

# Ukraine's 'Dr. Strangelove' Reality

**Exclusive:** The horrendous fire in Odessa, killing dozens of ethnic Russians protesting against the U.S.-backed coup regime in Kiev, has lurched the country closer to full-scale civil war and disrupted the American media's efforts to deny the existence of pro-regime neo-Nazis, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

As much as the coup regime in Ukraine and its supporters want to project an image of Western moderation, there is a "Dr. Strangelove" element that can't stop the Nazism from popping up from time to time, like when the Peter Sellers character in the classic movie can't keep his right arm from making a "Heil Hitler" salute.

This brutal Nazism surfaced again on Friday when right-wing toughs in Odessa attacked an encampment of ethnic Russian protesters driving them into a trade union building which was then set on fire with Molotov cocktails. As the building was engulfed in flames, some people who tried to flee were chased and beaten, while those trapped inside heard the Ukrainian nationalists liken them to black-and-red-striped potato beetles called Colorados, because those colors are used in pro-Russian ribbons.

"Burn, Colorado, burn" went the chant.

As the fire worsened, those dying inside were serenaded with the taunting singing of the Ukrainian national anthem. The building also was spray-painted with Swastika-like symbols and graffiti reading "Galician SS," a reference to the Ukrainian nationalist army that fought alongside the German Nazi SS in World War II, killing Russians on the eastern front.

The death by fire of dozens of people in Odessa recalled a World War II incident in 1944 when elements of a Galician SS police regiment took part in the massacre of the Polish village of Huta Pieniacka, which had been a refuge for Jews and was protected by Russian and Polish partisans. Attacked by a mixed force of Ukrainian police and German soldiers on Feb. 28, hundreds of townspeople were massacred, including many locked in barns that were set ablaze.

The legacy of World War II especially the bitter fight between Ukrainian nationalists from the west and ethnic Russians from the east seven decades ago is never far from the surface in Ukrainian politics. One of the heroes celebrated during the Maidan protests in Kiev was Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, whose name was honored in many banners including one on a podium where Sen. John McCain voiced support for the uprising to oust elected President

Viktor Yanukovich, whose political base was in eastern Ukraine.

During World War II, Bandera headed the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists-B, a radical paramilitary movement that sought to transform Ukraine into a racially pure state. OUN-B took part in the expulsion and extermination of thousands of Jews and Poles.

Though most of the Maidan protesters in 2013-14 appeared motivated by anger over political corruption and by a desire to join the European Union, neo-Nazis made up a significant number. These storm troopers from the Right Sektor and Svoboda party decked out some of the occupied government buildings with Nazi insignias and even a Confederate battle flag, the universal symbol of white supremacy.

Then, as the protests turned violent from Feb. 20-22, the neo-Nazis surged to the forefront. Their well-trained militias, organized in 100-man brigades called "the hundreds," led the final assaults against police and forced Yanukovich and many of his officials to flee for their lives.

In the days after the coup, as the neo-Nazi militias effectively controlled the government, European and U.S. diplomats scrambled to help the shaken parliament put together the semblance of a respectable regime, although four ministries, including national security, were awarded to the right-wing extremists in recognition of their crucial role in ousting Yanukovich.

### **Seeing No Nazis**

Since February, virtually the entire U.S. news media has cooperated in the effort to play down the neo-Nazi role, dismissing any mention of this inconvenient truth as "Russian propaganda." Stories in the U.S. media delicately step around the neo-Nazi reality by keeping out relevant context, such as the background of national security chief Andriy Parubiy, who founded the Social-National Party of Ukraine in 1991, blending radical Ukrainian nationalism with neo-Nazi symbols. Parubiy was commandant of the Maidan's "self-defense forces."

When the neo-Nazi factor is mentioned in the mainstream U.S. press, it is usually to dismiss it as nonsense, such as an April 20 column by New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof who visited his ancestral home, the western Ukrainian town of Karapchiv, and portrayed its residents as the true voice of the Ukrainian people.

"To understand why Ukrainians are risking war with Russia to try to pluck themselves from Moscow's grip, I came to this village where my father grew up," he wrote. "Even here in the village, Ukrainians watch Russian television and loathe the propaganda portraying them as neo-Nazi thugs rampaging against Russian speakers."

“‘If you listen to them, we all carry assault rifles; we’re all beating people,’ Ilya Moskal, a history teacher, said contemptuously.”

In an April 17 column from Kiev, Kristof wrote that what the Ukrainians want is weapons from the West so they can go “bear-hunting,” i.e. killing Russians. “People seem to feel a bit disappointed that the United States and Europe haven’t been more supportive, and they are humiliated that their own acting government hasn’t done more to confront Russian-backed militants. So, especially after a few drinks, people are ready to take down the Russian Army themselves.”

Kristof also repeated the U.S. “conventional wisdom” that the resistance to the coup regime among eastern Ukrainians was entirely the work of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who, Kristof wrote, “warns that Ukraine is on the brink of civil war. But the chaos in eastern cities is his own creation, in part by sending provocateurs across the border.”

However, when the New York Times finally sent two reporters to spend time with rebels from the east, they encountered an indigenous movement motivated by hostility to the Kiev regime and showing no signs of direction from Moscow. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Another NYT ‘Sort of’ Retraction on Ukraine.”]

Beyond the journalistic risk of jumping to conclusions, Kristof, who fancies himself a great humanitarian, also should recognize that the clever depiction of human beings as animals, whether as “bears” or “Colorado beetles,” can have horrendous human consequences as is now apparent in Odessa.

## **Reagan’s Nazis**

But the problem with some western Ukrainians expressing their inconvenient love for Nazis has not been limited to the current crisis. It bedeviled Ronald Reagan’s administration when it began heating up the Cold War in the 1980s.

As part of that strategy, Reagan’s United States Information Agency, under his close friend Charles Wick, hired a cast of right-wing Ukrainian exiles who began showing up on U.S.-funded Radio Liberty praising the Galician SS.

These commentaries included positive depictions of Ukrainian nationalists who had sided with the Nazis in World War II as the SS waged its “final solution” against European Jews. The propaganda broadcasts provoked outrage from Jewish organizations, such as B’nai B’rith, and individuals including conservative academic Richard Pipes.

According to an internal memo dated May 4, 1984, and written by James Critchlow, a research officer at the Board of International Broadcasting, which managed Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe, one RL broadcast in particular was viewed

as “defending Ukrainians who fought in the ranks of the SS.”

Critchlow wrote, “An RL Ukrainian broadcast of Feb. 12, 1984 contains references to the Nazi-oriented Ukrainian-manned SS ‘Galicia’ Division of World War II which may have damaged RL’s reputation with Soviet listeners. The memoirs of a German diplomat are quoted in a way that seems to constitute endorsement by RL of praise for Ukrainian volunteers in the SS division, which during its existence fought side by side with the Germans against the Red Army.”

Harvard Professor Pipes, who was an adviser to the Reagan administration, also inveighed against the Radio Liberty broadcasts, writing on Dec. 3, 1984 “the Russian and Ukrainian services of RL have been transmitting this year blatantly anti-Semitic material to the Soviet Union which may cause the whole enterprise irreparable harm.”

Though the Reagan administration publicly defended Radio Liberty against some of the public criticism, privately some senior officials agreed with the critics, according to documents in the archives of the Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California. For instance, in a Jan. 4, 1985, memo, Walter Raymond Jr., a top official on the National Security Council, told his boss, National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane, that “I would believe much of what Dick [Pipes] says is right.”

What the Reagan administration apparently didn’t understand three decades ago and what the U.S. State Department still has not seemed to learn today is that there is a danger in stirring up the old animosities that divide Ukraine, east and west.

Though clearly a minority, Ukraine’s neo-Nazis remain a potent force that is well-organized, well-motivated and prone to extreme violence, whether throwing firebombs at police in the Maidan or at ethnic Russians trapped in a building in Odessa.

As vengeance now seeks vengeance across Ukraine, this Nazi imperative will be difficult to hold down, much as Dr. Strangelove struggled to stop his arm from making a “Heil Hitler” salute.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America’s Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).**

---

# American Hawks Who Never Learn

The mainstream U.S. news media has taken great umbrage over President Obama's defense of the more peaceful parts of his foreign policy, when he suggested lessons were not learned by the many pundits and pols who supported the disastrous Iraq War, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

President Barack Obama has gotten much attention from a single extended response he gave to a question about his foreign policy from Ed Henry of Fox News in a press conference last week in Manila. The apparently strongly felt need, on the part of some of the President's hardline critics, to strike back at his remarks and to try to discredit them indicates that he spoke some embarrassing truths.

Garden-variety disagreement with the substance of the President's policies and what he has said to support them would never have stimulated this kind of response.

The President made several perceptive observations about the less productive aspects of current discourse in Washington about Ukraine, Syria, and other difficult issues, but if there was a single "ouch" line that made the critics most uncomfortable it may have been Mr. Obama's comment that "for some reason many who were proponents of what I consider to be a disastrous decision to go into Iraq haven't really learned the lesson of the last decade, and they keep on just playing the same note over and over again."

It must be painful for Mr. Obama's opponents to be reminded how right he was about this issue while so many others, Democrats as well as Republicans, were wrong. Some of the rest of us who have commented repeatedly on the lessons of that war could be accused (although the President, who is not a serial gloater on the subject, cannot) of playing our own note over and over again.

It *ought* to be played, because the Iraq War was the biggest and costliest U.S. endeavor ever in the Middle East, because we continue to suffer from the domestic as well as the regional consequences of that misadventure, because what was bad about that war has parallels in what could easily happen with some current issues if they are not properly handled, and because it is astounding that the biggest promoters of the Iraq War somehow still seem to have an audience even though they have been proven to be guilty of gross malpractice as policy analysts.

If there is any ground for criticizing what the President said at the press conference in Manila, it is that he seemed implicitly to accept some of the simplistic frames of reference that characterize not only what his critics are saying but more general discussion in the United States of foreign policy.

There is the tendency in that discussion, for example, to register anything good or bad happening in the world as a success or failure of the incumbent U.S. President. Thus Mr. Obama pointed to how security relations between the United States and the Philippines are far better today than they were a decade ago, without mentioning that some of the reasons for that really don't have much to do with his own foreign policy.

There also is the tendency, amid the slapping on of sanctions against adversaries hither and yon, to treat someone else's pain or isolation as if it were an end in itself. Thus Mr. Obama stated that "Russia has never been more isolated," without quickly pointing out that any isolation of Russia is only a means to try to induce certain changes in Russian behavior. But the President was, after all, only giving an impromptu response to criticism, and he did not make any specific claims about the meaning and significance of Filipino cooperation or Russian isolation.

If subsequent commentary by the critics were to be believed, the main takeaway from the President's remarks was that he was accusing his political opponents of being warmongers. But the President explicitly acknowledged, in referring to debates over Syria and Ukraine, that the opponents he has in mind have disavowed wanting to send U.S. troops into such conflicts.

Mr. Obama's main point was instead that after making such disavowals, the critics either (1) fail to spell out what other action they have in mind, beyond what the administration already is doing; or (2) to the extent they do mention an alternative, fail to assess carefully the likely consequences both good and bad, and instead just make unsupported assertions that acting more boldly or aggressively will somehow help to solve the problem at hand.

The President's point is valid. In fact, it applies as well to a lot of criticism of the foreign policies of other U.S. presidents. It is a reflection of the luxury of non-incumbency. Only incumbent policy-makers have to come up with a course of action that, despite all the downsides, is most likely to help solve problems. Non-incumbent critics can sit back and carp about problems that are still unsolved, whether or not solution is really within the capability of the United States.

Charles Krauthammer is one of those critics whose nerve evidently has been struck by the President's comments. His reaction gives evidence of having been

thrown into a spasm upon first hearing the comments and never going back to reread the transcript.

He begins, for example, with the assertion that Mr. Obama “began with a complaint about negative coverage on Fox News.” Actually, in response to Henry’s statement that “there have been a lot of unflattering portraits of your foreign policy right now,” the President simply observed that “there are actually some complimentary pieces as well about my foreign policy, but I’m not sure you ran them,” which falls short of a “complaint” about Fox’s coverage, however much such a complaint would be warranted.

Krauthammer goes on at length on the theme of people being falsely accused of warmongering. He issues a challenge to name any U.S. political leader “who has called for sending troops into Ukraine,” disregarding that the President was not accusing anybody of doing that and instead specifically said his critics were not calling for that.

Trying to turn tables, Krauthammer writes, “wasn’t it you, Mr. President, who decided to attack Libya...?” Yes, it was, and there is significant valid criticism yet to be written about that decision. But it would not be Krauthammer who would be positioned to write it; he applauded the military intervention in the Libyan civil war and only wished at the time that the intervention had come sooner. He does not mention that fact, nor does he say anything about what lessons the continuing mess in Libya may hold for possible intervention in other Middle Eastern civil wars.

Another topic on which the Obama administration can be validly criticized was the drawing of a “red line” about chemical weapons use in Syria. But what needs to be criticized was the drawing of the line in the first place, not that the administration “retreated abjectly,” as Krauthammer puts it, because the administration never did that.

Instead, the administration with help from the Russians made lemonade out of the lemon of a red line and won an agreement that already has resulted in the destruction of Syria’s capability to manufacture prohibited chemical weapons and removed from Syria for destruction nearly all of the regime’s stockpile of the weapons.

This is a far greater blow in favor of the cause of nonproliferation and non-use of chemical weapons than anyone hoped for before the Syria war even began. And as Robert Golan-Vilella reminds us, it is hard to see how any cruise missile strikes on Syria merely to show that we are willing to use military force would have done an iota of good in the Syrian situation.

On Ukraine, Krauthammer does identify one specific policy alternative to what the administration has done so far, providing lethal aid to the Ukrainian military, and argues that this would get Putin to shape up.

“The possibility of a bloody and prolonged Ukrainian resistance to infiltration or invasion would surely alter Putin’s calculus,” he says. Surely it would, but there would likely be bloody and prolonged Ukrainian resistance with or without U.S. lethal aid. One question is whether such aid would change the prospective length and bloodiness of the resistance enough to make a critical difference in Putin’s calculations.

Another question is how much weight such an effect would have relative to any provocative effects of the United States, the leader of NATO, initiating such a military relationship with Ukraine. Krauthammer does not bother to address either question.

Just below Krauthammer’s column on the same *Washington Post* opinion page is a piece by House Armed Services Committee chairman Buck McKeon, which is another “what, me a warmonger?” reaction to the President’s comments in Manila. Besides the forced indignation over presidential accusations that were never made, this item is characterized mainly by unsupported assertions, without even an attempt to get at the multiple underlying questions that would have to be analyzed, that military saber-rattling always means less chance of war breaking out and more chance of reducing the intensity of wars already underway.

On Syria, for example, McKeon says that “arming moderate rebel factions and restoring the U.S. military posture in the Mediterranean” could have prevented use of chemical weapons “or even shortened the conflict.” How? The divisions among opposition groups, the domination of the more extreme ones, and the fight-to-the-death determination of the regime’s supporters make very unlikely that a further (beyond what Gulf Arabs were doing anyway) arming of the hard-to-identify “moderates” would have had such desired effects.

And just what sort of threat would be implied by any further U.S. military deployments in the Mediterranean? You do seem to believe, Mr. Chairman, that we need to be willing to carry out threats that we make.

The most preposterous statement in the same piece is, “Increasing violence in Iraq, provocations by North Korea and an ongoing Iranian nuclear program stem from similar paralysis in the Oval Office.” The comment about Iraq seems to wipe eight years from recent history, including the mistaken launching of the war in the first place, rampant insurgency during the time of the previous administration, and a “surge” of U.S. forces that could only temporarily help to tamp the insurgency down.



In North Korea, three generations of the Kim regime have made provocation a central aspect of grand strategy, with provocation being the most prominent feature of North Korean behavior for decades. And as for the Iranian nuclear program, which also has been ongoing for decades, the preliminary agreement negotiated last fall already has achieved severe limitations to the program that years of sanctions and bluster alone could not.

A hazard of the kind of flak represented by these misplaced criticisms is that they nourish a political climate that tends to push the administration toward mistaken paths, notwithstanding the kind of verbal pushback that Mr. Obama exhibited in Manila. The intervention in Libya and the “red line” in Syria may represent such mistakes, although, to be sure, there also were forces within the administration pushing in the same direction.

Christopher Fettweis has aptly summarized the challenge: “We know...that a set of deeply pathological beliefs exists within the so-called ‘marketplace of ideas,’ or arena of debate over U.S. foreign policy. As a result, we also know that the Obama administration will continue to be bombarded by a variety of misapplied analogies and faulty reasoning, generated largely by people who ought to know better, and that the president will have to tune out a great deal of noise and filth, to paraphrase Kennan, if he is going to chart a wise path forward.”

**Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency’s top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as a [blog post](#) at The National Interest’s Web site. Reprinted with author’s permission.)**

---