



Baltic Engagement
Centre for Combating
Information Disorders

HOT REPORT

“WAR IS COMING”: HOW RUSSIAN Z-BLOGGERS FRAME NATO AS THE AGGRESSOR

MARCH 2026



Co-funded by
the European Union

THIS REPORT IS A DELIVERABLE 3.1 FOR THE EU-FUNDED PROJECT WITH THE ID 101226242,
COORDINATED BY RE:BALTICA.

THIS REPORT IS BASED ON THE ARTICLE BY ARTJOMS
LIPINS (TVNET), PUBLISHED BY RE:BALTICA: **“COULD
RUSSIA ATTACK NATO AND LATVIA? WHAT Z-BLOGGERS
ARE SAYING”**.

WHAT'S HOT?

As concerns grow across Europe about a potential Russia–NATO conflict, pro-Kremlin military influencers on Telegram – known as Z-bloggers – are actively shaping narratives about an inevitable war with the West. While echoing official Kremlin messaging, these channels amplify more radical, emotional, and aggressive claims, consistently portraying NATO and Europe as the aggressors and Russia as acting in self-defence. This evolving information ecosystem plays a key role in preparing domestic and international audiences for potential escalation.

What Do We See?

- **Decentralised propaganda ecosystem:** The Kremlin sets core narratives, which are then amplified and intensified by Z-bloggers and pro-Kremlin influencers across Telegram, reaching millions of users.
- **Narrative of a besieged Russia:** Z-bloggers consistently frame Russia as under threat from a hostile West, reinforcing long-standing Kremlin narratives now presented in more radicalised forms.
- **War framed as inevitable but justified:** Many influencers claim that a conflict with NATO is already underway or increasingly likely – but always as a result of Western provocation.
- **Blame shifted to Europe and NATO:** Even hypothetical war scenarios portray the West as initiating escalation, whether through troop deployments, provocations, or military build-up.
- **Contradictory messaging:** While some Z-bloggers express confidence in Russia's military strength, others openly acknowledge weaknesses, shortages, and systemic problems.
- **Emotional and radical tone:** Compared to official state messaging, Z-bloggers use more aggressive, alarmist, and emotionally charged language to mobilise audiences.

Why Does It Work?

- **Blending credibility with bias:** By acknowledging real battlefield challenges, Z-bloggers appear more trustworthy while still reinforcing pro-Kremlin narratives.
- **High reach and engagement:** Telegram remains a major platform in Russia, with tens of millions of users consuming this content daily.
- **Decentralised amplification:** Multiple actors repeat and reshape the same narratives, creating the illusion of organic consensus.
- **Emotional mobilisation:** Fear, threat perception, and national defence narratives are used to justify escalation and unify audiences.

RISK ASSESSMENT: HIGH

Normalization of war narratives: Repeated messaging that conflict with NATO is inevitable may prepare public opinion for escalation.

Strategic blame-shifting: Framing the West as the aggressor creates justification for potential future military actions.

Regional security implications: Baltic states, including Latvia, are directly referenced in scenarios, increasing perceived threat levels.

Information environment manipulation: The combination of official messaging and influencer amplification strengthens Russia's hybrid warfare capabilities.

How to Respond?

For policymakers and security institutions

- Monitor and analyse Telegram-based influence networks as part of hybrid threat assessments.
- Strengthen strategic communication that clearly explains NATO's defensive role.
- Coordinate responses across the EU and NATO to counter consistent blame narratives.

For media and analysts

- Contextualise Z-blogger content rather than amplifying it without analysis.
- Highlight inconsistencies and contradictions within pro-Kremlin narratives.
- Track how narratives evolve from official messaging to influencer ecosystems.

For the general public

- Be critical of claims that portray war as inevitable or justified by Western actions.

- Recognise emotional and fear-based messaging as a common manipulation tactic.
- Rely on verified sources for information about security and international relations.

What is BECID?

BECID – the Baltic Engagement Centre for Combating Information Disorders – brings together expertise in fact-checking, media literacy, and journalism across the Baltics. We conduct fact-checks in collaboration with Delfi/Delfi Meedia, monitor disinformation narratives and campaigns under the leadership of investigative journalism organisation Re:Baltica, and promote media literacy through the Baltic Centre for Media Literacy (BCME). We also develop methodologies to effectively counter disinformation. Learn more: becid.ut.ee

**THIS REPORT IS A DELIVERABLE 3.1 FOR THE EU-FUNDED PROJECT WITH THE ID 101226242,
COORDINATED BY RE:BALTICA.**