

“Donbass: I’m Alive!” Deconstructed

An RT.Doc Atrocity-Inversion Package

Treadstone 71 LLC | treadstone71.com | 28 July 2026

BLUF: The RT.Doc promotional post is a state influence product built on a single inversion: the crimes of the besieger, reassigned to the defender. Every emotionally loaded line works toward one goal, laundering the Kremlin’s “denazification” casus belli through the format of humanitarian documentary. Fake social proof does the certifying. So do the European screenings and the Tehran prize. RT’s claims score E5 to F6 on the NATO Admiralty Code. The countervailing record from AP, HRW, and the UN scores A1 to B2. Judgment: deliberate deception, not journalism. Almost certain (95–99).

TL;DR

- The core claim, that “Ukrainian punitive forces would not let them leave” Mariupol, swaps perpetrator for victim. Russia besieged the city, shelled the agreed corridors, bombed the maternity hospital and the drama theatre, then ran the survivors through filtration and forced deportation.
- Screenings inside EU states went through pro-Kremlin proxies based in occupied Donetsk and through Rossotrudnichestvo “Russian House” venues, ban or no ban. The Tehran “best documentary” prize came from a festival wired into Iran’s Sacred Defense cinema apparatus. Borrowed credibility at each end.
- RT stopped operating as a normal broadcaster years ago. The US State Department assessed on 4 September 2024 that the network functions as a covert influence arm with intelligence ties, and the EU cut its transmissions under Council Regulation 2022/350. Weigh the view-count boast against that record, not against normal audience math.

Findings

1. The film’s central premise reverses attribution. RT’s own synopsis claims 400,000 people in Mariupol went underground because they “weren’t allowed outside the city by the Ukrainian units” (rtd.rt.com/films/donbass-im-alive, 2022). The record runs the other way. Russian forces besieged Mariupol from late February 2022. Ukraine and the UN reported, week after week, that Russian shelling collapsed the corridors: “Ceasefire violated! Russian forces are now shelling the humanitarian corridor from Zaporizhzhia to Mariupol” (Al Jazeera, 8 March 2022). Evacuations halted again in April “due to continuing Russian shelling of agreed-to humanitarian corridors” (Euronews, 21–22 April 2022). The evacuations that worked were run by the UN and the ICRC (press.un.org, SC/14882, May 2022).

2. Russia destroyed the civilian sites the film exploits. AP’s forensic reconstruction of the 16 March 2022 drama-theatre strike concluded the attack killed “closer to 600 people inside and outside the building” and refuted Russian claims that Ukrainian forces demolished the theatre or based troops in it (AP, 4 May 2022). ДЕТИ, children, stood painted on the pavement outside in letters sized for a pilot to read. One week before the theatre, an airstrike hit Maternity Hospital No. 3; Iryna Kalinina, photographed on a stretcher in the rubble, died with her stillborn son, Miron (World Press Photo,

Evgeniy Maloletka, 2023). The AP crew that filmed the siege from inside won the Oscar and the BAFTA for “20 Days in Mariupol.” The EESC put the civilian death toll at “at least 25,000” (eesc.europa.eu, April 2024).

3. The coercive population-control machine ran in the other direction. The film shows Russian soldiers who “would find relatives ... and reunite people.” Human Rights Watch documented the machinery behind that image: Russian forces rounded up men across the Mariupol district and pushed civilians through a screening process Moscow called filtration before transferring them into Russia, conduct HRW assessed as prosecutable as a war crime and a crime against humanity (“We Had No Choice,” 1 September 2022, hrw.org). Senior crisis researcher Belkis Wille put it plainly: “No one should be forced to undergo an abusive screening process to reach safety.” Ukraine counted roughly 40,000 Mariupol residents taken into Russia by 18 April 2022. Russia itself claimed 143,631 four days later. The US State Department’s Conflict Observatory separately documented the deportation of children (2021-2025.state.gov).

4. “Punitive forces” is a WWII atrocity frame, chosen on purpose. NPR reported back in 2014 that the Russian term karatelnaya operatsiya “refers almost exclusively to Nazi atrocities” of the German occupation (3 May 2014, npr.org). “Punitive forces” translates karateli. The word primes the Great Patriotic War memory schema and makes Putin’s “denazification” pretext of 24 February 2022 feel intuitively true to the intended audience (State Department, “Disinformation Roulette”). One word carries a whole argument.

5. RT operates as a sanctioned, intelligence-linked platform, and RT.Doc sits inside it. The EU suspended RT’s broadcasting under Council Regulation (EU) 2022/350 on 1 March 2022 (eur-lex.europa.eu). On 4 September 2024 the DOJ unsealed an SDNY indictment naming RT employees Kostiantyn Kalashnikov and Elena Afanasyeva. Attorney General Merrick Garland described a \$10 million scheme to push “hidden Russian government messaging” at US audiences, with about \$9.7 million wired to Tennessee-based Tenet Media (justice.gov, via globalsecurity.org and cyberscoop.com). Secretary Blinken’s statement the same day assessed that RT had “moved beyond being simply a media organization” and now houses a unit with cyber capabilities tied to Russian intelligence (state.gov).

6. The metrics boast follows a documented pattern. DFRLab caught RT DE spinning its analytics to claim it outperformed German broadcasters online, noting that “focusing solely on total views alone can be misleading”: RT DE had uploaded 637 videos in June 2021 against as few as 12 from its rivals (DFRLab, 2021). Later DFRLab and OpenMinds studies (2024–2025) mapped coordinated Telegram reposting and bot networks moving RT-linked content. Now the promo: more than two million views claimed within hours of premiere, no platform named, no independent measurement offered.

7. The screening circuit runs on proxies. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue traced the Italian RT.Doc events, “Io Sono Vivo” among them, to two Italian pro-Kremlin figures based in occupied Donetsk, Andrea Lucidi and Vincenzo Lorusso, promoting through Donbass Italia, ControNarrazione, and InfoDefense and booking “public libraries and municipal halls” (ISD, 13 May 2025, isdglobal.org). Italian officials shut some events down; MEP Pina Picierno intervened, and the Tortona council cancelled. A Genoa screening featured EU-sanctioned LPR official Anna Soroka. In Nicosia the film ran at the Russian Center for Science and Culture with Ambassador Murat Zyazikov in the room, passing thanks to RT

editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan (news-pravda network, 12–13 October 2025). ISD reads the circuit as circumvention of the 2022/350 distribution ban.

8. The Tehran prize traces to the IRGC’s cinema orbit. Tehran Times reported the 18th Resistance International Film Festival’s best long documentary award going to “Artoum Sumo” from Russia (24 May 2025), a garbled transliteration of Artyom Somov; RT.Doc’s own awards page carries the entry (hub.rtdoc.tv). The Association of the Revolution and Sacred Defense Cinema and the Revayat Foundation run the festival at the Sacred Defense Museum in Tehran. Basij commander Gholamreza Soleimani attended. The grand-prize film, “Majnoon,” came from Owj Arts and Media Organization, the IRGC media arm placed by UK parliamentary evidence inside “the malign disinformation apparatus developed by the Iranian regime” (committees.parliament.uk).

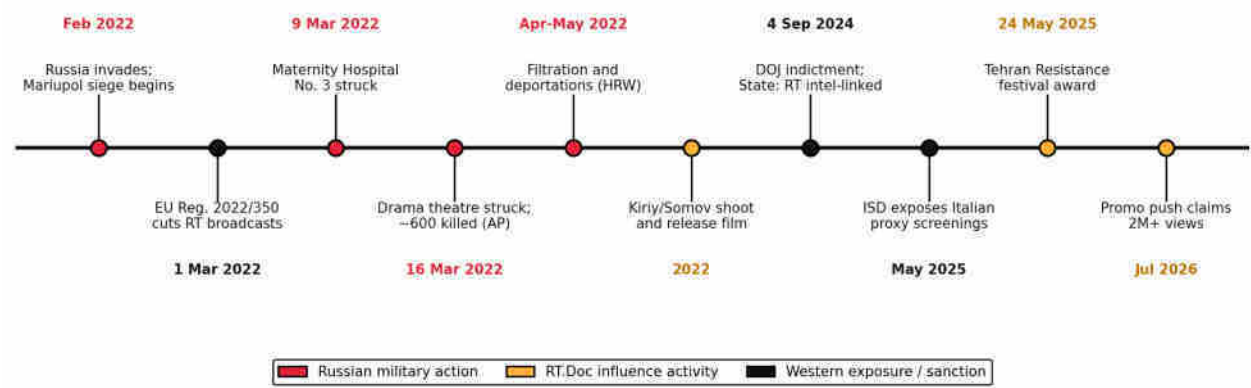


Figure 1. Operation timeline: Russian military action, RT.Doc influence activity, and Western exposure, February 2022 to July 2026.

Details

Source profile: authors and access

Olga Kiri (born Tambov; Moscow State Institute of Cinematography) started at Channel One and covered the North Caucasus, Beslan, and the 2008 Georgia war before joining RT Documentary in 2020 (rtd.rt.com/crew/olga-kiri). Artyom Somov (born Sarapul, Udmurtia; engineering degree from Izhevsk Technical University, 2004) joined RT Documentary in 2005 and rose from editor to director (rtd.rt.com/crew/artyom-somov). The pair keep producing war content for RT’s “Time of Our Heroes” festival (“Island of Faith,” “Voices from the Grave”). The access is the tell. Filming inside besieged Mariupol in 2022, among civilians trapped in the basements the film shows, required embedding with Russian or DNR forces on the attacker’s side of the line. A camera behind the besieging army produces a combatant information product. The crew shot the siege from the side that fired it.

Technique-by-technique breakdown

Table 1 maps each element of the promotional package to its influence method, DISARM technique ID, and function.

Narrative element	Technique	DISARM ID	Function
“Ukrainian punitive forces would not let them leave”	Victim-perpetrator inversion; accusation in a mirror	T0023 Distort Facts	Assigns the siege and corridor shelling to the victim; pre-empts the documented war-crime case
“Punitive forces” (karateli)	Loaded lexicon	T0003 Leverage Existing Narratives	Imports the Nazi-atrocity frame and the denazification justification
Basements, open fires, courtyard graves	Emotional anchoring	T0087 Develop Video-Based Content	Transfers real grief onto a false attribution
“Over two million views”	Social proof through inflated metrics	T0049 Flood the Information Space; T0019 Generate Information Pollution	Manufactures consensus and bandwagon pressure to watch
Screenings in Italy, France, the Netherlands, Greece; Tehran award	Validation laundering	T0057 Organize Events	Dresses state output as independent recognition
“Save it and watch it”	Engagement mechanics	T0126 Encourage Attendance	Drives saves and shares that outlive platform decay
“This is history that must not be forgotten”	Memory-duty framing	T0004 Develop Competing Narratives	Steals the moral cadence of the real Mariupol record
“15 Years by the Script of Truth” link	Funnel to the mothership	T0119 Cross-Posting	Routes engaged viewers into the wider RT.Doc catalogue

Table 1. DISARM technique mapping for the promotional package.

ABCDE summary. *Actor:* RT/RT.Doc, a Russian state media entity assessed by the US government as intelligence-linked, with authors embedded on the Russian side. *Behavior:* multi-platform seeding, proxy-run screening events, metric amplification, award-washing through Tehran. *Content:* an atrocity-inversion documentary plus a promotional package with loaded lexicon and a call to action. *Degree:* transnational, spanning domestic Russian, European fringe, Global South, and Iranian-axis audiences. *Effect (intended):* erode Western support for Ukraine and seed doubt about documented Russian war crimes.

Admiralty Code scoring

Scoring follows the expanded grid: source reliability and information credibility rated on separate axes, never averaged. Tables 2 and 3 carry the STANAG 2511 definitions; Table 4 scores the claims.

Rating	Label	Definition (STANAG 2511)
A	Completely reliable	No doubt of authenticity, trustworthiness, or competency; history of complete reliability
B	Usually reliable	Minor doubt about authenticity, trustworthiness, or competency; valid information most of the time
C	Fairly reliable	Doubt of authenticity, trustworthiness, or competency, but has provided valid information in the past

Rating	Label	Definition (STANAG 2511)
D	Not usually reliable	Significant doubt about authenticity, trustworthiness, or competency, with some past valid information
E	Unreliable	Lacking in authenticity, trustworthiness, and competency; history of invalid information
F	Reliability cannot be judged	No basis exists for evaluating the reliability of the source

Table 2. Source reliability, A to F.

Rating	Label	Definition (STANAG 2511)
1	Confirmed by other sources	Confirmed by independent sources; logical in itself; consistent with other information on the subject
2	Probably true	Not confirmed; logical in itself; consistent with other information on the subject
3	Possibly true	Not confirmed; reasonably logical in itself; agrees with some other information on the subject
4	Doubtful	Not confirmed; possible but not logical; no other information on the subject
5	Improbable	Not confirmed; not logical in itself; contradicted by other information on the subject
6	Truth cannot be judged	No basis exists for evaluating the validity of the information

Table 3. Information credibility, 1 to 6.

Item scored	Score	Basis
RT/RT.Doc as source	E	Demonstrated history of deception; formal EU and US findings of covert influence
“Punitive forces blocked evacuation” claim	E5	Contradicted by UN, AP, and Ukrainian-government primary reporting
“Two million views in a few hours”	F6	Unverifiable on its face; the source carries an inflation record
“Russian soldiers reunited families”	E5	Reframes HRW-documented forced transfer
Countervailing record (AP theatre investigation, HRW filtration report, UN corridor briefings, “20 Days in Mariupol”)	A1 to B2	Reliable primary sources with corroborating forensic and eyewitness evidence

Table 4. Claim scoring on the expanded Admiralty grid.

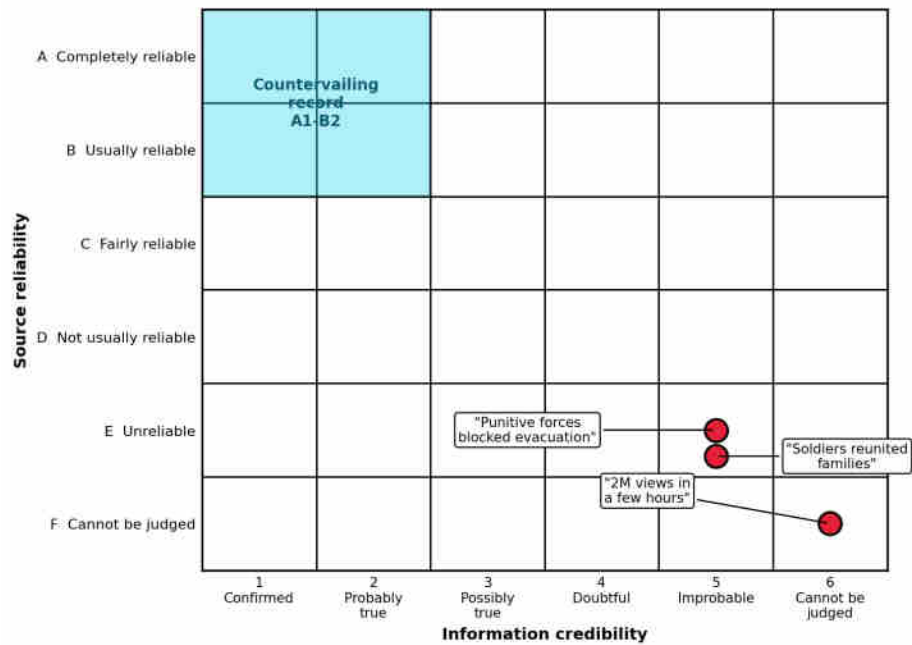


Figure 2. RT claims plotted on the reliability-by-credibility grid against the countervailing record.

Probability judgments (Sherman Kent)

Judgment	Kent term	Interval	Basis
The post is deliberate state influence content, not independent journalism	Almost certain	95–99	Sanctioned state platform; embedded authors; formal US assessment
The “punitive forces blocked evacuation” claim is false as stated	Almost certain	95–99	UN, AP, and HRW record
The European screenings functioned as sanctions circumvention under 2022/350	Highly likely	85–<95	ISD’s legal framing
The Tehran award is the “Artoum Sumo”/Somov prize at the Basij-attended festival	Highly likely	85–<95	RT.Doc’s award page
The view-count figure reflects amplification or inflation, not organic demand	Likely	55–<85	Documented RT inflation pattern; no platform data

Table 5. Probability judgments on the Sherman Kent spectrum, half-open intervals.

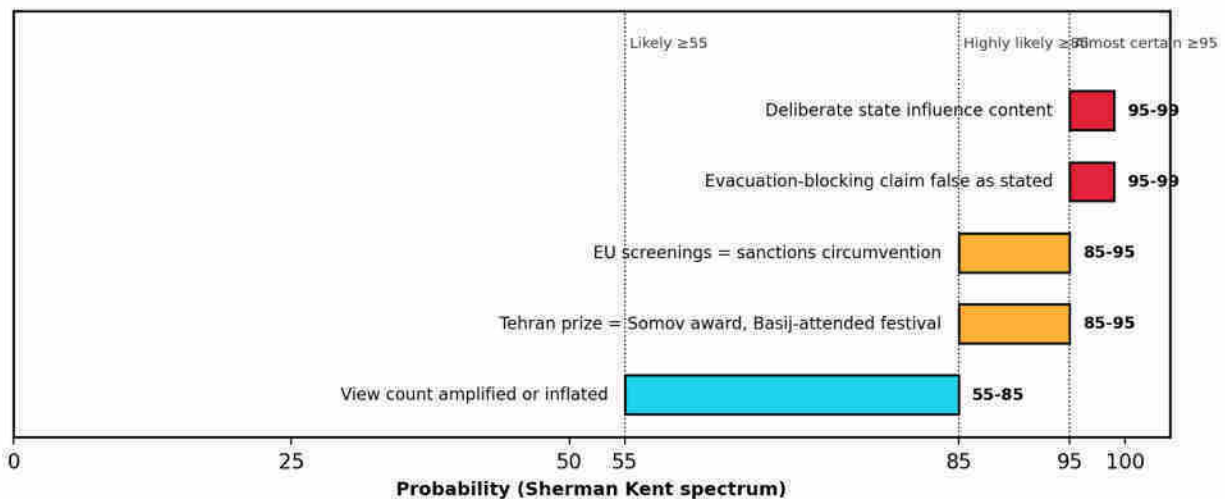


Figure 3. Kent probability bands for the five judgments.

Intent and target audiences

- **Domestic Russian audience:** reinforce the denazification and liberation narrative and keep moral licensing for the war intact; the Telegram framing and the memory-duty cadence work internal cohesion.
- **Western anti-establishment left and right:** the Italian proxy channels and municipal-hall screenings reach audiences primed to distrust mainstream media and NATO, and the EU ban itself feeds the “censored truth” hook.
- **Global South:** the “Time of Our Heroes” tour through Rossotrudnichestvo Russian Houses across dozens of countries casts Russia as an anti-colonial truth-teller, out of range of Western fact-checking.
- **Iranian-axis audience:** the Tehran award fuses the Russian and Iranian state-media ecosystems (Washington Institute, “Axis of Disinformation”; FDD on IRIB-Russia cooperation and TV BRICS), each certifying the other’s product for shared “resistance” constituencies.

Genre context

The film sits in RT’s Donbass-documentary line beside the Kremlin’s 2023 feature “The Witness” (Svidetel), which Monash analysts described as “atrocities propaganda” blaming the Mariupol theatre, Bucha, and Kramatorsk on Ukraine (lens.monash.edu, October 2023). The documentary runs the same reversal in observational dress. Italy saw “The Witness” too, screened in 2024 through the Italy-Russia Association network (Euronews, 10 January 2024).

Recommendations

Stage 1: attribution and metric forensics (0–2 weeks). Pull the RUTUBE, VK, Odysee, Rumble, and Telegram view-count curves for the film and its promo. Benchmark view-to-reaction and view-to-comment ratios against the 0.5–3 percent organic range; a mismatch signals view-bot inflation. Trigger to escalate: view accumulation in discrete spikes, or views beyond plausible subscriber reach.

Stage 2: network mapping (2–6 weeks). Map the Telegram repost graph seeding the promo (RT, RIA, Simonyan, and Soloviev nodes per DFRLab) and the European event organizers: Lucidi, Lorusso, Donbass Italia, ControNarrazione, InfoDefense, and the Russian House venues. Cross-reference against EU sanctions lists and flag 2022/350 circumvention cases for referral. Trigger: any organizer or venue linked to a sanctioned entity, on the Genoa precedent.

Stage 3: counter-narrative and pre-bunk (ongoing). Pair each inverted claim with the A1 to B2 record scored above. Pre-bunk the “censorship proves truth” hook that the EU ban feeds. Trigger to intensify: the film jumping from fringe venues into mainstream municipal or university programming.

Stage 4: axis monitoring (ongoing). Track co-amplification between RT and Iranian state media (IRIB, Press TV, Owj-adjacent outlets) around the Tehran award and any further Moqavemat-festival entries, an indicator of deepening Russia-Iran information cooperation.

Countering the Russian Playbook: Treadstone 71 and the Cyber Intel Training Center

The playbook deconstructed above repeats across every Russian campaign: invert the atrocity, pump the numbers, and buy the product a foreign pedigree. Treadstone 71 (treadstone71.com) and the Cyber Intel Training Center (cyberinteltrainingcenter.com) break that cycle for governments and corporations across three lines of effort.

Identify. The Treadstone 71 Adversary Index (TAI) scores nation-state cognitive warfare actors on a recurring composite scale. The July 2026 inaugural release rates Russia at 85, Tier 0, across 10 clusters and 8 sub-indices, and tracks the machinery the film rode, from proxy screening circuits to bought festival honors. The comprehensive Tier 0 edition is free at treadstone71.com/tai. The Intelligence Readiness Score assessment on treadstone71.com measures an organization’s capacity to detect an operation like the one above before the narrative lands. Decision Advantage AI engines (ATCRI, ACS, CWC, CWIA, HTIM, CARM) add machine-speed tracking of adversary narratives and infrastructure.

Defend. Cyber Intel Training Center courses train analysts to run the diagnostics used in the report itself: Admiralty and ASA Evidence Standard scoring, Sherman Kent probability calibration, structured analytic techniques from the Treadstone 71 Advanced SATs curriculum, influence-operations detection, and cognitive warfare analysis. Treadstone 71 consulting builds the surrounding muscle: intelligence program strategy, collection planning, counterintelligence programs, denial and deception detection, and analytic tradecraft hardened against the lexical and narrative manipulation documented above.

Counter. Countering runs past defense. Treadstone 71 plans and executes counter-influence campaigns, maps proxy and amplification networks of the kind ISD exposed in Italy, and conducts clandestine cyber HUMINT and SIGINT collection under general-counsel-approved rules of engagement. The four-stage plan above reads as standing Treadstone 71 tasking: metric forensics, network mapping, pre-bunking, and axis monitoring are deliverable engagements, not theory.

Start with the free Tier 0 report, run the Intelligence Readiness Score, or enroll in the cognitive warfare curriculum at cyberinteltrainingcenter.com.

Caveats

- The two-million-views figure remains unverified. No platform is named in the post and no third-party measurement exists. Treat it as an unproven claim matching a known inflation pattern, not as confirmed fabrication.
- Named-venue detail for the France, Netherlands, Spain, and Athens screenings rests largely on RT's own channels. Independent confirmation covers Italy (ISD) and Cyprus; the specific French, Dutch, and Athens hosts remain unconfirmed.
- The DOJ September 2024 indictment of Kalashnikov and Afanasyeva concerns RT's US election-influence scheme and RT's institutional character, not the film itself; the indictment establishes RT's nature, not direct authorship of the film.
- Casualty figures for Mariupol range widely because the city sits under Russian occupation and independent access stays barred. Mayor Vadym Boychenko told AP on 11 April 2022 that "more than 10,000 civilians have died," with later estimates near 21,000; Donetsk regional governor Pavlo Kyrylenko told CNN on 13 April 2022 that the toll ran between 20,000 and 22,000. The report carries the ranges as sourced, not as a single settled figure.
- "Artoum Sumo" reads as a transliteration of Artyom Somov, judged highly likely on RT.Doc's own awards page, but the Tehran Times listing omitted the film's English title, so the title-level match rests on inference, not direct quotation.