Centre for Information Resilience

The Digital Winter Offensive: How the Kremlin and other bad actors are cultivating 'Ukraine Fatigue', and how to combat it

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1.

Executive summary

Ukraine Fatigue has been posited as a risk factor since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, with possible effects ranging from disengagement by the West and ultimate withdrawal of financial and material aid, to resentment and eventual abandonment of Ukrainian refugees across Europe.

Whilst the Kremlin's assumption that this would set-in quickly and see a reduction in aid to Ukraine were wrong, the impact is uneven across European countries.[1] Given critical factors such as winter and an energy crisis triggered by the Kremlin[2] there is significant potential for the balance to quickly shift in Moscow's favour, particularly if one or more smaller countries can be convinced to withdraw support and this triggers a domino effect.

Most reporting on Ukraine Fatigue appears superficial at best; there is acknowledgement that 'it' is a potential or even current problem, but in the research community and media there have been few concrete attempts to define, or suggestions for how to mitigate, the phenomenon.

CIR specialises in exposing and countering the use of influence operations by hostile foreign and domestic actors – in particular, the Kremlin. Though Russia's military has been shown to be lacking, it remains an adept adversary in the realm of hybrid warfare, having built its networks and capabilities across geographies, languages, and media over many decades.

The Kremlin's strategic communications efforts have been poor throughout the war, but CIR analysts have assessed that Russia has coalesced around a 'Winter offensive' that utilises Ukraine Fatigue to encourage populations and their political leaders to reduce or even stop material and monetary support for Ukraine. With this support, Ukraine has been able to hold and even retake territory; without it, Ukraine may last several months, or a year, but likely no longer.

Using a mixed methodology of a literature review, expert interviews, and social/media analysis, this paper will examine Russia's use of Ukraine Fatigue under the broader umbrella of Compassion Fatigue, including case studies where these techniques were previously employed. It will discuss nascent attempts to counter the deliberate deployment and exploitation of Compassion Fatigue, and make recommendations to governments supporting Ukraine as they seek to craft programming and messaging in response to the ongoing Russian campaign. Ultimately, while the Russian campaign to exacerbate Ukraine Fatigue is novel in many ways, the messaging war is not yet lost; allied nations still have opportunities to maintain and even bolster support for Ukraine.

"Ukraine Fatigue" as a complex, multi-factor problem

Whilst appearing regularly in reporting, "Ukraine Fatigue" itself has been poorly defined, and this lack of understanding has meant that few solutions have come to the fore. CIR's investigation has found that it is a multifaceted issue, the largest but by no means sole component of which is "Compassion Fatigue". Other contributing factors include: an increase in day-to-day hardships for most ordinary people, due to the cost of living crisis; the architecture of the internet in 2022/23; and, seemingly, the first time an adversary as well-equipped (digitally) as the Kremlin has attempted to exploit the phenomenon at scale.

"Ukraine Fatigue" Narratives Gaining Traction

To inform the launch of campaigns countering Ukraine Fatigue, CIR and its partners investigated key narratives that either directly amplify Ukraine Fatigue, or that could contribute to it, in six countries. The main narrative categories identified in this research are: 'narratives pertaining to support for Ukrainian refugees'—often expressing refugee resentment—'narratives pertaining to support for the Ukrainian

government and the defense of Ukraine'—often highlighting alleged corruption in Ukraine or the impact of the war in Ukraine on host countries—and 'narratives pertaining to the perceived hypocrisy of supporting Ukraine or Ukrainians'—often expressing conspiratorial allegations about NATO hegemony or whataboutism related to alleged Ukrainian or Western crimes against Russia or other populations.

"Ukraine Fatigue" actors converging

There is a clear internationalisation of Ukraine Fatigue related narratives. These are being picked up by domestic actors across both language and territory, as well as across the Right/ Left divide. Indeed, it appears that this is providing an opportunity for the extremes of both sides to come together. The talking points of, for example, Tucker Carlson (a far-right U.S. commenter with one of the largest global audiences) are similar to those of Clare Daly (a far-left Irish MEP) and both are shared liberally with audiences in multiple – crucially non-English speaking – countries. The architecture of the modern internet makes this close to inevitable, and also provides rich new seams for the Kremlin to exploit. As has been seen with COVID-19 it is also fertile ground for bad actors without direct connections to the Kremlin to profit. Indeed, there appears to be significant overlap between the antivaxx movement and those who oppose supporting Ukraine.

Recommendations and Conclusions

In support of policy goals in Ukraine and worldwide, Western authorities should address Ukraine Fatigue head-on. Campaigns that peg parts of the energy crisis to Putin's deliberate strategic goals, for example, or those that demonstrate gratitude amongst Ukrainian refugees, among other themes, are likely to sustain empathy for the Ukrainian cause. In addition to supporting campaigns directed at the target countries identified for this pilot, consideration should be given to expanding the remit of strategic communications campaigns aimed at blunting Ukraine Fatigue in the Global South and Anglosphere, as well as at investing in other programmes, such as the support of volunteer organisations, to ensure continued support for Kyiv and its citizens.

2.1

Defining 'fatigue(s)'

The simplicity of the term Ukraine Fatigue belies an extremely complex interplay between multiple 'fatigues', which are usually considered distinct from each other and addressed through psychology or communications theory separately. Further, most of these concepts have not been interrogated through the lens of an adversary (or in the case of domestic actors, adversaries) that is willing to exploit them at scale. This is also true of the counterpoint; they appear not to have been researched with a view to countering them at the pace and scale required in the current conflict.

Compassion Fatigue

For the purposes of this paper, we will define Compassion Fatigue as the public's, policymakers', or the media's disengagement with a crisis of human suffering – for instance, a war, famine, disease, or natural disaster. Initially identified as an issue affecting caregivers in various sectors,[3] compassion (or empathy) fatigue has also been used as a term to more broadly cover the impact of referred empathy on difficult subjects over a sustained period.[4] This intersects with many

other 'fatigues', below, but is likely the critical underpinning of what is currently described as Ukraine Fatigue. Acknowledging 'fatigue' in this context is essential to understanding how broad, largely sympathetic audiences may be affected by a further prolonged conflict.

In the seminal book, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War, and Death*, author Susan Moeller writes that Compassion Fatigue "acts as a prior restraint on the media. Editors and producers don't assign stories and correspondents don't cover events that they believe will not appeal to their readers and viewers."[5] Media coverage, which drives the knowledge of and pressure on government policymakers, then sets the policy agenda. "What really makes a difference in the foreign policy equation," writes Moeller, "is how long the [stories or photographs of a particular crisis] continue to have prominence in the news and how effective those pictures are in illustrating a political stance: save the starving Somalis, rescue the imprisoned Bosnians."[6]

This intersects with another phenomenon in communications theory, known as the 'Spiral of Silence',whereby individuals are more or less likely to express their opinion if they perceive that the wider public agrees or disagrees with it.[7] The "spiral" is potentially challenged by social and digital media, which allows for otherwise 'unpopular' opinions to be aired and, seemingly, to find support.[8] In the context of Ukraine, should the Kremlin produce sufficient (often manipulated) content throughout the lengthy war, it is possible that those who oppose Ukraine and/ or support Russia for whatever personal, political or financial reason may become emboldened to voice their opinions, encouraging others and creating a critical mass that feeds into wider Compassion Fatigue.

There are a number of other, related forms of fatigue. These are listed below.

1. Refugee Fatigue

Sometimes called 'Refugee Resentment', this speaks to the perception that refugees are not sufficiently grateful, that they are taking resources unfairly, or that they are otherwise consuming resources needed for domestic populations.[9] Factors driving refugee resentment are often policy-related and are not easily overcome through strategic communications (as will be discussed further in the recommendations section).

2. Social[10]/Media Fatigue

Media Fatigue does not necessarily have to be 'horror' related, such as war or famine. Longitudinal studies suggest that seemingly intractable news and political issues appear to be the most problematic, with recent examples including Brexit and COVID-19.[3] Apathy, leading to Compassion Fatigue, may follow.[4] This is strongly related to Information Fatigue.

3. Information Fatigue

Concerns about Information Fatigue are reportedly "as old as information itself",[11] as technology and vectors of information distribution evolve. However, for the purposes of Ukraine Fatigue, perhaps the most salient effect to bear in mind when countering its exploitation and impact is that being overwhelmed by data and sources on a topic can lead users to be "less systematic and less thorough"[12] in their search strategies when seeking information. It may also make users less able to discern quality information from propaganda, which has been repeatedly used by the Kremlin through its "firehose of falsehood" model, which is "rapid, continuous and repetitive" and "entertains, confuses and overwhelms the audience" rather than informing them.[13]

4. Volunteer Fatigue

Volunteer Fatigue is a further subset of Compassion Fatigue, although it is distinct enough in the context of the war in Ukraine to require specific attention. Since the full-

scale invasion began, volunteers have been assisting Ukrainians, either by helping them pass through their country or helping them settle in a second country. Volunteer Fatigue has been previously interrogated through the lens of NGOs and charities,[14] but not on a scale this vast. Whilst many states have stepped up to provide support directly to Ukraine, or directly to Ukrainian refugees in host countries, volunteers still provide a major lifeline to the refugees as they arrive and settle. Should this strand of support buckle, there will be a serious knock-on effect in terms of service delivery and meeting refugees' everyday needs. The collapse of volunteer support may also fuel Kremlin propaganda, reinforcing Refugee Resentment and targeting vulnerable populations in the host country, abroad, and even in Ukraine.

5. Donor Fatigue

Donor Fatigue is the point at which individual or state-level donations to charities reduce or cease.[15] Significant effort is put into countering it by the third sector. A critical lesson from previous examples of Donor Fatigue appears to be relatively simple: "Compassion Fatigue happens when your donors hear heartbreaking stories without enough news about progress".[16] Indeed, the 2008 Russo-Georgian War generated self-reported "Georgia Fatigue" among transatlantic allies, which reduced support of Tbilisi's reform efforts in the war's aftermath.[17] Further contributing factors to Donor Fatigue may include "pressure to donate, overstretched budgets, and frustration with mis-managed charities and donation campaigns".[18]

The cost of living crisis is placing even more pressure on domestic budgets across Europe. This compounds the need to show progress; the support Ukraine has been receiving must not be wasted, or perceived to be wasted. Ukraine's historical challenges addressing corruption may be exploited to increase Ukraine Fatigue;l – American Congressmen have already made such arguments.[19] As such, alongside demonstrating that donated resources are leading to progress, it may be beneficial to show Ukraine's progress in combating corruption.[20]

6. War Fatigue

Historically relating to the psychological trauma suffered by soldiers over sustained periods of fighting, War Fatigue is resonant in the Ukraine context. This is a hybrid war and the noncombatant Ukrainian diaspora play a significant role in building understanding about the war in host countries and what local populations can do.[21] As authentic voices with a foot in both Ukraine and their host country, they can have a powerful impact. But they understandably suffer from many of the same psychological effects as soldiers, including the loss of their home, and vicarious trauma from seeing atrocities, even if from afar.[22]

2.2

The Kremlin's Use of Compassion Fatigue

As part of its influence campaigns, the Kremlin capitalises on hot-button, divisive issues in Western societies, to drive polarisation and disengagement from the international community, in particular in responding to autocratic behaviour.[23] Moscow has focused its efforts on electoral politics, gun rights[24] and racism[25] in the United States, the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom,[26] and the coronavirus pandemic,[27] among other issues, elsewhere. It has traditionally used misleading, hyperpartisan, or emotive coverage from state media outlets such as RT and Sputnik; narrative laundering from state-run media and government organised NGOs (GONGOs) or pseudo-experts into authentic local media; false amplifiers and paid advertising on social media; and/or direct monetary support to media outlets, political parties, and online influencers.[28]

The internet not only provides the Russian Federation with an effective method through which to target the audiences most vulnerable to false or misleading narratives; it provides an opportunity for Moscow to influence public sentiment around issues relating to human suffering, where Compassion Fatigue is prevalent. Communications scholar and author of *Compassion Fatigue*, Susan Moeller notes that there is a "one-crisis-at-a-time principle inherent in Compassion Fatigue."[29] This dynamic benefits Russia and other actors who frequently deploy whataboutism as part of their rhetorical toolkit. While the "mainstream," Western news media focusses on one crisis, Russian media and Russia-aligned individuals attempt to redirect the online audience's attention to other suffering, especially if it is or was perpetrated, abetted, or even ignored by the West. Compassion Fatigue—especially when boosted by online disinformation—is thus becoming a potent and attractive tool in Moscow's influence campaigns. This isparticularly true vis-à-vis its war in Ukraine, where it faces a comparatively resilient Kyiv and a united West.

2.3

Recent Examples of Compassion Fatigue

Since the mid 2010s, the Russian Federation has employed Compassion Fatigue to influence populations and policy in Europe, notably during the illegal annexation of Crimea and the early years of the Ukraine war, and the refugee crisis resulting from the Syrian civil war. Examples of Compassion Fatigue outside those (definitively) exploited by Russia also provide important lessons, such as the war in Afghanistan and the subsequent takeover by the Taliban. Other pertinent examples have informed the recommendations below, including: the 'rush' to declare political solutions present in Somalia since at least 1991;[30] the Biafra war as one of the earliest examples of mass telecommunication covering these kinds of events;[31] and the effects of 'Bosnia Fatigue' decades after the war.[32]

Illegal Annexation of Crimea, 2014

The lead up to the Russian Federation's illegal annexation of Crimea is now a familiar story, although in 2014, with a lack of clarity on the ground stemming from Russian manipulation of the information space, it was anything but. A dearth of information, combined with a complex, unfamiliar history and a feeling of a lack of proximity to Europe, meant that few in Europe had compassion for the Crimean plight, either just after the

annexation or beyond. Compassion Fatigue was the status quo, not a desired outcome for the Kremlin. Indeed, English language search results about "Crimea fatigue" refer entirely to fatigue toward Putin's activities within the domestic Russian population, rather than the international community.[33]

Russia's adept manipulation of the information space surrounding its illegal annexation of Crimea laid the groundwork for a lack of attention to the events in the long term. Moscow famously used "polite people" or "little green men"— soldiers without insignia on their uniforms—in its bloodless takeover of the peninsula. In the early days of the annexation, it was difficult for the news media to definitively ascertain whose orders the soldiers were carrying out, as Russia denied that the forces had any connection to Moscow.[34] When the Kremlin later conducted its sham referendum, news consumers were exposed to the falsehood that Crimean voters wanted to be part of Russia[35]. In short, the Kremlin's disinformation campaign removed urgency from the situation, causing any passing interest audiences may have had to quickly dissipate.

Furthermore, the historical and cultural conditions underlying the illegal annexation of Crimea contributed to the distance that European audiences may have felt. Mainstream knowledge of the Budapest Memorandum and its implications was not widespread, and short summaries of the events leading up to its ratification in 1994 might seem to support the Russian narrative that Crimea had "always been" part of Russia. In addition, the suffering of the Crimean Tatars, who had previously been expelled from their ancestral homeland during the Second World War – and were now being persecuted again during the illegal Russian occupation – was also poorly known, and was less likely to inspire affinity within Christian European audiences (as Tatar peoples are predominantly Muslim).

Human rights abuses on the peninsula, as well as forced disappearances, have continued in the eight-year period since the annexation, to little fanfare. As Susan Moeller notes, "to shake [audiences] out of their lassitude, there needs to be enough photographs often enough and different enough that the public is prompted to care, but not so many and so repetitive that [they] are inundated by a backwash of misery and horror."[36] Without compelling photographs of atrocities or conflict in Crimea— instead, just a narrative of "polite people" initiating a bloodless transfer of power and little trustworthy reporting out of the peninsula thereafter—paired with the physical and cultural distance Western audiences felt from Crimea, it was difficult to capture public attention.

Given these circumstances, Moscow did not have to inspire "Crimea fatigue" in order to achieve its policy goals. It needed only to continue to obscure the facts of the annexation – leading most Europeans to throw up their hands – to achieve a fait accompli.

Syrian Refugee Crisis

Now in its eleventh year, the Syrian Civil War has created the century's largest refugee crisis, with over six million Syrians internationally displaced, and another six-million or more displaced from their homes inside Syria. Despite this unprecedented level of need, the UN Refugee Agency refers to the crisis as a "silent one" that has now receded from headlines and policy priorities.[37] Yet Syrian refugees continue to make the dangerous journey from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe, albeit in smaller numbers that at the refugee crisis's peak. Others remain in refugee camps, stuck in bureaucratic limbo and living with limited access to basic services such as healthcare and education.

This example of Compassion Fatigue has been an instrumental element of Russian foreign and communications policy since Moscow's interventions in Syria in 2015. Capitalising on Refugee Fatigue, experts have argued that one of Russia's goals in its involvement in the Syrian conflict was to drive further migration to Europe and destabilise the continent.[38] [39]

This goal is made plain through the focus of Russian information campaigns during the

height of the crisis. Perhaps the most famous example is that of the so-called "Lisa Case," during which allegations of the rape of a Russian-German teenager, "Lisa," by an Arab migrant, enraged the public and "dominated the headlines and impacted on German public discussion for two weeks in January 2016."[40] Though the German police eventually confirmed no such rape had taken place, the fabrications were amplified through coordinated Russian information networks, including: coverage on Pervyi Kanal, Russia's state broadcaster; amplification through the Kremlin's foreign networks, including RT, Sputnik, and RT Deutsch; dissemination of the coverage via right-wing groups online; the organisation of demonstrations via Facebook events "involving representatives of the German-Russian minority (Deutschlandrussen) as well as neo-Nazi groups"; reporting on said demonstrations, including through mainstream German media; and amplification by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in two public statements.[41]

Germany was not the only country Russia targeted with anti-refugee rhetoric. In Czechia, for example, a 'news' article by "Bez Politicke Korektnosti" ("Without Political Correctness") exemplified the type of content circulating at the time: "Czech MP would rather there were 5 million Muslim migrants in the Czech Republic than 5 million voters of Czech president Miloš Zeman". The article was based on a fake Facebook profile claiming to represent the MP Dominik Feri.[42] Aeronet, a pro-Russian news forum, claimed that "the Czech Republic is undergoing Islamisation with the help of the state,"[43] while other outlets claimed that a "Czech army brigade will be commanded by German Bundeswehr. This is part of the German effort to dominate Europe and prevent the national states from protecting themselves against future waves of migrants."[44]

Using Compassion Fatigue coupled with scarcity mindsets and fear of a lost national identity, these narratives capitalise not only on antimigrant sentiment, but on distrust towards Brussels and towards "progressive," pro-migrant policies such as Germany's approach. While it is unlikely that Russia's weaponisation of Compassion Fatigue wholly precipitated anti-migrant sentiment in Europe in the mid 2010s, these events demonstrate Russia's awareness of the phenomenon and willingness to use it—as Moscow uses other divisive issues—to further its foreign policy goals.

Afghanistan and the U.S. Withdrawal

The U.S. led war in Afghanistan – and the Compassion Fatigue evident during the withdrawal – form an apt contrast with the war in Ukraine. This comparison demonstrates that Compassion Fatigue is contextual to the audience(s) it affects. That is, no two populations will experience Compassion Fatigue in the same way, due to differing proximity, affinities, and other contextual factors.

Time is the most important structural factor that has affected both compassion and fatigue regarding the war-turned-humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. This decades-long crisis has struggled with waning media attention, diminishing financial assistance, and lower levels of sympathy from foreign governments and populations.[45] Geographical distance is another key structural factor that has deeply impacted foreign audiences' compassion toward Afghans. Both scholars and journalists argue that, without pre-existing knowledge of a people or region, populations struggle with compassion generation.[46]

While the war in Ukraine is still relatively new, its novelty may wane in the face of mounting economic and political woes in Europe and North America. Ukraine's proximity to Europe is an advantage in the battle to stop this happening. Many Ukraine-aligned countries share a border with Ukraine, Russia, or both. The war is therefore not easily ignored.

Affinity, Proximity, and Emotions

One of the most obvious drivers of Compassion Fatigue is demographic or social affinity. Or, more specifically, ethnic, racial, religious, and/or cultural differences between a conflict's victims and observers.[47] Populations in Western countries in particular have been less

enthusiastic about aiding Afghan victims due to a lack of common identity[48]. In some cases, this issue has been so extreme as to amount to racism and Islamophobia, issues that were pervasive among Western populations and media during the war.[49]

Afghanistan's geographical distance from many states, and the decades-long length of the crises there, exacerbate these demographic differences.

Critics of the global, and especially Western, responses to the war in Ukraine have contrasted the apathy and even hostility given to Afghan victims and the kindness given to Ukrainian victims. A study reviewed for this report demonstrated that Compassion Fatigue often depends on whether war victims were perceived as "worthy", a status that may hinge on whether a common identity—race, religion, etc—is shared with a victim. Despite its positive role in lessening Compassion Fatigue towards Ukrainians, this can be problematic. European-presenting Ukrainians are perceived as "worthier" victims than Afghans[50], and NGOs have accused the EU of discriminating against African and Arab refugees coming from Ukraine[51]. Less problematic shared identities can and should be nurtured between Ukraine and its partners, however. These include pro-EU stances and solidarity with other independent, post-Soviet states in the face of Russian aggression.

Demographic and social affinities can also affect media coverage of a given conflict, contributing to Compassion Fatigue. Historian Benjamin Hopkins and journalist Margaret Sullivan separately criticised the U.S. media in 2021 for not challenging U.S. officials, politicians, and even the public to take effective action on Afghanistan during the war.[52] Instead of pre-emptively establishing an independent, fact-based narrative, the U.S. media largely reported on the war in a reactive, partisan way. Hopkins and Sullivan also point to the modern media's for-profit model as a driver of Compassion Fatigue in the United States.[53] Moeller concurs: "Compassion Fatigue encourages the media to move on to other stories once the range of possibilities of coverage have been exhausted so that boredom doesn't set in."[54] Distance, and the war's longevity exacerbated this issue. Media organisations operating in Ukraine-aligned information spaces must also contend with profit as opposed to quality or consequence. As discussed in the recommendations section of this report, pro-Ukraine governments and civil society organisations can work with media partners to promote unifying themes and quality reporting, as opposed to echoing or responding to Russian propaganda.

Emotional perceptions about a conflict, often fuelled by proximity and affinity, also affect Compassion Fatigue. One study regarding the war in Afghanistan found that the strongest psychological state to fuel Compassion Fatigue was a sense of helplessness: that an observer of a conflict could not possibly do anything meaningful to help victims.[55] Additionally, widespread attitudes can affect how compassionate or not a population is about a conflict. Journalists commonly attribute U.S. apathy about the war in Afghanistan to isolationist attitudes pervasive in the United States, for example.[56]

Emotional perceptions about the war (e.g. a sense of helplessness), isolationism or media biases are—like other fatigues—dependent on each population's information space. For example, Hungarians have been shown to be less likely to follow news about the war than other populations in the EU.[57] And German Friedensliebe ("Love of Peace") or opposition to armed conflict is pervasive at both the policymaking level and among the public. By understanding these differing conditions, Ukraine and its partners will be better equipped to counter Compassion Fatigue.

Donor Fatigue

Perceptions of corruption and the inefficiency of donated aid—be it military, financial, or humanitarian—have also been a prominent source of Compassion Fatigue for Afghanistan in recent years. One study found that, if donors believe their aid is being wasted or is ending

up in problematic hands, they are more likely to experience Donor Fatigue.[58] A coalition of foreign governments provided record levels of funding to the Afghan government in 2016, despite widespread concern about corruption within the government and broader Afghan society.[59] Many sources of aid, including both foreign governments and NGOs, have reduced or completely halted their deliveries to Afghanistan after the return of the Taliban, however.[60]

While some Western governments and experts have expressed concern about military aid ending up in the wrong hands due to corruption inside Ukraine, the U.S. Government has previously stated that it has no evidence of aid being illegally diverted.[61] Other assurances like this from the Ukrainian government and its close partners could help to allay these concerns. Ukraine's social cohesion and military successes have also proven that foreign military, humanitarian, and financial aid produces desirable results.

Russian Propaganda Coverage of the U.S. Withdrawal

In the chaos of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, Russian state-sponsored media did not hesitate to capitalise on Refugee Fatigue and resentment, in order to criticise the U.S. and drive Compassion Fatigue toward Afghans fleeing Taliban rule. In a later-deleted tweet on 21 August 2021, RT shared a photo of what appeared to be an Afghan family with weapons in their backpacks (see above). The caption and image text read, "Are some terrorists getting a free ride out of Afghanistan? Up to 100 Afghan evacuees on intelligence watchlists." Other RT tweets depicted Afghan refugees as "wolves in sheep's clothing,"[62] and amplified whataboutist narratives, citing U.S. mismanagement of the withdrawal and the war effort at large. While not an exhaustive sampling, these narratives are evidence of Russia's willingness to use crises and human suffering to further its own political ends—in this case by highlighting American military and foreign policy failures.

Tweet by RT, 25 August 2021

2.4

Fatigues: Conclusions

The interlocking fatigues that contribute to Ukraine Fatigue are ripe for exploitation by bad actors. Moscow is particularly adept at identifying and capitalising on these opportunities, which, like its other disinformation campaigns, are ultimately fuelled by pre-existing opinions, grievances, and fissures within the target society. The Kremlin was able to muddle the narrative around its illegal annexation of Crimea because of a lack of affinity, knowledge, and information about the peninsula and its people. This undermined interest in and coverage of the takeover, where Compassion Fatigue was already the status quo. And, in the aftermath of the Syrian refugee crisis, Moscow deliberately stoked refugee resentment and broader Compassion Fatigue, through disinformation in the European Union and Germany in particular. In Afghanistan, Russia was able to seize the fatigue resulting from a long and distant conflict to drive resentments toward refugees and the American handling of the withdrawal. Ukraine has already resisted and overcome many of the challenges faced in analogous conflicts. However, some Ukraine Fatigue narratives are gaining traction in target countries, as described in the next section.

3

Compassion (and other) Fatigue(s) in the Context of Ukraine: Overt Kremlin and Kremlin aligned activity

Overt Pro-Russia Propaganda

Overt Russian propaganda includes stories issued by Russian state media such as RT and Sputnik, statements from Russian government officials and embassies, and publicity stunts pushed by pro-Russia outlets and actors. While much of this content is made by the Russian government and its affiliates, some of it is homebrewed—made by individuals who are independent of direction or payment by the state. The following contains examples of different forms of overt propaganda.

Domestic propaganda leaking into foreign information spaces: In late May 2022, Russian television channel Tsargrad TV published a story sincerely claiming that the UK was preparing for cannibalism due to its support for Ukraine.[63] The story misrepresented a quote from a column Jeremy Clarkson wrote for the Sunday Times in which he joked that the cost of living crisis would push Britains to "eat their neighbors."[64] While Tsargrad TV is a Russian language channel aimed at domestic audiences, activity on social media suggests this narrative made its way into non-Russian information spaces. Although it ultimately gained little traction,[65] this example shows how Russian propaganda can spin even the most trivial narrative originating from abroad into something much more significant and harmful.

Publicity Stunts: A number of Russian organisations have turned Compassion Fatigue among Ukraine-aligned countries into publicity stunts, meant to worsen that fatigue, shore up support for Russia, or both. One prominent example was a video that RT made in late December 2022, depicting a European family celebrating Christmas by candlelight in a freezing house.[66] Another example is an advertisement allegedly made by Russian airline S7 in

November 2022, which shows a British woman trying to date a man in Moscow because she has no power, water, or heating in her home.[67] Our researchers could not determine whether S7 actually made and published this advertisement. Internet commentary suggests the company removed it from its website and social media pages and the video is not present on the company's official YouTube channel.[68] As garish and obvious as these stunts are, they are still capable of finding purchase in Ukraine-aligned information spaces.

Homebrew Propaganda: One Russia video that received some attention among pro-Russian media (and later among Ukraine-aligned media) occurred last autumn, and was actually made by Russian journalist Artur Khodyrev and his colleague, Vanya Kireyev—not by state actors.[69] According to Russian investigative outlet Fontanka.ru, Khodyrev stated that he made the video on his own volition and was not paid for it.[70] It showed a Gazprom employee shutting off gas flows to a freezing Europe. Like the Tsargrad TV story about imminent cannibalism in the UK, this homebrew video demonstrates how interconnected pro-Russia and Ukraine-aligned information spaces are, and how propaganda can easily spread from one to the other—often unintentionally.

Statements from Government Officials: Various Russian officials and government agencies have made statements meant, at least in part, to dissuade unity and decisive action among Ukraine-aligned populations. One example includes a statement made by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' spokesperson Maria Zakharova in November 2022, which stated that the EU was headed toward "energy collapse" as result of its energy policy and the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipeline.[71] Another example is a tweet published by the Russian embassy in London in January 2023, claiming that Western attempts to arm Ukraine were "doomed."[72] Statements from Russian officials are increasingly important, as the state has shifted many propaganda responsibilities to such officials since the EU blocked RT and Sputnik.[73] OECD researchers found that, between 25 February 2022 and 3 March 2022, about 75% of all tweets published by Russian officials were about Ukraine.[74]

Foreign Journalism: A final category of overt propaganda comes via foreign journalists and news organisations, which spread pro-Russia messaging. While sometimes they are paid to do so by the Russian government, they often receive independent financial gain through clicks, views, and general notoriety. Even if working independently, these pro-Russia foreign journalists are regularly amplified by Russian state media. A prominent example is Fox News' Tucker Carlson, who is responsible for popularizing the once-fringe conspiracy theory about US bioweapons labs in Ukraine.[75] Russian state media co-opted Carlson's promotion of this conspiracy theory, to further justify the war in Ukraine.[76]

A separate example of foreign commentators furthering Russian propaganda is Bulgarian journalist Dilyana Gaytandzhieva, who claimed in January 2022 that the United States was experimenting on Georgian and Ukrainian soldiers.[77] These claims went viral and were broadcast by pro-Russia media channels. (Even before the war, Gaytandzhieva was known for publishing overt pro-Russia propaganda).[78]

Populations in both the United States and Bulgaria have expressed Compassion Fatigue regarding Ukraine.[79] Carlson's narrative about US bioweapons labs in Ukraine can be directly tied to some of this fatigue in the former, evinced by U.S. Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene's open discussion of the supposed labs in Congress.[80] Greene is a staunch opponent of sending aid to Ukraine, and the episode illustrates how harmful pro-Russia foreign journalists can be, even if they are acting independent of the Russian government.

This element highlights a crucial factor in both identifying and countering wider Kremlin influence operations: the narratives are important, but more important are the actors and vectors that create and spread them. Whilst RT and Sputnik are prolific, for example, their reach and impact is questionable in Europe. Far more effective are the home grown actors who,

for their own purposes, parrot the Kremlin line and act as (in most cases) informal agents of influence on domestic populations.

Coordinated Information Operations

While coordinated information operations can include both overt and covert media manipulation, this section specifically focuses on covert activity. In the case of the war in Ukraine, covert media manipulation includes the proliferation of false or inflammatory posts and websites, that align with pro-Russia, anti-Ukraine views. This activity may or may not be catered to a specific audience and is done in a variety of languages.

Social Media Operations: Russian information operations on social media have become more fine-tuned in recent years. While pro-Russia actors still use conventional bots and trolls to spread disinformation and inflammatory content, they have recently begun using more insidious tactics. Russia has employed both conventional and innovative tools in its covert information operations on social media since the start of the war in Ukraine.

Research contracted by the UK government shortly after the start of the war showed that the notorious Russian troll farm, the Internet Research Agency (IRA), had been openly and actively recruiting tech-savvy individuals.[81] These trolls spread pro-Russia content on social media platforms and in the comment sections of different websites. They specifically targeted the social media accounts of key pro-Ukraine individuals, including British, EU, and German officials. IRA trolls were also documented amplifying genuine views that incidentally favoured Russian talking points and policies. The same research showed that TikTok influencers were paid to promote pro-Russia narratives.[82] Meanwhile a separate study, by U.S. academic Darren Linvill, also found that IRA trolls were increasingly adept at spreading believable, pro-Russia content on TikTok.[83]

Separate from the IRA's activities, other pro-Russia actors have been spreading covert disinformation and propaganda in Ukraine-aligned information spaces. As is detailed elsewhere in this report, Meta revealed in September 2022 that pro-Russia actors used its platforms and other social media platforms to coordinate a large, covert information operation.[84] This operation targeted several Ukraine-aligned countries, chiefly Germany. Much of the operation's content was made to look like legitimate stories from sources such Bild and The Guardian. These fake stories centred on topics central to Compassion Fatigue, such as Ukrainian refugees and sanctions on Russia.

According to Meta, several Facebook pages of Russian embassies in Europe and Asia re-posted this fake content. This shows that pro-Russia actors are adept at hybridizing methods, including the use of diplomats to spread disinformation and the dissemination of fake news (see below).

Sleeper Websites & Fake News: A sleeper website is a site that has existed for some time with no known links to a hostile actor, but which then begins to post content favouring that hostile actor and undermining its adversaries. Sleeper websites sometimes appear to be legitimate think tanks and news sources, often identically mirroring such organisations' outward appearance. Fake news sites exhibit similar behaviour, in that they resemble legitimate news sources but have had a clear bias towards a hostile actor since their creation.

Regarding Russia's war in Ukraine, one report from Newsguard, a U.S.-based misinformation research firm, found over 250 websites spreading pro-Russia, anti-Ukraine content.[85] These websites included both fake news sites and sleeper sites, and were publishing content in English, French, German and Italian. Another example of Russian fake news sites is a website that Russian actors created to mirror Gazeta Wyborcza, a legitimate Polish news source.[86] This website was used to spread disinformation about the atrocities Russian forces committed in Bucha, in an attempt to divert blame.

Conclusion

This summary demonstrates several broad features of the intersection of Compassion Fatigue and Russian overt and covert information operations. These are:

- Interconnectedness of information spaces, with intentional and unintentional crossover. Information spaces around the world are interconnected, regardless of whether they are Ukraine-aligned or Russia-aligned. Both intentional and unintentional crossover can occur, spreading narratives originating in one to the other, and even creating feedback loops.
- Propaganda can be created and spread by any kind of actor, with a fairly level playing field, including Russian government agencies, officials, companies, private Russian individuals, and foreign journalists.
- Covert information operations are nimble and are constantly updated to evade measures set by foreign governments and technology companies meant to prevent them. A prominent tactic involves amplifying genuine content favourable to Russia, including narratives relating to Compassion Fatigue.
- Russian propaganda and disinformation continue to evolve to match changing sentiments, current events, social media habits, and news consumption behaviours. This includes the proliferation of Russian narratives on newly popular social media platforms, such as TikTok, as well as on pro-Russian sleeper sites and fake news sites.

In Western reporting, Kremlin elites assert that Russian President Vladmir Putin believes Moscow will outlast the West in a long war of attrition. In June 2022, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told The Washington Post that Europeans "are feeling the impact of [Western] sanctions more than [Russians] are," and blamed Western 'mistakes,' not Russian aggression, for the global effects of the war.[87] Widespread assumptions that Ukraine Fatigue would both set in quickly and be a major contributing factor to Ukraine's fall have, to date, proven generally untrue;[88] populations have largely remained sympathetic to the Ukrainian cause.[89]

The issue is more complex than just a repetition of Kremlin talking points. Alongside the Russian State apparatus and its proxy sites, bad actors in every country have begun to use the same narratives. It can be assumed that this is largely happening without coordination with Moscow—for their own ends. These individual and 'organic' beliefs, however misguided, should not be dismissed.

4.

Ukraine Fatigue

"Ukraine Fatigue" is not a single phenomenon, but rather an issue emerging out of a web of interlocking factors. These include both resilience and vulnerability factors, as outlined below.

A. The psychological framework and interaction of 'fatigues'

The discussion of Ukraine Fatigue encompasses multiple, interconnected fatigues. Not all audiences are equally affected by every one of these, and hostile actors are not attempting to create or exacerbate all at the same time. It is likely too resource intensive to tease out whether any one individual audience is affected, has been affected, or can be affected by the multiple 'fatigues' described in this report. Despite this, in the context of the Russian invasion, it is clear that all the fatigue types described can be at play in isolation, via coordination or both.

Furthermore, these fatigues may be triggered by events that are unrelated to the invasion of Ukraine, but which still grind down audiences' compassion towards the Ukrainian cause. For example, Media Fatigue from other intractable problems may lead audiences to disengage from news about Ukraine.[90]

B. Landscape - the geographical and cultural proximity and affinity to the affected country and population

Few European audiences in 2022 will remember a war at this scale on their doorstep, involving a people with whom they closely identify. Proximity and affinity appear to be key factors in preventing or slowing the impact of fatigues. Whilst there have been wars relatively recently close to (or even within) Europe, they have been relatively small scale or short, or (literally) 'far away', in the sense of wider understanding of the drivers of the conflict.

And, whilst other wars may have similar characteristics, such as one side of the conflict being led by an oppressive dictator, or the war triggering a major migrant flows into Europe, there is an affinity with Ukrainians in terms of culture, language, history and other factors that may contribute to how the West has responded.[91] [92]

C. Domestic situation - how different countries are affected by phenomena triggered by, related to, or separate from the war

The energy crisis and runaway inflation in many countries has been in part triggered and weaponised by the Kremlin.[93] Local factors also play a critical role in this, such as access to key services, or trust in institutions—both of which are affected by domestic policy. Many of the domestic issues that countries across Europe are currently facing can be traced back to the war, and thus to the Kremlin's decision to invade Ukraine. It is a potentially obvious tactic for an adversary such as Putin to begin seeding the idea that his decision is irrelevant to these problems, or to point towards other explanations. For example, instead of the domestic issues being connected to Putin's decision, Moscow will try to connect them to Ukraine's refusal to surrender.

Should that be ineffective, then tying domestic issues to Ukraine's refusal to negotiate or give up any of its territory, and linking this to claims that such territory is—or was historically—Russian, may begin to give an air of respectability to the argument. People who have been happy to support Ukraine and bear some hardship may lose patience when a perceived reasonable offer to cease the conflict is on the table, or if Ukraine is seen to be unreasonable.

Other issues are not directly related to the war, such as inflation or demand on public resources. With the above in mind, it is likely the Kremlin will try to link these—along with other country-specific issues—to Ukraine's 'unreasonable' negotiating stance. This

has significant potential, and thus risk, to the wider effort of supporting Ukraine.

D. Medium – how the phenomenon may be weaponised or countered across digital media

Though there are no doubt many examples of offline activities driving Ukraine Fatigue, the bulk of the narrative dissemination appears to be digital. The world has never been more digitally interconnected and the number of mediums for sharing information has never been greater. The hybrid warfare and disinformation opportunities available to bad actors in 2022 and 2023 is not comparable even to 2014, and it appears that the thinking around how to counter these narratives has not kept up.

It is interesting, in terms of social media, to compare against the timeline of the invasion of Crimea, here. In 2014, for instance, Telegram reported 15 million daily users globally,[94] whereas by November 2022 this had risen to 55 million.[95] In 2014, Facebook ads and targeting had evolved significantly compared to their introduction in 2007, but were nowhere near as sophisticated as the present day.[96] Similarly, Facebook's groups-based architecture was not yet prevalent, and Instagram was still in relative infancy. TikTok did not exist in 2014, and nor did Discord or a range of alt-tech platforms such as Gettr, Gab or Truth Social. This says nothing of the evolution of video platforms, gaming, search engines and a host of other media, alongside the more traditional blogs and fake news sites.

E. Motivation – why bad actors would use Ukraine Fatigue to their own advantage

As noted previously, hostile actors—domestic and foreign—will use organic "Ukraine Fatigue" and other authentic fatigues for their own ends. For domestic actors this may be to monetise their disinformation efforts, something that remains stubbornly unchallenged by many social media and digital advertising brokers. For a hostile state such as Russia, this is a far cheaper method of denigrating Ukraine's capabilities than through land, air and sea.

In a paper on disinformation surrounding Ukrainian refugees, the European Migration and Diversity Programme notes that "focusing only on foreign actors and ignoring the complexity of the disinformation landscape inevitably leads to blind spots."[97] The same paper outlines various examples of (largely) far-right politicians attempting to use Ukrainian refugees for political gain, in countries such as Poland. Conversely, as is noted elsewhere in this paper, the war has led some anti-immigrant or far-right parties, such as Lega in Italy, to change their previously pro-Kremlin stance (ironically, also for political gain).[98]

More difficult to gauge are the lower level, or under-the-radar propagandists that are benefiting from increased profile or advertising revenue. A number of previously obscure (to the general public, if not those working to counter disinformation) hobbyist journalists, such as Graham Phillips, are now well known for their pro-Kremlin reporting on the ground.[99] Many hide behind pseudonyms—such as the Juan Sinmiendo/ Fearless John/ Ukraine Exposed Telegram account,[100] while others appear to be genuine (although often amateur) journalists.[101] Some channels are overt in their aims, and use online traffic to increase ad revenue and sell merchandise.[102]

Due to the wide array of options for social and traditional media reach, it would be remiss to suggest that it is possible to provide an exact number as to the potential reach of Ukraine Fatigue related disinformation that may be available at any one time. It is highly likely that it is reaching many millions, across hundreds of languages globally.

F. Hostile State objectives – the ultimate aim for state actors

Whilst attempting to denigrate the will of a population under attack is a relatively common tactic in wartime propaganda, there are limited examples of comparatively powerful states attempting to induce withdrawal of support from non-belligerents, which in itself is a key Kremlin goal. Within the few examples is Russia's campaign against

the ratification of Ukraine's EU Association Agreement in the Netherlands in 2016.[103]

At its most simple, the Kremlin's strategy regarding Ukraine Fatigue can be seen as:

- aggravating audiences hosting Ukrainian refugees, to the point that policymakers choose—or are forced—to withdraw support;
- denigrating the reputation of Ukrainians, so that audiences and policymakers do not want to support them (i.e. they do not feel affinity, or believe that they are deserving of support, or that they are on the right side);
- engendering sufficient literal and metaphorical exhaustion amongst donor audiences to accelerate the potential for natural decline in support; and
- providing an excuse for Kremlin sympathetic policymakers to withdraw from the united front which is supporting Ukraine and/ or sanctioning Russia.

G. Hostile State capabilities – how the Kremlin can leverage its hybrid warfare efforts in this regard

Further to points D and F above, there has never been a comparable belligerent as capable, nor one with such active pre-established networks, as the Kremlin in modern hybrid warfare.

This goes beyond the technical capacity of information operations, and results from the Kremlin's long term investment in networks of influence. Extremist entities, grey civil society, media talking heads, cultural, academic, and, crucially, political influence have been a staple of the Kremlin's influence for decades. However, the invasion of Ukraine has revealed cracks in these networks. The assumption that enough of their (political in particular) international allies would go along with the invasion was misguided, but not entirely so.

Whilst initially they may have overextended and lost the support of the likes of Lega in Italy,[104] many of those they have supported remain, independently or otherwise, active in pushing an anti-Ukrainian agenda. This ranges as far afield as the opposition extremist Vazrazdhane Party[105] in Bulgaria, to the governing ANC in South Africa.[106] The Kremlin continues to hold friendly relations with some, but it is enough for them to bolster the messaging of others (as they have always done) without their explicit knowledge.[107]. The Kremlin's comprehensive digital, media and political networks operate globally, and despite setbacks, they remain on the front foot compared to those attempting to counter them. The Kremlin's networks are willing to bend or break moral standards, have built up capabilities across languages and platforms that their opponents have not, invest significantly more money into their content and distribution, and are willing to test and fail. They are able to take a global view of their influence efforts and shift the dial in their favour, in sites ranging from Addis Ababa to Brasilia to Chisinau.

H. Defender coverage – the public image of Zelensky and Ukraine

President Zelensky and his staff quickly adopted the role of figureheads for Ukraine, and showed themselves as highly adept in disseminating their messages through popular and social media. Zelensky's image—including his clothes, haircut, and beard—as well as his refusal to leave the country, his repeated appeals to parliaments around the world and his nightly addresses, appear to have resonated with populations outside Ukraine. This is particularly contrasted with images of Putin's long table, or stories of him shouting at his generals and making outlandish claims. While Putin appears aloof, Zelensky, his personal life and even humour is relatable and appears to have helped the Ukrainian cause.[108]

A study of nine central and eastern European countries found that opinion of Zelensky was favourable amongst two thirds of the population, and four times higher than opinion of Putin.[109] Furthermore, Ukraine as a whole has been perceived as defiant in the face of adversity, and in particular in defending their country against a bigger aggressor.[110] However, the same study found that there had been a marked effect of Kremlin propaganda about Zelensky in key countries such as Bulgaria and Hungary.

In this war a potential reason for the onset of Ukraine Fatigue being slow has been a clear understanding of both sides of the conflict, and an affinity (as per the above) to one over the other. This was helped in particular by the popular image of both leaders, with one charismatic and relatable and the other distant and cold[111].

I. Defender capabilities – memetic and physical warfare

Related to point H above, Ukraine has defied expectations and not only held the line, but regained territories. Its persistence in terms of warfare, public affairs and communications have been highly effective. This is perhaps best contrasted with the perceptions of the Afghan government and military in the face of the Taliban resurgence, where—despite decades of investment by the international community—both collapsed with such speed as to surprise every observer.

The effective use of military and financial aid, and the demonstration of its impact, which can become somewhat circular, may have staved off Ukraine Fatigue. Ukraine has been able to push back militarily because of the support offered by the West; to continue this, it requires its support to remain at its current level or increase. For that to happen it needs to continue to demonstrate that the support has been effective.

J. Political, media and civil society unity

Most wars (in which the host country is not a participant) receive little coverage or comment by politicians, and wars between states tend to engender significant division (c/f Iraq and Afghanistan) often along political lines.[112] For most—although not all— 'Western' countries, it is largely the purview of fringe politicians and media to oppose supporting Ukraine or to actively support Russia. A united front across political, media and civil society—as has tended to occur with Ukraine—is extremely rare, and may help the feeling of being on the right side. However, there are signs of this fracturing, including in the largest donor country, the U.S.[113]

K. Gender

The various fatigues that form Ukraine Fatigue may be affected by the gender of the audience, and the gender of refugees covered by the media the audience consumed. Within the literature on Compassion Fatigue in healthcare, there has been some suggestion that women are more prone to the condition than men, though there appears a stronger correlation with gender when it comes to factors like Compassion Fatigue and work-related stress.[114]

Potentially more pertinent is the gender of the refugees themselves. A persistent anti-refugee narrative is the claim that refugees fleeing wartorn countries are often 'fighting age men' with the implied belief being that it is a man's duty to stay and fight. There are multiple examples of this narrative pushed about Ukrainian refugees[115], although it is unclear how effective it has been. There is a complex interplay here, with some commenters who are broadly anti-Syrian, Albanian or Afhan refugee exhibiting pro-Ukrainian views specifically because of the government's requirement for men under the age of 60 to stay in the country and fight.[116]

5.

Conclusion

The fatigue following the invasion of Crimea in 2014 gave the Kremlin false hope that Ukraine Fatigue would be a foregone conclusion during the full-scale Russian invasion, which began in February 2022. However, it has not gripped audiences as predicted. An assessment of the broader concept of Compassion Fatigue—and the interlocking fatigues that interact with it—reveals that the war in Ukraine has certain advantages that have kept interest and sympathy toward Kyiv high, compared to other ongoing and historical conflicts that have faced similar 'fatigue' phenomena. These advantages include geographic proximity to Europe, affinity toward Ukrainians and their cause, and the online nature of the conflict. Such ongong factors have allowed Kyiv to communicate effectively about its efforts, and to highlight Russia's horrific attacks.

However, there are signs across Europe and beyond that narratives that could contribute to widespread Ukraine Fatigue are gaining traction. In particular: protests of and resentment toward Ukrainian refugees are becoming more common; narratives questioning the provision of Western aid to Ukraine given its history of corruption are burgeoning; and arguments legitimising Russia's "security concerns" are being amplified by high-profile influencers around the world.

The concept of Ukraine Fatigue, as defined in this paper, provides a significant opportunity for both the Kremlin and other bad actors to achieve their own goals, to the detriment of Ukraine and the West. Whilst no one strategy can tackle the problem, a holistic approach that accepts the realities facing audiences, that humanises the Ukrainians, and that strategically demonstrates exactly how the blame lies with the Kremlin, will help blunt its effects.

The Kremlin is turning its disinformation resources to this task and is banking on it helping end the war by—forcing Ukraine's allies to withdraw their support. It is possible to create conditions that mean not only that these efforts ineffective, but they become one sunken cost amongst many that contribute to the Kremlin's ultimate defeat.

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[92] It should be noted that whilst the scope of this paper and its associated project is limited to Europe and Western donors, the issue of Ukraine Fatigue is increasingly being reported in countries that are distant both in proximity and affinity to Ukraine. African and Latin American countries in particular face a range of domestic and regional issues that are now largely being unaddressed by international institutions such as the UN, and have already had previous concerns around international responses to, inter alia, the COVID-19 pandemic and the response to climate change.

The war in Ukraine affects these regions largely only with regard to food supplies, which the Kremlin has already capitalised on in its communications. Further, the Kremlin has invested more in strategic communications on the subject in local languages than the West. This combined with Russia's relatively strong base of support (many African countries have abstained from UN motions on the subject) may make creating a groundswell of Ukraine Fatigue – or even Ukraine Resentment (for example, comparative treatment of refugees) – a relatively simple task within key sectors of the international community.

This has previously been highlighted and raises uncomfortable questions with regard to strategic communications. Whilst affinity need not equate itself with ethnicity – it may relate to religion, region, politics, social values and so on – it has been highlighted in reporting particularly in countries such as France, where migrants of African origin are not treated as well as those from Ukraine.

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