

Nuclear War and Clashing Ukraine Narratives

Exclusive: America and Russia have two nearly opposite narratives on Ukraine, which is more an indictment of the U.S. news media which feigns objectivity but disseminates what amounts to propaganda. These divergent narratives are driving the world toward a possible nuclear crisis, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The U.S. government and mainstream media are swaggering toward a possible nuclear confrontation with Russia over Ukraine without any of the seriousness that has informed this sort of decision-making throughout the nuclear age. Instead, Official Washington seems possessed by a self-righteous goofiness that could be the prelude to the end of life on this planet.

Nearly across the U.S. political spectrum, there is a pugnacious “group think” which has transformed what should have been a manageable political dispute in Ukraine into some morality play where U.S. politicians and pundits blather on about how the nearly year-old coup regime in Kiev “shares our values” and how America must be prepared to defend this regime militarily.

Though I’m told that President Barack Obama personally recognizes how foolhardy this attitude is, he has made no significant move to head off the craziness and, indeed, has tolerated provocative actions by his underlings, such as neocon Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland’s scheming with coup plotters to overthrow Ukraine’s elected President Viktor Yanukovich last February.

Obama also has withheld from the American people intelligence information that undercuts some of the more extreme claims that his administration has made. For instance, I’m told that he has detailed intelligence reporting on both the mysterious sniper attack that preceded the putsch nearly a year ago and the shoot-down of the Malaysia Airlines Flights 17 that deepened the crisis last summer. But he won’t release the findings.

More broadly over the last year, Obama’s behavior ranging from his initial neglect of the Ukraine issue, as Nuland’s coup plotting unfolded, to his own participation in the tough talk, such as boasting during his State of the Union address that he had helped put the Russian economy “in tatters” ranks as one of the most irresponsible performances by a U.S. president.

Given the potential stakes of nuclear war, none of the post-World War II presidents behaved as recklessly as Obama has, which now includes allowing his administration officials to talk loosely about sending military support to an

unstable regime in Kiev that includes neo-Nazis who have undertaken death-squad operations against ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine.

U.S. Gen. Philip Breedlove, who is commander of NATO, declared last November that regarding supplying military support for the Kiev government "nothing at this time is off the table." Breedlove is now pushing actively to send lethal U.S. military equipment to fend off an offensive by ethnic Russian rebels in the east.

I'm told that the Russians fear that U.S. officials are contemplating placing Cruise missiles in Ukraine or otherwise introducing advanced weaponry that Moscow regards as a direct threat to its national security. Whether or not the Russians are being alarmist, these fears are affecting their own decision-making.

None of the nuclear-age presidents not Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton or even George W. Bush would have engaged in such provocative actions on Russia's borders, though some surely behaved aggressively in overthrowing governments and starting wars farther away.

Even Ronald Reagan, an aggressive Cold Warrior, kept his challenges to the Soviet Union in areas that were far less sensitive to its national security than Ukraine. He may have supported the slaughter of leftists in Central America and Africa or armed Islamic fundamentalists fighting a Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan, but he recognized the insanity of a military showdown with Moscow in Eastern Europe.

After the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, U.S. presidents became more assertive, pushing NATO into the former Warsaw Pact nations and, under President Clinton, bombing a Russian ally in Serbia, but that came at a time when Russia was essentially flat on its back geopolitically.

Perhaps the triumphalism of that period is still alive especially among neocons who reject President Vladimir Putin's reassertion of Russia's national pride. These Washington hardliners still feel that they can treat Moscow with disdain, ignoring the fact that Russia maintains a formidable nuclear arsenal and is not willing to return to the supine position of the 1990s.

In 2008, President George W. Bush arguably one of the most reckless presidents of the era backed away from a confrontation with Russia when Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, a neocon favorite, drew the Russians into a border conflict over South Ossetia. Despite some war talk from the likes of Vice President Dick Cheney and Sen. John McCain, President Bush showed relative restraint.

Imbalanced Narrative

But Obama has failed to rein in his administration's war hawks and has done nothing to correct the biased narrative that his State Department has fed to the equally irresponsible mainstream U.S. news media. Since the Ukraine crisis began in fall of 2013, the New York Times and other major U.S. news outlets have provided only one side of the story, openly supporting the interests of the pro-European western Ukrainians over the ethnic Russian eastern Ukrainians.

The bias is so strong that the mainstream media has largely ignored the remarkable story of the Kiev regime willfully dispatching Nazi storm troopers to kill ethnic Russians in the east, something that hasn't happened in Europe since World War II.

For Western news organizations that are quick to note the slightest uptick in neo-Nazism in Europe, there has been a willful blindness to Kiev's premeditated use of what amount to Nazi death squads undertaking house-to-house killings in eastern Ukraine. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Seeing No Neo-Nazi Militias in Ukraine.](#)"]

The Russian government has repeatedly protested these death-squad operations and other crimes committed by the Kiev regime, but the U.S. mainstream media is so in the tank for the western Ukrainians that it has suppressed this aspect of the crisis, typically burying references to the neo-Nazi militias at the end of stories or dismissing these accounts as "Russian propaganda."

With this ugly reality hidden from the U.S. public, Obama's State Department has been able to present a white-hat-vs.-black-hat narrative to the crisis. So, while Russians saw a constitutionally elected government on their border overthrown by a U.S.-backed coup last February and then human rights atrocities inflicted on ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine the American people heard only about wonderful pro-American "reformers" in Kiev and the evil pro-Russian "minions" trying to destroy "democracy" at Putin's bidding.

This distorted American narrative has represented one of the most unprofessional and dangerous performances in the history of modern U.S. journalism, rivaling the false conventional wisdom about Iraq's WMD except in this case the media propaganda is aimed at a country in Russia that really does have weapons of mass destruction.

The Russians also have noted the arrival of financially self-interested Americans, including Vice President Joe Biden's son Hunter Biden and Ukraine's new Finance Minister Natalie Jaresko, reminding the Russians of the American financial experts who descended on Moscow with their "shock therapy" in the

1990s, “reforms” that enriched a few well-connected oligarchs but impoverished millions of average Russians.

Jaresko, a former U.S. diplomat who took Ukrainian citizenship in December 2014 to become Finance Minister, had been in charge of a U.S.-taxpayer-financed \$150 million Ukrainian investment fund which involved substantial insider dealings, including paying a management firm that Jaresko created more than \$1 million a year in fees, even as the \$150 million apparently dwindled to less than \$100 million.

Jaresko also has been involved in a two-year-long legal battle with her ex-husband to gag him from releasing information about apparent irregularities in the handling of the U.S. money. Jaresko went into Chancery Court in Delaware to enforce a non-disclosure clause against her ex-husband, Ihor Figlus, and got a court order to silence him.

This week, when I contacted George Pazuniak, Figlus’s lawyer about Jaresko’s aggressive enforcement of the non-disclosure agreement, he told me that “at this point, it’s very difficult for me to say very much without having a detrimental effect on my client.”

With Jaresko now being hailed as a Ukrainian “reformer” who in the words of New York Times’ columnist Thomas L. Friedman “shares our values,” one has to wonder why she has fought so hard to shut up her ex-husband regarding possible revelations about improper handling of U.S. taxpayer money. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Ukraine’s Made-in-USA Finance Minister.”]

More Interested Parties

The Russians also looked askance at the appointment of Estonian Jaanika Merilo as the latest foreigner to be brought inside the Ukrainian government as a “reformer.” Merilo, a Jaresko associate, is being put in charge of attracting foreign investments but her photo spreads look more like someone interested in some rather kinky partying.

The Russians are aware, too, of prominent Americans circling around the potential plunder of Ukraine. For instance, Hunter Biden was named to the board of directors of Burisma Holdings, Ukraine’s largest private gas firm. Burisma is also a shadowy Cyprus-based company linked to Privat Bank.

Privat Bank is controlled by the thuggish billionaire oligarch Ihor Kolomoysky, who was appointed by the Kiev regime to be governor of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, a south-central province of Ukraine. Kolomoysky has helped finance the paramilitary forces killing ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine.

And, Burisma has been lining up well-connected lobbyists, some with ties to Secretary of State John Kerry, including Kerry's former Senate chief of staff David Leiter, according to lobbying disclosures. As Time magazine reported, "Leiter's involvement in the firm rounds out a power-packed team of politically-connected Americans that also includes a second new board member, Devon Archer, a Democratic bundler and former adviser to John Kerry's 2004 presidential campaign. Both Archer and Hunter Biden have worked as business partners with Kerry's son-in-law, Christopher Heinz, the founding partner of Rosemont Capital, a private-equity company." [See Consortiumnews.com's "The Whys Behind the Ukraine Crisis."]

So, the Russians have a decidedly different view of the Ukrainian "reforms" than much of the U.S. media does. But I'm told that the Russians would be willing to tolerate these well-connected Americans enriching themselves in Ukraine and even having Ukraine expand its economic relations with the European Union.

But the Russians have drawn a red line at the prospect for the expansion of NATO forces into Ukraine and the continued killing of ethnic Russians at the hands of neo-Nazi death squads. Putin is demanding that those paramilitary forces be disarmed.

Besides unleashing these right-wing militias on the ethnic Russians, the Kiev government has moved to punish the people living in the eastern sectors by cutting off access to banks and other financial services. It also has become harder and more dangerous for ethnic Russians to cross into territory controlled by the Kiev authorities. Many are turned back and those who do get through face the risk of being taken and killed by the neo-Nazi militias.

These conditions have left the people in the Donetsk and Luhansk areas the so-called Donbass region on Russia's border dependent on relief supplies from Russia. Meanwhile, the Kiev regime – pumped up by prospects of weapons from Washington as well as more money – has toughened its tone with vows to crush the eastern rebellion once and for all.

Russia's Hardening Line

The worsening situation in the east and the fear of U.S. military weapons arriving in the west have prompted a shift in Moscow's view of the Ukraine crisis, including a readiness to resupply the ethnic Russian forces in eastern Ukraine and even provide military advisers.

These developments have alarmed European leaders who find themselves caught in the middle of a possible conflict between the United States and Russia. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande rushed to Kiev

and then Moscow this week to discuss possible ways to defuse the crisis.

The hardening Russian position now seeks, in effect, a division of Ukraine into two autonomous zones, the east and the west with a central government that maintains the currency and handles other national concerns. But I'm told that Moscow might still accept the earlier idea of a federated Ukraine with greater self-governance by the different regions.

Putin also does not object to Ukraine building closer economic ties to Europe and he offered a new referendum in Crimea on whether the voters still want to secede from Ukraine and join Russia, said a source familiar with the Kremlin's thinking. But Putin's red lines include no NATO expansion into Ukraine and protection for ethnic Russians by disarming the neo-Nazi militias, the source said.

If such an arrangement or something similar isn't acceptable and if the killing of ethnic Russians continues, the Kremlin would support a large-scale military offensive from the east that would involve "taking Kiev," according to the source.

A Russian escalation of that magnitude would likely invite a vigorous U.S. response, with leading American politicians and pundits sure to ratchet up demands for a military counterstrike against Russia. If Obama were to acquiesce to such bellicosity to avoid being called "weak" the world could be pushed to the brink of nuclear war.

Who's to Blame?

Though the State Department and the mainstream U.S. media continue to put all the blame on Russia, the fact that the Ukraine crisis has reach such a dangerous crossroads reveals how reckless the behavior of Official Washington has been over the past year.

Nuland and other U.S. officials took an internal Ukrainian disagreement over how quickly it should expand ties to Europe while seeking to retain its historic relations with Russia and turned that fairly pedestrian political dispute into a possible flashpoint for a nuclear war.

At no time, as this crisis has evolved over the past year, did anyone of significance in Official Washington, whether in government or media, stop and contemplate whether this issue was worth risking the end of life on the planet. Instead, all the American people have been given is a steady diet of anti-Yanukovich and anti-Putin propaganda.

Though constitutionally elected, Yanukovich was depicted as a corrupt tyrant who

had a pricy sauna in his official mansion. Though Putin had just staged the Winter Olympics in Sochi, signaling his desire for Russia to integrate more with the West, he was portrayed as either a new-age imperial czar or the second coming of Hitler if not worse because he occasionally would ride on a horse while not wearing a shirt.

Further, the U.S. news media refused to conduct a serious investigation into the evidence that Nuland and other U.S. officials had helped destabilize Yanukovych's government with the goal of achieving another neocon "regime change."

Nuland, who personally urged on anti-Yanukovych protests in Kiev, discussed with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt in early February 2014 who should lead the new government "Yats is the guy," she said, referring to Arseniy Yatsenyuk and how to "glue this thing."

After weeks of mounting tensions and worsening violence, the coup occurred on Feb. 22, 2014, when well-organized neo-Nazi and other right-wing militias from western Ukraine overran presidential buildings forcing officials to flee for their lives. With Yanukovych ousted, Yatsenyuk soon became Prime Minister. [See Consortiumnews.com's "When Is a Putsch a Putsch."]

Many ethnic Russians in southern and eastern Ukraine, who had strongly supported Yanukovych, refused to accept the new U.S.-backed order in Kiev. Crimean officials and voters moved to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia, a move that Putin accepted because of Crimea's historic ties to Russia and his fear that the Russian naval base at Sevastopol might be handed to NATO.

The resistance spread to eastern Ukraine where other ethnic Russians took up arms against the coup regime in Kiev, which responded with that it called an "anti-terrorist operation" against the east. To bolster the weak Ukrainian army, Internal Affairs Minister Arsen Avakov dispatched neo-Nazi and other "volunteer" militias to spearhead the attacks.

After the deaths of more than 5,000 people, a shaky cease-fire was announced in September, but – amid complaints about neo-Nazi death squads operating in government-controlled areas and with life deteriorating in rebel-controlled towns and cities – the ethnic Russians launched an offensive in January, using Russian-supplied weapons to expand their control of territory.

In reaction, U.S. pundits, including columnists and editors of the New York Times and the Washington Post, called for dispatching U.S. aid to the Kiev forces, including proposals for lethal weaponry to deter Putin's "aggression." Members of Congress and members of the Obama administration have joined the

chorus.

On Feb. 2, the New York Times reported “With Russian-backed separatists pressing their attacks in Ukraine, NATO’s military commander, Gen. Philip M. Breedlove, now supports providing defensive weapons and equipment to Kiev’s beleaguered forces, and an array of administration and military officials appear to be edging toward that position, American officials said. President Obama has made no decisions on providing such lethal assistance.”

That same day, the lead Times editorial was entitled “Mr. Putin Resumes His War” and continued with the theme about “Russian aggression” and the need “to increase the cost” if Russia demands “a permanent rebel-held enclave.”

On Feb. 3, the Washington Post ran an editorial entitled “Help for Ukraine. Defensive weapons could deter Russia in a way sanctions won’t.” The editorial concluded that Putin “will stop only if the cost to his regime is sharply raised and quickly.”

A new war fever gripped Washington and no one wanted to be viewed as “soft” or to be denounced as a “Putin apologist.” Amid this combination of propaganda, confusion and tough-guy-ism and lacking the tempering wisdom about war and nuclear weapons that restrained earlier U.S. presidents a momentum lurched toward a nuclear showdown over Ukraine that could put all life on earth in jeopardy.

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.
