

February 25, 2022

Pavel Durov  
Chief Executive Officer  
Telegram Messenger Inc.  
71-75 Shelton Street  
Covent Garden  
London WC2H 9JQ  
United Kingdom

Dear Mr. Durov,

In the wake of the Russian Federation's illegal invasion of Ukraine, I write to encourage your company to assume a heightened posture towards exploitation of your platform by Russia and Russian-linked entities engaged in information operations. In addition to Russia's established use of influence operations as a tool of strategic influence, information warfare constitutes an integral part of Russian military doctrine. As this conflict continues, we can expect to see an escalation in Russia's use of both overt and covert means to sow confusion about the conflict and promote disinformation narratives that weaken the global response to these illegal acts.

While social media can provide valuable information to civilians in conflict zones and educate audiences far removed from those conflict zones, it can also serve as a vector for harmful misinformation and disinformation campaigns and a wide range of scams and frauds that opportunistically exploit confusion, desperation, and grief. Malign actors continue to find ways to exploit your services.

Russia's efforts to shape global perceptions of the conflict in Syria, and its role in possible war crimes perpetrated by Russian and Russian-allied forces, offers a startling window into what's likely to be an even wider and more brazen set of information operation campaigns in the current conflict. Russia's information operations not only strove to sow false narratives on humanitarian efforts (including in ways that imperiled the safety of aid workers<sup>1</sup>), but sought to cover up evidence of war crimes by distorting online conversations with false claims, conspiracy theories, and doctored media.<sup>2</sup> Pointing to the long-term value of online influence assets to Russia, much

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<sup>1</sup> Louisa Loveluck, "Russian Disinformation Campaign Targets Syria's Beleaguered Rescue Workers," The Washington Post (December 18, 2018), available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/russian-disinformation-campaign-targets-syrias-beleaguered-rescue-workers/2018/12/18/113b03c4-02a9-11e9-8186-4ec26a485713\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/russian-disinformation-campaign-targets-syrias-beleaguered-rescue-workers/2018/12/18/113b03c4-02a9-11e9-8186-4ec26a485713_story.html)

<sup>2</sup> Olivia Solon, "How Syria's White Helmets Became Victims of An Online Propaganda Machine," The Guardian (December 18, 2017), available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/18/syria-white-helmets-conspiracy-theories>; "Chemical Weapons and Absurdity: the Disinformation Campaign Against the White Helmets," Bellingcat (December 18, 2018), available at

of the operating infrastructure focused on the Syrian Civil War was later found to pivot towards Russia's influence activities focused on the U.S. elections – underscoring the strong possibility that Russian influence actors may misuse current assets in future election contexts, such as the upcoming U.S. midterm elections.<sup>3</sup>

As one of the world's largest communications platforms, your company has a clear responsibility to ensure that your products are not used to facilitate human rights abuses, undermine humanitarian and emergency service responses, or advance harmful disinformation. Given the gravity of this situation, I would encourage you to, at a minimum, take immediate steps to:

- Establish mechanisms by which Ukrainian public safety entities can disseminate emergency communications to your users in Ukraine;
- Furnish additional account monitoring and security resources to Ukrainian government, humanitarian, and public safety institutions to prevent account takeovers;
- Surge integrity teams, including those with language expertise in Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, Romanian, and German, to monitor your platform for malign influence activity related to the conflict;
- Devote additional resources towards the identification of inauthentic accounts, and the removal or labeling of inauthentic content, associated with Russian influence operations; and
- Establish dedicated reporting channels for qualified academic, public interest, and open source intelligence researchers to share credible information about inauthentic activity, disinformation, and other malign efforts utilizing your platforms.

At this uncertain and critical juncture, I request your prompt attention to this matter. An unprecedented conflict of this kind requires global communications providers to prioritize efforts such as these.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator

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<https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2018/12/18/chemical-weapons-and-absurdity-the-disinformation-campaign-against-the-white-helmets/>

<sup>3</sup> Scott Shane, "The Fake Americans Russia Created to Influence the Election" The New York Times (September 7, 2017), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/07/us/politics/russia-facebook-twitter-election.html>; Shannon Bond, "Facebook, Twitter Remove More Russian-Backed Fake Accounts Ahead of Election," NPR (September 24, 2020), available at <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/24/916636508/facebook-twitter-remove-more-russian-backed-fake-accounts-ahead-of-election>