



Foreign Interference Commission

Public Consultation Process

Small Group Consultation Meeting Public Summary

In the summer of 2024, Commissioner Marie-Josée Hogue and members of the Foreign Interference Commission's (the "**Commission**") Public Consultation Process ("**PCP**") team met with seven individuals belonging to the Russian Canadian community in a consultation meeting organized with the assistance of the Russian Canadian Democratic Alliance ("**RCDA**"). This is a summary of the information shared at that meeting.

Notes to reader:

- The Commissioner has not and will not be making any findings about the accuracy of the information shared at the consultation meeting or make any findings of fact based on this information.
- The meeting attendees did not make an oath or swear to tell the truth before sharing information at this meeting.
- The meeting attendees were not subjected to cross-examination.
- The meeting attendees have reviewed and approved the contents of this public summary.
- Meeting attendees were given the option of anonymizing themselves for the purposes of the present public summary. Where meeting attendees opted to anonymize themselves, they are designated as "Participant 1", "Participant 2", etc.
- At each of the consultation meetings, the meeting attendees were asked to answer two questions, which are set out below. The meeting attendees were each given a total of 15 minutes to respond to both questions.
- Where necessary, Commission counsel have provided explanatory notes in square brackets and in the footnotes to assist the reader.

Executive Summary

- Certain attendees spoke about the dangers of Russian disinformation and propaganda. Certain attendees said that the goals of Russian disinformation include undermining democracy by portraying it as a cover-up with the results secretly decided in advance, and spreading the notion that there is no truth. Certain attendees described how various circumstances are seized on and manipulated by Russian propaganda.
- One attendee described the RCDA's experiences as a target of Russian disinformation, noting that there have been media articles asserting that the RCDA seeks to take power or destabilize the Russian government.
- Certain attendees described alienating and isolating effects of Russian disinformation for Russian Canadians, describing experiences in which Canadians had trouble believing that there were Russian Canadians who supported Ukraine in their resistance against the Russian invasion. One attendee said that Russian disinformation can lead to violence in other countries, citing the recent mass riots in the United Kingdom following disinformation about the identity and immigration status of the perpetrator of murders in the town of Southport, England.
- Certain attendees spoke about monitoring and surveillance carried out on Russian Canadians, including photographing those who attend protests against the war in Ukraine and related events. Certain attendees spoke about the potential consequences for those who are identified as attending these events, including the denial of consular services by the Russian embassy. Certain attendees said these fears lead people to self-censor and refrain from exercising their freedom of speech or attending events. Certain attendees also spoke about concerns for loved ones living in Russia, who may be subject to repercussions as a result of the actions of the attendees in Canada. Certain attendees spoke about the likelihood that Russia will introduce legislation enabling the revocation of Russian passports and their concerns that once this legislation has passed, people's Russian passports will be at risk, making circumstances even more difficult for Russians seeking citizenship status in Canada, and likely leading to more self-censorship.

- Certain attendees spoke about the immense psychological stress and strain for Russian Canadians who are subject to monitoring, surveillance, and harassment, and suffer from isolation. One attendee said that these factors compound the stress experienced by Russians immigrating to Canada.
- Certain attendees said that Russian-Canadian's self-censorship can lead to other Canadians drawing the incorrect conclusions that there are no problems in Russia or that Russian Canadians are in favor of Russia's war against Ukraine because there are not many protests.
- Certain attendees spoke about the restrictions on their ability to travel that necessarily flow from their activism in Canada, including their inability to travel to Russia and to countries that have extradition treaties with the Russian Federation. Certain attendees spoke about unfounded requests for assistance Russia has made to Interpol that resulted in people being detained while travelling.

1. Participants' responses to Question 1

The first question posed to the participants was: *How are you, your loved ones and members of your community impacted by foreign interference in Canada's electoral processes and democratic institutions?*

Participant 1

Participant 1 said that members of the Russian Canadian community are often subject to surveillance by Russia and its proxies, and that Russian Canadians are aware that they are subject to such surveillance. Participant 1 provided the example of being filmed by people who work at the Russian consulate when they attend events put on by the RCDA. Participant 1 said that while they cannot prove that the people doing the filming are from the Russian consulate, they feel confident drawing this conclusion because of the way the people filming act. Participant 1 mentioned that these individuals sometimes instigated arguments or conflicts during the RCDA's events, which has led the RCDA to increase security at its events.

Participant 1 spoke about disinformation campaigns carried out by Russia and those working on Russia's behalf, explaining that these efforts include both targeted campaigns during election periods as well as more general campaigns. Participant 1 said that the RCDA has been the subject of such disinformation campaigns, referencing an article stating that the RCDA wants to take power or destabilize the Russian government. Participant 1 noted that the Russian Federation had designated the RCDA as an "undesirable organization"¹. Participant 1 said that these false narratives questioning the RCDA's legitimacy and the legitimacy of those who oppose Vladimir Putin [Russia's current president] more generally foments distrust of the RCDA and interferes with the RCDA's efforts and its ability to interact with people, including attracting people to the RCDA's events.

Participant 1 also spoke about the effects of disinformation on Canadians and their perception of Russian Canadians. Participant 1 said that while they were protesting in front of the Russian consulate against the war in Ukraine, holding a Ukrainian flag, they encountered people who didn't believe that there are Russians who support Ukraine and Ukrainians in their fight against Russia.

Participant 1 spoke about the political and social isolation experienced by pro-Russian democracy advocates, explaining that they are isolated from the broader Russian community, at least in part due to the fear people have for their loved ones in Russia. Participant 1 stated that when they protest before the Russian consulate, they are risking the lives of their relatives in Russia, explaining that it would not be difficult for the Russian state to ruin their lives. Participant 1 described having to instruct a loved one living in Russia about how to react to a potential home search.

Participant 1 also stated that activists who have fled Russia may face visa and immigration issues in Canada. Participant 1 said that the Russian government is considering the possibility of revoking Russian passports. Participant 1 said that Russians in Canada awaiting their permanent resident status are stuck in a dangerous in-between

¹ **Note:** The designation as "undesirable organization" refers to the Russian *Criminal Code* which imposes criminal liability on such organizations.

situation, as they have fled Russia but do not feel supported by the Canadian government. According to Participant 1, Russians living in Canada may not exercise their democratic freedoms as a result, to avoid jeopardizing their permanent residency or citizenship applications. Participant 1 stated that the psychological stress from the constant threat of surveillance, harassment, risk of physical harm, and the related isolation has a profound impact on Russian Canadians, which, for recent immigrants, compounds the stress associated with immigration procedures.

Participant 2

Participant 2 said that they are a member of the RCDA, have been a political activist since 2017 and have also studied and researched Russian propaganda in Canadian society. Participant 2 said that Russian propaganda frames democracy as a cover-up and promotes the idea that electoral results in Western democracies are actually decided in advance by elites. Participant 2 said that Russian propaganda promotes the idea that the best approach is to refrain from interfering with the work of the government. Participant 2 stated that other concepts advanced by Russian propaganda are the distrust for institutions, and the notion that there is no truth and that everyone is lying. According to Participant 2, Russian propaganda fuels the narrative that a citizen's best course of action is simply to be as passive as possible and not to interfere with the government's actions. Participant 2 said that members of the Russian diaspora in Canada consume this information.

Participant 2 discussed exit polls conducted near the Russian embassy during the 2024 Russian presidential elections. Participant 2 said that the results of the poll indicated a strong correlation between votes cast for Putin and a voter's age, stating that older people mostly gain their information from Russian state-backed television which propagates disinformation narratives.

Participant 2 said that members of the Russian diaspora fear participating in protests due to the possible consequences. Participant 2 referenced a woman living in Ottawa whose passport application was rejected by the Russian embassy, along with the passport applications of her children, due to her oppositional and protest activity in Canada.

Participant 2 said that the Russian embassy also denied this woman consular services. Participant 2 said that such incidents in which the Kremlin targets individual activists scares people away from participating in protests and related activities. Participant 2 said that the Russian propaganda machine uses this reluctance to advance the narrative that all Russian citizens and diaspora members support the war in Ukraine, and that there are no protests outside of Russia. Participant 2 said that Western politicians are confused by the lack of protests by Russian exiles because they don't understand that people are afraid of protesting. Participant 2 expressed concern that this misunderstanding may lead to the wrong conclusion that the Russian diaspora supports Russia's war.

Participant 2 said they have spoken with people from Iraq and Afghanistan who sympathize with Putin's Russia and its antagonistic approach towards the United States. Participant 2 said that other people who feel targeted or isolated from mainstream society, for instance people associated with the far-right and the far-left of the political spectrum, also end up supporting Putin. Participant 2 said that Russian propaganda builds on and promotes this narrative. By way of example, Participant 2 said that two years ago, the Ottawa commemoration of the bombing of Hiroshima involved peaceful groups and organizations, including pro-Ukrainian groups who denounced Putin's escalating nuclear rhetoric. Participant 2 said that the 2024 commemoration was marked by division and that newly involved groups promoted pro-Putin narratives regarding the use of nuclear weapons.

Participant 3

Participant 3 said they were deeply involved in advocating support of Ukraine, Canadian values, and for Russian political prisoners, including organizing protests, rallies and exhibitions. Participant 3 said that the RCDA was designated as an "undesirable organization" in Russia on March 18, 2024, the day after the 2024 Russian presidential elections, possibly because of its involvement in organizing exit polls at Russian consular offices. Participant 3 noted that the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto and the Carleton University's Norman Paterson School of International Affairs were also designated as such. Participant 3 said that the RCDA is frequently branded as

an enemy of the people on pro-Kremlin channels. Participant 3 thinks that the next step will be for Russia to list the RCDA as a terrorist organization.

Participant 3 said they had to change their advocacy approach, backing away from public advocacy, after the RCDA received “undesirable status” for fear that their application for Canadian citizenship would be negatively impacted. Participant 3 cited the case of Maria Kartasheva, whose Canadian citizenship ceremony was halted due to Russian criminal findings made *in absentia* against her because she posted a statement critical of the crimes the Russian army committed in the Ukrainian village of Bucha. Participant 3 said that, while Ms. Kartasheva ultimately obtained her Canadian citizenship, the process of having to explain the Russian criminal findings against her caused her immense stress and concern. Participant 3 said that they and their partner have experienced delays in their Canadian citizenship applications and are both afraid of the possibility of criminal charges being laid against them in Russia because of their activism in Canada. Participant 3 mentioned that their name had been included on a leaked list of dissidents compiled by the Russian authorities.

Participant 3 also spoke about the isolation and trauma members of the Russian diaspora experience where their loved ones have been influenced by Russian disinformation and propaganda. Participant 3 said that this led to the complete breakdown of their relationship and communication with their family members in Russia.

Participant 3 talked about Russian disinformation and its infiltration of Canadian society. Participant 3 said that when the war in Ukraine started, attacks on Ukrainians in Toronto also started. Participant 3 said that these attacks were carried out by Canadians and informed by Russian propaganda. Participant 3 said that Eastern Orthodox churches may be vehicles of Russian propaganda.

Participant 3 explained that the Kremlin disinformation has the effect of putting its consumers “in a bubble”. Participant 3 mentioned the case of a former friend in Russia, who used to send Participant 3 *Russia Today* articles during the truckers’ convoy [in Ottawa, in February 2022]. Participant 3 noted that once an individual becomes hooked

on state-sponsored media outlets such as *Russia Today*, it becomes their primary source of information, and they believe it is the only media that speaks the truth.

According to Participant 3, another visible effect of the Russian propaganda narratives in Canada are attacks on Canadian Ukrainians since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, including the appearance of “Z” symbols² in Canadian cities.

Participant 4

Participant 4 said that they have seen Russian propaganda on social media, spreading disinformation about the war in Ukraine and undermining Canada and Canadian society. For instance, Participant 4 noted the significant volume of English-language accounts on social media platforms propagating pro-Russian narratives about the war in Ukraine. Participant 4 said that they were surprised at first when they started to hear concepts from Russian propaganda repeated by Canadians.

Participant 4 explained that the modern Russian government, as well as its Soviet predecessor, tries to “atomize” people, i.e. to make them feel alone and deprived of any social or political agency. According to Participant 4, the Russian strategy of spreading disinformation narratives within Canadian society aims to make people feel alone and isolated. In addition, Participant 4 also explained that Russian disinformation narratives also seek to sow discord and confuse public opinion.

Participant 4 gave the example of Russian newcomers to Canada who had their funds frozen while attempting to transfer settlement funds from sanctioned Russian banks. According to Participant 4, this left newcomers without resources and supports. Participant 4 said that the Russian government attempted to use this situation for propaganda purposes, spreading the narrative that the Canadian government was against Russian immigrants.

² **Note:** The “Z” symbol is associated with the Russian Armed Forces involved in the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Participant 4 recounted that individuals purporting to represent the Russian state and its agencies would give up business cards at cultural events organized by the Russian community. Participant 4 stated that these individuals would say that Russians should stay together because “they are all compatriots”.

Participant 4 noted that after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there were fewer individuals openly revealing their association with or support of the Russian government. Participant 4 said that the Russian embassy still financed events such as cultural festivals.

Participant 4 disagreed with the conclusions other Russian Canadians, including some Participants, have drawn based on the exit polling data from the 2024 Russian presidential election. Participant 4 said that they believe that the majority of Russian Canadians are loyal to Canadian values and that many did not participate in the Russian election because they didn’t want to participate in the masquerade. As a result, Participant 4 believes that the exit poll data can be interpreted only in relation to those who still associate themselves with the Russian state.

Participant 5

Participant 5 described some of the risks that Russian Canadian activists against the Russian government face, including hacking, blackmail and the theft of their personal information. Participant 5 said that the RCDA has been advised by a cybersecurity expert that there will be attempts to collect their information because of its designation as a “undesirable organization”. Participant 5 believes that the risk of hacking also exists for government officials and participants to the political processes in both Canada and the United States. Participant 5 warned that, without better understanding of Russian tactics and improved transparency, politicians may be at risk for hacking and exposure of their personal information, which would undermine the political process.

Participant 5 said that Russia also seeks to interfere with Russian activists’ immigration status. Participant 5 explained that the Russian government opens spurious criminal cases against Russian dissidents abroad to hamper their immigration process. According to Participant 5, another tactic employed by the Russian government is to deny consular

services to Russian Canadians. Participant 5 explained that, as a result of these threats, people are very hesitant to do anything that the Russian government can construe as opposition.

Participant 5 noted that the RCDA had many people retract offers to volunteer after Russia designated the RCDA as an “undesirable organization”. Participant 5 said that the Russian embassy has filmed protests in Ottawa and Montreal, and that the RCDA’s events have garnered increased attention since the designation. Participant 5 said that the fact that people can be filmed and identified causes people a lot of stress. Participant 5 said that Russian Canadian activists fear for their loved ones living in Russia who can always be targeted as a result of their activities outside of Russia.

Participant 5 said that Russian activists also face impediments to their ability to travel, noting that they cannot travel back to Russia or to other countries that have extradition treaties with the Russian Federation. Participant 5 said that Russia has unfounded requests for assistance about people to Interpol, which has led to those people being detained while travelling.

Participant 5 also spoke about Russian disinformation. Participant 5 said that the purpose of Russian disinformation is to create disdain for and distrust of democracy, and to create divisions within society. Participant 5 said Russia’s disinformation narratives impact Canada’s democratic institutions because Russia pours many resources into these efforts, and it is difficult to identify what information comes from Canadians and what information comes from foreign actors outside Canada. Participant 5 said that they have seen divisive narratives originally pushed by Russian troll farms spreading through Canadian political discourse and on social media platforms. Participant 5 identified the war in Ukraine, the Israel-Gaza war, and the Alberta separatist movement as issues that they have witnessed being seized by the Russian propaganda machine.

Participant 6

Participant 6 identified themselves as a Canadian citizen with a degree in journalism. Participant 6 said they do a lot of volunteer work with the RCDA and have been focused

on understanding what is going on in Canadian society. Participant 6 described engaging in spontaneous interactions with Canadians in conversations sparked by their reaction to Participant 6's ethnically Russian name or their accent. Participant 6 described being told in these conversations that Putin is nice or that things are great in Russia. Participant 6 explained that when they ask where that information came from, the sources identified are social media platforms, such as Twitter [now known as X]. Participant 6 said that Canadians thank them for sharing information about their own story and their opinions, and that Canadians are unaware that Russians have lost some fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression, freedom to openly disagree with the Russian government, and their freedom to protest.

Participant 6 spoke about the impact of their advocacy for Ukraine on their family relationships. Participant 6 no longer speaks with their mother because she is a supporter of the Russian war in Ukraine. Participant 6 also has family members in Russia and in Europe who are scared to maintain contact with them due to their open support for Ukraine and Ukrainians in the Canadian media. Participant 6 explained that their family members are scared about the implications for their personal and business relationships in Russia. Participant 6 further stated that they have not been able to go back to Russia for the last 10 years, out of fear of potential consequences if they were to travel there.

Participant 6 detailed their experience with their own children who had been exposed to Russian disinformation narratives. Participant 6 recounted that their children perceived themselves as primarily Russians, despite having lived in Canada for the last ten years. Participant 6 said that they had to explain to their children that Russians in Canada were divided with regards to their positions about the war in Ukraine.

Participant 6 spoke about being targeted by pro-Russian and pro-war activists in Canada, including harassment and threats, because of their activism. Participant 6 said that the threats included their personal information and traumatizing statements. For instance, Participant 6 detailed supporters of the Russian invasion of Ukraine making videos identifying Participant 6, and saying "we're going to get to you, you should stay at home".

Participant 6 provided an example of efforts to sow disinformation at a Russian cultural heritage festival. Participant 6 said that on this occasion, members of the Russian diaspora tried to convince people that all Russians are united, and that there is no war and there are no problems. Participant 6 said that many Ukrainian refugees that arrived in their city approached them for help, because they were traumatized by these narratives being spread publicly, but they didn't want to create a conflict. Participant 6 contacted the police to try to head off public harm arising from the disinformation presented at this festival, and they succeeded in preventing this disinformation from circulating further.

Finally, Participant 6 also noted that some Russian community organizations in Canada are openly associated and acting on behalf of the Russian embassy. Participant 6 explained that when they first immigrated to Canada, they were introduced to these organizations, and eventually, members of these organizations attempted to dissuade Participant 6 from engaging in political activities in Canada.

Participant 7

Participant 7 estimated that, based on information gleaned from the last Russian presidential election, half of the Russians inside and outside of Russia are brainwashed by Russian propaganda. Participant 7 described this as a joint problem for both Canadians and Russians. Participant 7 said that those Russian Canadians who have been contaminated by Russian propaganda can feel alienated because they don't feel like they share Canadian values. Participant 7 said that, to solve this problem, those affected should be engaged in a dialogue. Participant 7 said that the RCDA can do some of this work, but the organization needs the support of the Canadian government.

Participant 7 discussed cybersecurity, which they identified as a major issue and an important threat. In support of this proposition, Participant 7 listed examples including an attack on actors of the Canadian food supply chain, as well as disinformation campaigns in France and the United Kingdom. Regarding disinformation campaigns in the United Kingdom, Participant 7 spoke about Russian disinformation regarding the identity and immigration status of the perpetrator of murders in the English town of Southport which

led to massive riots across the country. Participant 7 said that former KGB agents are doing this, and that they can do it in Canadian society as well.

Participant 7 spoke about the need for more transparency from the Canadian government about Canada's policies about Russia. Participant 7 spoke about the assistance Canada provided to fix the damaged Nord Stream 1 pipeline, stating that there was no transparency about the cancellation and subsequent reinstatement of sanctions on Russia. Participant 7 also talked about Yaroslav Hunka's appearance in the Canadian House of Commons. Participant 7 said that these incidents play into Putin's hands and were leveraged in Russian propaganda. Participant 7 highlighted the important work that will need to be accomplished to combat Russian propaganda, and stressed that the first step is to acknowledge its existence.

2. Participants' responses to Question 2

The second question posed to participants was: *What are your suggestions for how you and others in your community who may be vulnerable to foreign interference could be supported and protected, and for how foreign interference could be detected or combated?*

Participant 1

Participant 1 spoke about the mutual benefits that would flow from partnerships between civil society organizations and governmental agencies in terms of countering Russian disinformation and interference in Canadian society. Participant 1 spoke about the importance of policy responses to foreign interference and offered that the RCDA would like to help Canada's policy-makers to gain a better understanding of the realities of what is happening in Russia.

Participant 1 said there is a need for greater legal protection of pro-democracy activists, and the provision of safe spaces for those who oppose the war in Ukraine and Russia's actions more generally. Participant 1 said there is the need for a clear path to Canadian residency for activists fleeing Russia.

Participant 1 said that one of the RCDA's goals is to build a community network that provides support, including psychological support, and assists people to embrace common democratic values and engage in Canadian society. Participant 1 said that the RCDA needs support in these efforts, citing as an example digital security training provided to the organization that was very helpful.

Participant 2

Participant 2 said that efforts to combat propaganda and disinformation must be increased, providing examples of disinformation including the myth that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (“**NATO**”) provoked the war in Ukraine, and that the war in Ukraine is only a proxy war.

Participant 2 highlighted the need for increased detection of disinformation narratives, including through monitoring social media platforms and the accounts of pro-Russian activists.

Participant 3

Participant 3 said that their most important suggestion was that the Canadian government should conduct a thorough investigation on disinformation and troll factories from Russia, similar to the investigations conducted by the United States when it was discovered that Russia interfered in their elections.

Participant 3 said that another approach to countering Russian disinformation is to coordinate with policy experts and diaspora communities. Participant 3 noted that it is important to maintain contact with colleagues abroad to understand the tactics being deployed in other countries, including bribing politicians, the killing of Russian dissidents on foreign soil, and the manipulation of Interpol.

Participant 3 said that Canadian government workers should be educated about the realities of life for Russians in Russia to avoid the drawing of incorrect conclusions based on assumptions. For instance, Participant 3 noted that although they are a lieutenant in reserve for the Russian Armed Forces, this should be understood in the context of the

existence of mandatory conscription in Russia, and explained that their status is not evidence of a desire to serve in the Russian military.

Participant 4

Participant 4 said that the Canadian government should support Russian activists in light of the difficulties they encounter in organizing and funding their efforts. Participant 4 suggested establishing a Secretary for vulnerable communities, with support to be provided based on their proportionate representation in the Canadian population

Participant 4 noted that support for a healthy Russian Canadian cultural environment will assist in opposing the Kremlin's narrative, providing examples such as Russian theaters, Russian-language newspapers and Russian language schools. Participant 4 said that this will help the Canadian government show Russian Canadians that they are not alone and break the cycle of silence currently existing within the Russian Canadian community.

Participant 5

Participant 5 said that there should be increased sanctions on those connected to foreign interference coming from the Russian government. Participant 5 suggested that the Canadian government has access to information that would allow it to leverage Canadian real estate owned by war criminals.

Participant 5 suggested that hearing directly from social media company representatives could assist the Commission in completing its mandate, noting that other countries have solicited testimony from social media companies when conducting investigations into disinformation.

Participant 5 suggested increasing support for Russian citizens seeking to immigrate to Canada, including giving people more time to deal with their status and supporting dual citizenship for those travelling to Russia. In that regard, Participant 5 noted that giving up one's Russian citizenship effectively cuts one's ties with Russia, including links to family. Participant 5 said that it also undermines one's ability to influence the future of Russia.

Participant 5 said that care must be taken to ensure that actions taken to combat foreign interference, including the Foreign Agents Registry, do not negatively impact the broader community. Participant 5 said that the Foreign Agents Registry in the United States is a good example, but the equivalent registry implemented by the Russian government is essentially a tool of repression. Participant 5 expressed their concern that the broad language of Bill C-70³ could leave the door open to too broad of an interpretation which could negatively impact diaspora community members.

Participant 6

Participant 6 said that education about foreign interference should start in school with an explanation about the difference between communism and socialism.

Participant 6 said that there needs to be more publicly available information and public education about how to identify and respond to foreign interference.

Participant 6 stressed the need to support Russian cultural institutions here in Canada, as well as monitor their activities.

Participant 6 said that there should be stricter repercussions in the form of sanctions and punishments for those who assist Russia and engage in foreign interference.

Participant 7

Participant 7 said that the Canadian government needs to work to counter misinformation and disinformation and to engage in more myth-busting. Participant 7 said that Russian Canadian activists cannot accomplish this on their own.

Participant 7 said that they would like to see more dialogue with and de-brainwashing of Russian Canadians and help get them out of the propaganda bubble.

³ Bill C-70, *An Act respecting countering foreign interference*, was given royal assent on June 20, 2024.

Participant 7 called for more transparency around the rationale for imposing and removing sanctions on Russia. Participant 7 would like to see the imposition of sanctions on the individuals that started the war on Ukraine.