

SELECTED EXAMPLES OF CW ALLEGATIONS AND RELATED DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS FROM THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION



BRIEF 2/3 | NOVEMBER 2024

This briefing aims to showcase a selection of specific examples of the allegations made by Russian authorities concerning the use of chemical weapons by Ukrainian forces. By analysing these cases, we can better understand the nature, consistency, and strategic patterns of the claims, which reveal key insights into Russia's broader disinformation campaign. These examples demonstrate how unsubstantiated allegations, often lacking credible evidence, fit into a larger strategy of influencing global narratives, discrediting opponents, undermining trust in international institutions and distracting from Russia's own alleged use of chemical weapons.

EXAMPLE 1: AMMONIUM NITRATE EXPLOSION (MAZANIVKA, MAY 2020)

In May 2022, Russia claimed that the Ukrainian Security Services were behind an explosion in Mazanivka (in the Donetsk Oblast in Ukraine) involving ammonium nitrate, creating a toxic cloud aimed at Kramatorsk. Russian authorities suggested that this explosion was a deliberate provocation, designed to falsely accuse Russia of using chemical weapons. The claim described the incident as a potential false flag operation, orchestrated to manipulate international opinion to justify further military action in Ukraine.

Despite the gravity of the allegation, no evidence was provided to support the claim. This reflects a common pattern in Russia's allegations, whereby accusations are made without evidence. The lack of substantiation suggests that the primary goal of these allegations was not to inform, but rather to create confusion and deflect the attention of the international community away from their own actions. This type of unfounded accusation aligns with their broader disinformation strategy, which aims to create ambiguity around accountability and make independent verification more difficult for international observers in the event of actual contraventions of WMD laws and norms.

EXAMPLE 2: UAV-DELIVERED CHEMICAL MUNITIONS (VELYKA NOVOSILKA, February 2023)

In February 2023, Russian media reported that Ukrainian forces had deployed chemical munitions via unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) near Velyka Novosilka. According to Russian sources, these munitions allegedly caused chemical burns amongst Russian troops. The claim accompanied by video and photo images, which was touted as proof of the chemical attack.



Figure 1: available evidence provided for the alleged chemical attack against Russian personnel near Urozhaine and Velyka Novosilka in February 2023

The images presented in this case lack the necessary context and clarity for independent verification. These images do not offer sufficient detail to identify the item in question; in fact, there is no evidence to confirm that it is a munition at all, as it lacks the paint and marking combinations typically used on military ordnance. Without these distinguishing features, the true nature of the object cannot be confirmed. Moreover, if the item were a chemical weapon or contained hazardous materials, standard gloves may not offer adequate protection, especially if the canister were damaged or leaking. This highlights a key tactic in Russia's disinformation: the use of suggestive misleading or unverified media to create a false impression of credibility. These kinds of manipulated materials are difficult to verify, making them an effective tool in attempting to shape public perceptions, particularly when combined with an ongoing narrative of Ukrainian aggression.

EXAMPLE 3: ALLEGED CHLORINE USE IN KURSK (AUGUST 2024)

In August 2024, Russia accused Ukraine in the media of deploying chlorine-filled chemical shells in the Kursk region, allegedly causing respiratory poisoning among workers at a power company and local officials. The accusation was accompanied by photographs, which were presented as evidence of the chemical attack.

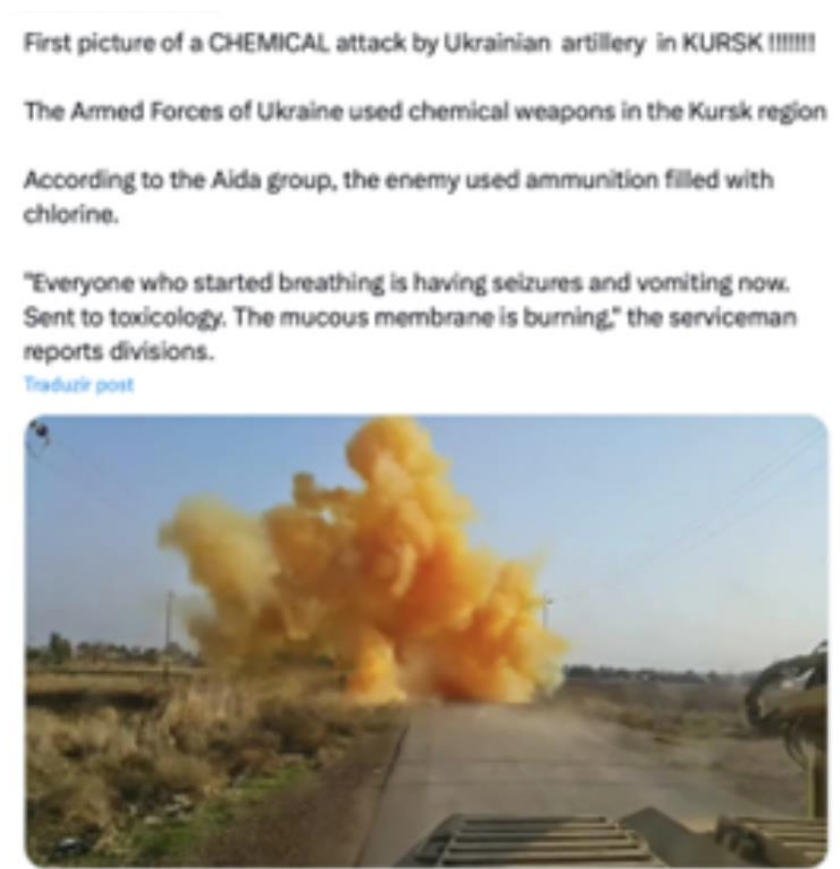


Figure 2: available evidence provided for the alleged deployment of chlorine in Kursk area in August, 2024

The photographs used to support these claims were quickly debunked. [Fenix Insight](#) traced the images back to a 2015 event in Iraq, where chlorine was used in a controlled explosion. This debunking highlights the extent to which Russia has been willing to manipulate or recycle old materials to support false claims. The lack of new, verifiable evidence and the reuse of dated images not only undermines the credibility of the claim but also showcases the systemic nature of the disinformation. This case demonstrates how Russia attempts to influence perceptions by weaponising old, unconnected content, further complicating the task for international bodies to assess emerging claims.

EXAMPLE 4: UAV MUNITIONS

The repeated allegations by Russia that Ukraine is using chemical weapons against its forces in a Note Verbale circulated to member states of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on the eve of its Executive Council session in July 2024.

Russia alleged that drone UAV-sourced footage shows a Russian soldier convulsing following the dropping of munitions, again suggesting the role of a chemical agent. The GP WMD Counter Disinformation Initiative has debunked this claim, showing that the video provided is incomplete, and a longer version is available showing a munition dropped on two soldiers, with a follow-on munition dropped on the single Russian soldier flailing in the water. The first munition dropped (0:06), prior to the imagery shown in the video, is a modified F-1 grenade (or clone thereof). The F-1 is a cast iron-bodied, high-explosive fragmentation defensive hand grenade. The second munition dropped (0:19) is a modified VOG-17M. The VOG-17M is a 30 mm, high-explosive fragmentation automatic grenade launcher (AGL) round.



Figure 3 - F-1 grenade dropped at 0:16



Figure 4 - Modified VOG-17M dropped at 0:19

There is no evidence of chemical agents being used within these munitions. The F-1 grenade appears to detonate and injure the personnel with fragmentation, with one soldier flailing in the water and bleeding from the mouth. The VOG-17M is dropped a distance away from the soldier. He then struggles to keep afloat in the water (likely due to injuries, as well as the weight of his body armour and other equipment) leading to him drowning.

This case shows how video documentation, and other such material, can be presented to further a suggested narrative. The case combines emotive imagery of wounded combatants, in tandem with a carefully cut video segment. Without the benefit of resource-intensive technical assessments and debunking efforts, such evidence can appear credible to the non-expert observer.

CONCLUSION

Across all four examples, a clear pattern emerges. The allegations made by Russia regarding Ukrainian use of chemical weapons are consistently unverified, based on ambiguous or fabricated evidence, and often part of a broader disinformation strategy. These allegations are repetitive in their structure: accusations are often presented with minimal or manipulated evidence, which cannot be independently corroborated. The use of dramatic claims, unsupported by verifiable evidence, serves to create confusion, shift blame, and discredit the opposing side.

This repetitive nature suggests that Russia is employing a strategic disinformation campaign, designed to influence the international community's opinion of the conflict and to deflect scrutiny from Russia's own alleged use of CW. These efforts complicate the global community's ability to discern truth from falsehood by clouding the collective factual understanding of the conflict.

The constant cycle of baseless accusations, lack of evidence, and use of fabricated materials significantly undermines the credibility of Russian claims. While these disinformation tactics may not always succeed in swaying public support for Ukraine or shifting the international stance in favour of Russia, they play a critical role in undermining global norms surrounding the use of WMDs. By continuously introducing false or misleading narratives, Russia erodes trust in factual reporting and creates confusion within the international community, which hampers the ability to make objective assessments of events.

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