

NYT Is Lost in Its Ukraine Propaganda

Exclusive: One danger of lying is that you must then incorporate the falsehood into the longer narrative, somehow making the lies fit. The same is true of propaganda as the New York Times is learning as it continues to falsify the narrative of the Ukraine crisis, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

In late February, a conference is scheduled in New York City to discuss the risk of nuclear war if computers reach the level of artificial intelligence and take decisions out of human hands. But there is already the old-fashioned danger of nuclear war, started by human miscalculation, fed by hubris and propaganda.

That possible scenario is playing out in Ukraine, where the European Union and the United States provoked a political crisis on Russia's border in November 2013, then backed a coup d'état in February 2014 and have presented a one-sided account of the ensuing civil war, blaming everything on Russia.

Possibly the worst purveyor of this Cold War-style propaganda has been the New York Times, which has given its readers a steady diet of biased reporting and analysis, including now accusing the Russians for a resurgence in the fighting.

One way the Times has falsified the Ukraine narrative is by dating the origins of the crisis to several months after the crisis actually began. So, the lead story in Saturday's editions ignored the actual chronology of events and started the clock with the appearance of Russian troops in Crimea in spring 2014.

The Times [article](#) by Rick Lyman and Andrew E. Kramer said: "A shaky cease-fire has all but vanished, with rebel leaders vowing fresh attacks. Civilians are being hit by deadly mortars at bus stops. Tanks are rumbling down snowy roads in rebel-held areas with soldiers in unmarked green uniforms sitting on their turrets, waving at bystanders, a disquieting echo of the 'little green men' whose appearance in Crimea opened this stubborn conflict in the spring."

In other words, the story doesn't start in fall 2013 with the extraordinary U.S. intervention in Ukrainian political affairs spearheaded by American neocons, such as National Endowment for Democracy president Carl Gershman, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland and Sen. John McCain nor with the U.S.-backed coup on Feb. 22, 2014, which ousted elected President Viktor Yanukovich and put one of Nuland's chosen leaders, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, in as Prime Minister.

No, because if that history were included, Times readers might actually have a

chance for a balanced understanding of this unnecessary tragedy. For propaganda purposes, it is better to start the cameras rolling only after the people of Crimea voted overwhelmingly to secede from the failed state of Ukraine and rejoin Russia.

Except the Times won't reference the lopsided referendum or the popular will of the Crimean people. It's better to pretend that Russian troops the "little green men" just invaded Crimea and conquered the place against the people's will. The Russian troops were already in Crimea as part of an agreement with Ukraine for maintaining the Russian naval base at Sevastopol.

Which leads you to the next paragraph of the Times story: "The renewed fighting has dashed any hopes of reinvigorating a cease-fire signed in September [2014] and honored more in name than in fact since then. It has also put to rest the notion that Russia's president, Vladimir V. Putin, would be so staggered by the twin blows of Western sanctions and a collapse in oil prices that he would forsake the separatists in order to foster better relations with the West."

That last point gets us to the danger of human miscalculation driven by hubris. The key error committed by the EU and compounded by the U.S. was to assume that a brazen bid to get Ukraine to repudiate its longtime relationship with Russia and to bring Ukraine into the NATO alliance would not prompt a determined Russian reaction.

Russia sees the prospect of NATO military forces and their nuclear weapons on its borders as a grave strategic threat, especially with Kiev in the hands of rabid right-wing politicians, including neo-Nazis, who regard Russia as a historic enemy. Confronted with such a danger especially with thousands of ethnic Russians inside Ukraine being slaughtered it was a near certainty that Russia's leaders would not succumb meekly to Western sanctions and demands.

Yet, as long as the United States remains in thrall to the propagandistic narrative that the New York Times and other U.S. mainstream media outlets have spun, President Barack Obama will almost surely continue to ratchet up the tensions. To do otherwise would open Obama to accusations of "weakness."

During his State of the Union address, Obama mostly presented himself as a peacemaker, but his one major deviation was when he crowed about the suffering that U.S.-organized sanctions had inflicted on Russia, whose economy, he boasted, was "in tatters."

So, with the West swaggering and Russia facing what it considers a grave strategic threat, it's not hard to imagine how the crisis in Ukraine could escalate into a violent clash between NATO and Russian forces with the

possibility of further miscalculation bringing nuclear weapons into play.

The Actual Narrative

There's no sign that the New York Times has any regrets about becoming a crude propaganda organ, but just in case someone is listening inside "the newspaper of record," let's reprise the actual narrative of the Ukraine crisis. It began not last spring, as the Times would have you believe, but rather in fall 2013 when President Yanukovich was evaluating the cost of an EU association agreement if it required an economic break with Russia.

This part of the narrative was well explained by Der Spiegel, the German newsmagazine, even though it has generally taken a harshly anti-Russian line. But, in a retrospective piece published a year after the crisis began, Der Spiegel acknowledged that EU and German leaders were guilty of miscalculations that contributed to the civil war in Ukraine, particularly by under-appreciating the enormous financial costs to Ukraine if it broke its historic ties to Russia.

In November 2013, Yanukovich learned from experts at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine that the total cost to the country's economy from severing its business connections to Russia would be around \$160 billion, 50 times the \$3 billion figure that the EU had estimated, Der Spiegel reported.

The figure stunned Yanukovich, who pleaded for financial help that the EU couldn't provide, the magazine said. Western loans would have to come from the International Monetary Fund, which was demanding painful "reforms" of Ukraine's economy, structural changes that would make the hard lives of average Ukrainians even harder, including raising the price of natural gas by 40 percent and devaluing Ukraine's currency, the hryvnia, by 25 percent.

With Putin offering a more generous aid package of \$15 billion, Yanukovich backed out of the EU agreement but told the EU's Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, on Nov. 28, 2013, that he was willing to continue negotiating. German Chancellor Angela Merkel responded with "a sentence dripping with disapproval and cool sarcasm aimed directly at the Ukrainian president. 'I feel like I'm at a wedding where the groom has suddenly issued new, last minute stipulations,'" according to Der Spiegel's chronology of the crisis.

After the collapse of the EU deal, U.S. neocons went to work on one more "regime change" this time in Ukraine using the popular disappointment in western Ukraine over the failed EU agreement as a way to topple Yanukovich, the constitutionally elected president whose political base was in eastern Ukraine.

Assistant Secretary of State Nuland, a prominent neocon holdover who advised Vice President Dick Cheney, passed out cookies to anti-Yanukovich demonstrators

at the Maidan Square in Kiev and reminded Ukrainian business leaders that the United States had invested \$5 billion in their “European aspirations.”

Sen. McCain, who seems to want war pretty much everywhere, joined Ukrainian rightists onstage at the Maidan urging on the protests, and Gershman’s U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy deployed its Ukrainian political/media operatives in support of the disruptions. As early as September 2013, the NED president had identified Ukraine as “the biggest prize” and an important step toward toppling Putin in Russia. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Neocons’ Ukraine-Syria-Iran Gambit.”](#)]

By early February 2014, Nuland was [telling](#) U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt “fuck the EU” and discussing how to “glue this thing” as she handpicked who the new leaders of Ukraine would be; “Yats is the guy,” she said about Arseniy Yatsenyuk.

As violent disorders at the Maidan grew worse with well-organized neo-Nazi militias hurling firebombs at police the State Department and U.S. news media blamed Yanukovich. On Feb. 20, when mysterious snipers apparently firing from positions controlled by the neo-Nazi Right Sektor shot to death police officers and protesters, the situation spun out of control and the American press again blamed Yanukovich.

Though Yanukovich signed a Feb. 21 agreement with three European countries accepting reduced powers and early elections, that was not enough for the coup-makers. On Feb. 22, a putsch, spearheaded by neo-Nazi militias, forced Yanukovich and his officials to flee for their lives.

Remarkably, however, when the Times pretended to review this history in a January 2015 article, the Times ignored the extraordinary evidence of a U.S.-backed coup including the scores of NED political projects, McCain’s cheerleading and Nuland’s plotting. The Times simply informed its readers that there was no coup. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“NYT Still Pretends No Coup in Ukraine.”](#)]

But the Times’ propaganda on Ukraine is not just wretched journalism, it is also a dangerous ingredient in what could become a nuclear confrontation, if Americans come to believe a false narrative and thus go along with more provocative actions by their political leaders who, in turn, might feel compelled to act tough because otherwise they’d be attacked as “soft.”

In other words, even without computers seizing control of man’s nuclear weapons, man himself might blunder into a nuclear Armageddon, driven not by artificial intelligence but a lack of the human kind.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). 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](#).

Flattering the Dead Saudi King

Though Saudi King Abdullah was a repressive leader at home who contributed to political and sectarian violence across the Middle East, his death is mourned by Western leaders who were dependent on his vast ocean of oil and his vaults full of money, as Sam Hussein explains.

By Sam Hussein

Many are voicing surprise at the comments of International Monetary Fund head Christine Lagarde following the death of the Saudi monarch: "He was a great leader. He implemented lots of reforms, at home, and in a very discreet way, he was a great advocate for woman. It was very gradual, appropriately so probably for the country, but I discussed that issue with him several times and he was a strong believer."

After a reporter expressed surprise that a woman would say that, Lagarde added: "Very often, Saudi Arabia is portrayed as a place where women do not play quite the same role." The last sentence hasn't been seriously scrutinized, but it should be.

"Quite the same role" is a remarkable way to describe a country that has a system of male guardianship. But I think it's noteworthy that the source of the comments was hardly some random woman. It was the head of the IMF, an international financial institution purported to aid the global development but that is frequently criticized as doing the bidding of the rich and powerful – such as the major U.S. and European banks.

And, like a good managing director, Lagarde is probably on the lookout for more funding for the IMF, it's not straightforward to find out how much the Saudis have already ponied up. But once again, we see here the emptiness – even on the most limited basis – of a shallow diversity that seeks to put a woman or African American in a prominent position while maintaining incredibly oppressive power

dynamics.

Back in 2011, when the Arab uprisings were in their seemingly promising first year, I vigorously questioned Saudi Ambassador Turki al-Faisal about the legitimacy of the Saudi regime. I did this because I could see what was happening: The uprisings were taking root – and deforming into violent proxy wars – in secular states (Libya and Syria), which were at times somewhat critical of the U.S. establishment – while the pro-U.S. establishment regimes, largely monarchies like Saudi Arabia, were getting let off the hook.

Those repressive monarchies would therefore be able to mold events in the formerly secular states. Democracy, equality and the voice of the people would not be on their list of goals. So, when he came to the National Press Club, I asked Prince Turki what the legitimacy of the Saudi regime was. I was immediately suspended from the Press Club for my actions, though that was withdrawn by the Club's Ethics Committee some ten days later.

I was very gratified for having received support from a good number of people during my suspension, but one unfortunate aspect of the suspension is that it drew attention away from what Turki said in our exchange. His first line of defense to my questioning the legitimacy of the regime was this: "I don't need to justify my country's legitimacy. We're participants in all of the international organizations and we contribute to the welfare of people through aid program not just directly from Saudi Arabia but through all the international agencies that are working throughout the world to provide help and support for people."

I thus wrote at the time: "Turki's response that Saudi Arabia gets legitimacy because of its aid programs is an interesting notion. Is he arguing that by giving aid to other countries and to international organizations that the Saudi regime has somehow purchased legitimacy, and perhaps immunity from criticism, that it would otherwise not have received?"

This is worth journalists and independent organizations pursuing." I suspect that that's exactly what we're seeing manifested in Lagarde's comments. Some have noted aspects of the collusion between international financial institutions like the IMF and the Saudis, see for example, Adam Hanieh's piece "Egypt's Orderly Transition? International Aid and the Rush to Structural Adjustment."

Too often in poor countries around the world, the form of "development" that's funded is a collusion between what the IMF wants and what states like Saudi Arabia want. Not exactly a prescription for fostering meaningful democratic development. But an excellent example of back-scratching between elites. Really, a manifestation of my first law of politics: the powers collude and the people

get screwed (and not in a good way).

The relativistic part of Lagarde's comment – “appropriately so probably for the country” – also echoed Turki: “After how many years since the establishment of the United States did women get to vote in the United States? Does that mean that before they got the vote that United States was an illegitimate country?”

Indeed, my questioning of Turki was cut off when I tried to follow up with “So are you saying that Arabs are inherently backward?” – that they should be 100 years behind the U.S.? Though perhaps the most amusing part of Turki's comments about women was not in response to me, but the obsequious question that followed mine – asked by a worshiping female – where he refers to a “colleague” being “a woman as you can see.” The initial media wave of calling King Abdullah a “reformer” has brought on some minimal backlash. But it's largely constrained to domestic issues.

The geopolitical threats to democracy and peace are even more daunting – and full of myth. Saudi Arabia has been a center of counter-revolution and worse in Arab countries. The Tunisian dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia, as did the Yemeni dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh for a time. The Saudi regime reportedly tried to prevent the Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak from stepping down. Saudi Arabia moved into Bahrain to stop a democratic uprising there.

But much of its power is more indirect – for example, through a sizable media infrastructure that highlighted uprisings in secular republics and ignored democratic moves in monarchies.

All this has totally deformed the Arab uprisings the last four years, leading to horrific civil wars and the prospect of wider wars – and it was foreseeable, which is why I and others sought to challenge it from the beginning.

On the U.S.-Saudi relationship, now, the Harvard Political Review tells us: “The partnership was straightforward: Saudi Arabia provided special access to oil for the United States, and in return the superpower developed military installations across Saudi Arabia to advance mutual security goals.”

In fact, it was not about “access” to oil as Noam Chomsky has noted, but about control of oil, as well as investment in Western banks, not in real regional or global development. As Eqbal Ahmed was fond of asking: How did the wealth of the Mideast get separated from the people of the region?

The Saudi regime paved the way for the U.S.'s wars against Iraq and elsewhere, postured as helping the Palestinians while in a tacit alliance with the equally hypocritical Israelis. Saudi regime fosters violent al-Qaeda type violent

extremism and its U.S. violent mirror image.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the U.S. backed the Saudis to undermine Egypt's Nasser and slay the prospect of pan-Arabism. Robert Dreyfuss has written: "Choosing Saudi Arabia over Nasser's Egypt was probably the single biggest mistake the United States has ever made in the Middle East."

Though "mistake" is probably wrong – it has benefited elites tremendously at the expense of people in Arab countries, the U.S. and around the world. Liberals love making much of the Bush-Saudi connection, which is true enough, but the Saudi-U.S. bond was forged by the great liberal Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Shortly after World War I, the British Foreign Secretary "Lord" Curzon spelled out British aims: "Arab faÅšade ruled and administered under British guidance and controlled by a native Mohammedan and, as far as possible, by an Arab staff."

So, similarly to Lagarde's comments, how could any person awake to global dynamics be surprised by the sorrow from elites in the U.S. or that the British flag should be at half-mast with the passing of so useful a native?

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