

# COUNTERING CHEMICAL WEAPONS DISINFORMATION: TACTICS, MOTIVATIONS AND REALITIES

OPCW CSP-29 BRIEFING NOTE | NOVEMBER 2024



We expect an increase in state-sponsored and state-adjacent chemical weapons disinformation in the lead up to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) 29<sup>th</sup> Conference of the States Parties (CSP) on 25-29 November 2024. The Global Partnership's Counter WMD Disinformation Initiative has analyzed past disinformation campaigns spread by Russia and its allies to establish their common characteristics.

## FALSE ALLEGATIONS

Russia has submitted multiple [Note Verbales falsely alleging](#) that Ukraine is using chemical weapons against its forces. This follows [a July OPCW Technical Assistance Visit to Ukraine](#) supported by the Article X Trust Fund for the provision of assistance and protection.

Since the onset of the war in Ukraine, Russia has made a series of false chemical weapon allegations to create confusion, accuse others of nefarious acts, and further a narrative of grievance. These include:

- Accusations that Ukraine is using chemical weapons against Russian forces in Ukraine, and more recently during the Kursk incursion.
- Suggesting that Ukraine is preparing chemical provocations with the help of the United States and other partner nations.
- Claiming that “the West” controls and manipulates the OPCW to undermine opponents and further its hegemonic goals through unsubstantiated accusations of Russian use of chemical weapons at OPCW and UN Security Council meetings.

## DISINFORMATION TACTICS

Producers of disinformation often use the following tactics and techniques as part of their malicious efforts:

- **Discrediting opponents** with targeted messages such as:
  - Falsely accusing an adversary of chemical weapons use and flouting international disarmament laws and norms.
  - Manipulative referencing of historical chemical weapons use.
  - Distortion or creation of false evidence by inflating the importance of unrelated or inconsequential pieces of information to imply nefarious activity.
- **Using sources that appear “authoritative”**, but lack relevance, real credentials or expertise.
- **Exaggerating the risks associated with an opponent’s conduct** (whether real or falsely alleged).
- **Appealing to emotions** by showing graphic or upsetting images of alleged effects from chemical weapons use.

## MOTIVATIONS FOR SPREADING DISINFORMATION

Disinformation is regularly used by Russia to obfuscate or justify their own actions and undermine adversaries. Common motivations include:

- **Misdirection:** Disinformation targeting Ukraine is being used to distract from credible allegations of Russia's own illegal use of chemical weapons and violation of related international laws and norms.
- **Creation of Confusion:** A 'firehose' of disinformation is being used to overwhelm the information space, making it difficult for individuals to distinguish between false and accurate information. This creates an environment where malicious activity can remain undetected.
- **Justification:** Russia has repeatedly used false accusations of chemical weapons development and use in Ukraine by Ukrainian forces and NATO allies to justify its illegal war in Ukraine.
- **Undermining Trust:** Chemical weapons disinformation undermines trust in the rules-based international system, including essential multilateral disarmament fora such as the OPCW and UN Security Council.

## CURRENT REALITIES

A key factor in countering disinformation campaigns is understanding the current realities that such malicious campaigns try to mask or disrupt. The reality is:

- **Chemical weapons disinformation campaigns are a distraction** from credible allegations of Russian use of chemical weapons against Ukrainian troops.
- **The OPCW is a vital multilateral institution** that protects the rules-based international order and aims to keep the world free of chemical weapons.
- **There is no credible evidence** that Ukraine is in breach of its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. In reality, Ukraine requested support from OPCW and is openly cooperating with OPCW to investigate the use of chemical agents.
- **Russia's current actions are not new**, Russia has a long history of employing disinformation campaigns to misdirect and justify its illegal activities in other countries. These same tactics and similar narratives are being reused today.

## ACTIONS TO COUNTER CHEMICAL WEAPONS DISINFORMATION

There are several actions that diplomats can take to counter Russia's disinformation campaigns and to prepare for an increase in disinformation pre-CSP-29. These include:

- **Learn about common disinformation tactics and narratives** in advance of, and during meetings, such as CSP-29.
- **Build your capital and delegation's resilience** to these disinformation tactics and narratives.
- **Share accurate and correct information** and call out attempts to pollute and sidetrack CSP-29 negotiations.
- **Follow the GP Counter WMD Disinformation Initiative** to learn more about the common tactics, narratives and motivations behind chemical weapons disinformation

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE GP WMD COUNTER DISINFO INITIATIVE AT [GPWMDCOUNTERDISINFO.COM](https://gpwmdcounterdisinfo.com)

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