

THE RUSSIAN SPECIAL SERVICES' SUPPORT TO PRESIDENT PUTIN

During the war in Ukraine, the Russian special services have deliberated and concocted messages to help explain Russia's actions to its citizens and show the president in a favourable light.

The messages justify Putin's actions in Ukraine and create an image of him as an astute leader with foresight but, at the same time, lack objectivity and context and are often subject to public ridicule.

The prevailing view in the Russian special services is that by persistently lying and feeding conspiracy theories, sometimes hinting at the involvement of special services to add mystery, they can continue to speak to a certain segment of society.

The war in Ukraine has put the Russian special services in an unprecedented situation. The problems they need to address now include the sentiment of Russian citizens. At the same time, they also want to express their loyalty to the country's leadership and President Putin. There was a tense period at the beginning of the war as it became clear that a surprise attack would not succeed. Tensions rose again when a partial mobilisation was announced in September, just a few weeks before the president's 70th birthday..

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In September 2022, the Russian special services were still busy gathering ideas for updating the material used to celebrate President Putin's services to Russia. The material includes old talking points praising Putin, previously used in the 2018 presidential election campaign, which have become a laughingstock in the media as they repeat the existing narrative based on questionable statements and outright lies. The intended effect was to convince the audience of Russia's continued great military and economic capabilities and good intentions toward its own people and the Ukrainians.

Here are a couple of examples of the outrageous and unoriginal statements that served as the starting point for the special services' brainstorming:

1. During his rule, Putin has increased Russia's GDP 12-fold.
2. Putin has increased Russia's gold reserves 48-fold.



FSB director Aleksandr Bortnikov (left), President Vladimir Putin, and SVR director Sergey Naryshkin; to Russian special services, a good relationship with the President is of the utmost importance.

Source: Alexei Druzhinin / AP

In 2022, the special services continued to feed the target group with primitive and hackneyed tropes that frame the president's unpopular decisions as a cunning tactic against opposing countries. Let's look at some of the new ideas added during the year:

1. Russia is the world's largest supplier of titanium and palladium, thanks to which the Russians can do without Western cars and planes.
2. Russia imposed a flight ban over its airspace in response to the West's similar actions, which is why Western countries must spend significantly more time and money to fly to Asia.
3. Russia's special operation is destroying laboratories in Ukraine where the United States, Germany, and France developed biological weapons.
4. With the mutual closure of media channels, the West ruined its opportunities to influence the Russian audience.
5. The Western countries' continued solidarity and support for Ukraine are driven by the desire to subjugate Ukraine to gain access to its grain, mineral resources, and cheap labour.

Russian special services' eagerness to invent propaganda points and disseminate them to the public often overstretches their capabilities.