

Selective Outrage over Ukraine POWs

Exclusive: The U.S. news media regularly engages in selective outrage, piously denouncing some adversary for violating international law yet hypocritically silent when worse abuses are committed by the U.S. or allied governments, as the New York Times has shown again, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The New York Times has taken deep umbrage over an unseemly parade staged by ethnic Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine featuring captured Ukrainian soldiers. The Times noted that the Geneva Conventions prohibit humiliation of POWs, surely a valid point.

But the Times in its profoundly biased coverage of the Ukraine crisis apparently feels that other aspects of this nasty civil war are less newsworthy, such as the Kiev government's bombardment of eastern Ukrainian cities sending the death toll into the thousands, including children and other non-combatants. Also downplayed has been Kiev's dispatch of neo-Nazi storm troopers to spearhead the urban combat in ethnic Russian towns and cities in the east.

When the Times finally noticed this street-fighting role of neo-Nazi militias, that remarkable fact the first time armed Nazis were dispatched by any government to kill people in Europe since World War II was consigned to the last three paragraphs of a long article on a different topic, essentially a throwaway reference.

Similarly, the Kiev regime's artillery fire on residential areas killing many civilians and, over the weekend, damaging a hospital has been treated by the Times as a minor afterthought. But Times' readers are supposed to get worked up over the tasteless demonstration in Donetsk, all the better to justify more killing of ethnic Russians.

Though no one was killed or injured during Sunday's anti-Ukrainian march and rebel troops protected the captured soldiers from angry citizens the Times led its Ukraine coverage on Monday with the humiliation of the POWs. The article by Andrew E. Kramer and Andrew Higgins made a point of contrasting the ugly scene in Donetsk with more orderly celebrations of Ukrainian independence elsewhere. The story began:

"On a day when Ukrainians celebrated their independence from the Soviet Union with parades and speeches, pro-Russia separatists in the eastern part of the country staged a grim counter-spectacle: a parade that mocked the national army

and celebrated the deaths and imprisonment of its soldiers.

“Leading the procession was an attractive young blond woman carrying an assault rifle, followed by several dozen captured Ukrainian soldiers, filthy, bruised and unkempt, their heads shaved, wearing fetid camouflage uniforms and looking down at their feet.

“Onlookers shouted that the men should be shot, and pelted the prisoners with empty beer bottles, eggs and tomatoes as they stumbled down Artyomovsk Street, Donetsk’s main thoroughfare. ... People in the crowd shouted ‘fascists!’ and ‘perverts!’ and separatist fighters held back a man who tried to punch a prisoner.”

The Times then noted: “The Geneva Conventions’ rules for treating prisoners of war prohibit parading them in public, but the treatment of the wounded, disheveled prisoners seemed to offend few of those watching, who in any case had turned out for the promise of seeing a ghoulish spectacle. ‘Shoot them!’ one woman yelled.”

Kiev’s Abuses

While it’s certainly true that POWs shouldn’t be mistreated, it should be at least equally newsworthy when civilians, including children, are being killed by indiscriminate artillery fire directed into cities or when right-wing storm troopers under Nazi banners are attacking and occupying eastern Ukrainian cities and towns. But the Times’ bias in favor of the Kiev regime has been most obvious in the newspaper’s selective outrage.

At the start of the crisis last winter, the Times sided with the “pro-democracy” demonstrators in Kiev’s Maidan square as they sought to topple democratically elected President Viktor Yanukovich, who had rebuffed an association agreement with the European Union that included harsh austerity measures prescribed by the International Monetary Fund. Yanukovich opted for a more generous offer from Russia of a \$15 billion loan.

Along with the entire U.S. mainstream media, the Times cheered on the violent overthrow of Yanukovich on Feb. 22 and downplayed the crucial role of well-organized neo-Nazi militias that surged to the front of the Maidan protests in the final violent days. Then, with Yanukovich out and a new coup regime in, led by U.S. hand-picked Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, the IMF austerity plan was promptly approved.

Since then, the Times has behaved as essentially a propaganda organ for the new regime in Kiev and for the State Department, pushing “themes” blaming Russian President Vladimir Putin for the crisis. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com’s

"Ukraine, Though the US 'Looking Glass.'"]

Some of the most egregious New York Times reporting has been its slanted and erroneous summations of the Ukraine narrative. For instance, immediately after the violent coup (from Feb. 20-22), it was reported that among the 80 people killed were more than a dozen police officers. But, as the Times' pro-coup sympathies hardened, the storyline changed to: "More than 80 protesters were shot to death by the police as an uprising spiraled out of control in mid-February." [NYT, March 5]

Both the dead police and the murky circumstances surrounding the sniper fire that inflicted many of the casualties simply disappeared from the Times' narrative. It became flat fact: evil "pro-Yanukovych" police gunned down innocent "pro-democracy" demonstrators.

Whose Life Matters

Just as the deaths of those early demonstrators were played up by the Times and even spun to create a more black-and-white narrative the more recent deaths of thousands of ethnic Russians have been played down. And, the anger of eastern Ukrainians over the brutal assaults on their cities as displayed in Sunday's Donetsk demonstration is then used by the Times to, in effect, justify Kiev's continued "anti-terrorist" operation. In other words, it seems that the Times places a greater value on the lives of the Maidan demonstrators in Kiev than the ethnic Russians in the east.

The Times also displayed this bias after dozens of ethnic Russian protesters were killed by arson and other violence in Ukraine's southern port city of Odessa on May 2. The victims had taken refuge in a trade union building after a clash with a pro-Kiev mob.

Even the neocon-dominated Washington Post led its editions with the story of "Dozens killed in Ukraine fighting" and described the fatal incident this way: "Friday evening, a pro-Ukrainian mob attacked a camp where the pro-Russian supporters had pitched tents, forcing them to flee to a nearby government building, a witness said. The mob then threw gasoline bombs into the building. Police said 31 people were killed when they choked on smoke or jumped out of windows. [The death toll later grew.]

"Asked who had thrown the Molotov cocktails, pro-Ukrainian activist Diana Berg said, 'Our people but now they are helping them [the survivors] escape the building.'" [In actuality, some of the survivors who jumped from windows were beaten by the pro-Kiev mob.]

By contrast, here is how the New York Times reported the event as part of a

story by C.J. Chivers and Noah Sneider which focused on the successes of the pro-coup armed forces in overrunning some eastern Ukrainian rebel positions.

“Violence also erupted Friday in the previously calmer port city of Odessa, on the Black Sea, where dozens of people died in a fire related to clashes that broke out between protesters holding a march for Ukrainian unity and pro-Russian activists. The fighting itself left four dead and 12 wounded, Ukraine’s Interior Ministry said. Ukrainian and Russian news media showed images of buildings and debris burning, fire bombs being thrown and men armed with pistols.”

Note how the Times evades placing any responsibility on the pro-coup mob for trying to burn alive the “pro-Russian activists” who had sought refuge in the building. From reading the Times, you wouldn’t know who had died and who had set the fire.

Embarrassing Lapses

In the Times’ haste to perform its propaganda function, there also have been some notable journalistic embarrassments such as the Times’ front-page story touting photographs that supposedly showed Russian special forces in Russia and then the same soldiers in eastern Ukraine, allegedly proving that the popular resistance to the coup regime was simply clumsily disguised Russian aggression.

Any serious journalist would have recognized the holes in the story since it wasn’t clear where the photos were taken or whether the blurry images were even the same people but that didn’t bother the Times, which led with the scoop. However, only two days later, the scoop blew up when it turned out that a key photo supposedly showing a group of soldiers in Russia who later appeared in eastern Ukraine was actually taken in Ukraine, destroying the premise of the entire story.

There’s also the issue of U.S. selectivity in defending the principle of not parading or otherwise humiliating POWs. That issue arose last decade during the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq when the U.S. news media showed little outrage over the treatment of “war on terror” captives who were displayed in humiliating postures at the U.S. prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, or when Iraqi soldiers were paraded before U.S. cameras to demonstrate American military success in Iraq.

By contrast, there was a firestorm during the early days of the U.S. invasion of Iraq when five U.S. POWs were questioned by Iraqi television reporters in the southern Iraqi city of Nasiriya.

U.S. officials immediately denounced the brief televised interviews with the

prisoners as a violation of the Geneva Conventions, a charge that was repeated over and over by U.S. television networks. "It's illegal to do things to POWs that are humiliating to those prisoners," declared Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

Yet, the mainstream U.S. media stayed silent about the obvious inconsistency between its outrage over the footage of the American soldiers and the U.S. media's decision only a few days earlier to run repeated clips of Iraqis identified as prisoners of war.

In that case, Iraqi POWs were paraded before U.S. cameras as "proof" that Iraqi resistance was crumbling. Some of the scenes showed Iraqi POWs forced at gunpoint to kneel down with their hands behind their heads as they were patted down by U.S. soldiers. Yet neither U.S. officials nor U.S. reporters covering the war for the major news networks observed how those scenes might be a violation of international law.

Nor did the U.S. media see fit to remind viewers how President George W. Bush had stripped prisoners of war captured in Afghanistan of their rights under the Geneva Conventions. Bush ordered hundreds of captives from Afghanistan to be put in tiny outdoor cages at Camp X-Ray in Guantanamo Bay.

The prisoners were shaved bald and forced to kneel down with their eyes, ears and mouths covered to deprive them of their senses. The shackled prisoners were filmed being carried on stretchers to interrogation sessions. Their humiliation was broadcast for all the world to see but the treatment was accepted by the U.S. press as just fine. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[International Law a la Carte.](#)"]

That selective outrage was on display again on Monday in the New York Times.

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](#).

Bringing War Home to America

From the "war on drugs" to the "war on terror," U.S. society has grown

increasingly militarized with police now armed to the teeth with weapons of war to deploy against American citizens, a process that apes U.S. violence-oriented actions abroad, says Brian J. Trautman.

By Brian J. Trautman

The police response to public protests in Ferguson, Missouri, in the wake of the deadly Aug. 9 shooting of Michael Brown, Jr., an unarmed 18-year-old black man killed by a white police officer, was a prime illustration of the hyper-aggressive nature of policing in America today.

The residents of Ferguson fed up with hostile and abusive police behavior continue to flood the streets to demand justice for Mike Brown and other victims of police brutality. They have been joined in solidarity by people of conscience in other cities (e.g., Oakland, NYC).

Their anger and frustration was exacerbated by the heavy-handed tactics used against the mostly peaceful protestors in Ferguson during the first week or so of the demonstrations tear gas, rubber bullets, smoke, deafening sirens as well as assault rifles fixed on protestors were some of the violent methods employed by law enforcement.

In addition, a mandatory curfew imposed by the Missouri governor, verbal threats of physical harm from police, and arrests of journalists, among other ill-advised and counterproductive reactions, only escalated the tensions between protestors and police.

The police action in Ferguson sparked a much-needed and long overdue national discussion about the rise of the police-industrial complex. One important outcome of this conversation has been an increased awareness among the American public of how local and state police became armed with equipment meant for war.

The fact that government programs and funding provided police with military-grade weaponry and that these arms have been deployed against American citizens has provoked the ire of liberal and conservative lawmakers alike a rare show of bipartisanship in today's political climate.

The national media has now joined independent media in shining a spotlight on the paramilitary structure of modern-day policing. However, even now, the vast majority of media and politicians continue to ignore the fundamental causes of the increasingly violent policies and procedures of law enforcement, as it would require critically questioning and challenging the systems and institutions that produce them.

To better understand, effectively reduce, and eventually prevent the underlying factors which led to the police slaying of Mike Brown and other unarmed citizens, we must openly debate two major forms of violence prevalent in the United States: systemic violence (aka structural violence) and militarism.

Systemic violence is the type of violence that is deeply-embedded in a nation's social, economic, educational, political, legal and environmental frameworks, and tends to be rooted in government policy. It is organized violence with an historical context, and often manifests in subtle but very specific and destructive ways.

Examples include entrenched racism, classism and discrimination and economic inequality and relative poverty. Systemic violence paves the way for authoritarian and undemocratic values such as exploitation, marginalization and repression, especially of underrepresented, underprivileged populations.

Militarism is the ideology that a nation must maintain a strong military capability and must use, or threaten to use, force to protect and advance national interests. America's militaristic approach to overseas conflicts can be found in many aspects of its domestic policies.

Systemic violence and militarism are interconnected and mutually dependent. They go hand in hand, building on and reinforcing each other. Both define and direct American policing, which regularly treats citizens like enemies of the state. We need not look further for an example than the military-style police assault in Ferguson.

Systemic violence and militarism are responsible for the flow of military-grade equipment such as mine resistance vehicles and semi-automatic weapons to police departments across the country.

In an op-ed I wrote last month entitled "Escalating Domestic Warfare," I discussed a report from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) on the emergence of a militarist ethos in American policing. The ACLU's research showed that the militarization of police has become excessive and lethal.

For example, SWAT teams are being deployed primarily to serve search warrants in low-level drug cases, and these teams are using methods and equipment traditionally reserved for war to do so. The ACLU also found that police militarization increased substantially after each of three major national events: the initiation of the "War on Drugs," the attacks of 9-11, and a series of Supreme Court decisions which have eroded the rights guaranteed in the Fourth Amendment.

Over the past two decades, the violent crime rate in the United States has

decreased sharply. The militarization of policing, then, is counter-intuitive. Historically, nations that have militarized their police have done so not because of violent crime but rather to rapidly quell potential mass civil uprisings against tyranny, oppression and injustice.

A statement released by Veterans for Peace (VFP), a global organization of military veterans and allies working to build a culture of peace, calls for justice for Mike Brown and his family through, in part, “a complete, swift and transparent investigation” into his death.

VFP strongly condemns the use of violence in any form to secure justice. Instead, they implore protestors “to continue to channel their anger towards building power, solidarity and creating change nonviolently.”

The organization expresses deep outrage for the state violence in Ferguson: “police over reaction to community expressions of grief and anger is the outcome of a national mindset that violence will solve any problem.”

According to VFP, the military-industrial complex and a permanent war mentality are two major sources of this violence: “Thirteen years of war has militarized our whole society. We see equipment designed for the battlefield used in our nation’s streets against our citizens. We see police in uniforms and using weapons indistinguishable from the military.”

This militaristic approach to domestic policing, says VFP, has resulted in tragedy on our streets: “Week after week we see reports of police abuse and killings of innocent and unarmed civilians.” Justice for the victims is often denied: “time and time again we see police given impunity for their crimes and citizens left in disbelief wondering where to turn next.”

VFP reminds us of the repeated targeting of communities of color by police. The Ferguson protests are a natural reaction to this legacy of mistreatment and injustice. Police brutality against young black males, in particular, VFP argues, was a powder keg waiting to explode: “the unrest in Ferguson and similar incidents of citizen rebellions are the outcome of state abuse and neglect, not of hoodlums and opportunists. Eventually, any people who are held down will attempt to standup.”

VFP’s statement also warns that militarism at home cannot be solved until we end our nation’s militarism abroad: “We cannot call for peace in the streets at home and at the same time conduct war for thirteen years in the streets of other nations.”

America’s violent system of policing and its antagonistic foreign policy are interrelated. Therefore, they must be addressed together before reforms can be

effective and help to end our culture of violence.

Solutions-based approaches begin with local, state and federal legislators acknowledging that many current laws and policies create and fuel systemic violence and militarism. They must then find the wisdom and muster the courage to act to change or abandon those laws and policies.

One strategy that our towns and cities can adopt to contribute to this process is nonviolent community policing. Retired police captain Charles L. Alphin, who served for over 26 years in the St. Louis City Police Department, offers suggestions for such a policing model in an [article](#) titled "Kingian Non-violence: A Practical Application in Policing."

Alphin believes Kingian nonviolence holds great potential for American policing. He gives examples of how this model of policing can work using Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy of nonviolence. Alphin contends, as Dr. King did, that how we approach policing cannot stand alone from teaching nonviolence in the school, home, streets and in every phase of life.

Alphin also explains that he applied Kingian philosophy effectively in interrogation of criminal suspects and in the organization of communities to get at the root causes of violence and drugs, effectively empowering communities to identify and work on these problems at the grassroots level (note: this community-based solution to violence is a feature of the theory and practice of [transformative justice](#)).

There is an urgent need for models of paramilitary policing to be replaced with models of nonviolent community policing. Freedom and democracy are at stake. So are the lives of our innocent citizens.

The killing of Mike Brown can be a pivotal moment for how we treat the systemic violence and militarism that produced the policing system of today. Ferguson has awakened many Americans to the realities of police militarism on their streets and to the urgent need to demilitarize the police.

We cannot afford public apathy on this issue any longer. The people must insist on alternative models of policing that respect and protect civil and human rights. To reverse the trend of police violence in this country, we must work to eliminate the systemic and militaristic roots of this violence, remembering that military-style policing is inextricably linked to America's belligerence abroad.

No matter how you slice it, the weapons of war and other violent tactics used against Ferguson protestors will go down as a tragic chapter in American history. Still, robust and meaningful people-powered action for progressive social change can help make this chapter a turning point toward the positive

transformation of policing in the United States. This action, change, and transformation are inevitable because justice demands it.

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