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Media Sanctions Narratives Two Years Into The Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine

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Media Sanctions Narratives Two Years Into The Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine

**Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College**

**by
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**Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2024**

Dedication

I dedicate this paper to the lives lost as a result of the War in Ukraine, World Peace, my friends,
and most importantly, my Mother and Father.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the role of my Senior Project advisor, Christopher McIntosh, and my economics professors, Youssef Ait Benasser and Andiruddha Mitra, in helping me synthesize this project. Moreover, I would like to acknowledge my parents' role in providing me with the opportunity to study and grow as a human being.

Abstract

Economic sanctions are tools of pressure that utilize the financial leverage that the sanctioning entity has over the sanctioned entity, which has been used for centuries. In an increasingly globalized environment, countries share international platforms controlled by national and global financial institutions to conduct financial transactions, trade, and maintain complex supply chains. A country can use its financial, legal, and physical infrastructures to inflict economic damage on the target entity in reaction to a target committing some offense in the eyes of the sanctioning country. After the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the Donbas conflict, much of the Western bloc placed sanctions on Russia. Back then, all interested parties used journalism to create narratives about sanctions with an extensive range of assessments. After the beginning of the Full-Scale Russian Invasion of Ukraine, starting in 2022, the media spaces in Russia and Ukraine have been respectively centralized, with laws in both countries expanding government control over the press (to different extents). Throughout this Invasion of Ukraine, Ukrainian and Russian outlets have been creating narratives regarding sanctions, their economic consequences, and their effects on the ongoing conflict. This paper explores the narratives observed in those media outlets, the facts or conjectures used to help further each narrative, and the potential motivators to spread these narratives.

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Introduction

During a war that involves the use of financial sanctions, such as the Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine, media organizations dedicate hundreds of pages worth of content to narrate their role in the conflict. The narratives that describe the role of sanctions in Russia's war on Ukraine by their respective media organizations differ drastically based on how an outlet can characterize, manipulate, and contextualize widely accepted information. Analyzing how and what narratives are reported from Russian and Ukrainian media sources leads to a better understanding of the significance of sanctions in the modern war and a better grasp of the political and economic climate surrounding the War.

All countries have their own legal, material, and financial infrastructure, which act as tools that facilitate economic activity. Tools include airspace, tariffs, ports, logistical nodes, critical resources, financial instruments, and anything else that other entities might need to generate economic output. When entities conduct business internationally, their transactions and corporate activity access at least one of the tools under a foreign state's control. This is a situation in which economic leverage could be employed when one entity has control of a system used by another entity. Some other cases of financial tools at the mercy of state jurisdiction include examples such as US dollars as a tool of exchange issued and controlled by the Federal Reserve of The United States or a port used to expand trade operations under the jurisdiction of another government. The entity that controls access to these tools is the one with leverage.

The world has developed into a highly interconnected system in the twenty-first century, with countries allowing foreign business entities access to their tools in international business transactions. This is why after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on the 24 of February

2022, the United States, European Union, and other countries that support Ukraine began a continuous barrage of sanctions, with the aim of crippling Russia's economy and war effort. Both Western and Russian authorities engaged many of the critical leverage points against each other. This weaponized the financial, legal, and physical tools to make life simpler and more interconnected between Russia and the West.

Media organizations have a crucial role in influencing public opinion on sanctions at home and abroad, especially when considering the effects such policies may have on the economies of all parties involved. In the case of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the following sanctions, media organizations were tasked with convincing their audiences that sanctions would be beneficial or of no consequence to their nation's geopolitical goals. With the newest rounds of media regulation passed in Russia and Ukraine, the news organizations of these countries narrate sanctions and their effects through the lenses of their vested interests that control them. By comparing the reporting of these two groups, it is possible to deduce what narratives about sanctions are being created, how they are propagated, and why each group would like for this narrative to spread.

To understand how reporting is done on economic sanctions, it is essential to understand what sanctions look like, how they have been implemented in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, and how today's media space has been formed. As discussed, sanctions are measures taken by one entity to pressure another by taking control of its economic, legal, or physical tools, transforming them into points of leverage used to damage the adversary's financial activities. To familiarize ourselves with this definition, let us apply it to the Megarian Decree example.

The first sanctions package in recorded history was created in the 430s BCE when the Athenians blocked Megarian merchants from participating in Athenian markets and prohibited

Megrian ships from docking at their ports¹. These policies were outlined in the Megarian Decree and were introduced to the Athenian Assembly by the politician Pericles. In reaction to these sanctions, the Spartans and the Lacedaemonians, allied with the Megarians in the Peloponnesian League, sent envoys and ordered the Athenians to rescind the law under the threat of war. Pericles had to convince the Assembly that the Spartans and their allies were too weak to wage a successful war and were damaged by the sanctions on them. As a result of the motion passing, the Peloponnesian War ensued.

The tools controlled by the Athenians, mentioned in this Decree, were their ports and markets. These instruments were available to the Megarians for business use, the restriction of which was a point of leverage for the Athenians. The implicated economic effects of this policy were so devastating that the Peloponnesian League immediately threatened war. This reaction made sense since Athens controlled most ports surrounding the Peloponnesian League, and most of their trade would be under threat.

Many centuries later, sanctions followed the same formulation. Still, many more economic development tools are controlled and used by an increasingly large number of countries. This abundance of financial tools available globally means that many countries are wielding them in a highly interconnected global market, which can be considered good and bad news for those wishing to sanction another country. The good news is that most countries now have more tools than the city-states of ancient Greece, which can become leverage points due to the advent of an interconnected world. The bad news is that many other countries also have those tools and might be willing to make them available to those under sanctions, benefiting everyone except the sanctioning country. As a result of these circumstances, a state would feel more

¹ Diodorus Siculus, "Library of History (Book XII, Continued)," trans. Charles Henry Oldfather, LacusCurtius • Diodorus Siculus - Book XII Chapters 22-40, 1946, p 445.

confident in its sanctions if it has a monopoly of control over the tool being used as leverage or they are joined by other states possessing these tools.

These relatively new circumstances have been a critical factor in decision-making regarding sanctions planning. In the case of Russian aggression against Ukraine, the nature of the sanctions placed has changed drastically since 2014. Most of the sanctions following the annexation of Crimea came from the European Union, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, The United Kingdom, and The United States. They only targeted specific sectors of the economy that directly contributed to the annexation effort. The tools incorporated in the 2014 sanctions were foreign direct investment from the West, money inflows into Russia's military-industrial complex, technology transfers, transactions with businesses operating within Crimea, financial transactions of sanctioned individuals, and some parts of the banking system. They were made to punish the entities that partook in the annexation of Crimea – withdrawing most direct Western inflows of resources without dealing a crippling loss to domestic markets and the immediate lives of Russian citizens. Sanctions on energy exports from Russia were discussed, but fierce resistance from European countries was faced due to economic ramifications.

However, the nature of the sanctions changed with the geopolitical circumstances, coming to a head on February 24, 2022, when Russia commenced its Special Military operations against Ukraine. This time, in addition to the Anglosphere and the European Union, formerly neutral European countries (i.e., Switzerland, Sweden, and Finland), Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore all applied sanctions. Not all nations committed to the same ones, with the United States and the European Union employing far more consequential measures. Russian ships are not allowed to enter ports of sanctioning countries; the same could be said about aircraft and those countries' airspace. Over time, oil and Gas purchases have been phased out

entirely from Britain and the United States and have dropped significantly in the European Union. Direct technology exports from Western countries were effectively banned, eventually including commercial goods imported into the country containing dual-use goods.

The sanctions listed above are a small fraction of those placed since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. These sanctions target critical sectors of the Russian Economy despite the vast economic repercussions of separating Western markets from them. The reason for applying these hardened sanctions stemmed from the goal of Western-oriented states to inflict as much damage on the Russian war machine and the economy that maintains it. At the time of conception of this research project, two years into the war and the sanction regime that came with it, Russia still waged war in Ukraine. The world is now consumed in the fog war; economic statistics are being censored by the State Statistics Services of both Ukraine and Russia, respectively, leaving a considerable information gap for media organizations to fill in with their narratives regarding sanctions.

Even before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the mediascape in the world was shifting towards fewer and more tightly controlled sources that create narratives mostly corresponding with the vested interests that uphold them. In the case of Russian media, independence from the government when referring to the mainstream has been unheard of since 2022, with most media organizations owned by the state-run Rossiya Segodnya media group. In addition to media restrictions, defamation laws against the armed forces have made almost all voices of dissent prosecutable by law. Since the full-scale invasion, Ukraine's parliament has passed regulatory laws regarding the media and disinformation and has removed many domestic pro-Russian news agencies from television.

This consolidation of media organizations in each country also implies that the narratives created by the news agencies are likely to be uniform based on the country. This is referred to as agenda-setting theory in academic literature, which ascribes the role of media outlets as: “...beyond the dissemination of information, the news media have the ability to raise public awareness and political importance of issues through extensive press coverage”². This allows for a more straightforward analysis of the narratives from every side of this conflict and the purposes that they serve with fewer news outlets. The ability to narrate reality is a tremendous power, and it is imperative to understand how this power is used to affect the perceptions about the economic sanctions against Russia.

If the power of modern media existed in the age of Pericles, on both sides of the Peloponnesian war, he would not only need to debate the members of the assembly to uphold the Megarian Decree; he would also need to contend with the narratives of the League's media apparatus, possibly changing the flow of history. Thankfully for Pericles, such powers did not exist in the ancient world. However, these powers are actively employed today, and it is essential to determine how they create narratives about sanctions and to what end.

² Dursun Peksen, Timothy M. Peterson, and A. Cooper Drury, “Media-Driven Humanitarianism? News Media Coverage of Human Rights Abuses and the Use of Economic Sanctions,” *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (June 18, 2014): 855–66, p 856.

Methodology

Analyzing the narratives about the sanctions placed at the start of the Full Scale Invasion of Ukraine that were created by media organizations worldwide is quite a daunting task. There are far too many media organizations and articles regarding sanctions published by them to keep track of the sanction narratives with the resources and time available when writing this paper. Therefore, the method used to analyze sanctions narratives would only be applied to a select few media outlets representing Russia and Ukraine's vested interests, respectively. This technique could be applied to any other outlet not selected for research in this paper.

This method aims to identify the narratives about sanctions against Russia that began at the start of the Full-Scale Invasion, identify the economic data and descriptions used further in the narrative, and determine the effect this narrative is meant to have on its audiences. The steps required to collect the research material are as follows: Choose media outlets and determine whose interests they represent. Select a time period that would be optimal for research. Search and collect articles that pertain to sanctions and their effects.

Sources

The selection of sources representing Russian and Ukrainian interests was challenging due to several factors. The primary considerations were the extent to which a media organization represented the mainstream coming from each one of the political interest groups, the language the articles were published in, and the ease of searching and accessing archived articles. The first consideration is essential because there are many media outlets and personalities in this war that are not directly beholden to the state-determined vested interests of Ukraine, Russia, and the

West. Since this paper is focused on the narratives pushed by the establishment of all three factions, the news organization selected for each group should represent its interests.

The second consideration is crucial because it is hard to compare a text when more than one language is involved. Many details can be lost in translation, which can be essential in establishing a narrative. With this in mind, it is crucial to understand that there might be differences between an article published in its native language and an article from the same publisher in a foreign language because the publisher may distinguish foreign language speakers as a separate audience from the locals. For this paper, all media from the analyzed news organizations were published in English.

The third consideration is essential because, as of the conception of this paper, there are no publicly available tools that can look through archives of individual newspapers to find relevant articles. This means that all article selection had to be done manually, which could be a pretty painstaking business if the period being examined stretches over a year. That is why, for this paper, the sources selected had a way to quickly access articles from over two years ago, preferably a website with a date-based archive and a search function for keywords used in the articles. With these considerations in mind, here are the source choices made for this project

The source representing Ukrainian media is the Kyiv Post, a for-profit news agency with the motto “Ukraine’s Global Voice”. The articles are published in English and are directed at a global audience. In the company ethics commitments listed on the About Us³ page, they claim to present “reasonable accounts of competing views,” not beholden to any vested interest, with a goal to maintain their commitment to independent journalism. Complaints about misinformation or malpractice noticed in their work are encouraged by the company, which asks to submit any disagreements over interpretations as an email addressed to news@kyivpost.com.

³ Kyiv Post, “About Us,” Kyiv Post, 2019

Although the Kyiv Post seems like a balanced and independent news source that is un beholden to direct influence from vested interest, according to their ethics policy, some of the content that their journalists create is sponsored by: “the National Endowment for Democracy, Justice for Journalists Foundation, Reporters Without Borders (in 2019), the Danish government, NATO, and others”⁴. The journal was founded by an American entrepreneur, Jed Sunden, who has consistently lobbied on behalf of Ukraine in favor of providing aid. While this does not mean that this news agency is an unreliable source of information, it does confirm that the Post will be narrating from a fundamentally Western-rooted pro-Ukrainian position.

The search mechanism used to find relevant articles (as of the first of March 2024) is a simple keyword search engine that renders all articles and media files with mentioned keywords. Although there were no precise date selection mechanisms (as is the case with many other outlets), the post showed all published articles without endlessly scrolling to generate more articles. The post's intended audience is both foreign and domestic, with a version of the newspaper published in Ukrainian.

The media organization narrating from the Russian perspective is MID Sputnik International. This organization was founded in 2014, succeeding its predecessors, RIA News and Voice of Russia. The only mission statement on their About Us⁵ page is “The agency covers global political and economic news targeting an international audience.”. The organization makes no promise to provide accurate and impartial information. The website was banned in Europe because the channel only focuses on spreading Russian propaganda. Independent journalism in Russia is mainly done on YouTube, with official media platforms being subsidized

⁴ Kyiv Post, “About Us,” Kyiv Post, 2019, <https://www.kyivpost.com/pages/about-us>.

⁵ Sputnik International, “Sputnik News - World News, Breaking News & Top Stories,” Sputnik International, December 18, 2023

and controlled by the Russian Government. The narratives of this paper will reflect the narratives of the ruling government in Russia.

The source is operated with the organizational help of the media group Rossiya Segodnya, a subsidiary of the Russian government. The organization was founded months after the annexation of Crimea, with the implicit goal of countering Western narratives in the international media sphere. The organization publishes its news in English, Mandarin, Arabic, Farsi, and Spanish, allowing for a broad audience. Although the organization is under sanctions, the online version can be accessed in Europe.

Sputnik's search engine for archived articles is completed with article tags and a time range system. Searching the website for old articles is a quick process, and it is a credit to the website developers. This source is unapologetically Russian and anti-Western, almost always reflecting the narratives of the Kremlin.

Other sources can be used when researching narratives regarding sanctions, and the more sources incorporated into the research, the more accurate the analysis of these narratives in the media space. However, for this project, these two sources provide enough insight into the narratives propagated by Ukraine and Russia. Other geopolitical perspectives, such as Western, African, Indian, or Chinese, are essential to understanding the global reaction to Russian sanctions. Still, they are not necessary to understand the difference in narratives the two media outlets propagate.

Time Frame & Article Selection

With the sources necessary for this research determined, the next important decision to be resolved was the timeframe to be investigated. The chosen time frame includes articles dated February 24th, 2022 – December 31st, 2023. Due to the ongoing nature of the conflict at the time

of synthesizing this project, a cutoff has been implemented so that new changes in the narrative that coincide with current events do not interfere with the narratives discussed in the time range. This will be referred to as the project time frame or time frame.

An argument could be made for expanding the timeframe to include all articles since 2014 because that is when the first sanctions were implemented against Russia. While this is true, the nature of these sanctions has changed to match the intensity of Russia's military escalation. Since the nature of the sanctions changed during this war, the narratives surrounding them also changed. Moreover, based on the time it took to go through two years' worth of content from two news agencies propagating complex narratives, the addition of eight more years of content will require more resources to analyze in the timeframe given for this project.

This is why this project only explores the narratives about sanctions during the Full-Scale invasion of Ukraine. The methods used in this research paper can be implemented in any analysis of media narratives, allowing this project to be a template for future analysis projects. Any good template needs parameters, such as the two investigated outlets and the time frame, which gave this project enough material to select articles relevant to creating narratives about economic sanctions.

Articles were selected by entering keywords related to sanctions, focusing on economic sanctions. Keywords include but are not limited to Sanctions, Russia Sanctions, Sanctions Placed on Russia, Effects of sanctions, Economic Sanctions, Oil Embargo, and 'Russian Economy under Sanctions.' Articles that were selected cover economic sanctions only, excluding articles that are focused on the sanctions against individuals, non-government organizations, religious figures, and politicians. News regarding corporate, financial, and commercial sanctions are included due to their effects on the economy. The only time that personal sanctions would be examined was

when a direct impact on the Russian economy resulted from them. Articles regarding counter-sanctions implemented by Russia and the narratives created around them are included in this research because they add to the understanding of many narratives about sanctions. Opinion articles were not included in this research; however, interviews with industry professionals, economists, or political figures were used. It is important to note that the frequency of articles covering a particular topic in the manual selection does not necessarily reflect the frequency of the topic being reported on within the media organization since the selection only represents a small sample of articles selected based on mentions of keywords that are referring to sanctions. The complete collection of articles collected for this research will be referred to as the article selection.

Once the articles were selected, they were organized based on publishing date, with each article placed into the corresponding quarter in which it was written. The time period being researched is separated into eight parts in accordance with existing fiscal quarters. The only quarter that is incomplete would be the first quarter of 2022 because the beginning of Russia's Special Military Operation was almost two months into that fiscal quarter. Organizing the articles this way has allowed the tracking of changes in narratives over time. These changes in the observed narratives may have stemmed from the changing circumstances on the front lines, politics, or other changes in the media sphere.

After the articles were collected, they were analyzed for narrative claims. A narrative claim looks something like this headline from The Kyiv Post, published on March 19, 2024 (not used in the research for this project): "Sanctions on Russia Are Too Weak/Ineffective."⁶ A narrative should appear in multiple articles, becoming a central theme in the outlet's reporting. Then, the articles that provided information, disinformation, or narration supporting this

⁶ Timothy Ash, "Sanctions on Russia Are Too Weak/Ineffective," Kyiv Post, March 19, 2024,

narrative were collected from each quarter and analyzed. This was done in case the narrative evolved over time so the progression of it would be easily noticed. This process was done to smaller sub-narratives that further some of the main narratives that were determined.

It is important to define each of the supporting elements mentioned earlier: information, disinformation, and narration. Information, for the purposes of this research, includes any data, details of an event, or a fact of law. The words information and facts are used interchangeably in this project because other forms of information, such as speculative statements, are not guaranteed to represent the outstanding situation when the article was written. Only facts that are true at the moment of the article's publication can be considered as information for this project.

Disinformation, for the purposes of this paper, includes the use of false information or, in some cases, the purposeful exclusion of information used to further one's point. All information that has not passed the fact-checking done in the research will be designated as disinformation. Outdated data that has been cited without indicating when that data was accurate is also considered disinformation. A lot of the time, information and narration provided by the media outlets could not be fully verified at the time of this project's synthesis, so instead of labeling those supporting elements as outright disinformation, this report simply points out the potential discrepancies that might affect the interpretation of a source's subject matter.

Narration can be defined as descriptions or statements that lack concrete facts but describe the situation at hand. These statements can come from the author of the article or statements made by others that are cited in the article. Narration includes, but is not limited to, speculative statements, professional hypothesizing, political statements, and economic storytelling. Anything that can describe a situation with minimal use of concrete facts can be considered as narration.

Once the narratives and the supporting elements of these organizations have been identified, the narratives of the three media outlets are compared to each other, with particular attention paid to intersecting narratives. The narratives of these media outlets might intersect at certain points in time, sometimes mirroring each other while other times they diametrically opposed one another.

Narratives that mirror each other can be used in different ways depending on the narrator. For example, if the Russian and Ukrainian sources both claim that the sanctions are not working, each source would use this narrative to further their agenda. The Russian source may use this narrative as a deterrent message to those who are worried that sanctions might do more harm than good to their own economy. On the other hand the Ukrainian source might use this narrative in order to pressure their allies to apply even stronger sanctions.

Diametrically opposing narratives may reveal differences in the use of supporting elements to back each narrative. The two opposing narratives can use the same information by either describing the facts in a way that fits the narrative or by adding other information that completes the narrative. They could also use completely different supporting elements that only support their respective narratives, which can reveal information that was left out in each article by cross reference.

At the end of this process, conclusions can be drawn about these narratives. These conclusions answer questions such as which narratives are the most consistent over the selected time period, which narratives have the most realistic assessment of the situations, which narratives turned out to be less in touch with reality, which narratives were only applicable for a certain period of time due to the fluid nature of events, and which narratives have the most impact on policy in relation to their goals. Trying to answer these questions in this project will

further the understanding of the impact of journalism on the perception of economic realities and possibly the nature of the current sanctions and their effects.

Russian Narratives

When the Special Military Operation started in Ukraine, the Russian media space underwent a major reorganization, marred by the suppression of independent journalism. Russia's criminal codex was updated with article 207.3: "Public dissemination of false information in regards to the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, the execution of government duties by Russian government entities, assisted by volunteer groups, organizations, or persons in order to complete the tasks, which were given to the Armed forces of the Russian Federation or troops of Russia's national guard."⁷ This law makes it illegal to spread false information about the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, groups affiliated with the armed forces, or organizations helping complete their tasks. This coincided with a mass exodus of independent journalists and media outlets from Russia, thinning the herd of narratives about economic sanctions and their repercussions that spread from the country. The Russian state-owned news agencies were prepared to fill the information gap, especially with direct funding from Russia's state budget. One of those media outlets, MID Sputnik International, specializes in media targeting foreign audiences, with translations in thirty languages and reporting on a wide variety of subjects, including economic sanctions.

The project selection of articles from Sputnik (from 2/24/2022–12/31/2023) found fifty-eight articles that report on economic sanctions enacted as a result of the Full-Scale Invasion. These articles have a wide range of styles, from short-form updates to longer analysis articles. Regardless of their style, the three main narratives that were disseminated by Sputnik

⁷Sergei Alexeyev, Sergey Shakhrai, and Anatoly Sobchack, "Criminal Code of the Russian Federation | | Уголовный Кодекс Российской Федерации От 13.06.1996 n 63-ФЗ (Ред. От 06.04.2024)," "Уголовный кодекс Российской Федерации" (УК РФ) от 13.06.1996 N 63-ФЗ (последняя редакция) \ КонсультантПлюс, June 13, 1996, article 207.3

are: Sanctions backfired on the West; Russia's pivot to the Markets of the Global South allowed for its economy to recover and continue the war effort; and sanctions had negative effects on the global financial system. These Narratives have smaller sub-narratives along with supporting arguments that help propagate each of the main narratives. Most articles are focused on pushing one of these narratives, with many instances of them referencing other narratives in order to bolster the focus of the former.

The first main narrative (Narrative 1) that sanctions have been backfiring on the West is complemented by three sub-narratives. The first sub-narrative (1.1) is that the West profits off and is reliant on key Russian industry, making it difficult to maintain all of its sanctions against the country. The second sub-narrative (1.2) is about Western businesses losing money and their place in the Russian market as a result of economic sanctions and the voluntary exit of Western businesses. The final sub-narrative (1.3) is that sanctions will lead to de-dollarization, which means that countries will begin using other currencies to trade internationally instead of using the United States dollar. These narratives frame the West as politically incompetent due to the perceived damages rendered to their own economy due to these sanctions.

The second main narrative (Narrative 2), that despite the complications caused by sanctions, Russia's economy was relatively resilient, was maintained by supporting elements depicting an economy that was growing despite Western pressure, and sub-narrative 2.1: Russia's economic pivot to the Global South has allowed Russia to counter-sanctions. Sputnik, on occasion, admits to the real damages dealt by the sanctions, and when updating the public about sanctions, they tend to identify the intended targets of the sanctions along with some reports of immediate effects. Nevertheless, the narrative puts more emphasis on the recovery aspect.

The third main narrative (3) regarding Sanctions hurting the world was supported by articles claiming that they destabilized the global economy and damaged the climate by degrading global capacity to reach climate goals. They also frame the West as unreliable world actors that destabilize the global economy in pursuit of their own interests, further hurting the West. Moreover, it gives Sputnik the opportunity to actively endorse the alternatives to the West, such as alternative economic blocks, including BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, in partnerships with Russia herself.

These main narratives that are spread by Sputnik International, along with the many sub-narratives, all paint the West as an irrational and destabilizing economic force that acts in a unilateral manner to pursue its geopolitical goals. They also portray Russia as part of a greater movement towards a multipolar world free from ‘Western Hegemony’ by emphasizing the global partnerships that Russia has maintained or further developed over the period of the special military operation. According to this perspective, Western policy failures manifested in the sanctions policies, which hurt the whole world without dealing consequential damage to the Russian economy.

Narrative 1; Sanctions Are Backfiring

The speculation that the sanctions would backfire on the West was a trope alive a long time before the beginning of the Full Scale Invasion of Ukraine since Russia had already been sanctioned by Western governments in 2014 after the Annexation of Crimea. Over time, Russia recovered from those sanctions, with state media praising the handling of the crisis. However, after the commencement of the Special Military Operation, everyone felt the immediate impact of the sanctions. From that moment, all Russian outlets, along with Sputnik, began to poke holes

in Western policies and reassure the public that the move made by their geopolitical adversaries would eventually hurt them.

Sputnik prompted this narrative on the very first day of the Special Military operation, citing the then Vice President of the Eurasia Center think tank Earl Rasmussen's statements regarding the impending effects of sanctions⁸. The points that can be gathered from Mr. Rasmussen's direct quotes in that article are that Russia will be impacted by sanctions, but its economy is more prepared for sanctions than their European counterparts, while the gap created by Western companies in the Russian markets would be filled by others like China. He speculates that high energy prices would cripple European Industry, with Sputnik adding Rasmussen's opinion that that plays into U.S. strategy⁹. This article set the tone for how sanctions would be reported, focusing on the missed opportunities of the West's shortsightedness. The article makes sure to specify that the expert is the Vice President of an American-based think tank, giving his expertise (the only supporting element used in this text) as an heir of credibility.

On the third of the following month, an article titled "US Stocks Fall by 797 Points as Anti-Russia Sanctions Push Petrol Above \$130 per Barrel" pushed the narrative that the initial sanctions levied on Moscow and the price jump in energy prices along with the consideration of phasing out Russian petroleum products by the United States and the European Union is causing panic in the U.S. stock market¹⁰. On the same day, an article was published mentioning counter regulations being planned by Moscow, as well as a criticism of the West's use of sanctions targeting Russia's civilian infrastructure and an assurance that Russia does not want to leave the

⁸ Sputnik International, "New US Sanctions to Affect Europe, Ukraine More than Russia - Expert," Sputnik International, February 24, 2022

⁹ same as above

¹⁰ Sputnik International, "US Stocks Fall by 797 Points as Anti-Russia Sanctions Push Petrol above \$130 per Barrel," Sputnik International, August 6, 2022

European Gas market¹¹. These articles are used to convey the West's irresponsibility in applying these sanctions, causing a soaring price for oil, chaos in American Markets, and reckless measures that affect the civilian operations of Russia. Although these articles briefly mention the hardships placed upon the Russian economy, Sputnik does not describe the wider economic outcomes of the sanctions in the country.

In the following fiscal quarter, a price cap on Russian oil gained popularity in the legislative bodies of the West. In anticipation of these sanctions, the news agency invited the president of a large Indian-based investment firm, IIFL Securities Ltd, who suspected "A price cap on Russian oil will increase demand from Indian refiners. It may go up by 50 percent."¹². With India becoming one of the largest importers of Russian oil after the beginning of the conflict, this article highlights the potential increase in demand for Russian oil in a neutral country such as India after the implementation of a price cap. The option of relaxing sanctions against Venezuela or Iran to alleviate the pressures of rising energy prices while providing an alternative to Russian oil imports was described as an insufficient measure to displace Russian oil on the market.

This article illustrates the measures taken by the West as pointless and self-harming by citing the expressed demand for cheaper Russian oil rising in India and the increase in worldwide gas prices as a result of the cap. The article failed to mention that the price cap allowed European countries, still dependent on Russian oil, to buy it for a price significantly lower than the market rate. There was no mention of a need to increase Russian oil production or use oil reserves to meet the demand created by the discounted price. In this way, the article also supports the narrative that Russia will pivot to other markets when the West becomes unavailable.

¹¹ same as 10.

¹² Rishikesh Kumar, "India's Imports of Russian Oil Could Jump by 50% If West Imposes Price Cap, Expert Says," Sputnik International, December 7, 2022.

Only three articles, with regard to the narrative that Western sanctions are backfiring, were published in the next six months. The first article spoke of the decline in global stock markets caused by the rise in interest rates in most Western central Banks as a response to inflation, in addition to the soaring energy prices. This ‘price crisis’, as dubbed by Sputnik, “was only exacerbated by fresh Western sanctions against Russia, which resulted in discrepancies in gas supplies to Europe, oil shortages at refineries and the cutting of economic ties with the Russian market.”¹³

The second article elaborates on the energy war between the European Union and Russia. It mentioned that the fifteen percent target decrease in the European Union’s gas consumption is not enough to offset the demand to match oil imports into Europe, excluding Russia’s petroleum products.¹⁴ The article also claims that there has been a boost in Russia’s crude oil production and a recovery in income received from oil. After these main arguments were made by the author, the article included a fairly damning analysis of the sanctions provided by professor of energy economics Dr. Mamdouh G. Salameh, which can be summed up by this excerpt: “‘Western sanctions against Russia have on the whole failed miserably,’ he said. ‘The sanctions are hurting the economies of those imposing them rather than the Russian economy.’”¹⁵ The professor cited rising prices of petroleum products and energy bills. Vladimir Demidov, an independent Energy resource expert who often writes for Russian media sites, mentioned that Europe might not ‘freeze’ but will need to restore coal mining and rely on reserves, which will harm their environment but end up supplying enough energy for the European Union.

¹³ Tim Korso, “US Markets Lost up to 30% This Year amid Soaring Inflation, Fuel Prices, Sanctions Backlash,” Sputnik International, August 6, 2022.

¹⁴ Sputnik International, “‘The Last Laugh’: EU Sanctions on Russia Backfiring as Moscow Winning ‘Energy War,’ Analysts Say,” Sputnik International, August 11, 2022.

¹⁵ same as above.

The third article¹⁶, much in the vein of the previous two articles, speculates on growing rifts in regard to the continued support to Ukraine caused by the economic side effects of the sanctions. Much of the article reported on this speculated division in the upper echelons of E.U. governments, confirmed by unnamed sources and accented by links to two articles covering protests over inflation. Only two paragraphs were left aside in order to mention the rising inflation in the Eurozone, which reached a 10.7% high in October 2022, along with the increasing energy prices for households based on the Household Energy Price Index and a claim that a quarter of Europeans was on the brink of financial disaster, based on Ipsos poll only conducted in six of the forty-four European countries¹⁷.

The supporting elements used for this narrative in the last three articles might have correctly indicated that the prices of energy would rise as a result of further sanctions, global stock markets have stagnated over the course of the conflict, and Western countries suffer from worsening inflation. However, the articles do a mediocre job of proving that sanctions were the root causes of inflation of household goods and market decline in the West, only citing the rise in energy prices, increasing production costs, and the rising interest rates employed by Western central banks, causing skepticism amongst investors. The articles use narration as their main supporting element, emphasizing, to a fault, the potential for significant political division caused by the economic side effects of the sanctions.

Articles reporting directly on the narrative that the sanctions are backfiring were not observed in the selection from January 2023 to July of the same year, with only two articles in the third quarter of 2023 and one the following quarter. The first article, titled ““A Form of

¹⁶ Svetlana Ekimenko, “Backfiring Russia Sanctions May Fuel Growing US-Eu Rift amid ‘fracturing of Support’ for Kiev,” Sputnik International, November 12, 2022.

¹⁷ same as above.

Suicide’: Germany’s Economic Woes Created by Its Own Sanctions Policy,”¹⁸ proceeded to describe how Germany survived the winter of 2023 without Russian oil with great difficulty and is likely to experience an economic downturn without an alternative to Russian oil in the same price range.

Much of the supporting elements in this article were provided by the Director of Studies at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences in Paris, Jacques Sapir. He attributed the limited economic downturn to a relatively warm winter along with a massive subsidy provided by the German government, amounting to approximately seven percent of its GDP. Sapir says that without cheap hydrocarbons available to German producers, the government’s large investment in the industry might not be enough to incentivize foreign investment and stimulate industry. The director goes on to speculate: “If this [current] recession lasts until next spring, the economies of the countries mentioned will also go into depression, which in turn will affect the German economy even more.”, reasoning that since Germany is an important part of a fluid European economy with many other countries depending on its products and clientele, a continued downturn in the economy would likely cause a negative chain reaction.

The second article¹⁹, published the following month, went on to discuss the loss of one hundred billion euros after leaving the Russian market (reinforcing Sub-narrative 1.2), reported by the Financial Times, and how Europe’s dependency on Russian energy paired with the high-interest rates to curb inflation increases the costs for businesses, along with all of the issues discussed in the previous articles. While most of the article was far more focused on the narrative that the costs of businesses have increased since the sanctions went into effect, the mention of

¹⁸ Fantine Gardinier, “A Form of Suicide’: Germany’s Economic Woes Created by Its Own Sanctions Policy,” Sputnik International, July 13, 2023.

¹⁹ Ekaterina Blinova, “EU Sanctions Punish European Businesses More than Russia,” Sputnik International, August 7, 2023.

Western businesses losing money after withdrawing from the Russian market plays into the narrative that Western policies are counterintuitive. To further this point, Sputnik cited a Yale study that concluded that out of 1000 businesses that committed to leaving Russia, some were still operating there. Since the publication of the article, the Yale study has been updated to include 1028 entirely leaving Russia and shows companies that are not leaving Russia or only partially scaling back.

This piece also cited a member of the European Parliament, Gunnar Beck, to draw political recognition of the economic issues caused by sanctions while citing macroeconomics professor Sergio Rossi²⁰. According to the professor, Europe's current financial woes stem from two main issues: Remaining problems from the pandemic period (i.e., supply chain issues and lower demand due to decreased Purchasing Power Parity) and the European Union's reliance on imports to fuel their economy, such as the reliance on Russian energy. After the economist's comments, Gunnar Beck, with the article now referring to him as the 'economic observer', is quoted:

“Actually, the observed inflationary pressures reduce real wages of the bottom and middle-class workers, so that their own consumption expenditures must be reduced, thereby inducing a dramatic vicious circle for all stakeholders, namely, firms, banks, and the public sector of these countries. The European Union risks therefore disintegrating before the end of this decade, in light of the increasing social conflicts and economic problems that remain unaddressed because there is no political will to solve them before long.”²¹

Beck starts with the argument that inflation is affecting the real wages of Europeans, which causes a decrease in spending and will take a negative toll on the rest of the economy. Then, the European MP makes a statement foreshadowing the disintegration of the E.U. due to unspecified socio-economic issues. While the first part of this statement might be sound in

²⁰ same as 19, 21, 22.

²¹

economic logic, the following statement is far more political. It is used to depict a terrible situation that could be politically avoided. Using the label ‘economic observer’ can affect the perception of the above political statement as a continuation of economic analysis, shifting the interpretation of the narrative.

Balancing out the rhetoric-heavy article, it ended off with statistics sourced from Bloomberg: “According to their [Bloomberg’s] estimates, the deferred effect of raising interest rates, combined with the restriction of government spending, could trim 4% from [the] economic output of the eurozone.”²² This forecast is completely reasonable for the time, and when paired with shrewd political narration, it creates the sense that Europe is in decline due to its own policies.

The last article, which explains that sanctions are backfiring, is a short piece regarding the “Prohibiting Russian Uranium Imports Act.” The piece emphasizes the act’s clear drawbacks, such as the need for an alternative source of uranium and a new ‘uranium enrichment scheme’²³. The decision is framed as purely political without any logical incentive to do so, without elaborating on how much more the United States would spend on nuclear energy. According to a far more detailed analysis published in 2022 by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists²⁴, even the cessation of all uranium imports to the United States from Russia was to cause a fifty percent increase in the price of uranium, and the Separative Work Units (SWU) it takes to enrich it would only result in an approximate two percent increase in the retail price for nuclear energy is only two percent. While the cessation of all uranium exports to the United States has no large

²² same as 19, 20, and 21

²³ Andrei Dergalin, “US Shoots Itself in Foot with ‘politically-Motivated’ Ban on Russian Uranium Imports,” Sputnik International, December 12, 2023.

²⁴ François Diaz-Maurin, “US and EU Imports of Russian Uranium and Enrichment Services Could Stop. Here’s How.,” Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, September 13, 2022.

effects on the Russian state budget, the 2% spike in nuclear energy prices seems to be a fairly mild side effect compared to Sputnik's forecasts.

These articles used to further Narrative 1 use a lot of informational supporting elements that show real struggles in the European economy only to then frame those issues as consequences of their sanctions policy. While it is true that certain policies did decrease the trade revenues of transnational companies that serviced or were serviced by Russian entities and caused a price hike in energy costs, the articles did not provide any substantial data that proves neither correlation or causation between Western economic indicators like inflation, unemployment, or any other variable against the amount of economic sanctions (measured in quantity of sanctions or by estimated value of the damages caused by them) that were levied on Russia. The articles instead highlight the Western economic relationships that were sacrificed in the name of punishing Russia and the resulting losses incurred by the industries that relied on pre-sanction ties while providing their own analysis of the political motivations to apply these sanctions and foreshadowing economic outcomes in line with their narrative.

Sub-narratives, Furthering Narrative 1

By now, it is visible that the articles pushing the narrative of sanctions backfiring on the West are done by adding skillful narration of economic indicators that coincide with the narrative. The news outlet points out the worsening inflation, climbing interest rates, decreasing purchasing power parity, and rising energy prices, using those indicators as evidence of the widespread side effects of the mismanaged sanctions policies implemented against Russia. While these issues do exist in Western nations, some of which were exacerbated by sanctions, the

articles do not really cover the extent to which these sanctions caused difficulty for Russia and if the damages done to its economy outweigh the consequences of the sanction's side effects.

To further amplify the damages caused by Western sanctions to themselves, Sputnik published a number of articles Pushing the sub-narratives listed: The sanction exemptions passed by Western countries show their faults, Companies leaving Russia have sustained massive losses, and the sanctions are causing other countries to consider alternatives to the U.S. Dollar. These sub-narratives are mentioned in the articles discussed earlier in a way that furthers the idea that Western powers are not careful in their foreign policy, causing a fracturing of the global financial system to their own detriment. In the articles dedicated specifically to these subsections, the main narrative that they support is very present in the narration of the sub-narratives.

Sub-narrative 1.1: Sanctions Exemptions and Exceptions

The sub-narrative about the reconsideration of certain sanctions is framed in one of two ways. The first is that Western restrictions that have already been issued are being scaled back due to bad policymaking. The second is that certain industries are not touched because they are either too critical to the West. These re-considerations are not too abundant when compared to the number of sanctions levied on Russia in total, but each change in sanction policies gives all news outlets the opportunity to narrate the nature of that change. There are eight articles that focused on this narrative in the full article selection conducted for this project. Five articles speak on the topic of exemptions to sanctions made in accordance with vested interests, and the other three report on the sanctions that were either amended or not implemented due to the critical nature of the industry to the sanctioning country.

Two articles titled “‘Key’ Sectors Reportedly Exempted From EU’s Anti-Russia Sanctions Amid Covert ‘Lobby’ Efforts”²⁵ and “Canada Quietly Lets Companies Circumvent Sanctions to Import Russian Goods, Including Vodka”²⁶ are prime examples of pieces that highlight the observed corruption in the governing entities of the West. The first article, regarding E.U. exemptions from sanctions, claims that there are industries that are void of sanctions due to intense lobbying efforts. The article provides examples: “From Belgian-shielded trade in Russian diamonds and unimpeded shipping of the sanctioned country’s oil by Greek-owned tankers to continuing import of uranium from Russia by France and other countries, lobbying efforts are reportedly crucial to clobbering together unanimity on sanctions packages.”²⁷ The article specifies the trade values of two of the mentioned targeted industries, including uranium trade with Europe worth 194 million U.S. dollars and the Diamond trade worth about 1.75 billion dollars, both of which are relatively small parts of the whole Russian trade balance.

The European Union’s decision not to sanction these industries is not depicted as nonconsequential to the Russian economy; rather, the exceptions are painted as critical to E.U. industries that simply lobby the government for favorable exemptions. Sputnik uses this reasoning to further the notion that Europe is less willing to apply strict sanctions if they are in conflict with certain vested interests, citing an article in the New York Times²⁸. Moreover, the main narrative that the sanctions have backfired was reiterated by constantly bringing up their perceived side effects, such as the West’s soaring inflation rate. The more tangible information is nearly identical, with the main differences being in the narration of the material.

²⁵ Svetlana Ekimenko, “‘key’ Sectors Reportedly Exempted from EU’s Anti-Russia Sanctions amid Covert ‘Lobby’ Efforts,” Sputnik International, February 9, 2023.

²⁶ Ilya Tsukanov, “Canada Quietly Lets Companies Circumvent Sanctions to Import Russian Goods, Including Vodka,” Sputnik International, October 4, 2023.

²⁷ same as 25.

²⁸ same as 25 and 27.

The second article²⁹ addressed similar exemption issues, this time in Canada, where exemption documentation is given out far more frequently. Sputnik cited an article from the Quebec-based newspaper LeDevoir reporting on the exemptions given to Canadian companies. These include: “more than a dozen special permits have been issued to date... with exports totaling nearly \$2.8 million CAD (\$2.03 million US) between March 2022 and July 2023.” and “Canada imported some \$47 million CAD (\$34.2 million US) worth of Russian goods... as well as \$17 million luxury goods such as fresh seafood products and vodka.”³⁰ To create a sense of Canadian hypocrisy, the article reminded the readers of the billions in military aid committed by the Canadian government, the harsh stance that Ottawa has taken over the course of the conflict, even going as far as to mention the public relations disaster with a World War 2 veteran who fought against Soviet forces to the Canadian parliament. After informing the reader of such liberal distribution of exemptions and reminding them of the harsh stance the government is promoting, the article recaps with this analysis: “The Trudeau government’s apparent hypocrisy in talking a big game against Russia while continuing to do business with the country is not unique, with the United States, the European Union and other Western nations buying tens of billions of dollars worth of Russian resources... while exporting industrial goods to third countries which are then reexported to Russia.”³¹ Narrating around the fact that the Canadian Foreign Ministry was distributing a couple of dozen trade exemptions allows Sputnik to paint a picture of a hypocritical and ineffective West that is primarily committed to its moneyed interests.

Both of the previous articles used information sourced from Western articles that criticize the shortcomings of the sanctions and combined it with Sputnik's narration of the situation to

²⁹ same as 26, 30, and 31.

³⁰

³¹

make the West seem incompetent at best and doomed to fail at worst. Moreover, utilizing the select words of Western political representatives to complete the illustration of the economic situation gives the outlet a sense of legitimacy while furthering political narratives around the economic situation. While the industries that are being exempt from sanctions are a fairly small portion of the Russian Federal budget, Sputnik and other Russian outlets take big pride when anything falls through the cracks.

Another couple of articles from the selection, exemplifying Sputnik's focus on any small victory, are two reports on the Swiss unfreezing assets and issuing exemptions. The first article³² was published four months into the war, reporting on the unfreezing of 3.4 billion U.S. dollars because their government could not determine if that money belonged to sanctioned entities, citing a senior member of the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs. The second article³³, published in March of the following year, reported on exemptions, citing the Swiss government's statement: "In regard to the sanctions, the Federal Council has previously stated it is prepared to act within the framework of existing legislation to minimize any unintended economic consequences on Swiss companies." Both of these reports cite directly from the Swiss government, whose statements are framed as pragmatic decisions focused. When these statements are paired with either the decisions to unfreeze the sanctions or the implementation of exemptions, it makes the decision itself seem pragmatic and in correspondence with the vested interests of the country. This furthers the narrative that Western sanctions are being amended in light of vested interests within those countries.

³² Tim Korso, "Swiss Banks Unfreeze \$3.4 Billion in Sanctioned Russian Assets," Sputnik International, January 9, 2023.

³³ Sputnik International, "Swiss Government Introduces Exemptions from Russia Sanctions," Sputnik International, April 12, 2023.

An example of Sputnik beginning to develop the narrative regarding the reason for Western amendments to sanctions law is in the article: “US Won't Consider Petroleum to Be of Russian Origin Once It is Transformed in Another Jurisdiction.”³⁴ According to the article, the United States Treasury will not consider Russian Petroleum products to be from there once the product has been ‘substantially transformed’ outside the Russian Federation. This means that all products that have been transformed won’t fall under the price cap policy, allowing Russia to export crude petroleum products to countries that do not operate under the price cap and let them sell refined products. Western countries get refined oil that they otherwise would not have since Vladimir Putin signed a decree in December of 2022 banning the export of petroleum products to countries implementing the price cap. The article simply cites the U.S. Treasury for its information regarding the legal petroleum consideration without any noticeable narration.³⁵ The absence of the news organization’s storytelling may be because there is no need to frame something narratively if it is already playing to your advantage. Reporting on the fact that Western countries are changing their laws so that they can import oil of Russian origin conveys the message that those states are still reliant on Russian petroleum, far more than any commentary on the price cap or the inflation in the West.

The final three articles furthering the above narrative are about Atomic energy, the Nord Stream Pipe repairs, and the exception for helicopter repairs. Many of the points about atomic energy being a key industry have been made in the articles already discussed. The article that laid out Europ’s relationship to Russia’s nuclear energy markets³⁶, citing the Euratom Supply Agency’s 2021 annual report, stating that Rosatom (Russia’s State Nuclear Corporation)

³⁴ Sputnik International, “Us Won’t Consider Petroleum to Be of Russian Origin Once It Is Transformed in Another Jurisdiction,” Sputnik International, December 30, 2022.

³⁵ same as above.

³⁶ François Diaz-Maurin, “US and EU Imports of Russian Uranium and Enrichment Services Could Stop. Here’s How.,” Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, September 13, 2022.

provided 20% of Europe's uranium used in reactors along with "Deliveries of separative work from Russia to EU utilities accounted for 31% of total deliveries, an 8% increase from the year before," and the construction of two new reactors in Hungary³⁷. From this tight collaboration, Sputnik derives a story that the European Union would not be able to sanction this sector fully until they diversify, a difficult task given the specialized market.

Similarly to the previous article, the news piece regarding the return of the turbine used for the Nord Stream pipeline³⁸, published before the ban on crude oil from Russia, highlights the vital nature of the pipeline to European energy security. Citing the then Canadian Minister for Natural Resources Jonathan Wilkinson, the article states: "Wilkinson claimed that the German economy may have otherwise suffered 'very significant hardship' and heating may have become unaffordable for many in the cold months due to limited supply of Russian gas."³⁹ The statement has the desired effect of pushing the narrative that certain sanctions could not be applied to vital industries.

The article on the British sanctions exemption for a company selling spare Russian helicopter parts⁴⁰ does not just focus on the fact that the helicopters could only be repaired with matching parts, but it frames the British government as beholden to its own moral principles. The two-paragraph piece is sure to bring up the company's role in providing spare parts for Myanmar's military junta following the coup in 2021. The Myanmar cue was highly condemned by the United Kingdom, making this sanction exemption especially damning due to the company's alleged role. Not many details were published regarding the nature of the transactions

³⁷ same as 36.

³⁸ Sputnik International, "Canada to Return Nord Stream Turbines to Germany," Sputnik International, July 10, 2022.

³⁹ same as above

⁴⁰ Sputnik International, "UK Lifts Sanctions on Russian Helicopter Parts Trader Sins Avia," Sputnik International, July 5, 2023.

between British entities and the Russian company, but all that Sputnik needed to push its narrative was the exception itself.

All of these articles addressing sanctions exemptions were directly related to the narratives that exemptions are made based on vested interests and when a Russian product is crucial for the economies of the European Union. These narratives support the main theme of all the Russian-sourced articles up to this point: the sanctions are backfiring. A Europe that is issuing exemptions to sanctions that it itself has created is a perfect scenario for Sputnik to raise questions about the effectiveness or even the necessity for sanctions in the first place. For this particular sub-narrative, Sputnik mostly used Western information the vast majority of the time, with short stints of original narration in between, to make the articles palatable for a foreign audience.

Sub-narrative 1.2: Business Departure

The second major sub-narrative regarding the negative impact on Western companies after they withdrew from Russia's economy is elaborated on in three articles found in the project's selection. The first article published towards the beginning of the war speculated on the possible effects of Western companies leaving the countries and the effects on the departing companies and the economy of the Russian Federation, as well as the fates of the remaining foreign enterprises. The two later articles are shorter updates on the losses of Western companies. This sub-narrative has also already been referenced in the articles focused on Narrative 1, reinforcing it by presenting the West as poor decision-makers when leaving a fairly large consumer-oriented market like Russia's. The articles focused on the losses of Western businesses, which continue to reinforce this narrative. They also present Russia as a new market

for companies outside of the West (a key element of Narrative 2), predominantly from China and India.

The first article⁴¹, published in a few weeks after the start of the Special Military Operation in Ukraine, has the most content, covering the actions of major withdrawing companies in every sector and the prospects for the industry without them. The industries covered were natural resources (including petroleum), electronic commerce, consumer technology, and transportation, as well as the ‘Remain Camp’ of those entities choosing to remain in Russia. Along with the economically relevant facts, the article includes the expertise of Angelo Giuliano, whom Sputnik refers to as a “Hong Kong-based financial and political analyst.” Mr. Giuliano is a frequent correspondent for news organizations such as China Daily, CGTN, and China Military Online. As of March 25th, the Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation has announced that Angelo Guliani is a pro-Russian source of disinformation. Nevertheless, he is the one given the opportunity by Sputnik to narrate the withdrawal of Western businesses from Russia.

The article starts with a basic summation of the businesses that are leaving and the situation as they see it: “Most of them have not severed ties with Russia indefinitely; however, it's probable that the returnees will see their market niche filled by newcomers since Russia belongs to the club of the world's largest economies in terms of GDP based on purchasing power parity (PPP).”⁴² The outlook is positive, with emphasis placed on the assumption that most Western companies are willing to return to the Russian market and the probable replacement of those who have left.

⁴¹ Ekaterina Blinova, “Observers: Foreign Brands Leaving Russia over Ukraine Spec Op Are Losing Credibility & Market Niche,” Sputnik International, March 9, 2022.

⁴² same as above and below

The first assumption may be flawed; however, the second is backed by statements made by the representatives of Chinese and Indian companies that are set to replace Western providers. The Chinese National Petroleum Corporation struck a ten-year deal that was supposed to transport 100 million tons of oil to China before the war began. SWIFT is set to be replaced with the homegrown National Payment Card System (operating in 10 countries, both recognized and unrecognized) and China's Union pay system (operating in 180 countries). The list of companies ready to enter the Russian market is reiterated for every industry and is accompanied by statements from Mr. Giuliani that further both Sub-narrative 1.2 and Narrative 1. In addition to this, the article included a list of companies that have stayed in the Russian markets along with an early warning that French President Emanuel Macron urged heads of major industries not to withdraw quickly from Russia without government consultation to avoid unnecessary losses.

The combined points of this article⁴³ set the tone for all articles reporting on topics that projected the sub-narrative that Western businesses are losing money and a spot in Russia's consumer markets. The sub-narrative actively reinforces Narrative 1 by framing the losses of Western withdrawal as another futile attempt to damage the Russian Economy, dealing damage to their own business. Moreover, there is a strong focus on incoming replacements for Western businesses, which plays into the narrative that Russia will pivot to the Global South to survive the sanctions (Narrative 3). Sputnik frames Russia as a great business opportunity with a new consumer-heavy market freeing up, possibly targeting the moneyed people outside of the Western world.

The two articles covering this sub-narrative following this one carry this tone, focusing in particular on announcing the major losses of Western enterprises along with skillful narration.

⁴³ same as 42.

The first one⁴⁴, published six months into the conflict, reported a 70 billion dollar loss reported by companies that had left or were leaving at the time. Losses could be considered investments that have been lost due to the withdrawal or the losses for the sensation of contractual obligations by both parties. This article brings up the losses in the energy sector for Western businesses, including the losses caused by the suspension of Nord Stream 2 and other withdrawals. The second article⁴⁵, published on the seventeenth of December 2023, cited a New York Times article claiming that Russia has been able to benefit from the withdrawal of Western companies, which lost more than one-hundred-three billion dollars. The first article also included a quote from the speaker of the Russian Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin, basically stating that the West has pulled the Iron Curtain onto itself, punishing itself out of its own ignorance. This political statement, paired with the losses, reports further Narrative 1.

Although it is true that Western companies lost money in their withdrawal from Russian markets, the direct financial fallout for Western businesses is less of an issue than the lack of critical energy and material resources to supply their industrial base. While trade with Russia did bring profits for Western companies and consumer goods and services to the Russian people, the withdrawal mostly affected large energy companies, resource traders, and companies that held large material investments prior to withdrawal. Consumer goods companies were affected less by withdrawals since countries whose imports of those goods rose from 2021-2022, according to the World Bank, countries such as Turkey⁴⁶, Kazakhstan⁴⁷, Uzbekistan⁴⁸, and the Kyrgyz Republic⁴⁹ all resell these goods to Russia at a higher price, a phenomenon that has only been reported to

⁴⁴ Evgeny Mikhaylov, "Western Companies Suffer \$70 Billion Losses after Exiting Russian Market," Sputnik International, October 19, 2022.

⁴⁵ Sputnik International, "Western Companies Declare over \$100bn in Losses after Leaving Russian Market - Reports," Sputnik International, December 17, 2023.

⁴⁶ World Bank, "High-Technology Exports (Current US\$) - Turkiye," World Bank Open Data.

⁴⁷ World Bank, "High-Technology Exports (Current US\$) - Kazakhstan," World Bank Open Data.

⁴⁸ World Bank, "High-Technology Exports (Current US\$) - Uzbekistan," World Bank Open Data.

⁴⁹ World Bank, "High-Technology Exports (Current US\$) - Kyrgyz Republic," World Bank Open Data.

increase as the war went on. The shift away from Western countries may be a more permanent phenomenon in the more critical parts of the Russian economy, but consumer demand is still present for Western goods in Russia, as can be surmised from the increasing imports of consumer tech, automobiles, and luxury goods flowing into countries adjacent to Russia; which can be a way in for Western companies depending on how long the sanctions will persist.

Sub-narrative 1.3: Sanctions Accelerate De-dollarization

The final sub-narrative is that the sanctions are causing other countries to consider diversification of currencies used in trade, diminishing the U.S. dollar's dominance in global finance. There are five articles in the selection that primarily focus on this sub-narrative, framing the loss of Western financial dominance as a self-inflicted wound, in line with Narrative 1. There are two types of articles that have been employed to further this narrative, the first being articles that elaborate on the potential and real departures from the U.S. Dollar as the world's premier form of cross-border transactions, while the other articles provide examples of Russia developing trade ties with other countries based in currencies other than the dollar. The latter articles also help further sub-narrative 2.2: Russia's Pivot to The Global South alleviates sanctions by framing the trade deals as examples of the country's ability to pursue global partnerships amidst sanctions. The articles emphasize the emergence of alternatives to Western financial infrastructure and the need to develop better alternatives, with Russia at the forefront of this project.

The first of the two articles supporting this sub-narrative by bringing up the potential for departing from a U.S.-dominated financial system published two and a half months after the start of the Full-Scale Invasion featured statements from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) head, Kristalina Georgieva, describe the coming difficulties for the existing global financial system.

The article titled: “IMF Calls for New Payment System to be Developed to Iron Out 'Payment Blocs' Amid Sanction on Russia”⁵⁰ takes some liberties in framing Georgieva’s statements as a call to build a brand new international payment system. This title implies the IMF’s encouragement of a departure from existing financial systems dominated by the West. The article itself is less misleading in representing her statements, which instead expressed concern for the fragmentation of the global financial system into different factions that will result in more economic inefficiencies in trade and an urgent need for “public digital platforms to connect payment systems.”⁵¹ Remittances have bloomed approximately forty-five billion dollars annually, with the average transaction cost at the time of her speech around 6.3 percent of a transfer. Sputnik mentions Georgieva’s concerns about the growing transaction fees that drive up prices, only to use it as a way to convince other countries to join it in more bilateral trade deal, further complicating the flow of funds.

After the statements from Kristalina Georgieva, the article goes on to talk about the movement in countries like India, China, Iran, and Russia to develop new unified payment systems⁵². To back these developments with an official voice, the article cited “The Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, Shaktikanta Das, [who] had said that countries would give a thought to diversification from the US dollar as a reserve currency in response to sanctions imposed by the West against Russia.”⁵³ These two sections of the article are meant to back one another up, drawing a parallel between the IMF head’s recommendations regarding a fragmenting global payment system and the goal of a group of nations trying to counter Western influence. This is

⁵⁰ Rishikesh Kumar, “IMF Calls for New Payment System to Be Developed to Iron out ‘payment Blocs’ amid Sanction on Russia,” Sputnik International, December 8, 2022.

⁵¹ IMF Managing Director As Prepared for Delivery Kristalina Georgieva, “Confronting Fragmentation: How to Modernize the International Payment System,” IMF, May 10, 2022.

⁵² same as 50 and 53.

⁵³

done by emphasizing the risk that the weaponization of the U.S. dollar and Western financial tools poses to the rest of the world.

While it is true that the West's weaponization of finance further fractures the global economic systems, the alternative that the article is alluding to is actually not fully in line with the recommendation given in Georgieva's speech that was cited for this article⁵⁴. This is because a payment union between multiple countries is still a financial union that is separate from other global systems, which are currently connected by intermediaries for a price. While this payment union would make Russia and the other participating countries more sanctions-proof, transactions between payment blocks become bulkier, driving the prices for goods obtained using systems outside the bloc more expensive. In her speech, the IMF head was more focused on the interoperability of payment systems built on public digital infrastructure, not the creation of new payment blocks that are resistant and, therefore, separated from Western financial infrastructure.

The article tried to use the statements from Kristalina Georgieva's speech "Confronting Fragmentation: How to Modernize the International Payment System"⁵⁵ as an endorsement of de-dollarization (sub-narrative 1.3), which falls apart when cross-referencing her full statement. However, what this article does moderately well is present the Western sanctions as a force fracturing the global financial climate and promoting alternative payment systems based in the Global South. These ideas promote the sub-narrative while also supporting the narrative that the sanctions hurt the world (Narrative 3) and the narrative that other countries help Russia withstand sanctions (Sub-narrative 2.2).

⁵⁴ same as previous.

⁵⁵ same as 51

The second article has a similarly sensational title, “Yellen: US Dollar Global Hegemony Could Be Undermined by Western Sanctions,”⁵⁶ referencing the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen. Sputnik cited her interview with CNN’s Fareed Zakaria, in which she admitted that the U.S. Dollar’s hegemony is tested when sanctions are used. In both the interview and the article, Yellen’s position was that the U.S. Dollar was backed by the safest financial infrastructure in the world. However, the Sputnik article described this stance as ‘boasting.’ The article also quoted Yannel’s position on seizing Russian assets and the legal constraints surrounding the confiscation of another sovereign country’s assets under your jurisdiction. This article aimed to discredit the dollar-led system by emphasizing the U.S. Secretary of Treasury’s own admission of risk being present when sanctioning other countries and the legal hurdles of trying to confiscate Russian assets abroad, furthering the sub-narrative.

The first article⁵⁷ in the selection that specifically mentions new financial partnerships that do not involve Western currencies spoke about the imminent acceptance of Russian capital investments in Indian debt securities in March of 2022, commencing Rupee-Ruble transactions. The article emphasized Russia as a cheap source of financing amidst a global energy crisis, with thirty-one billion dollars that have been raised in the first three months of the fiscal year. In addition to this, the article cites India’s Foreign Minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, saying that India should have no issues with Ruble Rupee payments, with the only fear being the counter-sanctions that the United States and their partners might levy on India. This furthers the sub-narrative by providing a real example of de-dollarization happening as a result of sanctions

⁵⁶ Andrei Dergalin, “Yellen: US Dollar Global Hegemony Could Be Undermined by Western Sanctions,” Sputnik International, April 16, 2023.

⁵⁷ Rishikesh Kumar, “Scoop: India Okays Russian Firms’ Investments in Debt Securities Activating Rupee-Ruble Transactions,” Sputnik International, March 5, 2023.

since the sanctions have caused inflation in the West, making funding from there more expensive to obtain.

The second article⁵⁸, published three months after the previous one, featured an interview with the CEO of the Indian-based multinational pharmaceutical company Roerich Healthcare, Dr. D.B. Bhaaskara. The main questions were: Are there any payment issues between the two countries, are there any logistical issues hindering trade, and are there efforts being made by Indian companies to fill the gap of Western companies that are leaving Russia?

To the first question, the CEO confirmed that “Several Indian companies have signed contracts in yuan, which means they are ready to receive payment in China's yuan. Still, the preferred mode of settlement is in the Indian rupee.”⁵⁹, adding that his company was receiving regular payments in Indian rupees, U.S. dollars, or euros. This answer confirms that Russia has found new ways to get around Western payment methods (strengthening sub-narrative 1.3) while maintaining the ability to conduct transactions using Western currencies.

While responding to the second question, Dr. D.B. Bhaaskara confirmed the existence of logistics issues with a limited number of cargo ships and airlines available, driving prices up. Alternatives are continuing to be explored, including shipping through Iran, which, at the time of this interview, was still not a viable solution.⁶⁰ This underlined the main issue in the Russian trade system: the lack of trade infrastructure available, which hit especially hard in the early phases of the war.

On the subject of the potential for Indian firms to replace the departing Western businesses, Dr. D.B. Bhaaskara gave a frank analysis of the prospects of Indian pharmaceutical

⁵⁸ Rishikesh Kumar, “Indian Firms Signed Contracts to Receive Export Payments from Russia in Yuan: Pharma CEO,” Sputnik International, November 18, 2022.

⁵⁹ same as 58,60, and 61.

⁶⁰

companies setting up shop in Russia. He goes on to say: “Medium-scale companies can come forward to set up raw material (API) manufacturing in Russia. However, it is unclear whether Indian workers [or] professionals can go and work in Russia. Setting up a new unit in unknown topography with a different language and culture is a little complicated. A lot of these questions are unanswered.”⁶¹ The other unanswered questions that the entrepreneur mentioned were the unknown probability of Western counter-sanctions against Indian pharmaceutical companies, the work necessary to work out trade regulations between the two countries, and the work needed to be done by Russian entities to accumulate the raw materials needed to establish the production of pharmaceutical goods in Russia. These sobering questions asked by Dr. D.B. Bhaaskara outlined the conditions necessary for the establishment of enhanced bilateral trade and investment between the nations. At the same time, it acknowledges the existing financial ties between the two countries.

This interview was less controlling than Sputnik’s articles that use citations, which allowed for issues to be acknowledged. However, the answer regarding payment systems based on non-Western currencies operational and the steps being taken by both countries to build business relationships still helps the narrative that Sanctions have accelerated the use of non-dollarized currencies. The Russian initiative to pivot to the Global South is also apparent but does not go far enough to outright support sub-narrative 2.2: Russia’s pivot to the Global South has and will continue to help mitigate the sanctions.

A more conclusive article⁶² on the results and mounting efforts of the Russian pivot to the Global South was published by the outlet on the twenty-second of August, 2023, elaborating on the country’s financial cooperation with BRICS countries. The information cited in support of

⁶¹ same as previous.

⁶² Sputnik International, “BRICS to Deepen Financial Cooperation to Reduce Reliance on US Dollar,” Sputnik International, August 22, 2023.

the sub-narrative includes a 19.1 year-on-year growth in trade with BRICS nations reported by China's General Administration of Customs, The New Development Bank's increased target for handing out loans in local currencies, and 80% of the Russia–China trade balance being paid for with ruble and yuan transactions. This information, which alone supports sub-narrative 2.2, was framed with skillful narration as the first examples of non-Western systems servicing countries and a template of cooperation. With proposals circulating of a new BRICS currency, sputnik went on to conclude with the help of 'experts': "Although it's not possible to shake the dominant status of the dollar in global trade and settlement at the current phase, experts stressed that the greenback's hegemony could not be sustained, with more countries seeking to reduce reliance on the currency." This kind of speculation, paired with the earlier information, supports the sub-narrative stating that as a result of Western sanctions, the world is moving away from the dollar. Sputnik takes this a chance to frame BRICS as a developing financial alternative free of Western pressures.

All of the articles focused on the potential for de-dollarization and portrayed the dollar reserve dominance as a means for the West to unilaterally implement financial pressure to manipulate foreign policy. Partnerships in local currencies are presented as a fairer and more diversified financial reserve system. Many of the articles paint Russia's role in this process as critical while acknowledging the global effort that it will require to successfully de-dollarise. De-dollarization has been an economic concept pursued by countries that are acutely aware of the financial leverage that it gives to the United States. The use of sanctions has been a long-standing practice in U.S. foreign policy, making countries that have been or may soon be under threat of them create alternatives. The articles emphasize this movement, citing examples of the increased trade volumes conducted in local currencies and the first joint efforts to pursue

alternatives to the U.S. dollar. While this motivator is there, building an infrastructure that can provide an efficient alternative requires a lot of cooperation, dedication of resources, and, most importantly, time — issues that are admitted sparingly. Nevertheless, these ideas are definitely in the heads of policymakers and bankers all across BRICS and members of the Shanghai Cooperation Zone, which is something Western policy must now take into account.

Narrative 2; Russia's Resilience in The Face of Sanctions

As the sanctions piled on, articles that speculated with regard to the effectiveness of sanctions began to turn into articles that contested their capabilities with news of an economic comeback in Russia. The narrative (2) regarding Russia's resilience to sanctions was the main narrative in ten articles from the project selection, with one additional article that admits difficulties caused by sanctions in a certain industry. The articles in the first three quarters of the time period were mostly of a speculative nature, but with the passing of time, the reports seemed to have data that were indicators of good economic performance. The main three types of articles that can be detected in this selection, when excluding the outlier, are articles that describe information from pro-Russian sources, articles featuring Western reports that are framed in line with the narrative, and pieces that are based mostly on the commentary of 'experts.'

There are four articles that cite information from primarily Russian sources, with the first two published in 2022 and the latter in the following year. The tone of the first two articles was nearly identical, with each article citing a business representative who said that the Western sanction would not affect their businesses. The first article⁶³ cited the deputy head of Gazprom Neft, Vadim Yakovlev, who said there was no impact caused by the European oil embargo and

⁶³ Sputnik International, "EU Embargo on Russian Oil to Have Insignificant Impact on Gazprom Neft: Deputy Chief," Sputnik International, November 15, 2022.

that “restrictions created by Western countries are leading to the restructuring of logistics routes, given that Russian companies are moving to new markets displacing previous suppliers.”⁶⁴ The second article⁶⁵, this time about the farmers of Donbas who spoke about their business reorienting towards Russian buyers who also export it to “Turkey, Algeria, Syria, and Egypt — friendly countries that are ready to pay real money.”⁶⁶ The second source, in particular, was framed in response to Western claims that the war and the resulting sanctions are causing food hazards around the globe as evidence that the war and the sanctions targeting Russia and her allies are not affecting business. However, both articles speak of the need to reorientate their operations to focus on new markets since the traditional markets are becoming less of an option. In addition, using one surviving farm that is located closer to the Russian border than the line of contact at the time the article was written is then farms west of Severodonetsk, for example. The tone is not fully convincing, and there is limited information about how much these companies are making.

The two articles citing Russian sources published after 2023 were more substantive, the first of which is an article⁶⁷ citing data given by Vladimir Putin during 2023 at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum along with other Russian state and enterprise data. Putin claimed that “Russia’s unemployment rate has fallen to a record low of 3.3%, and its inflation rate has declined to 2.9% – considerably less than in most Western countries. After experiencing a mild recession in 2022, the Russian economy is projected to grow by 1.5%-2% this year.” In addition to this data, Sputnik claimed that “Russian exports hit a ten-year high of \$592 billion in 2022” and that “By the time the forum concluded on Saturday, about 900 deals worth \$46 billion had

⁶⁴ same as previous.

⁶⁵ Ceyda Karan, “Sputnik Correspondent: Donbass Farmers Unfazed by Sanctions, Will Sell Food to Friendly Countries,” Sputnik International, July 20, 2022.

⁶⁶ same as above.

⁶⁷ Simes Dimitri, “Russia Survived Western Sanctions. What’s Next?,” Sputnik International, June 19, 2023,

been signed.”⁶⁸ The only piece of information that might be contested is the inflation rate, with high estimates placing the rate at 5%. The article then proceeds to elaborate on a new economic doctrine labeled supply-side economics, where the government would invest massively into the expansion and creation of businesses, with a heavy focus on government development projects. This is basically the same model of development Russia already had, with upgrades made to include newer industries and technologies instead of continuing to invest solely in the companies adjacent to energy resource refinement and export.

The last article⁶⁹, which uses Russian sources, is much like the previous one, citing data released by the Russian Economic Development Industry. Sputnik states: “Russia's GDP grew by 2.5% in January [through] August in annual terms, and separately in August the growth accelerated to 5.2% year-on-year” This phrasing is very odd here, but it means that the GDP when comparing August 2023 to the same month of the previous year, was 5,2% higher; which does not mean that the economy grew by 5.2% year-on-year in 2023. Year-on-year growth is likely closer to the first figure for 2023. In addition to this, the article mentions the fact that Russia has the fifth largest Purchasing Power Parity, which the article equated to ‘becoming the fifth largest economy.’⁷⁰

The economic data from these four articles, when considered without Sputnik’s framing, points to a less dire situation in Russia and an economy that has fared fairly well against the sanctions. With the addition of the narration provided by Sputnik and their sources, even the reorientation of entire industries to new markets seems like an effortless task, regardless of the

⁶⁸ same as previous

⁶⁹ 1. Sputnik International, “Russia’s GDP Grows by 2.5% Year-on-Year in January-August,” Sputnik International, September 27, 2023.

⁷⁰ same as above.

circumstances. The sources provided very little nuanced information regarding the Russian economic recovery, only covering basic economic indicators and mentioning new markets.

The articles that cover reports of Russian resilience to sanctions by citing Western sources share some of the same characteristics seen in previously mentioned, with the important distinction that the tone in these articles is meant to display how these adversarial sources have admitted to Russian Resilience. There were four articles written mostly based on the information released by Western organizations, three based on news articles, and one citing White House National Security Council John Kirby's statements at a press conference. The articles were all published when the repercussions of sanctions were still reflected in the major economic indicators (2022- early 2023), which might indicate that the use of foreign media to support Russian narratives is heavily employed when the indicators reflect some of the country's economic struggles.

For example, only two months into the war, Sputnik announced that Russia had the potential to increase its energy exports to 321 billion U.S. dollars and has been able to reach a 240 billion current account surplus⁷¹, citing a report by Bloomberg. The article did not mention the likelihood of a European oil embargo, only the information that Russia would be able to make all of this money if no further oil-related sanctions were implemented. The article also brings up the price hike of natural gas that happened after Putin announced that petroleum products are to be sold in the Russian ruble to 'unfriendly countries,' which has allowed the country to make more money off of the higher prices and the exchange of foreign currencies to rubles. These statements furthered the narrative that Russia was able to withstand the sanctions, while the article also brought up inflation in Western countries that are framed as the side effects

⁷¹ Oleg Burunov, "Russia May Increase Its Energy Exports to \$321 Billion despite Sanctions, Report Says," Sputnik International, April 4, 2022.

of sanctions, even finding a statement to reporters from Joe Biden admitting that there are costs for imposing sanctions, furthering Narrative 1.

The other two Sputnik articles, citing *The Economist*⁷² and *Deutschlandfunk*⁷³, respectively, mention a change in the IMF's prediction for Russian GDP growth in 2022 from an 8.4 percent contraction to 3.4 percent instead. In addition, those two articles emphasized the increase of imports from other countries that replace the flow of goods from the West, with the article citing German news used this citation "...where Western companies or products have disappeared, Russian importers have stepped in to replace them, often via so-called parallel imports (i.e., goods imported by unlicensed distributors). 'In other words, something is always missing in Russia, including on the store shelves, but usually not completely and not for long.'"⁷⁴ This rhetoric is used to diminish the effects of sanctions, which have clearly disrupted supply chains while displaying the country's resilience, with foreign media admitting to the fact that sanctions have not halted economic activity in the country.

The article⁷⁵ that cites the statements of John Kirby uses selected statements from a White House press conference that announced fresh sanctions on Russia for the second anniversary of the war. Most of the article goes over the new sanctions and their target industries, in particular, 2.8 billion dollars worth of sanctions placed on the metallurgical industries in Russia. The news about the sanctions themselves was written with little detail outside what is cited directly from the press conference. On the other hand, the article starts with a few highlighted statements from the National Security advisor including: "We believe that these will have an impact, but the

⁷² Sputnik International, "Russian Economy Emerging from Recession despite Western Sanctions, British Newspaper Reports," Sputnik International, November 18, 2022.

⁷³ Ilya Tsukanov, "Sanctions Failed to Crack Russia, German Media Says," Sputnik International, February 9, 2023.

⁷⁴ same as above.

⁷⁵ Sputnik International, "US Admits Russian Economy Showing Resilience to Sanctions, Says Their Impact Can 'Take Time,'" Sputnik International, February 24, 2023.

second point is that it can take some time. Often, you don't see the immediate impact. It takes a while for the effect to be manifested... I take your point, that [Russia's] economy is in some ways showing some resilience"⁷⁶ This is the part of the press conference that was also emphasized in the title, with the purpose of furthering narrative 2.

The two remaining articles further this narrative with the use of expert voices, using them to narrate the economic situation in a mostly speculative narrative. The first article, which was published a couple of days after the beginning of the War, cited an Israeli researcher, Dr. Raz Zimmit, who reflected on the effects of sanctions as a political tool based on their implementation against Iran. He concluded with the following statement:

“We need to distinguish between the economic and political impact of sanctions. The former do have a tendency to leave an impact as they did with Iran's economy, especially between 2018 to 2020, when their inflation went up and there has been a dramatic decline in oil imports. The latter, however, are less effective, especially if they aim at unrealistic or wide goals. If the idea of the measures applied is to force a country to act against its national interests or desert its policy, it simply won't work.”⁷⁷

This analysis of the situation might have acknowledged the potential economic effects on Russia, but it immediately discredited the potential for sanctions causing political changes in Russia and, by extension, discrediting the viability of stopping the war using economic restrictions (essentially narrative 2). The statements from the analyst were accompanied by Sputnik's mention of Russia's preparations against disconnection from the SWIFT global payment system and reaching out to the Global South for future economic activity, which was meant to both increase the chance of sanctions failing and further, the sub-narrative that Russia's pivot to other markets will help her weather the sanctions.

⁷⁶ same as 75.

⁷⁷ 1. Elizabeth Blade, “As West Slaps Another Package of Sanctions on Russia, Analyst Mulls over Their Effectiveness,” Sputnik International, February 27, 2022.

The second article, published in October of 2023, was structured similarly to the previous article but carried a far more positive tone. The article covered Russia's rise on the Purchase Power Parity index and the strengthening of the ruble in March of 2022 as stellar examples of economic recovery, after which they cited UC Berkeley economics professor Dr. Jack Rasmus. He argues that the economic decline caused by increased energy costs in Europe is by American design, speculating that Europe is becoming an 'economic vassal' of the United States: "What they [Neocons controlling the U.S. administration] want, ultimately, is to dismember Russia and to go to war with China."⁷⁸ No matter the probability of whether this conspiracy is true or not, the use of this statement is used by Sputnik to further the narrative (2) that Russia is recovering while reinforcing the idea that the West, in particular the United States, has insidious motives behind the sanctions and the rest of their foreign policy.

One article that can technically be considered an outlier to this narrative is the article cleverly titled: "Boosting Russia's Civil Aviation Industry Remains Priority Amid Sanctions,"⁷⁹ which actually admitted to serious issues in Russia's civil aviation and adjacent industries. The article cited a Russian military analyst, Dmitry Drozdenko who, according to Sputnik, said: "that overcoming the fallout of the sanctions, especially in the field of import substitution in the commercial aviation sector, would be a protracted and "difficult" process.", confirming the major difficulties in importing high tech substitutes to Western components. The article finishes off by reinforcing Narratives 1 and 2 with rhetoric supposedly covering the 'West's Anti-Russian Sanctions.'⁸⁰

⁷⁸ James Tweedie, "Russian Economy Overtakes Germany, UK and France despite Western Sanctions," Sputnik International, August 10, 2023,

⁷⁹ Oleg Burunov, "Boosting Russia's Civil Aviation Industry Remains Priority amid Sanctions," Sputnik International, April 25, 2023,

⁸⁰ same as above.

Narrative 2, as presented by Sputnik, presented a limited exploration of the damages caused by sanctions, Russia's surprising resilience to them as reported by foreign news outlets, and a hefty dose of speculation regarding the sanctions' continued effectiveness. The only article that admitted 'serious issues' caused by sanctions did so in a way that framed the affected industry as a "Priority Amidst Sanctions" in the title. As time went on, the reports began to mention more economic indicators that pointed to a more robust recovery by 2023. There was further speculation throughout all of these articles as to the political motivations behind the application of the sanctions that support Narratives One and Three (sanctions hurt the world), along with evidence of further collaboration with the Global South (sub-narrative 2.1).

Sub-narrative 2.1: Russia's Shift to the Global South Alleviates Sanctions Effects

In addition to the articles addressing Russia's economic recovery, there is a group of reports specifically targeting the sub-narrative that states that the partnerships the country has pursued with the Global South have become essential alternatives to Western imports, markets, and services. In conjunction with three articles that covered Russia's cooperation with others in pursuit of diversification away from the U.S.-dominated reserve system and the small mentions of the country's pivot to the Global South, there were six articles specifically addressing sub-narrative 2.1. Three of these articles are based on the analysis of foreign institutions and analysts, while the three other articles reference corporate entities that are conducting business with Russia. The former articles use expert analysis to illustrate Russia's path to recovery with the help of the Global South, while the latter provides corporate indicators accompanied by an analysis of them and, in one case, the limitations of these partnerships.

The first of the three articles using expert analysis supported the claim made in its title: "Reoriented Trade Ties & Galvanized Resources Helped Russia Weather Sanctions

Challenges...”⁸¹ The article, written twelve days into the year 2023, started off by citing the updates made to the World Bank indicators on January 10th, forecasts for the Russian economy in 2023 and for the year to come, indicating a modest recovery. Production output was still forecasted to fall by 3.3% in 2023 and a 1.6% recovery in the following year, while the economic growth outlook for 2023 was downgraded from 3 to 1.7. The article continued by citing a Moscow State University Economics Professor, Dr. Andrey Kolganov, who elaborated on Russia’s ability to circumvent import restrictions when possible or import and produce parallel substitutes to Western goods, using the Russian auto market as an example. Dr. Olga Barisova, professor at the Financial University, elaborated on moves reorienting Russian trade relationships towards Asian and African countries to accomplish the goals listed by Dr Kalganov, such as Russian companies changing legal jurisdictions to Asian countries to circumvent sanctions and the use of countries like Turkey to act as intermediaries for Western goods.

The second⁸² and third⁸³ articles provide examples of such cooperation and present both real and potential advantages of pursuing partnerships with monied Russian entities. The second article, citing a visiting professor at the School of Orientalism of the National Research University Higher School of Economics, Ramy El Kalyouby, mentioned the profits made by the Gulf states from not boosting their oil production and maintaining high prices, resulting in approximately 1 billion dollars in daily revenue for the Saudis; along with deals between Egypt and Russia to build nuclear reactors, replace Ukrainian imports of grain, and constructing a Russian industrial zone in Egypt⁸⁴. The third article mentioned the Russo-Iranian “\$1.6 billion

⁸¹ Svetlana Ekimenko, “Reoriented Trade Ties & Galvanized Resources Helped Russia Weather Sanctions Challenges, Experts Say,” Sputnik International, January 12, 2023.

⁸² Ekaterina Blinova, “Why Arabs Bolster Energy & Security Cooperation with Russia in Defiance of Western Sanctions,” Sputnik International, January 19, 2023.

⁸³ Fantine Gardinier, “As Russia-Iran Cooperation Increases, US Sanctions ‘Lose Their Bite,’” Sputnik International, May 18, 2023.

⁸⁴ same as 81

deal toward construction of the Rasht-Astara railway, a key part of the International North-South Transport Corridor,”⁸⁵ along with a pending delivery of twenty-four Su-35 fighters, with Dr. Hossein Askari, who teaches international business at George Washington University, commenting on this partnership becoming one of the main corporations focused on mitigating Western sanctions for anyone that is willing to join the group.

Two out of three articles that cite entities that represent corporate interests covered the benefits that came from Sino-Russian business relationships that occurred after the implementation of Western sanctions, reflecting the statements made in the previous three articles. The first article⁸⁶, published in early May of 2022, spoke of the 30% jump in coal imports for the year 2022, citing the lead analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, Lauri Myllyvirta. She added that China seemed “ to be walking a line of maintaining friendly relationships with Russia without encouraging or directing Chinese firms to increase business with the country and discouraging anything that might run afoul of the sanctions imposed on China.”⁸⁷ Although China show restraint from fully embracing full-on economic cooperation, the massive spike in energy imports from Russia still helped the northern neighbor fill its coffers.

However, by the time the second article⁸⁸ was published in February of 2023, the situation shifted towards more substantial exchanges between the countries’ firms. To illustrate this, the article used the new partnership between a Chinese car manufacturer, Haval Motor Manufacturing, and Russian automotive companies, along with a 36.4 billion dollar subsidy for

⁸⁵ same as 82

⁸⁶ Oleg Burunov, “China Coal Imports from Russia Almost Double amid Western Sanctions,” Sputnik International, May 21, 2022.

⁸⁷ same as above

⁸⁸ Denis Bolotsky, “Pivot to China: How Russia’s Car Industry Is Adapting to Sanctions,” Sputnik International, February 22, 2023.

Russia's domestic automaking industry and substantial growth in Chinese brand imports into the country, which rose "from 9.6% in January 2022 to 38.1% in January 2023."⁸⁹ The Sino-Russian trade relations and the articles describing them are great examples of the firms of the Global South's change in attitude towards pursuing business ventures with Russian firms, along with their crucial role in stimulating Russia's economy.

The last article⁹⁰, which acts as an outlier article discussing the limitations of Russia's economic recovery, is a brief report admitting the serious effects of Western sanctions on a Russo-Iranian oil field development deal. The outlet cited the statements of Norwegian company Rystad Energy, which said, "The corrosive nature of Iranian oil and gas reserves requires high-grade piping for extraction, which neither Russia nor Iran have the capacity or capability to produce in the short term."⁹¹ This points to the serious issue of acquiring certain high-grade technologies that are exclusively sourced from the collective West despite partnerships with the wider world.

All in all, the three articles citing the analysis of experts described Russia's framework for working with the Global South and the real or potential benefits of such partnerships (respective to when the article was published). The first of the two articles that cited sources representing corporate interests elaborated on the developed trade relationships with China, which indicated a fairly successful implementation of the framework outlined in the previous articles over the course of the years between the start of the war and the end of 2023. The final article, also citing corporate interests, acknowledged the issue of obtaining specialized products

⁸⁹ same as 88.

⁹⁰Sputnik International, "Western Sanctions May Hamper Russian-Iranian Offshore Gas Production Plans - Rystad," Sputnik International, August 25, 2022.

⁹¹ same as above.

solely possessed by Western nations, which require significant time and resources to develop. It is important to note that.

Narrative 3; Sanctions' Ripple Effects on the Global Economy

Sputnik wrote multiple articles that focused on the economic damage rendered to the rest of the world as a result of Western sanctions. The four articles covering this topic are covered in a manner similar to the articles propagating Narrative 1, in which after the damages are presented, they are framed as the results of something in between incompetence and complete disregard on behalf of Western powers. This very idea is then used to prop up Russia as a sensible actor in the global financial arena and a potential partner for all those seeking alternatives to a Western (particularly U.S.) dominated international economic system. Three of the four articles cover problems that stem from supply chain issues, most of which were a consequence of sanctions and countermeasures taken against them. The last article uses the statements of a foreign government official to back the validity of this narrative.

The first three articles, all of which were published late in the second fiscal quarter of 2022, detailed the new issues caused by sanctions' disruption of global supply chains. The first of these articles⁹² reports on the effects of sanctions on the global diamond industry, according to the head of media relations at Antwerp Diamond Center, along with the reports from “the president of India's Diamond Workers Union Gujarat, Ramesh Zilariya, told Sputnik that Western sanctions on rough diamonds have ended up devastating workers in India's polishing industry, where unemployment, wage reductions, and suicide rates are now on the rise.”⁹³

⁹² Sputnik International, “US Sanctions on Russian Diamonds Mainly Impacting Supply to India, Antwerp Diamond Center Says,” Sputnik International, November 18, 2022.

⁹³

Such outcomes were not isolated to one industry for some countries, with Sputniks' second article⁹⁴ serving as an update regarding Bangladesh's 'Import Problems.' The article cites Sri Lankan Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, who said, "The Ukrainian war is causing difficulties to many countries, including the country like Bangladesh which is far away from the war territory... It is because of sanctions; it's because you know we used to import some products from both Russia and Ukraine, and those stopped now."⁹⁵ Although this article was meant to focus on the problems that sanctions cause, the Foreign Minister used the Ukraine War and sanctions interchangeably since the latter was a reaction to the former and due to slow imports from both countries. To reiterate the correlation between sanctions and Supply chain issues, the article added that although the U.S. does not sanction agricultural goods, the financial sanctions impede the cycle of global trade, an argument that doesn't hold much weight since more of those goods are exported from Ukraine rather than Russia to Sri Lanka.

The third article focused on the adverse effects of sanctions on the environment, citing minority Austrian Parliamentarians' complaints regarding the ability of Western countries, and by extension, the rest of the world, to fulfill their obligation to the Paris Climate Accords. The article first described how the new designation of nuclear and gas power "signaled that EU governments are facing a stark reality, recognizing that more time and more realistic goals are required to transform the energy infrastructure in Europe,"⁹⁶ according to E.U. parliamentarian Roman Halder. In addition to this, the lawmaker complained about the increase of coal reliance in Europe due to the lack of alternative energy sources and the worrying tendencies of Austria's emissions in 2021 to reach the same levels they did four decades prior to that.

⁹⁴ Sputnik International, "Bangladesh Has Been Affected by Anti-Russia Sanctions, Import Problems, Foreign Minister Says," Sputnik International, September 22, 2022.

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⁹⁶ Sputnik International, "EU Climate Plan Doomed Unless Sanctions against Russia Lifted, EU Lawmaker Says," Sputnik International, February 9, 2023.

All three previous articles clearly further the narrative that sanctions hurt the global economy, particularly affecting the efficiency of supply chains that have global consequences. In addition to the supporting elements of this narrative, a sparse few reports along the lines of the fourth article⁹⁷, which cites the statements of Kazakhstan's Deputy Foreign Minister Roman Vassilenko condemning Western sanctions, are used to further the claims that Western countries, in particular the United States, are unpredictable players on the financial arena causing havoc in supply chains worldwide. The article then links these supply chain issues to more tragic consequences like food insecurity, climate instability, and mass unemployment in certain sectors.

Conclusions on Sputnik's Narratives

To sum up, the narratives propagated by MID Sputnik International are as follows: Narrative One spoke to the self-inflicted damages caused by the West's decision to employ multiple rounds of sanctions; Narrative Two reported on signs of a recovery in the Russian economy along with the steps taken to achieve it; and Narrative Three covered the damages of sanctions on the global financial system and their effects. The articles often promote multiple narratives simultaneously since they are all interconnected through the news outlet's writing.

Articles focused on propagating Narrative One presented economic indicators that alluded to the decline of Western economies, such as rising inflation and unemployment. They framed sanctions as the cause for these worsening signs or an additional obstacle towards their recovery. The articles attempt to establish direct correlational and causal relationships between the application of sanctions and the previously mentioned indicators by providing examples of real adverse effects that the sanctions had on specific industries. However, there was

⁹⁷ Sputnik International, "Kazakhstan Opposes Use of Economic Sanctions with Global Affect," Sputnik International, October 26, 2023.

undoubtedly no statistical analysis that could confidently establish the relationship between the worsening economic indicators of the West and the sanctions they applied. Sanctions negatively affected Western economies; however, the nature of Sputnik's narration describing this damage could be more accurately characterized by the discovery of the finer details regarding the sanction's economic effects on the West presented by peer-reviewed work. Nevertheless, the news outlet still presents evidence of the negative repercussions of the sanctions on those levying them along with the three sub-narratives, which allows them to propagate this narrative.

The articles pertaining to the sub-narrative (1.1) that some industries remain unsanctioned or receive exemptions due to their importance to Western economies reinforce the idea that real damage was done to those economies since they are still mulling over which Russian industry to exempt. The exemptions themselves are painted as decisions made as a result of lobbying efforts pursued by certain industries, the irreplaceable nature of certain trade relations with Russia, and as evidence of the West's limited political capital. Many of the sanctions exemptions mentioned in the articles focused on this sub-narrative were later reconsidered, at which point Sputnik reported on those sanctions in other articles that have already been described in the Narrative One section.

Articles propagating the sub-narrative that Western companies lost money when exiting the Russian market reinforced the idea that exit from the country's market was haphazard and detrimental to the exiting entities' domestic economies. The losses were mostly incurred by withdrawing companies that focused on resource trading, energy production or distribution, and any firm holding assets under the jurisdiction of the Russian government, while consumer goods and services companies suffered less, with many of them selling through neighboring countries. The articles brought up the replacement of Western companies with Russia's own firms or

foreign-owned companies in the domestic market and even mentioned companies that decided to continue operating in the country; both observations furthered the idea of an irrational West.

The articles spread the sub-narrative that the sanctions accelerate movements to de-dollarize, using the real and perceived damages of sanctions to the West and the rest of the world as justification for countries to seriously contemplate the restructuring of their reserves to counter Western influence. The articles used statements from Western officials (with varying degrees of integrity) to further the idea of new alternatives to financial institutions under Western jurisdiction while providing examples of new financial systems being used by BRICS and SCO countries. While the idea of de-dollarization has been around for a while, even the most reactionary anti-Western forces have not considered consistently using local currencies and systems for large international transactions until the beginning of the Full Scale Invasion of Ukraine. It would still take a long time before a smooth alternative to Western financial systems and the U.S. dollar can be implemented on a more global scale, but the first seeds of de-dollarization have been planted.

The articles propagating the Second Narrative show that Russia largely recovered from Western sanctions; it had an interesting progression over the course of this project's selected time parameters. The articles published earlier in the time selection were mostly analytical pieces that cited Western reports of sanctions not affecting Russia to the desired extent and certainly not enough to stop the Russian war effort. Articles after 2023 had more substantive evidence of a Russian economic recovery, including economic indicators and examples of businesses recovering from the sanctions. The articles do indicate some of the struggles that are present, such as trying to get access to components for Western technology remaining in Russia and obtaining goods exclusively manufactured or controlled by countries that are applying the

sanctions, especially shown in the outlying article about difficulties in Aviation. However, these issues are mostly fixed with the presence of domestic and foreign replacements for those goods that require Western components combined with parallel imports and sanction aversion schemes that have been employed by Russian entities to obtain sanctioned goods.

The sub-narrative that addresses Russia's pivot to the Global South and its role in Russia's economic recovery ties into the previous narrative's coverage of the country's rebounding economic health. The articles themselves narrate Russia's new approach to global financial and trade relations while listing potential benefits, or they provide examples of Russian partnerships in the Global South that have been paying off. There was a shift in the quantity and nature of partnerships that Russia developed with the Global South, with countries like China and India being more wary of potential secondhand sanctions for participating in the country's wartime in the first year of the war. This fear subsided over time, and a corresponding influx of capital from the Global South followed the calm of global investors. The Global South can provide most of the goods the West used to, except highly specialized products that are only made in countries that are sanctioning Russia.

The articles covering the Third Narrative mostly report on the damages to global supply chains caused by sanctions. Sputnik then attributed food shortages, unemployment, and worsening climate conditions to the disruptions caused by global supply chains. As in the very first narrative, the results of the sanctions are framed as collateral damage caused by the West's irrational policymaking in the pursuit of political hegemony.

The composite narrative regarding sanctions created by Sputnik's reporting could be synthesized along these lines: Western sanctions, levied with the intent of stopping Russia's Special Military Operation in Ukraine, have not been able to live up to their mission statement

(Narrative 2); instead damaging their own economies as well as those of the rest of the world (Narratives 1 and 3), further cultivating anti-Western sentiment in economic policy making worldwide. When ignoring the surrounding political rhetoric of this narrative and only focusing on economic reporting, Sputnik does a decent job of getting the correct data, but at times, the source took certain artistic liberties when describing the significance of these indicators or their relation to sanctions. The same liberties were taken when the source used citations, with more frequent interpretation errors and miss-quotes. When reading the economic reporting with the political storytelling used, the resulting narrative seems to be somewhat based in reality, but it is still missing a full depiction of the damages caused by sanctions, which could only be inferred from the available reports of Russia's recovery and the disclosed measures taken to counter these sanctions. The accuracy of this composite narrative can only be verified once more trade, financial, corporate, and production statistics are published and analyzed in relation to the amount of sanctions leveled on the Russian Federation.

Ukrainian Narratives

The Kyiv Post, as mentioned in the Sources section of the Methodology, was founded by Jed Sunden as a paper originally intended for expats who wanted to follow current events in Ukraine. Eventually, after the crunch of the financial crisis, Mr. Sunden sold his paper to Mohammad Zahoor, a Pakistani-born entrepreneur who worked in tandem with American editor Brian Bonner to create a paper that was un beholden to monied interests within Ukraine, including the pro-Russian oligarchs within the country⁹⁸. The paper continued its independent operations under Bonner's care until the new owner of the paper, Adnan Kivan, announced a reorganization of the paper in 2021. According to former journalists, there were concerns that the new owner of the paper was buckling under pressure from the Ukrainian government, which prompted a rift between Mr. Kivan and his editing team and the subsequent re-organization of the company. Considering the new ownership and the departure of many former editors who were worried about the future integrity of the post, it is important to consider a slightly more favorable view of the Ukrainian Government.

⁹⁸ Cjr, "Kyiv Post's Unlikely Success," Columbia Journalism Review, September 2, 2014.

This would be especially true after the implementation of the 2019 media laws, which were passed to prevent the spread of misinformation using Ukraine's federal news regulator, the National Council. With the beginning of the Big War and throughout its duration, more powers have been seeded in this organization. The law, in its current form, enforces transparency in regard to who sponsors the outlet and allows for the regulator to censure any information that is seen as disinformation⁹⁹. While the scope of disinformation as defined by the National Council that has been acted upon seems fairly targeted, free speech organizations in Ukraine and abroad are concerned with the continued impartiality due to half of the appointments to the council being made by the president while the other is chosen by parliament, both of which are currently under the control of Volodymyr Zelensky's political party Servant of the People¹⁰⁰. Although this does not mean that the Kyiv Post is completely controlled by those in government, it can be concluded that the government has more influence over what gets published, thereby making the narratives of the Kyiv Post more in line with Ukrainian national interests.

The manual search and selection of articles from The Kyiv Post throughout the duration of the project time frame found thirty-two articles that report on economic sanctions enacted as a result of the Full Scale Invasion. Thirteen of these articles are structured as updates about issued sanctions that are reflective of the statements issued by the foreign ministries or treasuries of those who are enacting the sanctions. These articles usually present little to no supporting elements that are used to propagate any specific narrative about sanctions except the sheer amount of them being levied upon Russia. Nine articles propagate the narrative that sanctions have been working and will work over time. Five articles report with the narrative (2) that

⁹⁹Anushka Patil, "Critics Say a New Media Law Signed by Zelensky Could Restrict Press Freedom in Ukraine.," The New York Times, December 30, 2022.

¹⁰⁰Estelle Nilsson-Julien and Ilaria Federico, "Ukraine: New Media Law Sparks Division," euronews, March 5, 2023.

sanctions are insufficient to stop the War, with six more articles reporting on the supporting sub-narrative (2.1) that Russia is doing everything to overcome them to various effects.

These narratives were propagated with the context that Russia is the force of a violent dictatorship that will continue to disrupt democracies worldwide in pursuit of its agenda. The West is praised for helping Ukraine thus far through the propagation of Narrative One but still called on more support and sanctions because it has not succeeded in stopping the Russian War effort (Narrative 2). The narratives acknowledged that it would take a coordinated and politically willing West to significantly damage the Russian economy through political sanctions, which come with serious challenges (sub-narrative 2.1). These challenges are presented as problems that could only be solved through the combined efforts and sacrifices of the West, which should be willing to sacrifice the pre-war comforts in order to stifle Russia's war effort, saving Ukraine and democracy in the process.

Narrative 1; Sanctions Are Working

There were two main kinds of articles supporting the narrative that sanctions were effective. The first kind of articles that were published speculated on the compound damages of the sanctions eventually showing themselves in Russia's economy, using economic indicators as tools for their narration. The second group of articles was more focused on the observed and recorded effects on certain industries that suffered as a result. The effects of sanctions were intended to damage Russia's economy to the point that it would not have the ability to economically sustain a military operation in Ukraine. However, the desired outcome of a policy is not always the real result. Because of this, the definition of effectiveness and success changed when reporting on the effects of sanctions, mainly the idea that sanctions work in terms of

damaging the Russian economy but not when it comes to stopping the aggressor's military actions and ambitions, an idea reflected in Narrative 2.

There were four articles that focused on propagating the idea that the compounded effects of all the sanctions would eventually rid Russia of the ability to sustain this war. Three of these articles are interviews of economists that further this narrative in their responses, with the remaining one reporting on the potential compound effects of the wider Oil sanctions applied in early 2023. All of these articles predict that the sanctions will work when their effects are compounded, with the argument that successes in sanctioning specific industries can be scaled up with more sanctions.

The first of these articles¹⁰¹ was an interview with British economist Timothy Ash, published a few weeks after the beginning of the Big War. Mr. Ash spoke about the ramifications of the conflict in general; however, when speaking on the subject of sanctions in particular, he argued that there has already been serious damage dealt to the Russian economy and that further damage can be dealt if the West has the political will to employ harsher policies. In the interview, Mr. Ash hypothesized that Russia's economy would contract anywhere from eight to ten percent in 2022 (as done by many other credible economists at the beginning of the war), mentioning the 50-80% collapse in equities and bond markets, owned by many Russians earning middle income and above, as an example of damages caused to the aggressor's economy. He speculated: "A significant section of the Russian population will be hurting because of this. Ordinary Russians — maybe not yet, but years of sanctions will mean lower growth, higher inflation, less investment, more unemployment, and lower living standards."¹⁰² The economist emphasized the further damage that would be caused by harsher sanctions, like the later implemented oil

¹⁰¹ Tony Leliw, "Economist Timothy Ash: Time on Ukraine's Side in War, Russian Economy Squeezed ," Kyiv Post, May 2, 2022.

¹⁰² same as above and bellow

embargo and price cap. The economist also commented on China's pragmatic timidity when approaching closer business ties with Russia at the beginning of the and its role in sanctions working, noting: "It has been notable that China has not been providing sufficient support for Russia, so they have been responding to America's requests."¹⁰³ The assumption that Russia would remain economically isolated while under sanctions later becomes the weak link in the idea that the compound effects of sanctions would eventually catch up to the war effort.

The second article, this time reporting on an interview with Ukraine's Ambassador and Special Envoy for Sanctions, Oleksii Makeiev, who spoke at length about the implementation of "smart sanctions," ref," cited the idea that the compound effects of sanctions will eventually deplete Russia's ability to wage war. According to Mr. Makeiev, the elements that made the sanctions 'smart' were their coordinated nature despite the vast political and economic differences amongst countries implementing them, the smart selection of targets that have the most damage on the Russian economy, and the clear communication of the idea that "the cost of inaction or status quo is higher than that of sanctions" to voters and businesses.

This approach was reflected in the following two articles that make the argument that the compounded effects of sanctions will work. The first of these two articles¹⁰⁴, an interview with investment banker Brian Best, underlined the damages done by more selective technology transfer sanctions, which limited Russia's ability to procure military and dual-use technologies despite the reported 38.8% increase in revenues from oil, made on the wave of rising oil prices in the first invasion. The technology measures are a good example of smart targeting, with bans on highly specialized goods dealing damage to the war effort despite not having a significant effect on Russia's trade balance, a point that is used by Narrative Two.

¹⁰³ same as above.

¹⁰⁴ Aleksandra Klitina, "Russia Sanctions Work in Tech, Will Work in Economic – Head of IB, Dragon Capital," Kyiv Post, September 28, 2022.

The other article¹⁰⁵, published after the implementation of an E.U.-wide embargo on oil products along with the new G7 price cap, elaborates on both established and estimated effects of the sanctions, including the near complete half of its diesel profits from Europe, the assumed lack of demand in China and India for refined petroleum products, and the costs of the price cap: estimated at one-hundred-sixty million Euros daily by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. These measures are perfect examples of ‘smart’ coordination in action, with the crude oil import ban preceded by the petroleum product embargo along with the G7 price cap, all implemented in the span of three months and implemented by more than twenty-seven countries.

The argument that all of the articles mentioned so far revolved around was the idea that the compounded effects of sanctions would eventually critically damage Russia’s military capabilities, which is backed by examples of sanctions affecting key industries, referencing the fairly consistent framework used to implement the sanctions, and the assumption that Russia’s economic isolation would not be severely altered by the commercial cooperation with non-Western powers (due to their concerns regarding Western counter-sanctions). However, there is a consistent presence of supporting elements that support the arguments that propagated Narrative 2, which was written around the same time as the articles described in this section so far. Nevertheless, sanctions still damaged the Russian economy and some of its important industries, which the Kyiv Post was happy to report. These reports observed damages caused by the sanctions regardless of their ability to completely halt the Russian war effort, alone or compounded with other policies.

Within the article selection for the Ukrainian media outlet, there were five articles that covered the effects of sanctions. One of these articles cites different economic authorities in Russia, who were debating over the possible economic fallout resulting from them; another two

¹⁰⁵ Afp, “West’s New Oil Sanctions Aim to Tighten Screws on Russia,” Kyiv Post, February 7, 2023.

were written as reports that listed some observed effects and discussed to what extent they would affect Russia's willingness to go to war, with the remaining two articles reporting on the damages dealt to specific sectors of the economy.

The article titled "Russian institutions in rare public discord over economy"¹⁰⁶ detailed the statements made by Russian officials regarding the state of the economy around the time of the annual Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum in 2022. In particular, there are contrasting statements between members running Russia's central bank and their counterparts in the Ministry of Economic Development. The deputy governor of Russia's central bank, Alexey Zabolotkin's view that deflation was not a major issue since the year-on-year inflation for 2022 was reported to be 16.7%, was challenged by the Minister of Economic Development Maxim Reshetnikov with the point that deflation has been seen for the fifth consecutive week. Another disagreement between Kremlin advisor Maxim Oreshkin and Russia's central bank chief Elvira Nabiullina over the pessimistic, and to some, unpatriotic, nature of forecasts given by certain Russian authorities, to which the central bank chief responded: "In the uncertain conditions we find ourselves in, to consider that they [economic forecasters] are enemies or non-believers is quite simply absolutely wrong."¹⁰⁷ The outlet frames these statements as evidence of the negative effects of sanctions and war on the Russian economy, using the more pessimistic forecasts from Russia's central bank as an admission of them.

The two articles that were written as reports on the effects of sanctions both provide speculation about the targets and effects of the highly anticipated oil sanctions (as described in previous articles of this section) along with more quantifiable evidence of the damage caused by sanctions, including the decrease in monthly auto sales dropping from one-hundred-thousand

¹⁰⁶ Afp, "Russian Institutions in Rare Public Discord over Economy," Kyiv Post, June 18, 2022.

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cars to twenty-seven-thousand (as reported by the article written in August of 2022)¹⁰⁸, a decline in weapons production in line with the 70% decrease in semiconductor imports (as reported by the article written in October of 2022)¹⁰⁹, as well as the loss of money experienced by Russian Oligarchs. The tone of the articles changed over time, with the latter mentioning Russia's mostly unchanged standards of living and a similarly unaffected will of the state to continue its war (another point that is later brought up in Narrative Two) despite the inflicted damages on the country.

More evidence of sanctions damaging the aggressor's economy was reported in two articles covering their negative effects in specific industries, the first of which covered tech sanctions and the latter covering the issues with civilian aviation. The article¹¹⁰ covering the tech sanctions attributed their effectiveness to sanctions on dual-use goods, and there are no signs of China helping evade these sanctions (as of late 2022). The other article¹¹¹ disclosed some effects on the aviation industry caused by sanctions, citing the 10 to 15 percent reduction in flights made by private airline S7 "over the 2023-2024 autumn/winter period due to maintenance problems concerning the US-made engines for its Airbus planes" along with the admission of Russian government and commercial entities with troubles in maintaining and expanding Russia's air fleet. The article still mentioned that "domestic air traffic inside Russia has not markedly fallen since the start of Russia's offensive on Ukraine." and: "The Aviation Safety Network (ASN) also reported the number of aviation incidents in Russia over the period has stayed within the range recorded in previous years." Nevertheless, the damages were significant enough for Russian

¹⁰⁸Afp, "Sanctions Have Huge Toll on Russian Economy: Report," Kyiv Post, August 2, 2022.

¹⁰⁹ Kyiv Post, "Sanctions Really Are Hurting Russia – Analyst," Kyiv Post, October 28, 2022.

¹¹⁰ Kyiv Post, "Russia Is Running out of Technology," Kyiv Post, September 7, 2022.

¹¹¹Kyiv Post, "Explained: Russia's Airline Industry Is Crumbling – Here's Why," Kyiv Post, November 1, 2023.

sources to admit to issues that ‘needed fixing’ in this industry, as mentioned in this article along with the article.

All of the articles used to promote the narrative that sanctions are working praise the damage that has been done, emphasizing the compound effects on the Russian economy. However, the idea that these policies will degrade Russia's military capabilities to the extent that the country will stop the invasion of Ukraine in its tracks was abandoned due to the continued war effort after almost a year of sanctions. The damages were always accompanied by a call for more sanctions to strengthen the compound effect, disrupting the adversary's economy and military-related industries.

Narrative 2; Sanctions are Insufficient For Stopping the War

There were five articles propagating the narrative that sanctions are insufficient to stop the war out of the article selection. Two of them were articles that in some way underlined the limitations that sanctions had or might have, both of which were published in April of 2022, while the other three articles reported or admitted to some aspects of recovery in the Russian Economy. All of the articles acknowledge that there are real damages caused by sanctions, but not enough of them to reflect themselves on the battlefield.

One of the two articles¹¹² that emphasized the limitations of the anti-Russian sanctions reflected on the country's level of isolation in the world. The article cited statements from former Chilean ambassador to India and South Africa, Jorge Heine; professor of international relations at the University of Johannesburg, Chris Landsberg; and former national security adviser to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, which all pointed to the idea that many countries are

¹¹²Bohdan Nahaylo, “Is Russia as Isolated as Ukraine’s Allies Hope?,” Kyiv Post, April 24, 2022.

not willing to sever their economic and political ties with Russia if it would be counter to their respective national interests. The article added the statements from analyst Judy Dempsey, which emphasized the fact that the sanctions have not stopped the continued Russian War effort, along with the commentary of Russian financial analyst Alexey Vedev, who noted that the damage of sanctions “will be clearer in June or July [of 2022], because now the economy is still functioning off the back of its reserves” to which he added “The reserves are dwindling, but as long as they still exist, the sanctions are not fully felt”

¹¹³ The other article¹¹⁴, an interview with Slovakia’s former Minister of Finance Ivan Milkos and adviser to Ukraine, discussed sanctions and the potential political outcomes of the Big War. On the subject of sanctions and their effectiveness, Mr. Milkos elaborated on whether sanctions go far enough, the reason for the ruble's recovery from initial shock from the invasion, the effects of the sanctions so far, and a call for more sanctions (particularly an E.U. ban on Russian petroleum products). On the subject of how the ruble managed to stabilize, he attributed the recovery to the currency’s inflated prices, which assisted with the use of the country's foreign currency reserves. When speaking on the subject of how the sanctions affect the Russian economy, he mentioned that the effects are not really felt by ordinary people besides inflation on domestic goods, with the Russian government increasing its public spending to help those affected. When asked if sanctions go far enough, the economic advisor asserted that despite their unprecedented use, the sanctions were insufficient, citing the estimated three-hundred-twenty billion dollar revenue Russia would earn from petroleum products, tying into his later pleas for the West to implement a ban on the country’s carbon fuels and disconnect its largest banks from the Swift payment systems.

¹¹³ same as previous

¹¹⁴ Jason Jay Smart, “Interview with Ivan Miklos, Former Slovak Finance Minister and Economic Adviser to Ukraine,” Kyiv Post, April 12, 2022

The previous articles are then backed by reports that specifically cover the recovery of Russia's economy as a whole or the accomplishments in a particular industry. The article¹¹⁵ that covered the latter subject elaborates on the increase in Russian oil revenues in 2022, attributing this phenomenon to the high oil prices that balanced out the decrease in the volume of goods exported. The article added that the European Union accounted for 61 percent of all fossil fuel exports, with countries like France buying up more liquified natural gas (LNG) in order to mitigate the potential side effects of an E.U. oil embargo. This article included a call to action for Europeans to abandon Russian petroleum products completely.

This message was reflected in an article published three months later, which covered the economic recovery proclaiming: “Impact of first sanctions ‘over.’”¹¹⁶ The article mentioned the IMF’s edited economic indicators for Russia, forecasting a smaller contraction in GDP in 2022, which was attributed to the previously mentioned boom in oil prices caused in part by the decision of OPEC Plus to cut oil production that year. Moreover, the economic recovery was attributed to the Russian government’s shift to markets that were alternative to those of the West, such as the example used in the article citing the new contracts between Moscow and Beijing that agreed to settle energy payments in rubles and yuan. The article was sure to detail the damages to high-tech sectors caused by the sanctions along with the business exit of Western firms, with the piece using the example of the country’s car market that is experiencing a mass exodus of Western car firms, a shortage of spare parts for existing cars, and high tech components. While car imports would be replaced by those from other markets, the features and components controlled by Western companies became more expensive.

¹¹⁵Afp, “Russia Earns \$98 BN from Fuel Exports in 100 Days of Ukraine War: Report,” Kyiv Post, June 13, 2022.

¹¹⁶Afp, “Resilient Russian Economy Surfs Sanctions on Oil Boom,” Kyiv Post, October 12, 2022.

The tone about the failure of sanctions to stop the war was even reflected in an article¹¹⁷ that put the optimistic statements about the Russian economy made by Kremlin press secretary Dimitry Peskov in November 2023. While the article concluded by mentioning the departure of Western businesses, inflation, and a volatile currency, it admitted that “A massive hike in military spending and redirecting vital energy exports to China and India has helped Moscow avoid the West’s early hopes that sanctions could push Russia into economic collapse.”¹¹⁸

The articles promoting this narrative use it to promote new sanctions that will deal additional damage to the Russian war effort. The reporting itself is filled with a fairly balanced assessment of the economic situation in Russia (acknowledging some of the damages caused by sanctions, which supports the claim made in Narrative One) while speculating on the effects of larger sanctions packages that were yet to be applied. In this way, the articles do give some credit to the sanctions and, to an extent, the West for damaging Russia’s economy while reinforcing the idea that said damages do not do nearly enough to stop the war and suffering inflicted on Ukraine.

Sub-narrative 2.1: Difficulties Implementing Sanctions, a Reason to Double Down

Six articles propagated the sub-narrative that there were difficulties in implementing sanctions, including legal, geopolitical, and material repercussions from the sanctions policies and their Russian countermeasures. In part, this idea supports the previous narrative (2), with both narratives propagated in a way that oftentimes calls for Western powers to step up their acts in countering Kremlin interests. However, while the sub-narrative contextualizes Narrative 2 by providing additional informational and narrative supporting elements that show certain failures in sanctions policy, the sub-narrative differs in the forming of the provided supporting elements.

¹¹⁷ Afp, “Russia Tries to Shrug off Latest US Sanctions,” Kyiv Post, November 3, 2023.

¹¹⁸ same as above

The articles spreading this sub-narrative also framed the policies taken by Russia to counter the sanctions as unstable, aggressive, and illegal despite their role in making sanctions difficult to implement while continuing to call for more support to punish Russia for its misconduct.

Out of these articles, four of them reported on employed and threatened Russian countermeasures and their effects (real and potential), one piece covered a shadowy example of a sanctions evasion scheme, and the remaining report analyzed the legal hurdles faced when trying to confiscate Russian assets under Western jurisdiction. The articles all provide instances of difficulties in implementing and maintaining sanctions; however, they leverage these difficulties in different ways, ranging from framing Russian grain re-appropriation as genocidal to rallying more Western support.

Out of the four articles that speak about Russia's countermeasures and the obstacles they pose to sanctions, two of them cover countermeasures with concrete effects while the latter pieces cover the potential consequences of threatened responses to Western economic measures. The first¹¹⁹ of the two articles that reported on difficulties caused by clear countermeasures elaborated on a bill brought to the floor of the Russian Duma in May of 2022 called "On the Specifics of Regulating Corporate Relations in Business Entities That Are Economically Significant Organizations.", which was signed into law two months after the article was published. These difficulties include Russia's federally appointed business administrators for "firms where at least 25% of the shares are in so-called 'unfriendly' countries", who have unprecedented control over operations located in Russia, along with unspecified policies that would make it hard for Western companies to leave their market without incurring serious losses. The article cited a representative from the Federation of Austrian Industries saying: "Russia was

¹¹⁹Kyiv Post, "Russia Is Running out of Technology," Kyiv Post, September 7, 2022.

already isolated and no longer of interest to investors. This law can only make that worse”¹²⁰, framing the law as a unilateral and irresponsible measure displaying the country’s untrustworthiness.

The other article, reporting on the difficulties caused by Russian countermeasures, covered the title of the story: “Russian Siberian Territory Passes Resolution to Seize Grain in Ukraine’s Kherson Region.”¹²¹ The region in question, Krasnoyarsk Krai, passed a law that seized the ‘surplus’ food output from Kherson to “assist small businesses and consumer cooperatives” in the name of mitigating sanctions. Neither the article nor the statement that it refers to specify the exact amounts of grain taken or how ‘surpluses’ were determined by Russian authorities. The article drew parallels between these new policies and the collectivization policies of Joseph Stalin, which killed millions of people by artificial famine. While the damage from the Kherson product seizures is not nearly as severe, the article cites the statement of the city’s mayor, Ihor Kolykhayev, who claimed that 200 people went missing in the city at the hands of Russian authorities. Seizing the output of an occupied territory as a way of countering sanctions can be considered an economic reprisal with negative consequences for the local economic livelihood.

The first of the articles that reported on the difficulties of implementing sanctions as a result of potential responses threatened by Russia, published in June of 2022, reported on Putin’s threatening statements to stop petroleum imports. The article also mentioned that since the start of the Full Scale War in Ukraine, “Russia has begun reducing its gas deliveries, apparently to prevent EU countries from replenishing reserves.” It cited the International Energy Agency in saying that there were not enough cheap alternatives available to fully compensate for a potential

¹²⁰ same as previous

¹²¹ Mark Raczkiwycz, “Russian Siberian Territory Passes Resolution to Seize Grain in Ukraine’s Kherson Region,” Kyiv Post, April 27, 2022.

withdrawal of Russian petroleum (at the time). The article, along with the European Commission, characterized Russian behavior as blackmail and called for a reduced reliance on energy, with the article mentioning the call from the United States to implement a price cap on their adversary's energy products.

The other article¹²², reporting on threats made in response to sanctions and the difficulties that came with them, discussed the potential escalation as a result of Lithuania's decision to restrict certain goods being transferred from Belarus to Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast. This article was largely a political analysis piece that analyzed the geopolitical implications of Russia's threats toward Lithuania while using the opportunity to point out the aggressor's precarious position in the eyes of the West. When it came to the subject of the effects of potential economic side effects of sanctions, the article cited the statements, streamed over Russian Radio Kommersant, which worried about the more extensive effects of sanctions in Russia and the 'ricocheted' effects on the economies of the E.U. The article called for the Western allies to consolidate in opposition to Russian threats to take advantage of the unpredictable circumstances, in particular, use the goods corridor as a bargaining chip to negotiate the grain deal, which allowed Ukrainian Grain shipments to pass through the Russian blockade at the time.

The article¹²³ documenting an uncovered sanction evasion scheme in late 2023 is another example of action taken by the Russian government and its agents, which seriously undermined the Western economic war effort. The three people arrested for this operation managed to deliver ten million dollars worth of dual-use goods, some of which were found in a captured Russian weapons system. The article does not add much speculative or political rhetoric, but it does show that Russia is actively pursuing sanctions evasion tactics,

¹²² Eurotopics, "Eurotopics – Escalation over Goods Transit to Kaliningrad?," Kyiv Post, June 22, 2022

¹²³ John Moretti, "Three Russians in NYC Caught Selling Weapon Components to Moscow," Kyiv Post, November 1, 2023.

Legal issues with implementing sanctions were also reported in an article¹²⁴ reviewing the difficulties of seizing the assets of an adversary under the jurisdiction of another country. The article mentions the protection of foreign-owned assets granted by the understanding of “sovereign immunity” enshrined in international law and the limited exceptions to this clause, like the process of crime (which cannot be definitively proven without Russia’s assistance). The article mentions the call of many lawyers to push for reparations to pay for Ukraine’s reconstruction, but the article emphasizes the more radical approach by citing multiple Western political figures in calling for the seizure of Russian assets in their countries.

The articles covering this sub-narrative, when stripped of their political messaging, all detail real and potential issues when implementing sanctions and maintaining their effects. However, depending on the obstacle(s) presenting those difficulties, the Kyiv Post either points out their flaws or frames their counterpart’s measures as illegal or morally abhorrent policies. These obstacles are described in this way to influence Western audiences to help Ukraine defeat Russia, depicted by the outlet as a brutal opponent whose disregard for morality and constant mismanagement will destroy everything that Ukraine has managed to build. This support request was not only for additional sanctions but for more financial and military aid, which was and continues to be more consequential on the battlefield.

Sanctions Updates And Their Messaging

Twelve of the articles from the project selection for the Kyiv post are updates about new sanctions, which mostly consist of citations of Western statements announcing those sanctions as well as a general description of their targets. Not all sanctions updates that were published by the

¹²⁴Afp, “Seizing Russian Assets Is Easier Said than Done,” Kyiv Post, February 12, 2023

Kyiv Post were included in the Project selection due to the sheer amount of them and the short length of some of the articles. Four articles chosen in the selection were lists of sanctions implemented on certain individuals for facilitated acts of aggression, including the sanctioning “those accused of spearheading recent mobilization efforts”¹²⁵, ‘Russian Energy Execs’¹²⁶ (executives), individuals that helped ‘Russia’s attempts to destroy Ukrainian national identity’¹²⁷ (in the case of the article just cited: those accused of facilitating the deportation and forced adoption of Ukrainian children in Russia), and officials conducting “Sham Elections in Ukraine.”¹²⁸ These sanctions have no obvious economic effect indicated in the article or elsewhere; however, if the individual in question had assets important to the Russian government under foreign jurisdiction, the state might suffer materially or financially significant consequences.

One of the articles¹²⁹ from the selection reported on Zelensky’s G7 remarks that called for “a new wave of responsibility for Russia – new sanctions, new forms of political pressure, and new forms of support for Ukraine” after the bombardment of civilian and military infrastructure of his country that reportedly killed seventeen civilians on October tenth, 2022, being the largest scale bombing of that time, since the beginning of the War. The remaining articles that announced newly approved or recently passed sanctions of the time could be organized into the following categories: (two) articles published before Zelensky’s address to the G7 and (four) pieces released after his statements. This does not mean that Zelensky’s call for more sanctions and aid corresponded with the immediate implementation of new sanctions. Rather, the article indicated that there was a change in Russia’s tactics that increased the intensity of drone, missile,

¹²⁵ Afp, “UK Unveils New Russia Sanctions over Ukraine Mobilisation,” Kyiv Post, November 30, 2022

¹²⁶ Afp, “UK Unveils New Russia Sanctions over Ukraine Mobilisation,” Kyiv Post, November 30, 2022

¹²⁷ Afp, “UK Sanctions Russians over Deportation of Ukrainian Children,” Kyiv Post, July 17, 2023

¹²⁸ same as above

¹²⁹ Kyiv Post, “Zelensky Calls for More Sanctions,” Kyiv Post, October 12, 2022.

and conventional bombardment, which definitely contained ordinances with some foreign-made parts, including those of the West.

The two articles that provided updates for sanctions passed before Zelensky's statements detailed the sanctions announced by the European Union¹³⁰ and the United Kingdom¹³¹, respectively, both of which applied unprecedented export restrictions for goods and services that can be used to bolster the Russian military or the State Budget (including financial services such as Swift and the E.U. wide oil embargo). All of these sanctions were introduced in June of 2022, reflective of the use of 'smart sanctions' tactics referred to in Narrative One. While these measures include the largest target that bolstered the Russian budget — petroleum exports; these sanctions targeted Russia directly and did not address sanction evasion

The four articles published after the Ukrainian President's remarks at the G7 summit indicated a more expanded focus on firms and entities helping Russia evade sanctions. The articles each respectively covered the sanctions announced by the United States¹³² and E.U.¹³³ around the first year anniversary since the beginning of the Full Scale Invasion of Ukraine and the British¹³⁴ and Japanese¹³⁵ sanctions announced in May of that year. Along with many previously discussed measures that were passed after 2023, the sanctions and the announcements accompanying them targeted some companies providing dual-use goods to Russia, like the one mentioned in the news outlet's report on E.U. sanctions, which "promised to cut off industrial goods worth 11 billion euros (\$12 billion) to Russia and target drone producers in Iran whose unmanned aircraft containing warheads Moscow has been using to attack Ukrainian targets."

¹³⁰ UkrInform, "EU Adopts Sixth Package of Sanctions on Russia, Belarus," Kyiv Post, June 3, 2022

¹³¹ Jay Beecher, "UK Introduces New Sanctions to 'Squeeze Russia from the Global Economy,'" Kyiv Post, June 24,

¹³² Afp, "US to Impose 'sweeping' Sanctions on Russia over Ukraine War: W.House," Kyiv Post, February 24, 2023

¹³³ Afp, "EU Agrees New Sanctions over Russia's War in Ukraine," Kyiv Post, February 25, 2023

¹³⁴ Afp, "UK Announces New Russia Sanctions, Including Diamond Ban," Kyiv Post, May 19, 2023

¹³⁵ Afp, "Japan Unveils New Sanctions on Russia over Ukraine Invasion," Kyiv Post, May 26, 2023

The political narratives depicting Russia as a rogue and mismanaged global actor were ever so present, with most of the sanctions packages being announced in response to hostile actions taken at the directive of its government. Narrative One is clearly amplified by these updates since they provided long lists of sanctions and their targets, many of which were announced in waves by multiple countries coordinating with each other. Narrative Two is barely echoed in these updates, besides a statement made by Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki in the article reporting on the tenth package of E.U sanctions, calling the sanctions “too soft, too weak.” These articles reflect the changing nature of this war and the sanctions meant to weaken Russia’s ability to wage it, with the sanctions passed after Zelensky’s 2022 address to the G7 focused on countering Russia’s ability to bypass the sanctions through third parties and including many of the industries previously avoided for pragmatic reasons.

Conclusion of The Kyiv Post’s Narratives

All in all, the Kyiv Post published articles that either gave updates listing sanctions and their targets or those that propagated the narratives that sanctions work to disrupt the economic system in Russia (1) and that sanctions have failed in achieving a collapse of the financial system funding the War in Ukraine (2), along with the sub-narrative detailing some difficulties when trying to implement or maintain the effects of some of the sanctions that have been place (2.1). These narratives evolved over time while also being interconnected with each other through the outlet’s writing.

The articles spreading Narrative One did so by laying out the framework for creating ‘smart’ sanctions packages that deal damage when compounded and reporting the damages inflicted by sanctions. Outside of the immediate disruptions caused by sanctions once they are

implemented, long-term damages were seen in industries requiring high-tech goods or components that are hard to replace due to the extremely limited domestic or non-Western alternatives available at the time. In addition to this, some articles written before the end of February 2023 observed the cautious approach of Chinese entities when considering new economic ties with Russia to avoid Western counter-sanctions, a point used to promote Narrative One until it could be proven China's economic relationship with its northern neighbor changed. The articles promoting this narrative by detailing the framework for sanctions policies, which were published in the second quarter of 2022, contained statements echoing the hope that the economic measures will help bring about the end of the war. However, a tone shift would occur that changed the way sanctions damages were presented by the news outlet that, changes from: 'sanctions will cripple Russia's war effort' to: 'sanctions continue to inflict damage on the occupant's economy' regardless of whether the war would stop as a result of the measures. The latter tone was adopted, propagating Narrative Two with statements made in the articles published as early as August of 2022 admitting to the recovery of the Russian economy, while the bulk of the content in the articles continued to report damages yielded to the aggressor economy.

The news reports that propagated Narrative Two discussed some limitations that sanctions may have, as well as reports of a recovering Russian economy. The pieces discussing said limitations before 2023 often called for more sanctions targeting critical Russian industries that were yet to be sanctioned at the time, such as the long-awaited E.U. ban on the country's petroleum products. Russia's recovery itself is attributed to massive government spending, high oil prices maintained by OPEC Plus, and, after 2023, the increased economic ties with countries such as China and India (indicating a shift away from the cautious approach mentioned

previously). Despite the articles admitting to the damages already dealt to the Russian economy while continuing to use the narrative to bolster confidence in sanctions, the point that the economic measures employed by the West did not amount to the speedy economic disarmament of Russia was reiterated. This point, along with the constant reminder that sanctions can hamper the efforts of the enemy, is used by the Kyiv Post to rally support against Russia in the form of more sanctions in addition to direct military and financial aid.

Articles that focused on the sub-narrative (2.1) pointing to difficulties in implementing sanctions were not simply admissions of obstacles that prevented or complicated the implementation of economic measures against Russia but a call to action that used negative characterizations of the obstacles deployed by them to convince Ukraine's allies to support it in its struggle against the occupant. These obstacles include geo-politically consequential threats, increased government oversight over Western-affiliated corporate entities, sanctions evasion, and the seizure of Ukrainian resources to be implemented in the Russian economy, respectively characterized as unsustainable, aggressive, illegal, borderline genocidal policies. The outlet mostly included articles about countermeasures implemented by Russia that could be negatively characterized while promoting Narrative 2 in all of the articles by indicating that sanctions and the political circumstances around them needed to be improved in order to mitigate existing obstacles.

The twelve updates identified in the article selection for the Kyiv Post mostly cited announcements of new sanctions and the statements that accompanied them. The existence of so many updates, along with statements detailing some sanctions' (real and potential) effects made by some of the articles in the articles, serve to propagate the first narrative. The later updates focused on sanctions that counter evasion tactics used by Russia, which corroborates the

presence of difficulties in implementing and maintaining the effectiveness of the sanctions (sub-narrative 2.1). Statements directly pushing Narrative 2 were sparse but present in articles published after 2023.

It is clear that over time, particularly after 2023, sanctions could not aspire to the mission statement of grinding Russia's war effort to a halt. However, the sanctions have seriously affected critical industries, as reported in articles and statements propagating Narrative One, particularly sectors that required the substitution of high-tech components exclusively manufactured in the West that had no analog in the rest of the world at the time. The composite narrative on sanctions that could be synthesized from the Kyiv Posts reads something like this: **Despite the failure when it came to accumulating enough sanctions to acutely damage Russia's war effort (Narrative 2) along with the difficulties that came with implementing and maintaining those sanctions (sub-narrative 2.1), they continued to cause disruptions in critical parts the adversary's economy (Narrative 1), which must continue in order to resist the occupant at every step.** The Kyiv Post did a fairly good job of maintaining a variety of accurate information in its articles, with most of the narrative work accomplished through craftful storytelling as opposed to blatant misreporting or willful omission. However, the source was capable of elaborating on certain points more than others in order to further their narrative(s).

Comparisons and Conclusions.

Key: Number of Narrative/Sub-narrative (#) Russian Narrative (R#) Ukrainian Narrative (U#)
i.e: Russian Narrative 2 ⇒ narrative R2 -or- Ukrainian Sub-Narrative 2.1 ⇒ sub-narrative U2.1

The Kyiv Post and MID Sputnik International are two very different media organizations that provided equally different viewpoints over the same war and, by extension, the sanctions used in them. When reading the composite narratives of Sputnik and the Kyiv Post, the narratives echo seemingly essential parts of each other while maintaining vastly different tones. The reason for this is that many narratives propagated by one side are corroborated, in some capacity, by either other narratives or supporting elements in articles written by the opposing news organization, with each outlet narrating their supporting elements in line with their own political viewpoints.

The articles propagating narrative R2 published by Sputnik mirrored the information used in the publications from the Kyiv Post that propagated narrative U2. News pieces propagating the Ukrainian narrative (U2): sanctions have failed at stopping Russia's war effort, often corroborating the Russian narrative that detailed the country's resilience to sanctions. Many articles corroborating both of these narratives covered the same IMF indicators indicating Russia's recovery, the country's increase in energy exports, and the diversification of Russian export markets. Statements made to the effect of sanctions have failed to stop Russia's war can be found in the narratives R2 and U2.

Moreover, articles that propagated the sub-narrative U2.1 detailing the issues with implementing sanctions and maintaining their effects, which arose as a result of countermeasures threatened or executed by the Russian government along with certain legal questions, corroborated reports from Sputnik that promote (sub)narratives R1.2 and R2 respectively, The

Russian sub-narrative R1.2, which elaborated on the losses of Western businesses, was corroborated by the article “Russia Trying to Force Big Companies to Stay Via New Bill”, which stated that the Russian government “aims to preclude companies from leaving Russia unless they are prepared to take a major financial loss.” Some reports propagating the narrative (R2) that detailed Russia’s recovery were reports of successful countermeasures that helped overcome sanctions, which have been corroborated by the Kyiv Post’s articles promoting sub-narrative U2.1.

Sub-narrative R2.1, propagated by Sputnik, which affirmed that Russia’s Pivot to the Global South helped the country recover from the effects of sanctions, was corroborated by some articles published by the Kyiv Post, particularly those that propagated narrative U2. Even the timidness towards increasing economic ties with Russia expressed by the Global South before 2023, induced by the threat of Western sanctions, and the eventual re-evaluation of those concerns were mentioned in the articles published before 2023 by both sources.

Articles published by Sputnik, particularly found in narratives R1 and R2 and their sub-narratives, admitted to some damages caused by sanctions. Most of these admissions are sparsely mentioned across all of the Russian outlet’s articles and do not go into much detail about the damages dealt. However, the outlier articles found in the project selection for Sputnik’s (sub)narratives R2 and R2.1 are more honest examples of the outlet admitting that the sanctions can seriously affect certain projects, in particular damages done to **Russia’s civil aviation¹³⁶ and the delay in a joint oil field development project in Iran¹³⁷**. These industries required unavailable alternatives to goods and services only produced by the West at the time.

¹³⁶ Burunov, Oleg. “Boosting Russia’s Civil Aviation Industry Remains Priority amid Sanctions.” Sputnik International, April 25, 2023.

¹³⁷ Sputnik International, “Western Sanctions May Hamper Russian-Iranian Offshore Gas Production Plans - Rystad,” Sputnik International, August 25, 2022

The similarities between the narratives of the two news organizations reveal that they still report on information and statements that can be accepted by most people as the truth. Although the more concrete supporting elements of the articles published by the Kyiv Post and Sputnik do corroborate each other's narratives, the divergences in the countries' political worldviews and priorities dictate how narratives are relayed. To put it simply, the outlets characterize information that is considered to be true by both sides in a way that propagates narratives about economic sanctions in line with the respective outlet's political viewpoint.

For instance, the joint corroboration of sanctions failing their initial goals is complicated by different characterizations of said failures made by each media outlet. The Kyiv Post framed the inability of sanctions to achieve their goals (U2) as an unfortunate reality that can be overcome with more sanctions and fiscal aid, which have been proven to help achieve victory on the battlefield (U1). Sputnik presented the failure to stop the war effort through economic means as a testament to Russia's economic policies that mitigate the effects of a majority of the Western sanctions (R2) and Western incompetence (R1), with the remaining damages being framed as a temporary setback being actively fixed.

There were a few pairs of articles published by both outlets that reported on the same subject and covered agreed-upon information, but they ended up telling a completely different narrative. One such example consists of completely different characterizations of grain 'exports' from the occupied territories of Ukraine to Russia, with the Sputnik article¹³⁸ characterizing the transfer of grain as beneficial to all parties involved while its counterpart¹³⁹ drew parallels between this measure and the collectivization implemented by Stalin.

¹³⁸Ceyda Karan, "Sputnik Correspondent: Donbass Farmers Unfazed by Sanctions, Will Sell Food to Friendly Countries," Sputnik International, July 20, 2022

¹³⁹ Mark Raczkiwycz, "Russian Siberian Territory Passes Resolution to Seize Grain in Ukraine's Kherson Region," Kyiv Post, April 27, 2022.

The differences in narrative seen in another such pair of articles reporting on the state of Russia's civilian aviation could be deduced from the difference in the titles of the articles, with the Sputniks article titled "Boosting Russia's Civil Aviation Industry Remains Priority Amid Sanctions"¹⁴⁰ compared to the Kyiv Post: "EXPLAINED: Russia's Airline Industry is Crumbling – Here's Why."¹⁴¹ Both of the articles agreed on the fact that sanctions were making it difficult to get the necessary components to sustain air fleets, mostly composed of Western airliners, but the Russian article's goal was to emphasize the work that was planned to help the industry while the article counter to it cast doubt upon the country's ability to achieve those plans.

The stories told using the narrative claims about sanctions were reflective of the political and economic needs of the war effort in each country. In the eyes of Russian economic advisors, in the cabinets of the Kremlin or the Moscow State University, in order for their country to achieve victory and prevail against Western hegemony, they must invest billions into the war effort and embrace alternative sources of goods, services, and capital to the country; with officials propagating the corresponding narratives. In the eyes of Ukrainian economists and administrators, who are left to choose between inheriting a bombed, bloodied, and financially crippled country or nothing at all, choose the former by spreading the narratives that would help resist the aggressor at every turn.

¹⁴⁰ same as 136

¹⁴¹Kyiv Post, "Explained: Russia's Airline Industry Is Crumbling – Here's Why," Kyiv Post, November 1, 2023

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