

A Close Look at Efforts of Pro-NATO Propaganda Units Behind the Scenes of South Front Censorship

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Pro-NATO propaganda units have broadcasted a new episode of their censorship excuse series.

On May 5th, the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab), published a new piece designed to label SouthFront as official Russian propaganda. ([LINK](#)) The article employs a twisted, yet sophisticated, style of mixing words, pictures and public facts in order to support the Atlantic Council's agenda. It largely attempts to build an association between SouthFront and News Front, and in so doing, relies heavily, if not entirely on guilt by association, to label SouthFront as official Russian propaganda. Throughout its report, the DFRLab fails to provide a single example of any association between the two entities, providing zero evidence.

The DFRLab "hit piece" fully confirms the conclusions reached by our analysis "[An In-Depth Look Behind the Scenes of SouthFront Censorship](#)", published last week. Thus, we would like to extend a big thank you to the team of DFRLab. Thanks to their incompetence, they provided us with overwhelming evidence for the upcoming court case against Facebook and YouTube.



Screenshot: [Medium](#)

Let's take a closer look at the DFRLab's published "report". As we have already pointed out, in order to label SouthFront as official Russian propaganda, NATO propagandists first identify another media site with a similar name, and then proceed to emphasize the similarity of the two brands.

The name of this organization is "News Front", which indeed shares the word "Front" in its name, yet the similarities end there. News Front is an official Russian organization that is located in Crimea and publicly pursues an acute pro-Russian patriotic informational agenda for a Russian speaking audience.

During the entire article, DFRLab proceeds to regularly put the SouthFront name next to that of News Front, as if in a crime witness line-up, and yet 90% of the text is dedicated to News Front. The first 12 paragraphs are dedicated to an overview of open data about the founders and editors of News Front. In order to paint a picture of the supposed malign behavior of News Front, the DFRLab authors added to the report such names as RT, Sputniknews, Mehr, Press TV. In other words, media sites whose affiliation with state governments is a declared

matter of public record.

SouthFront is only sparingly mentioned during this entire segment. For example, the authors added a single screenshot of the deleted Facebook page of SouthFront claiming that “Most of the assets that DFRLab had access to did not hide their connection to South Front or News Front.”



Screenshot: [Medium](#)

Any reader, even the most loyal of DFRLab followers, would be surprised by such an almost subliminal attempt to conflate the two organizations. What is the aim of the authors in presenting to the audience this screenshot? If they were trying to display their deep investigative research in concluding that the screenshot belongs to SouthFront, then we can only say, thank you Captain Obvious.

At this point, this brilliant investigation once again forgets about SouthFront all together and focuses on publishing screenshots demonstrating that News Front’s various Facebook pages were linked with one another. All Facebook pages run by a single organization are linked. What a surprise! Bravo DFRLabs for this brilliant deduction.



Screenshot: [Medium](#)

We do not know if there are any violations of journalistic norms or Facebook’s Terms of Service on the part of News Front. In any case, it remains unclear how the big international team of authors working under the brand of SouthFront: Analysis & Intelligence is linked to News Front in any way. Instead the DFRLab authors resort to a little bit of journalistic “sleight of hand.”

“Though the DFRLab did not find that the accounts involved used inauthentic means at scale, there were clear attempts to use sockpuppet accounts to push content, especially in promoting News Front and South Front stories.”

From this quote, it becomes clear that they accuse SouthFront’s Facebook page (see [this](#)) of using “sockpuppet” accounts to push content; however, they decline to provide any evidence to confirm this claim, because it is simply a blatant lie.

At this point in the article, DFRLab focuses on juggling screenshots of News Front and Anna News accounts related to various aspects of the pro-Russian agenda they are trying to peddle to the reader. Vague conspiracy reasoning of the authors regarding News Front and Anna News continues almost until the end of the article. After this, they once again, without any pretext, mention SouthFront.

“South Front features similar content to News Front, but the former mostly posts military-related analysis.”



Screenshot: [Medium](#)

This claim demonstrates that DFRLab team members have never actually read any of the content available on southfront.org and know nothing about SouthFront’s long history of accomplished work, content and editorial policy. Instead, they resort to simple dishonesty. To push their stated agenda, they enlist the aid of our old acquaintances from EUvsdisinfo:

“According to EUvsDisinfo, the outlet shares Russian talking points “verbatim” and is “frequently featured in [its] database of cases of disinformation.”

If EUvsdisinfo is the only source of DFRLab’s revelations about SouthFront, this explains the poor quality of the article. On May 6th, [SouthFront released an in-depth look at claims made by EUvsdidinfo regarding SouthFront](#). In its recent article vilifying SouthFront, this pro-NATO propaganda unit cherry-picks a mere 3 of approximately 3,000 articles released by SouthFront since the start of the year.

Near the end of the report, having realized that their ‘investigation’ is long on inuendo and short on facts implicating SouthFront in their imaginary conspiracy, DFRLabs presented the coup de grace. They found two Facebook pages “ZuidFront” and “South Front Netherlands” and published 3 screenshots of posts from these pages dated 2015, 2016 and 2017. The Facebook post of “ZuidFront” demonstrates the position of then DPR head Alexander Zakharchenko towards Brexit, while two SouthFront Netherlands posts are dedicated to the MH17 case. The DFRLab article then presents a screenshot of the “South Front Netherlands” description which states that the page is run by a group of Dutch citizens that translate content of SouthFront and other media organizations.

The screenshots posted by DFRLab are below:



Screenshot: [Medium](#)



Screenshot: [Medium](#)



Screenshot: [Medium](#)

SouthFront: Analysis & Intelligence is an independent group of authors from around the world that focuses on issues of international relations, armed conflicts and crises. The individuals that run “ZuidFront” and “South Front Netherlands” made use of the umbrella brand of SouthFront, but operated independently. We regularly receive emails and messages from people that want to contribute their efforts to share and promote an independent point of view on key developments around the world. SouthFront always tries to provide them with technical help, advice and other assistance. We have repeatedly done this in the past and will continue to do this.

Another ridiculous attempt by the DFRLab authors to link SouthFront with News Front is through the use of various screenshots and statistics regarding the posting of content on

News Front’s Facebook page. The main point is that News Front published some southfront.org content on their Facebook page.

Until recently, and largely as a result of this issue, the SouthFront team knew very little about News Front. The only contact that we had with any of the other sites mentioned was with Anna News in 2016, when Anna News translated several SouthFront videos into Russian on their own initiative. These examples are the few meager “contacts” that SouthFront has had with the group of nefarious Russian organizations mentioned in the DFRLab hit piece. Furthermore, DFRLab failed to specify how many News Front articles were published by SouthFront’s Facebook page. Why? The answer is simple: the SouthFront Facebook page has never posted News Front articles. All content published on our Facebook page originated from southfront.org.

SouthFront is also mentioned again in the conclusion of the DFRLab piece. The incompetence of the authors is perplexing, as they assert that in general, SouthFront specializes in covering the conflict in Ukraine.



Screenshot: [Medium](#)

The conflict in eastern Ukraine is just one among the many conflicts covered by SouthFront. In the recent years, accounting for only 1.5% of SouthFront content. Now that we realize how especially concerned the pro-NATO propagandists are by alternative coverage of the conflict in Ukraine, we promise to contribute far more time and energy in our efforts to cover developments in Ukraine and Eastern Europe in general.

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