COUNTERING CHEMICAL WEAPONS DISINFORMATION

CSP-31 BRIEFING NOTE | NOVEMBER 2026

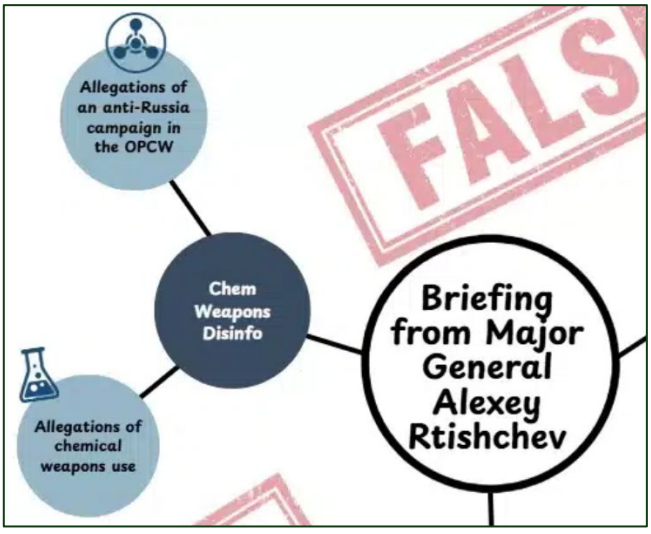
State-sponsored disinformation remains a persistent challenge within the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), surfacing regularly in this forum, including in the lead-up to and during Conferences of States Parties (CSP). Left unaddressed, disinformation threatens to erode trust in the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), portrays legitimate cooperation efforts as politically motivated, and undermines the broader nonproliferation, arms control, and disarmament (NACD) regime. The Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction's (GP)'s Counter WMD Disinformation Initiative works to detect and counter these false narratives in an effort to strengthen resilience and preserve trust in multilateral institutions like the OPCW and the global norm against chemical weapons.

CSP-31: ANTICIPATED DISINFORMATION THEMES

There are several disinformation narratives we may anticipate in the lead-up to and within the proceedings of CSP-31, through national statements, working papers, Notes Verbales, and Rights of Reply. These narratives are often recycled from previous campaigns and aim to delegitimize investigation mechanisms, governing bodies, and the broader CWC framework. A few of the expected themes to keep an eye out for include:

- **Delegitimization of the OPCW** by framing it as a politically motivated or "puppet" organization controlled by and acting on behalf of "the West," rather than as an independent and neutral institution. This may include, for example, allegations that the OPCW disregards evidence submitted by Russia.
- **Challenges to investigation and verification mechanisms**, including the questioning of the validity, impartiality, or legal basis of CWC compliance processes more broadly. By example, the former Assad regime in Syria sought to obstruct accountability and undermine international investigative mechanisms, with statements targeting the activities of Fact-Finding Missions (FFM), the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT).
- **Justification of conflict and invasion** through false claims of CW use by an adversary, such as Russia's continued justification of its invasion of Ukraine on these grounds.

ANALYSIS REPORT: RTISHCHEV'S BRIEFING DEBUNKED



On December 12, 2025, Major General Alexey Rtishchev, Deputy Chief of Russia's Radiation, Chemical, and Biological Protection Troops,* gave a briefing that contained numerous false allegations pertaining to biological, chemical, and radiological weapons. The briefing illustrates several disinformation tactics commonly used to undermine CWC verification mechanisms and arms control norms. For instance, it sought to delegitimize the OPCW by calling into question its independence and neutrality, portraying it as a tool to advance "Western" interests. This tactic aims to erode trust in the OPCW's verification mechanisms, making its findings easier to dismiss. Moreover, the briefing advanced false allegations of chemical weapons use by Ukrainian forces and their allies, supported by misleading "evidence" designed to appear scientifically credible. This "evidence," however, lacked independent third-party verification or was deliberately misinterpreted, a common CBRN disinformation tactic used to lend false legitimacy to unsubstantiated allegations. By learning to recognize these tactics wherever they occur, the global nonproliferation and disarmament community can build resilience to CBRN disinformation and safeguard multilateral agreements and norms.

**The title reflects Alexey Rtishchev's rank and position as of January 2026, when this analysis was conducted.*

ANALYSIS REPORT: THE MATRYOSHKA MODEL

Chemical disinformation is now part of the geopolitical contestation around chemical security and disarmament. In that contest, laboratories, industrial and agricultural chemistry, forensic and analytical capacity, OPCW technical assistance and chemical safety and security cooperation can all be recast as evidence of hostile intent. The “chemical laboratory” narrative follows the logic of its biological counterpart by alleging that ordinary research and industrial facilities, and the international partnerships that support them, hide the covert production of chemical warfare agents. These describe an “extensive network of laboratories for the mass production of chemical warfare agents” along with hundreds of cases of purported Ukrainian chemical weapons use, without any verified data or OPCW verification procedures.

The GP Counter WMD Disinformation Initiative’s Matryoshka model explains how these narratives travel and gain force, with each local case nested inside a single global narrative. At the multilateral layer, allegations enter the OPCW Executive Council and Conference of the States Parties as questions of CWC compliance, declarations or verification. This gives them procedural legitimacy even when no formal request for clarification or challenge inspection follows. At the state and media layer, technical-sounding claims are produced and translated through official statements and then circulated by a wider ecosystem of state-aligned and proxy outlets. At the local layer, they connect with existing concerns about industrial pollution, the toxic legacies of war, foreign influence and military involvement. Each layer reinforces the others. Local anxieties are repackaged as international “evidence” that state actors cite to validate the broader narrative, which is then redeployed in new regional contexts. In Ukraine, the chemical and biological strands have also been woven together, with allegations of Ukrainian use of toxic substances forming part of an ongoing Russian campaign about a dirty bomb and American biological laboratories, so the feedback loop runs across the BWC and CWC. This places governments and the OPCW in the same bind the biolab narrative creates. Defending chemical security cooperation can be portrayed as complicity, while stepping back from it weakens real capacity to prevent misuse and to investigate the use of chemical weapons, at a time when the OPCW’s attribution work depends on the trust of States Parties.

TAKE ACTION AND ENGAGE WITH US

Maintaining situational awareness of disinformation is an important component of effective CWC participation. False allegations and politicized narratives often circulate within parallel information spaces before entering formal multilateral settings. Tracking these narratives enables States Parties to anticipate their escalation, distinguish genuine compliance concerns from coordinated disinformation campaigns, and avoid reactive dynamics that further erode trust.

Diplomats can take several concrete actions to identify and counter disinformation about chemical weapons, including:

1. **Explore disinformation tactics** through the Disinfo Tactics Bingo board to uncover how actors manipulate perceptions and influence beliefs at CSP-31.
2. **Monitor emerging narratives** using the CBRN disinformation tracker to stay informed of CW disinformation trends affecting disarmament efforts.
3. **Reaffirm support for and trust in the OPCW** encourage reliance on its established inspection and assistance mechanisms, as well as its technical reports, when assessing allegations.
4. **Refute false claims** as they arise, using evidence-based debunking practices.
5. **Distinguish substantiated compliance concerns** from unsupported or misleading claims

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