРОЕКТЫ ВИДЕО

### В освобожденном Мелитополе подняли Знамя Победы впервые за много лет

**LIFE** НОВОСТИ РАССЛЕДОВАНИЯ WOW ДИЧЬ СТАТЬИ МНЕНИЯ СПЕЦПРОЕКТЫ ВИДЕО



Певец Клим Черненко принимает участие в замене въездного знака в Мелитополь. Фото © Telegram / Клим Черненко

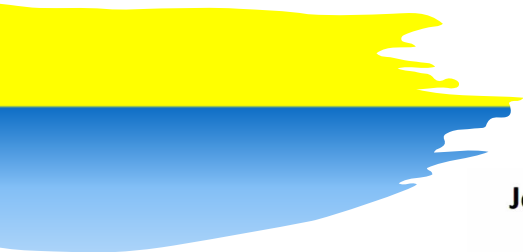


Знамя Победы на центральной площади Мелитополя. Фото © Telegram / Администрация города Мелитополя

## Narratives of “Russia-Ukraine brotherhood” abroad – advertising in Vienna, Austria



- Promotes reconciliation between Russia and Ukraine – equating the aggressor and the victim
- Abusive and inappropriate for Ukrainians



Journalism standards as a victim and a tool for disinformation and propaganda in the times of war

## IT'S ALL ABOUT WORDS, MEANINGS AND AGENDA?

Hate speech?

Peace journalism?

New terminology is acceptable for Ukrainian media.

And a part of the story for international media.

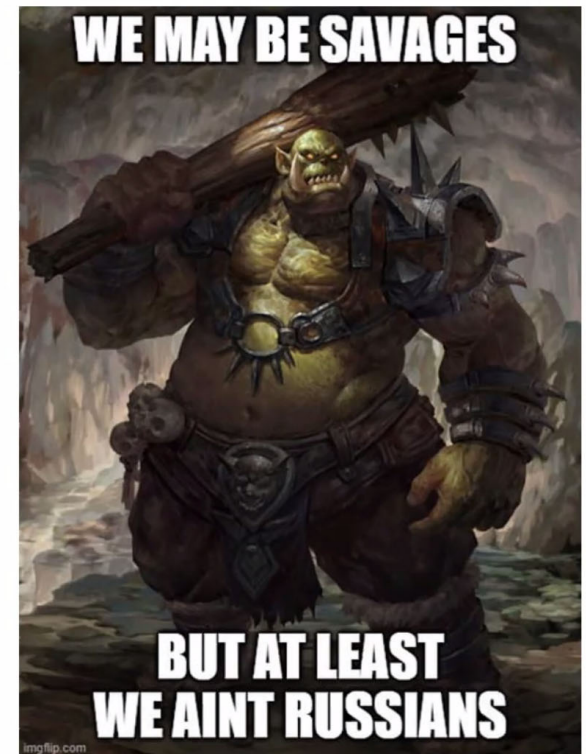




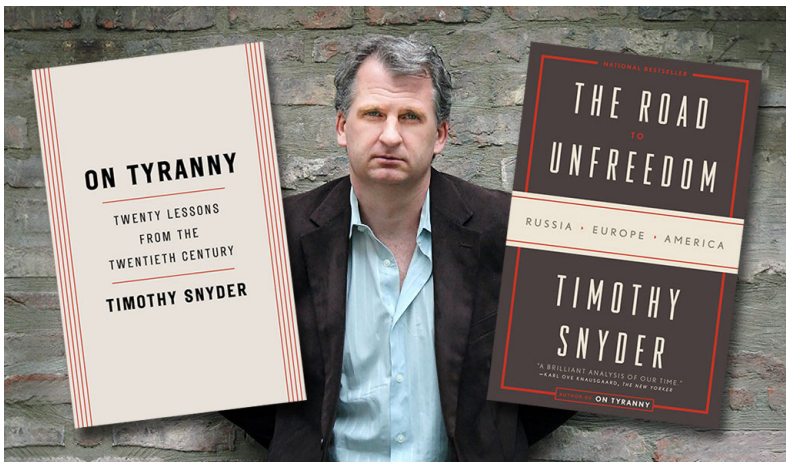
## What about Ukrainian media vocabulary?

- Russcism (Russian fascism)
- Russcists (Russian military)
- Orcs (Russian soldiers)
- Horde (Russian army)
- Russcist Federation (Russian Federation)
- Mordor (Russian Federation)

Dehumanizing vocabulary,  
abusive swearing – is it ok for news?



# Politics of time



- Politics of inevitability
  - 90s, policies for the future, progressive era, climate change is acknowledged and policies for the future are made
- Politics of eternity
  - MAGA period, focusing on the great past, as the age of greatness and “real Americans” being in charge, trying to reverse climate change policies, no policies for the future
- Politics of catastrophe
  - There is no future, nothing matters, military conf
- Russia is ahead of the world
  - But the world does not have to follow
- Climate change
  - If the West would switch to alternative energy earlier
  - Carbon Emperor would not have risen



## Conclusions

- More than ever before, counter messaging is about listening rather than talking
- Understanding local needs and motivations
  - Particular media environments and social networks—holds the key to success.
  - Audiences are more fractured than ever
    - but up-to-date sociology and big-data analysis also allow us to understand more about audiences than ever. Simply “blasting” single messages at audiences is naive and could well be counterproductive.
- RT, Sputnik are banned
  - In many European countries
  - IN Ukraine was turned off in 2014 through the courts
- Information Literacy on a large scale

# Thank you

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