



UKRAINE CRISIS
media center

Broken binoculars of the Russian Air Force - Weekly Collection of RUSpropaganda Rhetoric, Verified

Propaganda Digest: This is our weekly analysis that exposes the most exaggerated, misleading, and outrageous rhetoric from recent Russian media sources, aimed at promoting critical thinking to better debunk the manipulation of Russian propaganda.



Ukraine claims it shot down a Russian A-50 reconnaissance surveillance plane over the Sea of Azov and damaged an Il-22M bomber on the evening of January 14. The loss of such an aircrafts is very painful for the military capability of Russia and its prestige.

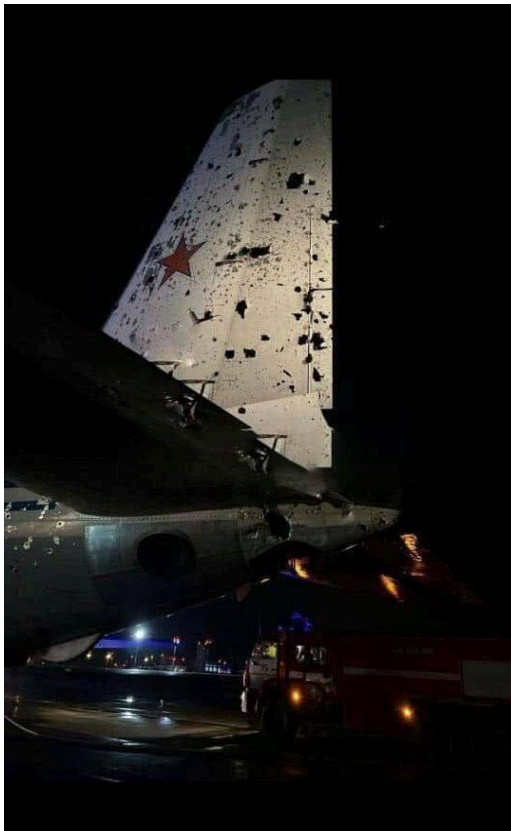
A Refusal to Confirm

Dmitry Peskov, *press secretary for Russian president*: “The Kremlin has no information about Russian planes being shot down”.

Oleg Tsarev, *fugitive former Ukrainian MP*: “In some cases, authorized individuals should provide information. This appears to be one such case. This will be the right thing to do. I hope this clarifies where decisions are made. We should at least give them that chance”.

Colonelcassad (*804,000 subscribers*), *Telegram Channel*: “If the information is not confirmed [...] it means that Ukrainian authorities are trying to distract with some massive betrayal. This is where things get more interesting”.

Verified:



After news broke that the A-50 had been taken down and IL-22M11 damaged, silence enveloped the flood of Russian propaganda. Typically, whether true or not, propaganda proliferates in various versions to obscure the actual events. However, the conspicuous absence of such narrative proliferation underscored the gravity of the situation; that even propagandists hesitated to weave their web of alternative narratives without the Kremlin's command. The tension mounted as propagandists found themselves in an unusual position of restraint. Requests for confirmation circulated among them, with even figures like Oleg Tsarev facing pressure from Sergey Markov to say at least something. When the Kremlin finally commented, not confirming the news as per usual in the first vacuum of panic, propagandists realized it was their go-ahead to spread multiple alternative realities.

Photo of the tail of the Russian Il-22 aircraft that landed in Anapa after having been hit by an anti-aircraft missile over the Sea of Azov. 15.01.2024. Russia. Photo credits: Fighterbomber

Friendly Fire

Thirteenth, (217,000), *Telegram Channel*: “Only our air defense forces have the technical ability to hit this aircraft at this altitude. But if it happened to be our own men, I'd like to identify the perpetrators”.

Two majors (531,000), *Telegram Channel*: “The preliminary cause was friendly fire”.

Rybar, *Telegram Channel*: “By no means is the possibility of 'friendly fire' from Russian air defense merely theoretical: regrettably, there have been plenty of such incidents in the past two years, and there is no sign of a trend towards correction”.

Pyatiletka (26,000), *Telegram Channel*: “...the most probable cause of which is still considered to be "friendly fire of our own air defense forces," though the enemy attributes it to themselves”.

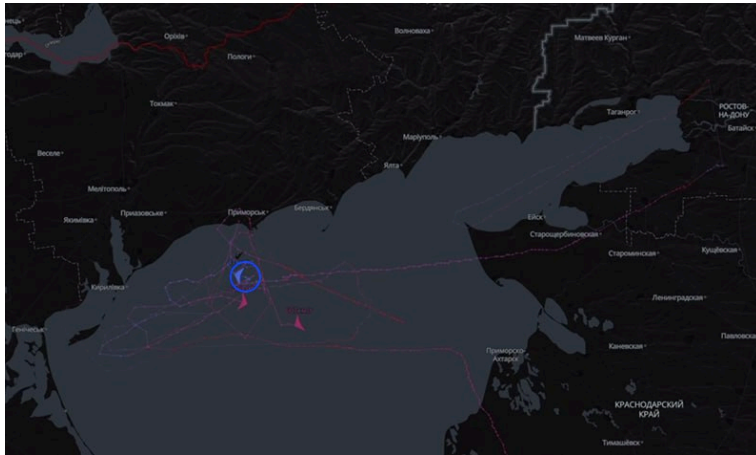
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Oleksander Kovalenko, a military analyst, [concedes](#) that Russian air defenses displayed significant incompetence in 2023, rendering this version susceptible to manipulation due to its inherent believability. In 2023, this incompetence resulted not only in the downing of their own aircraft but also Ka-52 helicopters in the occupied Kherson and Zaporizhia Oblasts. These errors, Kovalenko argues, were near the 20km convergence line and so could be somewhat understandable.

However, A-50 and Il-22M11 were positioned far 150-200 km from the frontlines and above the Russian-controlled Azov Sea, meaning this location should have minimized the likelihood of such mistakes. Even if the question of friend or foe emerged, Russia's air defenses should have easily identified the routes of these aircraft based on the consistent characteristics displayed.

Alexei Kopytko, ex-advisor to the Minister of Defense of Ukraine, [told](#) that the "friendly fire" version is thrown in as the lesser evil. *“The Kremlin can't let the Russians get any ideas about Ukraine's ability to shoot down scarce aircraft deep behind the lines. Because this would have a strong demoralizing effect, especially on the occupation troops in the Kherson and Zaporizhzhya regions”*. However, Israeli Military observer David Sharp told Radio [NV](#) that it is impossible to rule out the possibility of friendly fire: “I don't see many likely opportunities for Ukrainian fighter jets to enter that zone of fire; doing so would be on the cusp of suicide. Nevertheless, assigning blame to their own air defense appears to be the least unfavorable option among a range of poor choices”.

Acknowledging their vulnerability to Ukraine's military would be a painful admission for the Kremlin's propaganda machine. Therefore, accepting a regrettable mistake supported by remembered blunders by their air defence in 2023 seems to be the least bitter pill for propagandists to swallow. This may also elucidate why propagandists were hesitant to comment on the news, preferring an official reaction from the Kremlin first. They recognized the gravity of the situation and were cautious to first discover the Kremlin's track.



The point on the radar where the A-50 lost speed

The Arrival of a New Weapon? The Brits?

Markov's Logic, (65,000), *Telegram Channel*: “It appears to be an announcement that the AFU is deploying a new type of weapon. It's either some new Western missiles delivered to the AFU. Or perhaps the first combat use of F16 aircraft with a new type of missile”.

Thirteenth, (217,000), *Telegram Channel*: “If the Khokhls (*derogatory name for Ukrainians*) did it, what weapons did they use, and how did they counter it?”.

This is not the end, (127,000), *Telegram Channel*: “Our intelligence believes that only British specialists were involved in the attack on the Russian aircraft and that this is retaliation for the killed officers, who were buried with military honors yesterday in a military cemetery in the suburbs of London and Manchester. According to operational reports, 22 SAS specialists were involved, who used British military technology to divert the airborne RERs, temporarily blind them, and strike them with British-made man-portable air defence systems”.

Verified:

While the arrival of F-16s in Ukraine has been long-awaited and is indeed plausible in the coming months, ongoing training processes temper such assumptions. Training on F-16 jets typically entails a two-year program in the United States, but Ukrainian pilots, due to their exceptional flying competencies, have been granted an expedited training program. Despite this acceleration, several months of training still lie ahead, and a delivery now before offensive operations begin in the spring is highly doubted. The fact that no proof of this delivery has yet surfaced, even four days after the incident, supports this.

Even if F-16s were indeed in Ukraine, they are not a wonder weapon capable of evading Russia's radar undetected. The significance of the incident lies not only in the type of aircraft involved but also in the strategy employed to circumvent the array of sensors and fighter jets specifically deployed for the defense of such aircraft. This achievement really was just that for the Ukrainian Air Force—a strategically planned triumph, marking the first of its kind—the take down of a A-50 aircraft.

When Russia seeks to deflect from its inferiority to Ukraine, a recurring narrative involves blaming direct involvement by military superpowers such as the British and Americans. Russia is particularly wary of the UK in this conflict because it is a prominent ally calling for greater support for Ukraine. The narrative of British soldiers' deaths has already been discredited, as [verified](#) by the HWAG team during Sunak's visit to Ukraine.



Training of the Ukrainian military on the Patriot air defense system in Germany. February 2023. Photo credits: Ministry of Defense of the Federal Republic of Germany

“True Heroes”

Roman Saponkov, war correspondent: “They made strong planes. The pilot is a hero. The wounded man reached the airfield and single-handedly landed the damaged car. Everything is analog, without autopilots or electronic systems. A miracle, nothing less. This is not an automatic watermelon planted in a field”.

Operation Z: Voenkory Russkaya Vesna (1,317,000), Telegram Channel: “Real heroes: photo of an IL-22 landing in Anapa in the evening following the incident over the Sea of Azov. The tail of the military plane is literally riddled”.

Fighter-bomber (411,000), Telegram Channel: “To say that the IL-22 crew are true heroes is to say nothing. I hope to hear their story in the first person”.

Verified:

During a crisis, the Kremlin's propaganda strategically shifts attention from the negative to the positive. Russia, with an inflated sense of self-worth, has long propagated the myth of its superiority in politics, military, sports, and literature. This self-perception, therefore, becomes an easy tool for propagandists to use during catastrophes. Rather than emphasizing the loss of one of Russia's most expensive and irreplaceable aircraft, the focus was on the so-called "victory" of landing the damaged (by an inferior army - as Russia claims) plane. This serves as a metaphor for Russia's war in Ukraine, where victories are claimed not through genuine military achievements but rather through the avoidance of failures, underscoring just how weak Russia's military has become.

This narrative control extends to sharing photos of the damaged aircraft with an immediate positive spin, aiming to shape the domestic audience's perception before international media or Ukrainian sources comment on the failure. Despite attempts to frame it as a success, the evident damage, with holes in the wings, points to a missile attack and so a rather foolish failure for the Russian Air Force.

Retaliation

This is not the end, (127,000), *Telegram Channel*: “This is essentially a declaration of war in proxy form. From Crimea, Kursk, and Belarus, Iskander M and Iskander K cover all decision centers. MiG 31k with Kinzhal can reach all bunkers. V. Zelensky and A. Yermak have prudently left Ukrainian territory. Not them, so others have targets. Everything is possible now”.

Russian Grammar, (56,000), *Telegram Channel*: “And we'll tell the Khokhls not to be happy. Russia is building aeroplanes, not begging for junk. And whatever they build this year will bomb Ukraine”.

Verified:

Andriy Kramarov, a military expert and reserve officer of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, [emphasized](#) to Radio NV the significant impact of losing such an aircraft. He highlighted that Russia now lacks a crucial long-distance observation and intelligence platform. These planes play a vital role as communication links between the battlefield, ground targets, and air objectives, functioning as translators of connections.

Contrary to the narrative about retaliatory strikes hitting all 'decision-making centers,' it should be dismissed as pure rhetoric. Ukraine's success in repelling a technologically advanced missile strike on Kyiv on January 2, 2024, and intercepting all 10 Kinzhal hypersonic missiles shows that even after months of reconnaissance using the now-destroyed A-50, Russia wasn't able to touch the decision-making centres. What makes them think they can do it this time around without Russia's eyes and ears in the sky?

Finally, among the lost planes were critical intelligence officials, notably older officers. These machines, staffed by uniquely skilled military engineers, must undergo extensive and costly training. Meaning Russia is not just down 1/2 aircraft but down experienced and irreplaceable personnel.

