

# **RUSSIAN INFLUENCE OPERATION IN KENYA & SOUTH AFRICA**

**Final Report**

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# 1. Executive Summary

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Traditional war and war-like gestures are no longer confined to physical spaces, weaponry, or country borders. Tactics, advancements, and battles are fought online, as opposed to on the ground; faceless social media handles, sometimes automated accounts, and boosted posts can infiltrate vulnerable hearts and minds not trained or accustomed to hidden agendas.

The heavy and known presence of the Russian state-funded private military company 'Wagner Group' in West Africa (most specifically in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger) provoked the research question: what is the Russian presence in East and Southern Africa, and if it is not 'boots on the ground' as it is in West Africa, could it perhaps then be in the form of an online presence, with 'soldiers' instead on social media?

This report presents findings from a research study conducted in Kenya and South Africa, focusing on the dissemination of pro-Kremlin propaganda through Facebook. Russia has used social media platforms in other countries to influence public opinion through various networks and accounts, often disguised or operated by Kremlin-aligned actors. The primary objective of this research was to evaluate whether such a coordinated effort was established in both countries and to what extent diplomatic channels and means have or have not been part of such efforts.

We also monitored the content of Facebook posts spread by Russia in both countries to evaluate the extent to which disinformation narratives are present. This tactic has been observed in numerous regions, including but not limited to Africa, where false narratives are crafted to suit Russia's geopolitical interests.

A retrospective monitoring effort from March 19, 2023, to March 19, 2024, focused on analysing the social media landscape across Kenya and South Africa. This research utilised the public data provided by Facebook through the CrowdTangle tool, which primarily tracks public pages and groups, omitting private profiles or groups. Criteria for platform relevance included popularity, web traffic referrals, and Application Programming Interface (API) data accessibility.

The research proceeded in three phases: a desk study to identify relevant platforms, followed by data mining using the CrowdTangle tool to identify mentions of 'Russia' and 'Putin', network mapping using the Gephi tool to assess the scale of influence of pro-Russian actors, and finally, the analysis of Russian embassies' Facebook accounts in the two target countries. The monitoring of Russian embassies' Facebook accounts focused on the top 50 posts based on interactions.

The desk study focusing on the social media landscape identified that both Kenya and South Africa have substantial internet and social media usage, with South Africa showing higher penetration rates. In both countries, WhatsApp and Facebook are the leading social media platforms, with Facebook being a key driver of web traffic referrals.

Network mapping is used to establish a visual representation of a structure of connectivity based on specific criteria; the network map can then be used to explore the reach, extent, and actors involved in the found network map. This study concerned itself with the potential existence of pro-Russian actors clustered on Facebook who would systematically disseminate and amplify

pro-Kremlin content. The analysis did not reveal such coordinated dissemination of pro-Russian propaganda on Facebook in either Kenya or South Africa. The findings revealed that prominent legacy media outlets such as *Nation* and *NTV Kenya*, along with various other platforms of unclear authenticity or ownership, actively engaged in reporting and sharing content related to Russia or President Vladimir Putin on their Facebook profiles, indicating a diverse landscape of information dissemination on this topic.

Similar to Kenya, the network mapping analysis in South Africa revealed that established legacy media outlets such as *SABC News* and *Daily Maverick*, alongside various blogs and Facebook groups of unclear authenticity, actively engaged in reporting and sharing content related to Russia or President Vladimir Putin, indicating a convergence of narratives across different online communities and a potential connection between pro-Jacob Zuma groups and pro-Russian narratives.

The monitoring of Russian embassy Facebook accounts in both countries revealed a strategic narrative aimed at shaping positive perceptions of Russia and negative perceptions of the West. The narrative utilised cultural diplomacy, geopolitical messaging, and dissemination of propaganda and disinformation to foster support for Russian policies while positioning Russia as a defender against perceived Western imperialism.

The study revealed the use of official Russian embassy Facebook accounts in both countries to propagate false and misleading narratives, portraying Ukraine as a Nazi-controlled state and Russia as a victim. This tactic is aimed at legitimizing Russia's invasion while influencing public opinion in both Kenya and South Africa.

The monitored Russian embassy account in Kenya revealed efforts to highlight Russia's commitment to fostering a multipolar world order, prioritising cooperation with African nations, advocating for multilateralism, and emphasising the need for accountability for war crimes.

The monitoring of the Russian Embassy's Facebook account in South Africa revealed a focus on portraying Russia's historical support for African nations, economic progress within the BRICS group, recent diplomatic engagements with South Africa, domestic Russian affairs like record turnout during the recent presidential election and Navy Day celebrations, and cultural insights relating to landmarks such as the Moscow Metro.

The identified manipulative strategies underscore the importance of critical media literacy and the need for robust fact-checking mechanisms to combat the spread of disinformation and uphold the integrity of democratic discourse. They also raise questions about effective policy enforcement and moderation of false and misleading content.

## 2. Methodology:

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The monitoring was conducted retroactively and focused on a period of one year (from 19 March 2023 to 19 March 2024). The research was carried out using public data provided by Facebook—one of the more popular and used social media platforms in South Africa and Kenya—using the *CrowdTangle* tool, which provides access to public groups and pages.

To enable comparative analysis, we focused on the two countries. In the initial phase, we analysed the social media landscape in both countries to determine which social media platforms were relevant for monitoring based on the following criteria:

- most popular social media platform
- web traffic referrals from social media
- access to data through Application Programming Interface (API)

In the second phase, *CrowdTangle* was used to mine the data from all public accounts (profiles and groups) that mentioned the words 'Russia' and 'Putin' from 19 March 2023 to 19 March 2024. We consequently used the *Gephi* open-source tool to create network maps to determine the most active actors who included the keywords in their content and shared it with others in the respective countries. The network mapping (*Figure 1*) was conducted in both Kenya and South Africa to determine the potential impact of pro-Russian actors on Facebook in both countries.

The third phase of the research focused on the Russian embassies' Facebook accounts in both countries. Experience from other countries (Slovakia, for example) shows that Russian embassies use social media platforms to disseminate pro-Kremlin propaganda. Hence, we used the *CrowdTangle* tool to monitor the content published by both accounts. Due to time constraints and limited human resources, we reviewed the top 50 Facebook posts in each country, using the total number of interactions these posts generated as a selection criterion.

As *CrowdTangle* only tracks public content and does not include private personal profiles or private groups, we focused only on public pages/accounts and groups.

A team of two social media monitors analysed the Russian embassy posts in Kenya and South Africa on Facebook. Analysts also monitored popular pages (including public Facebook groups) identified by using keywords ('Russia' and 'Putin') in the *CrowdTangle* search.

### Network mapping

The open-source network mapping tool, *Gephi*, was used to identify the occurrence and spread of keywords—'Russia' and 'Putin'—in groups and pages that *CrowdTangle* tracked for a period of one year (19 March 2023 to 19 March 2024) in Kenya and South Africa. This enabled us to see the groups where the keywords received the most interactions and the groups and pages that shared the keywords most frequently. The network charts also identified which accounts and groups shared content with each other most frequently (e.g., they are clustered together) and

which actors were most influential (based on the number of posts and interactions) within each group.

### 3. Findings

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#### **The social media landscape in Kenya and South Africa**

The desk study identified that internet and social media usage are prevalent across [Kenya](#) and [South Africa](#), with varying degrees of penetration. In South Africa, internet penetration rates are 74.7%, while Kenya's rate is 40.8%. Meanwhile, social media usage of the total country population is 42.8% in South Africa and 23.5% in Kenya (Source: Kemp 2024).

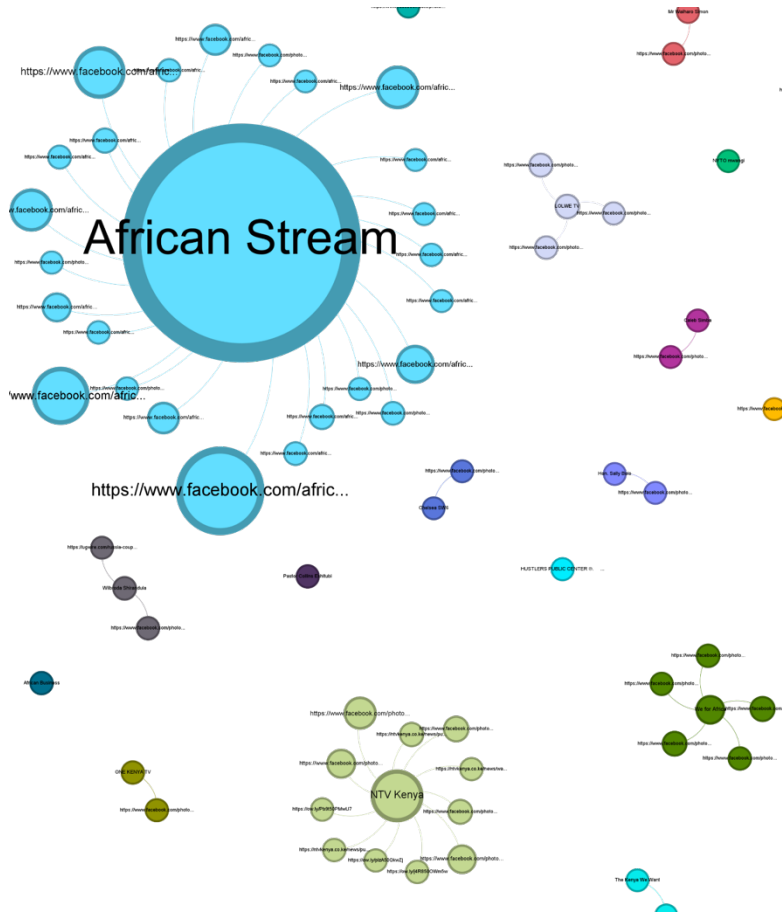
Social media preferences differ among the two countries, with Facebook leading in South Africa and WhatsApp in Kenya. Despite these variations, keeping in touch with friends and family remains a primary motive for social media usage in both countries, while reading news stories ranks as the second and third reason in South Africa and Kenya, respectively. Facebook consistently emerges as a significant driver of web traffic referrals from social media in both countries, followed by various other platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram (Source: Kemp 2024).

#### ***Network mapping (using key words Russia and Putin)***

The keyword query, in combination with the network mapping of their occurrence on Facebook public accounts and groups, was used to evaluate if there was any systematic and coordinated dissemination or amplification of pro-Kremlin propaganda. We identified which Facebook accounts and groups these keywords received the most interactions and which accounts and groups shared them most frequently. At the same time, however, we did not find proof of coordinated dissemination of pro-Russian propaganda on Facebook within the analysed period in either of the two researched countries.

In **Kenya**, network mapping revealed that several legacy media outlets reported on global issues, referring to Russia or President Vladimir Putin and promoting such content on Facebook profiles (*Figure 1*). The mapping enabled us to determine that the most visible legacy media included *Nation*, *NTV Kenya*, *KBC (State broadcaster)*, *The Star*, *The EastAfrican*, *Citizen TV Kenya*, *Capital FM*, *Standard Digital*, *K24 TV*, and *Spice FM*.

The mapping also helped us to identify other 'information' platforms whose authenticity, motivation, or ownership is unclear. The most active ones included *Your Africa Nation*, *Modern Africa*, *Who Owns Kenya*, *Kenyans.co.ke*, *Tuko.co.ke*, *Touch TV*, *Lightcast TV Kenya*, *The Voice of Africa*, *Uzalendo News*, *African Mall*, *We Are Africa*, *Show of Africa*, *African Business*, *One Kenya TV*, *Military updates*, *Breaking Kenya News*, *Record TV Africa*, *Communist Party of Kenya*, *Pan African Daily TV*, *Africa Updates*, *M.K.Media Kenya*, *Jicho TV Kenya*, *Global TV Kenya*, *African Report Files*, *Breaking News Today*, *Frank Facts*, *Malema TV*, and *New Africa*.



*Figure 1. Excerpts from the networking map showing the occurrence of the keywords Russia and Putin from 19 March 2023 – 19 March 2024 in Kenya, from selected outlets. Source: CrowdTangle. Compiled by the authors using Gephi.*

In some cases, accounts attempting to mimic media organizations are seen to amplify posts by the Russian Embassy's Facebook account. The motivation of the account itself and the amplification by another account may be an attempt to drive engagement and increase followers.

One such example of the amplification of a post by a "media organization" comes from this Russian Embassy post (pictured below):

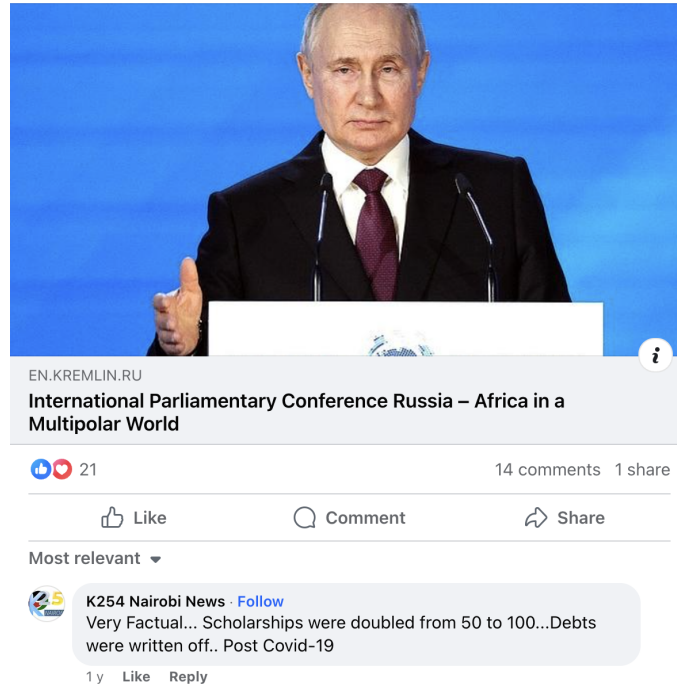


Figure 2. Facebook post dated 20 March 2023. Source: Facebook

The engagement with the post was limited, given the content, generating only 21 engagements and 7 replies. Some of the replies contained anti-Russian and pro-Ukrainian sentiment, demonstrating some level of opposition and push-back to the content posted. Of all the replies, only one was identifiable by way of a real name.

In South Africa, the analysis helped to determine that several legacy media that report on global issues referred to Russia or President Vladimir Putin and promoted such content on their Facebook profiles (Figure 3). The most active legacy media that reported on Russia or President Putin from our analysis period included *SABC News*, *Daily Maverick*, *Eyewitness News*, *Jacaranda FM*, *Business Live*, *Kaya 959 FM*, *Daily News*, *IOL News*, *East Coast Radio*, *Moneyweb*, *MSN South Africa*, *Zebediela Voice*, *News 24/7 Updates*, *Cape Talk*, and *SurgeZirc SA*.

Similarly to Kenya, we also revealed other 'information' platforms, including blogs and Facebook groups, whose authenticity, motivation, or ownership is unclear. It should be noted that some of these carry the name of television programs run by legacy media platforms. The most active ones included *Know Thyself*, *Mzwanele Manyi and debaters*, *The Insight Factor*, *Channel N-TV*, *Squad Magazine SA*, *The Surprise Golela Podcasts and Updates*, *Updates with LolahM*, *We For Africa*, *Dr Emmy Wonder*, *Robert Mugabe Hilarious Quotes*, *Charles Kgari*, *Aus Dee*, *The Defenders of Jacob Zuma*, *Blackstone DNA*, *Leroy Mnisi*, *Ashra Kwesi*, *Political Debate of the World*, *Igbo Times*, *The Drive with Rob & Roz*, *Solutions to fix SA*.



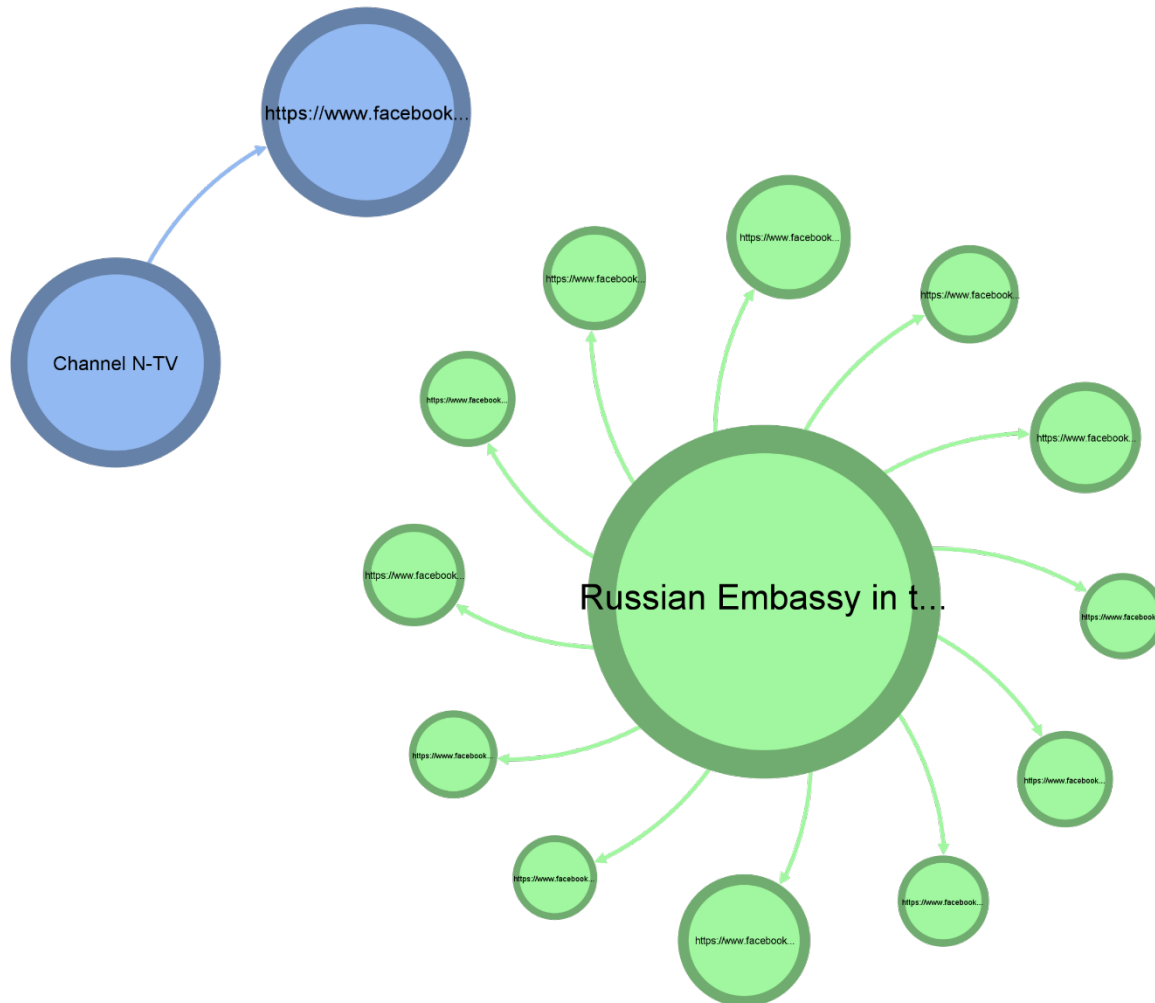


Figure 3. Excerpts from the Russian Embassy in South Africa Facebook account networking map showing the occurrence of the keywords Russia and Putin from 19 March 2023 – 19 March 2024. Source: CrowdTangle. Compiled by the authors using Gephi.

Some Facebook groups with a pro-Jacob Zuma narrative have also been mapped out among pro-Russian actors on Facebook. There appears to be a relationship between the pro-Jacob Zuma narrative and the Russian narrative in South Africa. While the focus of our research was on Facebook, some groups mapped have also been peddling the same Russian narrative on other platforms. This is the case with accounts such as *The Insight Factor* and *The Defenders of Jacob Zuma*.

Russian influence operations often liken former President Jacob Zuma to Russian President Vladimir Putin. This is evident in the Facebook mapping, which shows groups such as *The Defenders of Jacob Zuma* appearing frequently. The mapping also unveiled the group named after former Jacob Zuma spokesperson *Mzwanele Manyi and debaters*. This Facebook public

group has 15,872 members as of May 2024, and the posts on the group are largely pro-MK Party narratives. The latter is a left-wing populist South African political party, founded in December 2023, named *uMkhonto weSizwe* - which in English means "[Spear of the Nation](#)". The party is named after *uMkhonto we Sizwe*, the paramilitary wing of the African National Congress (ANC) during apartheid. Before the establishment of the MK Party, the same group posted pro-Russian content on the invasion of Ukraine. There is a symbiotic relationship between MK Party influence and Russian influence operations in South Africa through such public groups on Facebook. Local analysts believe that there is a close relationship between Russian influence operations and the newly formed MK Party led by former President Jacob Zuma.



Figure 4. Facebook public group Mzwanele Manyi and debaters Source: Facebook

**Analysis of the Russian embassies' Facebook accounts in Kenya and South Africa**

In the third phase of the research, we used the CrowdTangle tool to filter the top 50 Facebook posts from the Russian embassies in Kenya and South Africa, focusing on posts with the highest interactions to understand their use of social media for pro-Kremlin propaganda. Based on the content analysis, the posts can be divided into the following five different categories (including subcategories):

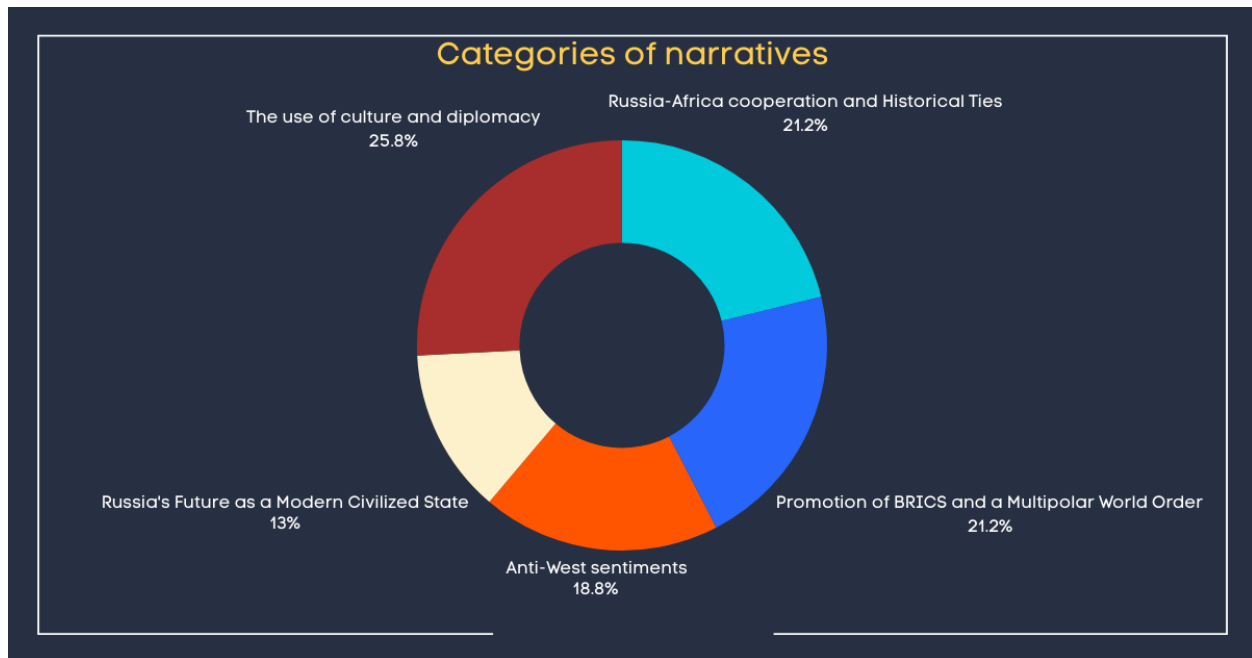


Figure 5. Categories of narratives of analysed Facebook posts in Kenya and South Africa from March 19, 2023, to March 19, 2024. 100 % are the 100 analysed posts. Source: Compiled by the authors

### 1. Russia-Africa Cooperation and Historical Ties (21.2%)

- **Historical and Ongoing Support:** Emphasis on Russia's longstanding support for African nations in their struggles against colonialism, racism, and apartheid. Highlights include the 35th anniversary of the [Battle of Cuito Cuanavale](#), where Soviet-backed forces played a crucial role.
- **Rewriting of history**
- **Russia is portrayed as a victim** ("it is not us doing it, it's them, we are the victims of this")
- Celebration of Russia's non-colonial past and its **treatment of Africans as friends**.
- Russia is presented as a cornerstone of history, tradition, and civilization
- **Development Assistance:** Russia is portrayed as a development partner, providing grain, fertilizers, technology, and other aid to support African development. Initiatives also include debt forgiveness, doubling university quotas for African students, and promoting free food and fertilizer supplies.

### 2. Promotion of BRICS and a Multipolar World Order (21.2%)

- **Economic Leadership:** Emphasizes the growing influence of BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), now surpassing the G7 in global GDP share, with Russia playing a key role in BRICS and the New Development Bank.

- **Advocacy for Multipolarity:** Calls for a more equitable global order, opposing Western dominance and neo-colonialism. Praises Russia and China's efforts in creating a fair global security system and calls for UN reforms to better represent Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

### 3. Anti-Western sentiments (18.8%)

- **Condemnation of Western Practices:** Criticizes Western exceptionalism, nationalism, and Russophobia, particularly regarding the Ukraine conflict. Highlights Western leaders' admissions of deceit concerning agreements with Ukraine.
- **Hypocrisy and Destabilization:** Accuses the US and its allies of misleading international relations and causing destabilization. Condemns Western military operations and unilateral actions without multilateral approval.

### 4. Russia's Future as a Modern Civilized State (13%)

- **Military Development:** Emphasizes the rapid growth of Russia's military-industrial complex, claiming superiority in ammunition and tank production over Western countries' supplies to Ukraine.

**Technological Initiatives:** Showcases advancements in Russian technology, education, and agriculture, highlighting initiatives aimed at bolstering these sectors

### 5. The use of culture and diplomacy (25.8%)

- **Language and Cultural Promotion:** Encourages learning the Russian language and participating in cultural exchanges with African countries. Highlights Russia's involvement in international events like the World Youth Festival in Sochi.
- **Diplomatic Efforts:** Details engagements such as the Russia-South Africa Intergovernmental Committee for Trade and Economic Cooperation, emphasizing diplomatic efforts to strengthen ties with African nations.
- **Cultural and Educational Engagements:** Promotion of Russian language courses, cultural exchanges, and scholarships for African students. Russia participates in projects to digitize African states and develop sectors like power engineering and agriculture.

**Analysis of the Russian Embassy account in Kenya**



Figure 6. Embassy of Russia in Kenya Facebook Account. Source: Facebook

The Facebook monitoring in Kenya revealed that the Russian embassy account focused on key statements and positions from Russian leadership and diplomatic representatives on various global issues, particularly emphasising Russia's stance on international relations and conflicts.

**Russia-Africa Cooperation and Historical Ties**

Our monitoring of the Russian embassy's Facebook account in Kenya underscores Russia's commitment to bolstering ties with Africa through historical cooperation and shared geopolitical interests. Concrete examples that we came across during our monitoring include debt forgiveness, provision of fertilizers, participation in digitization, and power infrastructure projects. The monitoring also revealed posts featuring Russia's investments in cultural and educational exchange, offering free language courses and scholarships. This category of narratives reflects Russia's multifaceted approach to fostering mutual benefit and cooperation with African nations across various sectors. Additionally, the promotion of the Russia-Africa Summit focuses on fostering economic and humanitarian collaboration.

However, it is crucial to understand that these posts often present a skewed and misleading portrayal of Russia's actions and intentions. For example, Russia frequently highlights its [provision of fertilizers](#) as a generous [aid initiative](#) while neglecting to mention the dependency they create for local farmers. Another narrative involves debt forgiveness, which is portrayed as a benevolent act but often comes with strings attached that can lead to increased political influence and control over local governments.

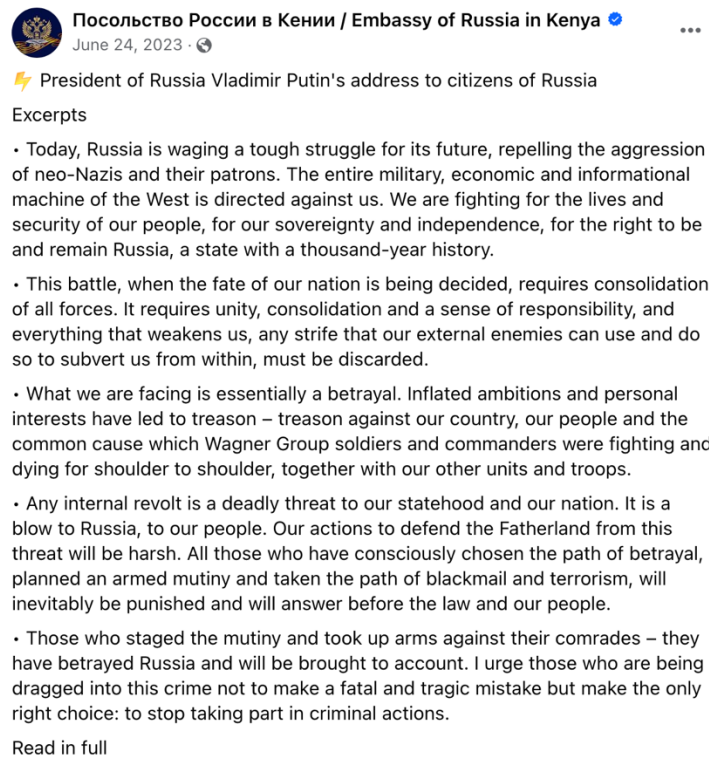
These positive narratives promoted by the Russian embassy obscure the reality of Russia's geopolitical strategies, which may not always align with the best interests of African nations. By disseminating such content, Russia creates a false image of herself as a benevolent and

supportive partner to Kenya and other African countries. This deliberate dissemination of misleading information serves to advance Russia's agenda, potentially at the expense of truthful reporting and genuine mutual benefit. Such practices not only distort public perception but also undermine the credibility of genuine diplomatic and development efforts in the region.

### *Russia portrayed as a victim*

The analysis of posts revealed that in this category, the Russian Embassy's Facebook page deployed a narrative in which Russia is portrayed as a victim in the global order.

The following post is an example:



*Figure 7. Facebook post dated 24 June 2023. Source: Facebook*

In his speech referenced in this post, President Putin lamented that, once again, war was being waged against Russia, forcing them to defend the people of Donbas and safeguard their security. He portrayed Russia as a peace-loving nation with no known hostilities to any nation, whether in the East or West. At the same time, he went on to lay responsibility for Russia's woes at the feet of the "...Western global elite", who he believes seek to not only destroy Russia but also to break down the entire system of global security and international law.

This type of post is misleading in that it creates a false impression that Russia is being victimized for no discernible reason. Though the post claims that Russia is a peace-loving nation with no known hostilities, at the time of writing, the Russian war in Ukraine had been ongoing for almost a year and a half! Russia is solely responsible for this war, having violated international laws by

initiating the unprovoked invasion and subsequent military actions. These types of posts, therefore, are a deliberate effort by the Russian Embassy to 'play victim,' while in actual fact, the converse is true. This post, therefore, is disseminated with the knowledge that it is deliberately deceptive and intended to mask the truth of the matter.

*Celebration of Russia's non-colonial past and its treatment of Africans as friends*

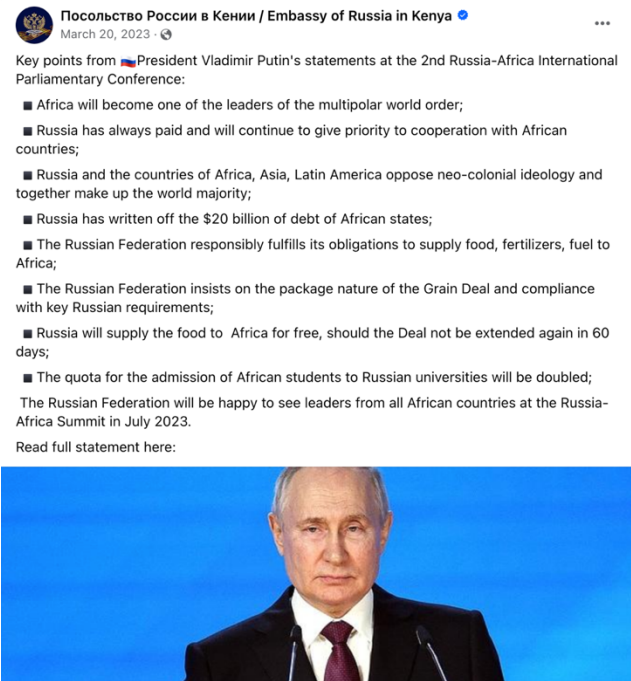


Figure 8. Facebook post dated 24 June 2023. Source: Facebook

The Russian Embassy's Facebook account in Kenya goes to great lengths to highlight cooperation with African countries and often seeks to portray Russia as a great friend of Kenya and the African continent. This deliberate strategy employs individual data points (around debt relief, opposition to neo-colonial ideology, and supply of grain) to create the narrative of enduring cooperation with Africa.

Such narratives propagated by the Russian embassy in Kenya are false. Firstly, the portrayal of debt forgiveness and economic assistance often exaggerates the extent and impact of these measures, omitting the conditionalities and strategic interests driving them. The emphasis on infrastructure projects and agricultural aid frequently overlooks the underlying motives of increasing Russia's geopolitical influence and creating economic dependencies rather than fostering genuine development. Additionally, the promotion of cultural and educational exchanges is often a soft power tactic to garner favor while masking the broader agenda of political and strategic leverage. Historical cooperation narratives selectively highlight positive aspects while ignoring the complex and sometimes exploitative dimensions of past interactions. The Russia-Africa Summit's depiction as a purely humanitarian and collaborative effort disregards the

significant political and economic interests Russia aims to secure through these engagements, thus presenting a skewed picture of mutual benefit.

There was only limited engagement with the above-mentioned post (14 likes, 4 comments). Those who did comment, however, did so to voice support for the Russian President. Furthermore, of the four who commented, only one bore a Kenyan name, while another bore a name that was clearly a play on a leading motor vehicle brand. It is, therefore, difficult to ascertain the true identity of some of those voicing support for these sentiments. It is significant that in a category in which Russia is portrayed as a victim, the fact that it is not possible to identify those voicing support for the narrative points to inauthentic behaviour. Conversely, it is equally surprising that more robust efforts were not made in this regard.

### **Promotion of BRICS and a Multipolar World Order**

The promotion of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and the renouncement of colonial history were identified as a recurrent theme in the monitoring. In the post below, the Russian Ambassador describes the downfall of "...the old world order based on a neo-colonial system of unfair distribution of global wealth for the benefit of the former colonial powers". In congratulating Kenya on #AfricaDay, he went further to emphasize Russia's solidarity with efforts to put African interests first. In the monitored post, Russia refers to the narrative of colonialism, seemingly so as to distance herself from that history as a further demonstration of solidarity with Africa. The monitored narrative implies that since Russia does not have a history of colonialism in Africa, Russia is in a position to be a sincere partner for Africa.

This narrative is also misleading as it selectively ignores Russia's own imperial history and current exploitative practices, using anti-colonial rhetoric to mask its geopolitical ambitions and gain influence in Africa.





Figure 9. Facebook post dated 24 June 2023. Source: Facebook

## Anti-Western sentiments

In a number of analysed posts, there was criticism of Western policies and actions. For example, in the post from 24 June 2023, President Putin addressed Russian citizens, highlighting Russia's struggle against external aggression, particularly from neo-Nazi forces and their Western supporters, emphasizing the need for unity and vigilance. Using emotive language, he said that the entire military, economic, and informational machine of the West had been directed against Russia. President Putin went on to condemn internal betrayal and warn against any attempts to undermine Russia's sovereignty, pledging severe consequences for those involved in such treasonous acts.

Russia's spread of anti-Western sentiments matters because it exacerbates geopolitical tensions, destabilizes global relations, and fosters division and distrust. This narrative is deceptive as it deflects attention from Russia's internal issues, misrepresents Western intentions, manipulates public opinion to consolidate power, erodes international trust and cooperation, and involves historical revisionism that distorts facts. Ultimately, these disinformation tactics serve Russia's political agenda while undermining global stability and collaboration.

The post generated 14 reactions, including 9 comments. The majority of those who commented on the post expressed solidarity with President Putin's sentiments. Though the post did not generate widespread traction, such posts help build the narrative: this is especially so when (as in this case) the majority of those who comment on the post are in support of the sentiments in the post, and hence the narrative it seeks to create.

By spreading this type of anti-western sentiment, Russia seeks to bolster the case and narrative in which President Putin claims that all the instruments of the West have been directed against Russia. In so doing, the post also seeks the sympathies of those of similar inclination. The narrative is, in and of itself, disingenuous and misleading in that Russia can be considered a Western nation, in the same vein as those she attempts to distance herself from by using this reference. It also seeks to manipulate public opinion by creating an external enemy, fostering nationalism, and justifying harsh measures against internal dissent. It is false as it distorts the true nature of Western actions, which are generally aimed at promoting global stability and democracy, and deflects attention from Russia's own aggressive policies and internal issues. This disinformation strategy ultimately serves to consolidate Putin's power while undermining trust and cooperation both domestically and internationally.



Figure 10. Facebook post dated 24 June 2023. Source: Facebook

## Russia as a Modern State

In this category of monitored posts, we came across several posts that sought to portray Russia as a modern state. The generic term 'development partner', particularly when used on the African continent, typically elicits the image of a Western diplomat or aid agency official, usually from one of a handful of countries, responsible for engaging with a range of interlocutors on various fronts. Beyond diplomatic and development-related exchanges, these might also include cultural exchange visits, language courses, or educational exchanges and offers for tertiary education (such as in the post below).

For example, in the analysed post, the Russian embassy invites young Kenyans to participate in a competitive scholarship selection to study in Russia. The post pushes the narrative that Russia can offer Kenyans the same as any other developed country or development partner.

While mutual cooperation in this manner between countries is not unusual, the significance of a post of this nature is that it emphasizes that Russia, too, can assume this role: a patron of sorts, able to provide desirable opportunities for Kenyans. In as much as Russia is in a position to offer these opportunities, in many cases, they have come at a price. [Reports](#) have emerged of foreign students being coerced into activities such as spying on their home countries, contributing to military efforts like drone building, or even being [forced](#) into the war in Ukraine. Needless to say, no prospective student imagines that a foray into another country in pursuit of education would culminate in this type of activity.



Figure 11. Facebook post dated 20 March 2023. Source: Facebook

## **The use of cultural diplomacy**

Russia has involved cultural diplomacy, fostering goodwill, and promoting cultural, political, and social values to create a positive image and influence international audiences. This category of narratives reflects on these trends, specifically in terms of cultural and diplomatic endeavors in which Russia has promoted its geopolitical interests. Concrete examples include providing free Russian language online courses, launching technology initiatives like computer donations to Kenyan schools, and hosting summits such as the Russia-Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum.

While cultural diplomacy is not new, it is significant when it is used to create or promote various narratives portraying Russia in a particular light. [Using](#) cultural diplomacy to promote Russian geopolitical interests poses significant dangers by subtly manipulating public opinion and political decisions, undermining the sovereignty of host countries, and masking aggressive policies. This strategy allows Russia to build soft power and create dependencies, often serving as a cover for intelligence gathering and espionage activities, thereby compromising the security and political stability of the nations involved.

These initiatives showcase Russia's commitment to fostering mutual understanding and cooperation with African nations and, more importantly, to counter Western dominance. Through cultural exchange and diplomatic engagement, which are very much the norm, Russia seeks to strengthen political relationships and address shared challenges for the purpose of promoting her own influence on the African and global stage. In recognition of the role Africa is likely to play in a new world order (due to population and natural resources), sometimes described as 'the scramble for Africa', Russia has come to the realization that a closer engagement with Africa would be of strategic value.

Russia's use of [cultural diplomacy](#) for geostrategic goals is problematic as it involves manipulation, undermines sovereignty, espionage, dependency creation, and masking aggressive policies. Thus, it destabilizes regions and compromises the host nations' security and autonomy.



Figure 12. Facebook post dated 25 May 2023. Source: Facebook

### Facebook vs. Twitter in Kenya

The fact that a number of posts discussed here received only limited engagement appears to be something of an anomaly and is not indicative of a failed or wasted effort.

Interestingly, the Russian embassy Facebook account in Kenya has a low number of followers (approximately 2,000) compared with the X (Twitter) account, which has some 45,000 followers). This could be due to Russia aiming for engagement with [intellectuals](#), prominent media figures, and social media influencers, which, within Kenya, are groups that engage more with the X platform; this can be seen with the example of the powerful account of @kot (Kenyans on Twitter) with 229.4k followers, and hashtag #kot demands attention and commentary from an unidentified user group that regularly comments on, and is called for comment, on current affairs within the country. Additionally, Russia's online [influence campaigns](#) aim to create confusion and doubt about foreign actors, leveraging Twitter's real-time engagement and widespread reach to amplify their messages more effectively than on Facebook. However, this study concerned itself with information and narratives being shared at the 'grass-roots level' of Facebook users, who might not have the awareness and critical eye that Kenyans on X have.

## ***Analysis of the Russian Embassy account in South Africa***

The Russian Embassy's Facebook account in South Africa (*Figure 13*) provided a similar picture to that identified in Kenya. The analyzed posts commemorated historical milestones like the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale, emphasizing Russia's historical support for African nations in their struggle against colonialism and apartheid. Moreover, our analysis identified posts highlighting the economic progress of the BRICS group, showcasing its collective contribution to global GDP, allegedly surpassing that of the G7 nations. These narratives follow a similar pattern of using propaganda and disinformation to underscore Russia's commitment to fostering alliances and promoting shared prosperity on the world stage.



*Figure 13. Russian Embassy in the Republic of South Africa Facebook Account. Source: Facebook.*


## ***Russia-Africa Cooperation and Historical Ties***

In this category of narratives, Russia emphasizes its historical solidarity with African nations, particularly in the fight against colonialism, racism, and apartheid. The concrete examples include significant events like the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale, where Soviet-backed forces played a crucial role. Other examples focused on ongoing support, such as providing grain, fertilizers, and technology, underscoring Russia's commitment to African development. By celebrating its non-colonial past and framing the relationship as one of friendship, Russia seeks to strengthen ties with South Africa, positioning itself as a dependable partner in the country's pursuit of progress and prosperity.

Despite Russia's proclaimed attempt to become a reliable partner to South Africa, the motives of its behaviour are questionable. This is because, in other parts of Africa, [Russian military influence](#) has been used to prop up autocratic regimes while plundering the natural resources of those countries. The Russian disinformation narrative emphasizing historical solidarity and ongoing support for South Africa is thus problematic as it potentially masks ulterior motives, such as economic exploitation and political manipulation. While portraying herself as a dependable ally, Russia's actions in other African nations raise concerns about its true intentions. As in Kenya, this

narrative indicates risks of creating economic dependencies, undermining democratic institutions, and straining South Africa's relations with other international allies, ultimately compromising the country's sovereignty and long-term stability. For South Africa, the danger lies in the potential for exploitation, the undermining of democratic institutions, and the creation of dependencies that could compromise the nation's sovereignty and long-term stability. It is crucial for South Africa to critically evaluate such narratives and maintain a balanced approach to its international relations.

*Russia is portrayed as a victim*

 Russian Embassy in the Republic of South Africa •  
10 May 2023 · 🌐

President of Russia – Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Federation Armed Forces Vladimir Putin attended a military parade marking the 78th Anniversary of Victory in the 1941–1945 Great Patriotic War.

The key points of the President's speech:

Today, our civilisation is at a crucial turning point. A real war is being waged against our country again but we have countered international terrorism and will defend the people of Donbass and safeguard our security.

For us, for Russia, there are no unfriendly or hostile peoples either in the west or in the east. Just like the vast majority of people on the planet, we want to see a peaceful, free and stable future.

We believe that any ideology of superiority is abhorrent, criminal and deadly by its nature.

The Western globalist elites keep speaking about their exceptionalism, pit nations against each other and split societies, provoke bloody conflicts and coups, sow hatred, Russophobia, aggressive nationalism, destroy family and traditional values which make us human.

<...>

Their goal – and there is nothing new about it – is to break apart and destroy our country, to make null and void the outcomes of World War II, to completely break down the system of global security and international law, to choke off any sovereign centres of development.

Boundless ambition, arrogance and impunity inevitably lead to tragedies. This is the reason for the catastrophe the Ukrainian people are going through. They have become hostage to the coup d'état and the resulting criminal regime of its Western masters, collateral damage in the implementation of their cruel and self-serving plans.

<...>

I strongly believe that the experience of solidarity and partnership during the years of fighting a common threat is our invaluable heritage and a secure foothold now when the unstoppable movement is gaining momentum towards a more just multipolar world, a world based on the principles of trust and indivisible security, of equal opportunities for a genuine and free development of all nations and peoples.

#Victory78 #May9



Figure 14. Facebook post dated 10 May 2023. Source: Facebook

The Russian embassy in South Africa's Facebook post during the 78th Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War combines a reflection on historical resilience with a critique of current global politics. Vladimir Putin positions Russia as once again under threat, now from Western elites who allegedly promote division and undermine traditional values. Despite this, Putin asserts

Russia's commitment to peace, condemning ideologies of superiority and calling for a more just, multipolar world founded on trust, equal opportunities, and the genuine development of all nations.

The narrative of Russia as a victim (Figure 13) draws on the targeted audience's empathy that Russia has constantly fought for its place in the global community. This post is significant in that it draws attention to the view that Russia has constantly been victimized by the West for its patriotic stance. This individual perception is [misleading](#) as it ignores the other perceptions that could be attributed to Russia's positionality in the global world. It is, therefore, intended to draw sympathy and affection towards the Russian cause to gain support for the targeted Facebook audience. The good intentions of Russia concerning South Africa are [deceptive](#), as seen during the [Jacob Zuma presidency when a secret nuclear deal](#) was negotiated on behalf of the South African government. Therefore, there is always an economic or geopolitical interest for Russia through the portrayal of good intentions toward South Africa.

#### *Celebration of Russia's non-colonial past and its treatment of Africans as friends*

The narrative of celebrating Russia's non-colonial past and its treatment of Africans as friends draws on differentiating Russia from Western countries based on colonialism. This narrative is based on the concept of friendship, which borders on the African culture and identity through concepts such as [Ubuntu](#), which speaks to humanity to others. The homophobic language is also important because most African states perceive the LGBTQI community as a [Western-driven agenda](#). [Uganda](#) is a case in point and not an African cultural phenomenon. Hence, posts with an Anti-Western sentiment are intertwined with Anti-Western culture, anti-Western sentiment, and homophobic language and can be attributed to conservatives and traditionalists who will draw emotive affection from the post and find Russia as a more suitable friend to South Africa than Western countries such as the US. By perpetuating fabricated narratives, such as the portrayal of the US Summit for Democracy as a fallacy, the anti-Western agenda also erodes a balanced understanding of what the summit and democracy are all about.





**Russian Embassy in the Republic of South Africa** · 1 April 2023 · 6

On March 28-30, the United States held an international event which they call the Summit for Democracy. A similar meeting was held in December 2021. This is, therefore, the second attempt by the current US administration to convene some kind of conference in order to – as Washington is portraying it – form a coalition of democratic states led by the United States. But in fact this anti-Russia event has no other purpose than to revive America's global 'liberal idea' in order to force everyone to look at the world through the lens of the rules-based order.

Under the banner of counteracting the 'autocratic regimes', Washington is trying to consolidate the Western community and bring onboard its supporters and allies who are not part of the community. Among the Summit invitees were the leaders of more than 120 states which are either already involved in the hybrid war headed by the collective West or that are not yet engaged; but clearly, the US plans to gain their support one way or the other.

In his address at the Summit plenary session, US President Joseph Biden stated that he was proud to stand together with his Western colleagues to defend the fundamental values 'they all shared': justice, the rule of law, free speech, assembly, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, and their 'core belief in the interest of human rights for every single individual in the world'.

But let's see how these 'core values' work in actual practice.

Late capitalism as the West domination and tech supremacy system is based on the US dollar monopoly. The declared foundational values are open markets and free capital and technology flow. However, when it comes to the West's interests, these "values" are openly ignored (as an example - the US blocked the WTO disputes resolution mechanism due to the challenging competition with China. Another examples – the initiative to set up oil and gas price cap limits for Russia (denial of the market mechanisms), freezing Russian gold (breach of property rights), and politically motivated sanctions violating the freedom of entrepreneurship.

While proclaiming the right of nations to self-determination, the US interferes in the domestic affairs of other countries for the sake of 'promoting democracy'. There are plenty of examples of the US "democracy export" to Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Ukraine. People of none of these countries have got a better life.

Values of the Enlightenment, Christianity and other monotheistic religions are being replaced by dogmas of a 'new ethics' which the collective West invented under the pretext of combating discrimination against minorities. The Western countries continue to encourage once-marginal phenomenon as obsessive LGBT+ agenda, radical feminism, 'critical race theory'. In fact we see special privileges for those denying heterosexual norms and the oppression of others who don't accept the LGBT deviation. Gender minorities get their positions in business and governments through the artificial system of quotas that undermines the idea of fair professional competition.

Contrary to the proclaimed principle of freedom of speech, the Western authorities enforce 'digital authoritarianism'. New censorship tools including undesirable social media accounts (along with the content) removal have been developed in order to suppress alternative voices.

Combating climate change is yet another modern 'liberal value'. The Western countries impose strict environmental protection regulation and standards on developing and poor countries, while simultaneously moving harmful industries to those areas.

Anti-Russian racism is a language of hate towards Russia and Russian people, inconsistent with the Western conventional tolerance. Western media and political leaders are promoting racist myths about Russia based on the dehumanizing rhetoric against Russian people and the idea of Russian 'collective responsibility' for the global security and political crisis. In fact, we see the following approach: 'if you are against Russia, you are with us'.

These are the principles Joseph Biden and the collective West refer to as 'fundamental values of true democracy'. Their democracy is nothing more than a pretty façade of a state structure designed to cover up how they ignore the rights and freedom of other nations.

### FUNDAMENTAL VALUES OF 'TRUE DEMOCRACY' DEFENDED BY THE COLLECTIVE WEST



*Figure 15. Facebook post dated 1 April 2023. Source: Facebook*

As mentioned above, the Russian Embassy in South Africa's Facebook account posts anti-western narratives that speak against the LGBTQI community. Through such posts, the embassy challenges the narrative of Western domination, capitalism, US dollar dominance, and Tech Supremacy from US organizations.

It lambasts the Summit for Democracy held in the US in 2023 and 2021. The post describes the summit as an "anti-Russian event." Part of the post reads: "The Western countries continue to encourage once-marginal phenomenon as obsessive LGBT+ agenda, radical feminism, 'critical race theory.' "In fact, we see special privileges for those denying heterosexual norms and the oppression of others who don't accept the LGBT deviation." The post, therefore, gives prominence to homophobia and intersects with issues on climate change, trade, capitalism, and globalization.

The posts accompanied with images portray an anti-US narrative and border on the confines of propaganda. Posts such as the above received extensive engagement as they critiqued the US and generated interest among the South African audience, which is anti-America and in support of a multipolar world.

### ***Promotion of BRICS and a Multipolar World Order***

The posts by the Russian embassy in South Africa highlight Russia's leadership within BRICS, particularly its role in establishing the New Development Bank. The narratives criticize Western dominance and neocolonialism while praising Russia and China for their efforts to foster an equitable global security system. These narratives emphasize the importance of BRICS in shaping a more balanced and inclusive international order, challenging Western hegemony, and promoting cooperation among emerging powers.



Russian Embassy in the Republic of South Africa

6 April 2023 · 🌐



First BRICS roadshow took place in Mpumalanga

On April 4, 2023, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Republic of South Africa H.E.Mr.Ilya Rogachev participated in the roadshow dedicated to South Africa's chairmanship in BRICS this year.

The event was hosted by Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Alvin Botes in partnership with Premier of Mpumalanga Refilwe Mtshweni-Tsipane.

The Mpumalanga roadshow aimed at raising public awareness around the South Africa's role as Chair of BRICS for 2023.

#russia #southafrica #brics #rogachev #embassyofrussia #mpumalanga



Figure 16. Facebook post dated 6 April 2023. Source: Facebook

As a result, in South Africa, posts on BRICS receive positive engagement on the creation of a multipolar world and are usually accompanied by the emojis of the Russian and South African

flags. This is a recurring narrative of the Russian embassy in South Africa that does not appear in Kenya since South Africa is one of the founding members of BRICS.

The Russian embassy's Facebook account posted information that on April 4, 2023, the Russian Ambassador Ilya Rogachev participated in the first BRICS roadshow in Mpumalanga, South Africa, hosted by Deputy Minister Alvin Botes and Premier Refilwe Mtshweni-Tsipane, to raise public awareness about South Africa's role as BRICS Chair for 2023. The embassy's post can be viewed as a strategic move to enhance Russia's influence, shape public opinion, and reinforce bilateral ties with South Africa. It serves multiple purposes, including legitimizing Russia's presence, creating dependencies, and propagating narratives that favor Russian geopolitical interests. By carefully crafting and disseminating such messages, Russia aims to solidify its foothold in South Africa and the broader African continent, counterbalancing Western influence and promoting its own strategic agenda.

The Promotion of BRICS Narrative, specifically Figure 14, illustrates the prominent role that South Africa plays in creating an alternative to the unipolar world. BRICS is largely perceived as the alternative to the domination of the Western world in multilateral institutions, and this post shows the prominent role of South Africa in recreating the global order. This is important for Russia to post this to boost support and influence of BRICS and spearhead the reconfiguration of the multipolar world. On the other hand, the BRICS narrative, since the formation of the organization, has been used to exploit South Africa through relations with China. This was the case during the [Zuma presidency](#). This exploitation of portraying a multipolar world continues to be misleading even during the [Ramaphosa presidency](#), as witnessed during collaborative naval drills since Russia's global isolation after the invasion of Ukraine. The constant support of Russia in the war by South Africa due to the BRICS relation has led to the country losing its [moral standing](#).

Russia's promotion of a multi-polar world through the BRICS narrative is problematic due to its hidden motives of strategic self-interest rather than genuine partnership. By leveraging historical ties and anti-Western sentiment, Russia aims to weaken Western influence and enhance its own global power. This involves exploiting economic promises that often disproportionately benefit Russia, supporting autocratic tendencies that erode democratic values, and manipulating public perception through selective successes and disinformation. Such actions mislead South Africa, fostering dependencies and undermining its democratic institutions for Russia's geopolitical advantage.

### ***Anti-Western sentiments***

In narratives critiquing Western policies and actions, Russia condemns Western exceptionalism, nationalism, and Russophobia, highlighting perceived double standards and interference, especially in the context of the Ukraine conflict. The narratives accuse the US and its allies of misleading and destabilizing international relations, with particular emphasis on admissions of deceit regarding agreements with Ukraine by Western leaders. By highlighting these criticisms, Russia aims to challenge Western narratives, assert its own perspective, and underscore the need for a more transparent and equitable approach to global affairs.

Russia's anti-Western narratives advocating for a [multipolar world](#) are deeply problematic as they foster division, distrust, and instability globally. By framing the West as an aggressor, Russia deflects attention from its own hostile actions and manipulates public opinion to consolidate power. For instance, in Ukraine, Russia's narrative of Western aggression justifies its illegal annexation of Crimea and military intervention, leading to severe regional destabilization and humanitarian crises. In Africa, Russia leverages anti-colonial sentiments to build alliances and counter Western influence, often ignoring its own exploitative practices and geopolitical ambitions. Additionally, Russia's interference in Western democratic processes through cyber operations and election meddling erodes trust and undermines international stability. These tactics reveal Russia's true intentions and actions, which are contrary to the principles of world peace, international stability, and human rights, highlighting the deceptive and destabilizing nature of its anti-Western propaganda.

**Russian Embassy in the Republic of South Africa**  
25 May 2023

The USSR in the struggle against apartheid

The West saw South Africa as an important ally during the Cold War. Under the pretext of spreading the 'red menace', the Union of South Africa passed a law suppressing communism and banning the South African Communist Party in 1950. The Soviet Consulate in Pretoria was seen as the primary source of falsehoods. But this did not put an end to cooperation between the USSR and freedom fighters.

The year of 1960 was a frontier for both South Africa and Soviet policy towards it. For South Africa the Year of Africa had a greater meaning: the events in Sharpeville and ban of the African National Congress. These shocked the West and attracted the attention of the Soviet leadership. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union established direct contacts with the freedom fighters, which was no mere coincidence.

The Soviet Union's consistent support for the ANC over three decades did not mean that relations were always smooth. In the wake of the struggle, the amount of aid to the ANC, both financial and military, increased dramatically. For example, in 1963 the ANC for the first time was listed among the recipients of financial assistance from the USSR and put in the 9th place (out of more than eighty). Two years later the ANC was already in the 7th place.

Not only material support was provided to African National Congress. Personnel of the armed wing of the ANC uMkhonto we Sizwe were trained in the USSR, which enabled the organization to maintain its army. The USSR was also involved in establishing uMkhonto camps in Angola and educating its new members. In 1982, the well-known Russian scholar V.G. Shubin wrote that 'the struggle was perhaps longer and more difficult than anticipated'.

South Africa became one of the fronts of the struggle against imperialism.

[#RussiaAfrica](#) [#AfricaDay](#) [#RussiaHelps](#) [#SovietUnion](#) [#History](#)



**O. TAMBO AND T.MBEKI MEETING WITH M.GORBACHEV, MOSCOW, 1986**

**USSR IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST APARTHEID**

- 1960 was a frontier for both South Africa and Soviet policy towards it: the Communist Party of the Soviet Union established direct contacts with the freedom fighters
- Throughout three decades the USSR provided assistance both financial and military: ANC was in the top 10 foreign beneficiaries
- Personnel of the armed wing of the ANC uMkhonto we Sizwe were trained in the USSR

48 32 comments 21 shares

**Russian Embassy in the Republic of South Africa**  
22 May 2023

The Soviet Union – advocate of African decolonization

The Soviet Union provided multifaceted assistance to African countries, including support for the national liberation movements on the continent. The Soviet leadership welcomed the emergence of each new state on the map of Africa and declared its recognition. The first treaty establishing diplomatic relations with an African state was signed in 1958 with Ghana, the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence.

In reality, international support for African nations was much wider:

- At the initiative of the USSR, the UN General Assembly adopted the historic Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples in 1960. It proclaimed on behalf of UN member states the need for an immediate and unconditional end to colonialism in all its forms and manifestations, and affirmed the inalienable right to full independence and freedom of the peoples of all colonies and other non-self-governing territories. The USSR and other socialist countries insisted on establishing of the UN Special Committee on the Implementation of the Declaration.
- In 1965, the USSR submitted to the UN a draft Declaration on the Inadmissibility of Intervention in the Domestic Affairs of States and the Protection of Their Independence and Sovereignty.
- Soviet representatives actively sought the liberation of the last colonies. In 1970, the UN General Assembly adopted a document, which declared colonialism in any of its forms and manifestations as a crime against humanity, violation of the UN Charter and principles of international law.
- At the initiative of the USSR together with Guinea, the UN GA in 1973 adopted the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, which became a significant contribution to the international struggle against racism and one of the tools for isolation of the white minority regime in South Africa.
- The USSR actively and consistently advocated for the rights of indigenous people and against racism in South Africa. Assistance was provided to African states in promoting their interests at the UN, strengthening unity, and eliminating inter-African conflicts. The USSR signed treaties of friendship and cooperation with a number of African countries such as Angola, Benin, the Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Somalia and Ethiopia.

[#AfricaDay2023](#) [#AfricaDay](#) [#liberation](#) [#decolonize](#) [#Decolonising](#) [#ussr](#) [#russia](#) [#russian](#) [#ungeneralassembly](#) [#UnitedNations](#) [#africa](#)



**LEADERSHIP OF SA COMMUNIST PARTY (INCLUDING T.MBEKI) AND SOVIET AFRO-ASIAN SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE, 1979**

**USSR – ADVOCATE OF AFRICAN DECOLONIZATION**

USSR initiated the adoption of:

- Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, 1960
- Declaration on the Inadmissibility of Intervention in the Domestic Affairs of States and the Protection of Their Independence and Sovereignty, 1965
- International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, 1973

*Figures 17 and 18. Facebook posts dated 22 and 25 May 2023. Source: Facebook*

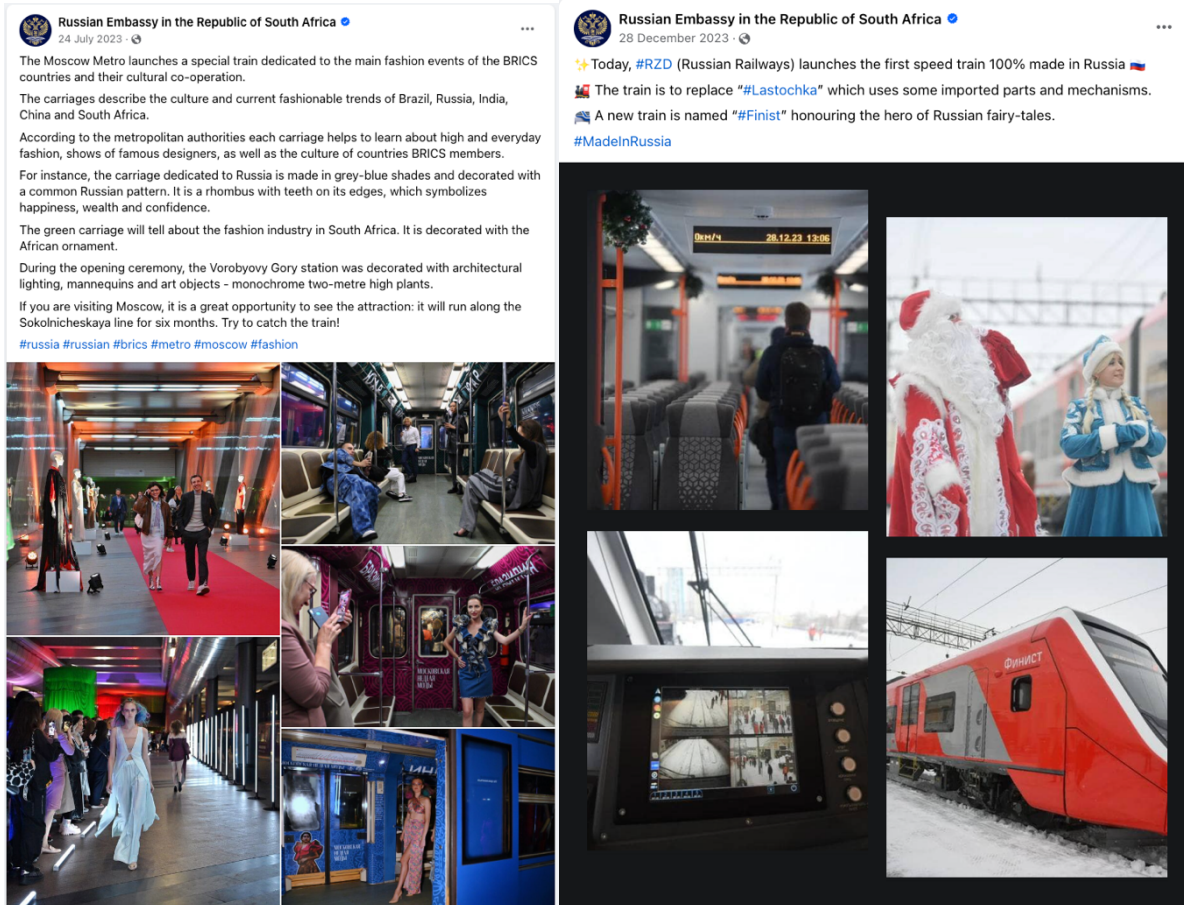
The embassy consistently posts on the Soviet Union's role in bringing an end to apartheid. In a post to celebrate Africa Day, the Russian embassy reiterates how it has constantly supported South Africa since the days of the apartheid struggle. Historic images of past African National Congress (ANC) and Russian leaders emphasize the historic relationship and how it has continued over the years. The post above generated significant engagement with Facebook users, who praised Russia for always supporting South Africa. Facebook posts by the Russian Embassy in South Africa are framed around Russia's role in supporting the struggle against apartheid. The posts were accompanied by historical images of meetings between the then Soviet Union under the leadership of Gorbachev and ANC president Oliver Tambo and served as constant reminders of the close ties between Russia and South Africa. The post on the right reiterates the Soviet Union's active support of African decolonization through diplomatic recognition, advocacy for anti-colonial declarations at the UN, and signing treaties with numerous African nations while providing multifaceted assistance to liberation movements and promoting indigenous rights.

By leveraging decolonization narratives and anti-colonial sentiments, particularly in Africa, Russia attempts to position itself as a champion against Western oppression while diverting attention from its own [aggressive actions](#), particularly the [ongoing war in Ukraine](#). For example, Russia's narrative around supporting the apartheid struggle, as shown in curated posts for Africa Day, seeks to exploit historical grievances to build alliances and counter Western influence.

Figures 14 and 15 show the use of decolonization narratives about the apartheid struggle curated to celebrate Africa Day, posted on May 25. The constant repetition of Russia's role in the apartheid struggle reinforced and perceived Russia as the main supporter of the struggle and alienated any opposing views of other states' roles, specifically Western Countries. These posts give credibility to Russian influence in modern-day South Africa based on their role in the struggle to end apartheid. It gives a warped-sided perception of Russia's role in the struggle and can, from a different perspective, be interpreted as if South Africa owes allegiance to Russia in the war in Ukraine because it was also supported during the apartheid struggle.

### ***Russia's Future as a Modern Civilized State***

In narratives highlighting Russian military and technological strength, there's a focus on the rapid advancement of Russia's military-industrial complex, showcasing its capability to produce significant quantities of ammunition and tanks. Claims are made of outpacing Western countries in military production, particularly concerning supplies to Ukraine. Alongside military prowess, there's promotion of Russian technological initiatives, especially in education and agriculture, underscoring Russia's multifaceted approach to technological advancement and its strategic importance in various sectors.



Figures 19 and 20. Facebook posts dated 22 and 24 July 2023. Source: Facebook

This narrative aims to portray Russia as a modern civilised state that is at par with any other Western state. The Facebook posts were mostly accompanied by images of the subway train stations in Russia, especially during US media figure Tucker Carlson's visit to Russia. These images amplify the message that Russia is a modern, developed state like any other global superpower. The post on the left describes the first fully Russian-made speed train, celebrating the modern transport infrastructure in the country.

Russia's portrayal of itself as a technologically advanced nation is a form of propaganda designed to enhance its global image and influence, often exaggerating its capabilities to mask internal issues like economic struggles and corruption. For instance, despite highlighting advancements in space and military technology, such as [Roscosmos](#) and hypersonic missiles, these sectors face [funding issues and project delays](#). Similarly, Russia boasts about its cyber capabilities to intimidate and assert influence globally while obscuring its internal technological infrastructure shortcomings. This narrative also falsely suggests economic diversification into AI and biotechnology, which suffer from underfunding and lack of progress. By projecting technological prowess, Russia aims to attract investments and strategic advantages, diverting attention from its authoritarian practices and domestic challenges, thereby misleading international stakeholders

and distorting global perceptions. By exaggerating its technological capabilities, Russia aims to mask its domestic challenges and enhance its global influence, but these efforts ultimately reveal significant gaps between its propaganda and reality.

This narrative matters because it gives prominence to the Russian superiority fixation and its goal to be treated and perceived as a superpower. It is in line with the Russian pursuit of a multipolar world where the country should be perceived and seen within the same scope and magnitude as any country in the global north because it gives prominence to the Russian superiority fixation and its goal to be treated and perceived as a superpower. While Russia possesses significant military and technological assets, its capabilities are often overstated. Internal issues, technological failures, and [economic vulnerabilities](#) highlight a more complex and less dominant reality. These points collectively debunk the narrative of Russia as an unequivocal military and technological superpower.

*Military Developments*

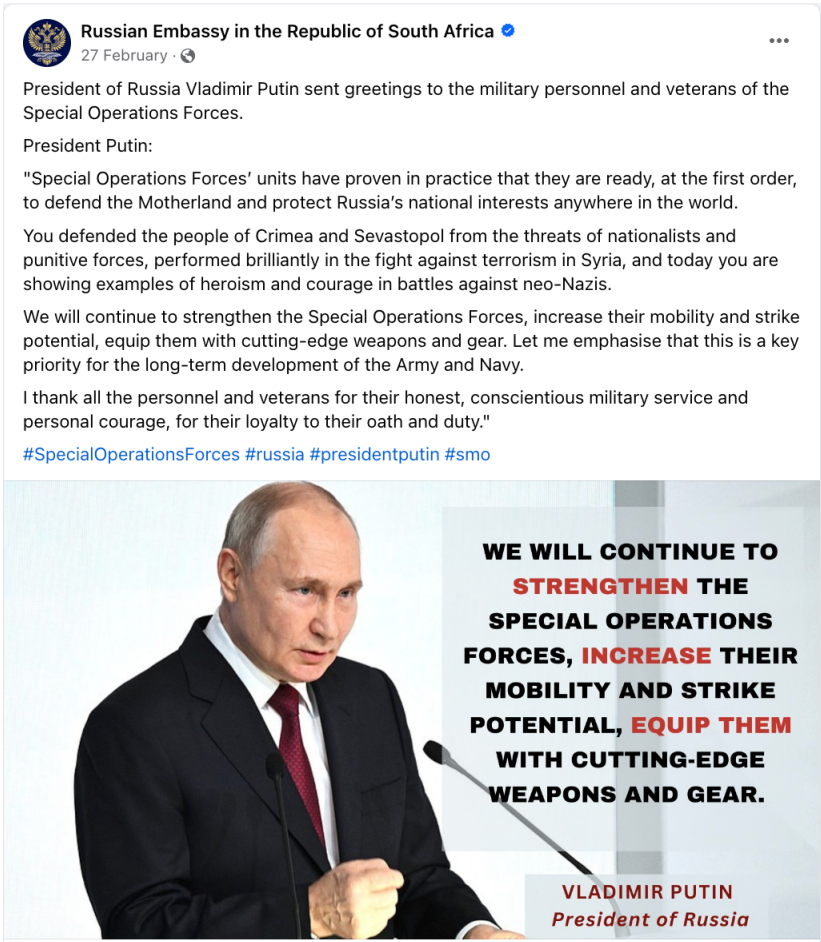


Figure 21. Facebook post dated 27 February 2024. Source: Facebook



The narrative of Russian military aggression and military powers is usually accompanied by images of President Vladimir Putin, who portrays himself as a strong leader in charge of a powerful army and country. The posts receive minimal engagement. The example above consists of a message to military personnel and veterans, but what is more prominent are the bold words in red reiterating "strengthen, increase, equip them." When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, it was believed that they would have taken over Kyiv in three days, but two years down the line, the war still rages on with massive casualties on both ends. Posts such as Figure 19, curated with a clenched fist of President Putin, are propagated to persuade the targeted audience of Russian military strength and strong leadership under Putin. Figure 19 reinforces a false perception of Russian military might and leadership to divert attention to the fact that the war in Ukraine has lasted longer than the Russian state under Putin initially imagined; hence, such posts have to reinforce the assumption of military strength and strong leadership. The fact that the war in Ukraine has lasted over two years reveals how [Russia is not the military powerhouse](#) that posts such as Figure 19 propagate.

## 6. Conclusion

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The research findings illuminate a troubling reality: the dissemination of pro-Kremlin propaganda through Facebook in both Kenya and South Africa. These campaigns have transcended physical borders, infiltrating the digital realm to shape perceptions of global events, particularly the ongoing war in Ukraine. They also use disinformation narratives about colonialism and Western imperialism. By perpetuating fabricated narratives, such as the portrayal of Ukraine as 'Nazi-infested,' these propaganda efforts not only garner support for the Russian invasion but also erode a balanced understanding of the situation among citizens.

The monitoring indicates that Facebook has become a vehicle for propagating these deceptive narratives. Often disguised as legitimate news or commentary, these campaigns manipulate historical events and exploit isolated incidents to craft a distorted depiction of the Ukrainian government and its military. The identified volume of such content on Facebook raises questions about the effectiveness of current content moderation approaches and the adaptability of existing policies to confront rapidly evolving conflict situations.

The prevalence of pro-Kremlin propaganda underscores the pressing need for robust media literacy initiatives and the cultivation of a fact-checking culture in both Kenya and South Africa. Empowering citizens to critically evaluate online content and discern potential manipulation is paramount in navigating the complex and ever-changing information landscape. By fostering a more discerning and informed citizenry, both nations can effectively combat the distortion of truth and promote a nuanced understanding of global events.

To confront the spread of false and misleading content, concerted efforts must be made to establish partnerships with established fact-checking organizations in both countries. Leveraging their expertise and existing networks, targeted debunking and inoculation efforts can be disseminated widely through various channels, including social media platforms, mainstream news websites, and community organizations. This proactive approach equips Kenyan and South African citizens with the tools necessary to identify and counteract deceptive narratives, thereby safeguarding the integrity of public discourse.

As Kenya and South Africa approach critical junctures, such as general elections, continuous monitoring of Facebook and other social media platforms is imperative. By tracking the evolution of pro-Kremlin propaganda narratives, identifying malign actors and networks, and measuring the effectiveness of counteraction strategies, both nations can take proactive measures to mitigate the influence of disinformation. Through collaborative efforts and vigilance, Kenya and South Africa can uphold the principles of transparency, accountability, and informed decision-making in the digital age.

