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Calls for Trudeau to step down during 'Freedom Convoy' traced back to Russian proxy sites

By [Caroline Orr](#) | [Analysis](#) | February 16th 2023



Demonstrators gather to protest against COVID-19 measures and in support of a demonstration in Ottawa, which has grown to a broader anti-government demonstration, in Edmonton, Saturday, Feb. 19, 2022. The Canadian Press/Jason Franson

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Russian propaganda sites attacked Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, making false accusations about his government “ordering” the use of violence against demonstrators, and tore into Canada’s mainstream media during last year’s “Freedom Convoy.” The protest occupied downtown Ottawa for three weeks and cost the Canadian economy nearly \$4 billion.

But beyond overt propaganda outlets, like Russia’s RT, disinformation spread through proxy sites and on social media messaging apps, like Telegram, which was widely used by the convoy’s genuine grassroots supporters.

Russian proxy websites are another pillar of Russia’s disinformation ecosystem. These websites, which include SouthFront and Canada-based Global Research, have been previously linked to Russian intelligence agencies and have at times even published articles authored by fake personas created by Russian intelligence agencies.

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The purpose of websites like these is to disseminate Russian propaganda while maintaining a degree of plausible deniability. The use of proxy sources creates the appearance of independence and manufactures false consensus by making it appear as though the content is supported by multiple independent agencies when really it is just more Russian-backed sites, writers and commentators.

SouthFront and Global Research both produced ongoing coverage of the “Freedom Convoy” that often included disinformation and inflammatory rhetoric, as well as repeated calls for Trudeau to step down.

Global Research produced much more extensive coverage, but SouthFront’s coverage was much more inflammatory and conspiratorial. SouthFront made claims about protesters being “demonized” and “abused” by the media and the government, and accused the Trudeau government of “ordering” the use of violence against them.

Both SouthFront and Global Research also made unfounded claims about “agent provocateurs” sent in by the Trudeau government to incite violence — a common trope deployed by Russia as part of its active measures campaigns. The two proxy sites republished each other’s content, as well as articles from other Russian proxy sites, demonstrating the tightly connected and co-ordinated nature of Russia’s disinformation ecosystem.

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In January and February 2022, a large number of public Telegram channels were created or repurposed under the auspices of supporting the “Freedom Convoy.” These channels initially shared information about the convoy route(s), solicited donations, discussed ongoing convoy related events, expressed opinions about politics and COVID restrictions, posted links to news stories, spread conspiratorial content, shared calls to action and encouraged people to take part in the protests. But over time, many of these channels — including some with tens of thousands of members — started to feature Russian propaganda intermingled with convoy-related content.

Eventually, part of this network of Telegram channels effectively became a repository for Russian propaganda, including some channels that regularly post Kremlin press releases and Russian-language content. Some of these channels still post convoy-related content, too, including plans for upcoming events and rallies, while others have pivoted away from the convoy entirely and now only post a mix of Russian propaganda, QAnon conspiracy theories and other conspiratorial content.

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Many of the conspiracy theories posted in these channels either originated from or circulated widely in Russian propaganda networks, including allegations that COVID-19 is a bioweapon and/or that Russia invaded Ukraine to shut down U.S.-backed biolabs, claims that Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election was a hoax and various conspiratorial narratives about COVID vaccines, 5G technology and tracking chips. Some of the most widely shared content on these channels portrays the Canadian government as being overrun with Nazis and claims Canada supports Nazis in Ukraine. These claims align with some of the most dominant propaganda narratives used by Russia to justify its invasion of Ukraine.



On a tactical level, the strategies employed by operators of these Telegram channels — including multilingual posting, repurposing existing channels, creating networks of interconnected channels and using Telegram to co-ordinate talking points on other social media platforms — have previously been linked to Russian influence operations. This is important, as it demonstrates alignment with known influence campaigns both in terms of content and tactics.

For now, we don't know the impact of Russia's influence activities, and the findings don't mean organizers of the convoy co-ordinated with Russian operatives. Instead, the findings show Russian state actors and affiliates had a strategic interest in the convoy and reveal a pattern of activity that is characteristic of Russian influence campaigns.

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This is Part 3 of a three-part series from Caroline Orr covering Russian disinformation and the so-called "Freedom Convoy." Read Part 1 and Part 2.

Note: This article is based on Caroline Orr Bueno's research published as "Russia's Role in the Far-Right Truck Convoy: An analysis of Russian state media activity related to the 2022

Freedom Convoy" in The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare.

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Fox News picked up 'Freedom Convoy' coverage where Russian propaganda left off

By Caroline Orr | Analysis | February 13th 2023

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Russia used state-funded propaganda outlet to whip up support for the 'Freedom Convoy' and undermine the Trudeau government

By Caroline Orr | Analysis | February 10th 2023

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Dave Rouleau | a year ago

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01/04/2024, 22:14

Calls for Trudeau to step down during 'Freedom Convoy' traced back to Russian proxy sites | Canada's National Observer: Clima...

Linda Solomon Wood | a year ago

Thanks, Dave. It's live now.

Dale Corbett | a year ago

Pierre Poilievre and Putin are on the same team

Seamus Conn | a year ago

Not knowing what's good for us is oftentimes a Canadian trait, but not caring what's good for the country is always a conservative value.

Patricia Spencer | a year ago

Very disturbing. Is this information getting out to mainstream media and Canadians in general? Or will we continue to be vulnerable to disinformation from Russia- and China? How to stop the disinformation that is being spread through social media and online news sources?

mary NOKLEBY | a year ago

While this sounds plausible and to a certain extent, only to be expected.....a report Chris Hedges put out a week or so ago makes me wonder. In his podcast, he interviewed a young reporter who looked into the claims in the United States that Russians had worked hard to influence the election of Donald Trump. What he found when he managed to reverse the twitter accounts of the Russian bots claimed to have done the dirty in the caper called HAMILTON 68 was that most of the accounts belonged to ordinary Americans - some of whom had opinions

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Here is the link: <https://chrishedges.substack.com/p/the-chris-hedges-report-podcast-with-...>

It disturbed me more than I thought it would, suggesting as it did the possibility that Democratic operatives were constructing a case against Russia.....perhaps to make the election loss 'not their fault'.....perhaps for more devious reasons, such as laying the plot lines for this current conflict between Russia and the American led NATO powers.

When it comes to spy activity, disinformation, and the creation of conspiracy none sense....it seems every Tom Dick and Harry can now get into the act. We need to be skeptical of the entire lot...and ground ourselves on plausible reality. Nothing any foreign source said excused the appalling behavior of real Canadians. Wanting to believe the worst of our enemies is the enemy....remembering our common humanity just might be the antidote.

Michael Luce | a year ago

Well, did you read the Mueller report? "The Russian government interfered in the 2016 presidential election in sweeping and systematic fashion. Evidence of Russian government ..." If I take a minute to look at Chris Hedges twitter feed, I quickly see he is anti-woke (ie. very conservative) anti-Ukraine (you go Russia) and anti- American and he describes himself as an anarchist. Of course, he questions the obvious and provable ie. Russian involvement in democratic civil society including elections. And of course, he wants Russia to appear squeaky clean. Throw the cult a bone "democratic operatives" and give Putin another pass.

Tris Pargeter | a year ago

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"Anti-woke, anti-Ukraine (?!), anti-American and a self-described anarchist." Wow. There's that suite of stupidity together again, amazingly predictable. You can just glide by three out of four of those as someone else's opinion, but the one he himself uses is the worst. All of that jives with the distinctly negative impression I also have of him as a conservative, but since conservatives have rightly become "cons," that's an indictment like no other. He's also religious, another one of those affiliations that speaks volumes and is NOT just the Rotary Club.

Alex Botta | a year ago

One assumption is that, in general, conservatives are feeling insecure and weakened by demographic shifts and "too many" election losses to the point they'll Hedges their bet, so to speak, with gerrymandered political boundaries, disenfranchisement of poor and largely liberal or MoR voters and so forth, and lately devolving deep into the insanity of conspiracies, hidden foreign influence and misinformation distributed through proxies. It's clear they are running out of rope and cannot descend much farther except into violent insurrections and dramatic truck convoy invasions. The capacity for intelligent discourse is way over their heads and is considered a sign of weakness.

Please note that the Ottawa occupation was shut down with relatively little violence, and the majority socio-political orientation remains non-conservative in Canada.

John McGuire | a year ago

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Tris, your drive-by assessment of Chris Hedges is both inept and recklessly absurd. You have no comprehension of who he is as either a journalist (and he's a Pulitzer Prize winner) or as an individual. I will intrude myself momentarily to tell you that I personally support Ukraine's right to self defense in it's current predicament of being invaded by imperialist Russia. But Hedges makes utterly factual and clear minded criticisms of Ukraine's domestic policies, he's not going to play ostrich to support Ukraine's dirty laundry... and like all countries Ukraine has plenty of dirty laundry. Hedge's knows well Ukraine's political history, he knows Russia's political history too... he's not out to sanitize Russia. He doesn't sanitize Russia. And Hedge's is deeply critical of both political parties in America... .he's a war correspondent, he's spent many years covering wars on the ground in theatres of war... that is how he acquired his Pulitzer Prize. He's not a novice, he's not a conservative, he's deeply skeptical of capitalism and has been for decades because he's seen the methodologies used by corporations in vulnerable countries around the world, particularly in the Middle East and in Latin America. He took theology before he became a journalist, he's an ordained minister but that is not his practice.... and his theology was always along the thread of 'liberation theology', which asserts that Jesus' teachings were not about being punitive of the vulnerable, anything but. They were about dignifying and elevating the downtrodden and desperate. So Hedges identifying as an anarchist is not because he wants to see street riots or mob vendettas, he's interested in social justice. That's the underpinning of his world view, and that's a similar world perspective as that which animates the Green Party, animates Human Rights Watch, animates Amnesty International, and I could go on. Your assessment of Hedges is laughable, it's as shallow as a street puddle.

John McGuire | a year ago

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And as an addendum, my remarks to Tris Pargeter are also directed at Michael Luce and Alex Botta. You're all talking out of the sides of your necks respecting Chris Hedges. The sum of your understanding of his intellectual perspective, his rigour, his transparency, and his veracity comes down to this....misrepresentation.... shame on the three of you. You're smearing him, mischaracterizing him, and if what you've stated about him is the summation of your understanding on his work, you really need to talk less and think considerably more.

Alex Botta | a year ago

The more I read about him involuntarily, the less I want to.

John McGuire | a year ago

No one is twisting your arm, Alex.

Tris Pargeter | a year ago

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A personal friend of yours is he? One of your heroes? And the guy who just happens to have the right take on "Jesus?" That kind of admiration actually puts YOU in the puddle doesn't it? There's another commenter on here recently who reacted similarly about Elon Musk, HIS hero, arguably more dangerous than Chris Hedges.

At a time when democracy is teetering all over the world, anyone who doesn't vote for WHATEVER left wing configuration that can win power is basically contributing to its demise because politics has become binary, period, as in "there are two kinds of people in the world."

Even worse than that is the right wing's full frontal assault on the truth. "Fake news" ultimately ushered in the "big lie" taken up by millions of Americans (arguably primed for it by religion, the first and worst example of that) perpetuated and spread exponentially by social media algorithms that include the nightmarish spectre of deep faking.

And then there's the catastrophic denial of science, including climate change.

ALL of this is huge and unprecedented, dwarfing the influence of ANY one man, including a mythical one, no matter how brilliant, entirely irrelevant.

And voting as just another form of personal expression? No.

And it's not just a matter of conscience either. Try basic human survival.

John McGuire | a year ago

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Tris, you're a bit full of yourself. You mischaracterized Hedges, I called you on it. That's fair play. Your take on him was skewed, you needed to hear that because you don't get free rein to make up stuff. Per his beliefs in a type of Christianity, it's all about the values you hold, whether they're informed by a faith or by other ways that have legitimacy or profundity to an individual. Hedges never inveighs on others using Christianity as a cudgel or prop. Ever. He's found that identifying with and trying to defend the interests of the vulnerable, and to expose the depredations of the powerful is important to him... he despises exploitation. He's put himself directly at risk by choosing to work in warzones to try to represent the perils faced by others, he's interested in human welfare and he lives that out. He doesn't do that to be a 'hero', he's a level and humble man, not self-effacing but not ego driven... listen to him and it'll be there for you to perceive. I have no inkling of what you meant when you said he's conservative, he's heavily influenced by Marxism. That's much closer to describing his world-view than the label of 'anarchist', or seeing him as an apologist for Putin. As for my own attitude toward Chris Hedges, I respect him. (I respect many journalists and intellectuals, we need them, and we need their diversity of perspectives). I respect him for how he conducts himself. I respect him for how he relies on solid investigation and evidence... that's good legitimate journalism, or it was the last time that I checked.

Respecting your overview of threats posed by the radical right, you're not telling me anything that hasn't been hashed over ad nauseum by pundits and others for years now. Certainly these behaviors are concerning, but life is not always a five alarm fire.... we can express ourselves well enough without resorting to that mindset of unrelenting peril. We don't have to outdo people who are clearly driven by frenetic frames of reference.... many of them simply feel dispossessed and disenfranchised. Understanding them is probably more important, certainly over the long interval, than demonizing them.

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forward good public policy (no, I don't see politics all as being 'binary'), strategic voting is not furthering democracy or human progress... it's only furthering a trivialization and even a brutalization of thought, it's lapsing into tribalism. Right now a clear majority of Canadians want to see proportional representation implemented at the federal level, I count myself squarely among that number.

Tris Pargeter | a year ago

I don't know how old you are John but I'm 70 so am certainly full of myself, but have also always followed politics and have seen the trajectory change on the right with the Tea Party and the Reform Party allying with politically aggressive Christianity. You have to understand they just can't keep it to themselves because so much affirmation is required to maintain a delusion, and all that incipient proxy power is irresistible, particularly for men, who clearly invented religion. Go big or go home Americans are still churning them out with Scientology, Mormonism (read More men) and most recently QAnon. The gender of who's at the top is never in doubt, which is probably the reason so many men are so surprisingly sanguine about this particular myth/big lie while railing against Trump's iteration.

I have heard Chris Hedges and agree that he's interesting and intellectually impressive, but I maintain that's not the issue at hand and sorry but it's major water in anyone's wine who actually believes there's a god, especially to the extent that they study theology. Greek mythology or English Literature would show far more depth actually.

The right/left dichotomy IS what's actually seminal at this point of existential climate crisis until someone unplugs the internet, but how likely is that.

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Thanks for posting that. The idea that Chris Hedges is a conservative or that he is anti-American is ludicrous. He's very much pro "the better angels of America" who are under siege these days. He's not perfect and Russian election interference MAY have been overblown but it certainly existed and still exists. Why wouldn't Russia take advantage of social media and people's gullibility to further their own interests? All nations do that. If their goal is to create division in Western countries they certainly had golden opportunities with Trump and the Honking Man festival in Ottawa.

Tris: this is the first post of yours that I've seen that I didn't agree with. I suggest you read some of Hedges even though it's difficult because his view is so bleak... and hard to refute.

J. B. | a year ago

It's hard to tell which reply goes with which comment but I was thanking John Maguire for an accurate assessment of Chris Hedges.

I've been reading a book called "They Knew" by Sarah Kendzior. It's an excellent, if disturbing, read that is very germane to this discussion. Her main thesis is that there's so much lying coming at us from all sides - from authorities and everywhere else - that it's very difficult to determine the truth which is why people cleave to conspiracy nonsense so easily.

Tris Pargeter | a year ago

I don't think you can underestimate the contrarian stance as a novelty contrived in part to sell one's writing though either. Same with sailing up above "beyond the fray," always a timeless appeal there along with any involvement in any war. The heroic male myth splutters everywhere. I look at the moment, or I like to

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Jordan Guilford | a year ago

More neoliberal propaganda from NO. Definitely will not be renewing my subscription to this publication. I haven't seen a single story in support of CANADIAN NON-VIOLENTLY PROTESTING a mandate that they have a medical procedure that had no evidence it prevented the disease it claimed to.

Alex Botta | a year ago

The truck convoy occupied the centre of a city and did everything they could short of gunfire to aggravate thousands of residents for several weeks. Just because truckers didn't riot or shoot people doesn't mean their unlawful actions of shutting down Ottawa and two border crossings and costing the economy \$4B was in anyway acceptable.

Non-violent my ass. Tell that to the residents of downtown Ottawa who suffered through the cacophony, some of whom were assaulted and called racist names. Their class action lawsuit against 400 truckers, their companies and supporters is nearing a court date.

Michael Luce | a year ago

Yup, and never mind the air pollution from all those diesel trucks which was documented well past dangerous far worse than Mexico City for days on end. Knowingly polluting the air is in my opinion a form of violence against humans and all living things.

Jordan Guilford | a year ago

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J. B. | a year ago

I'm just wondering how you feel about draft dodgers in World War II. Fighting the Axis powers was definitely "unsafe" and hazardous to people's Health - far more so than having an inoculation.

Alex Botta | a year ago

"Bad traffic"? That's pretty dismissive of the actual conditions. Almost as bad as dismissing medical science -- until you actually need medical attention. I don't think you'd last long with hundreds of big rigs blaring and blowing coal on your street for three continuous weeks accompanied by a 24 / 7 trucker street party. I doubt you were even there to put words into resident's mouths.

Note that the "leaders" stayed warm and cozy in hotels often removed from the cacophony with the occasional jaunt outside for video media exposure, returning to their hotels for radio interviews and to check on their millions in earnings from right wing media encouraging supporters to make donations. Funny how a million bucks suddenly appeared in one "leader's" personal bank account while she concurrently claimed poverty to the court.

I gladly got jabbed four times and celebrated after each one. Looking forward to the next booster. My partner has severe asthma and as far as we are concerned science saved her life. We knew two people who died from COVID in 2020. Both were unvaxxed. And we also know several who caught it even after their early shots and now have long COVID. Before retirement my employer provided space and time for all employees to voluntarily get their annual flu shot, and the lineups were always long. The proportion of health science employees who were anti-vaxxers and get fired or transferred to non-public duties was very

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Note also that COVID is not done with us yet, though all of us would no doubt agree we prefer to be done with it.

Michael Luce | a year ago

May be a bad double pun with Russian involvement in our convoy affair, but you are free to go.

Tris Pargeter | a year ago

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-pro...>

You don't understand what "neoliberalism" actually is. This article will clarify it, so you better make sure not to read it.

John McGuire | a year ago

This story, while useful, isn't in any way timely. Investigative journalism about national security issues needs to be real time, not a year after the fact. Theoretically, investigative journalism should be able to change hearts and minds, this story comes way way after the barn door is open. And people who have been turned against the Liberal government, and I'm not a Liberal voter (I vote NDP or Green) , are already deeply antagonistic to the Liberals (in so many instances) by now, they are GONE.... who are you aiming to educate?

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