

Clapper's Unhinged Russia-Bashing

Exclusive: Russia-gate's credibility rests heavily on ex-Director of National Intelligence Clapper who oversaw a "trust us" report, but a recent speech shows Clapper to be unhinged about Russia, as David Marks describes.

By David Marks

Whatever the ultimate truth about the murky Russia-gate affair, it appears that it is Donald Trump's willingness to consider friendship and cooperation with the Russians that is driving this emotional debate.

For some of the older U.S. intelligence and military officers, there appears to be a residual distrust and fear of Moscow, a hangover from the Cold War now transferred, perhaps almost subliminally, into the New Cold War and a sense that Russia is America's eternal enemy.

James Clapper, President Obama's last Director of National Intelligence, is a fascinating example of how this antagonism toward Russia never seems to change, as he revealed in [a June 7 speech](#) to the Australian National Press Club.

"The Russians are not our friends; they, (Putin specifically) are avowedly opposed to our democracy and values, and see us as the cause of all their frustrations," Clapper declared.

In reaching that harsh judgment, Clapper ignored the U.S. government's own role in the mounting tensions – expanding NATO to Russia's borders, renouncing the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, and locating new missile bases in Eastern Europe. Instead, Clapper blamed the renewed arms race and resulting tensions on the Russians:

"The Russians are embarked on a very aggressive and disturbing program to modernize their strategic forces – notably their submarine and land-based nuclear forces. They have also made big investments in their counter-space capabilities. They do all this – despite their economic challenges – with only one adversary in mind: the United States. And, just for good measure, they are also in active violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty."

That Clapper would offer such a one-sided account of the reasons behind the worsening antagonisms and the emerging arms race – leaving out the fact that the United States, despite its own budgetary and economic problems, spends about ten times more on its military than Russia does – suggests that he is not an objective witness on anything regarding Russia.

A Shrill Voice

Clapper's shrill voice confirms his cold-warrior perspective, caught in the past but applying his thinking to the present, still believing that he has a special understanding of America's interests and is protecting them. Clearly, the Russians have been at the center of Clapper's frustrations for many years and Russia-gate just gives him the opportunity to rekindle anti-Moscow hysteria.

Clapper is repeating with new gusto what he has sold to recent presidents, Republicans and Democrats, for decades. His entire attack on Trump beats the drum of Russian deviousness. Yet, Clapper ignores the context of the Russians actions.

Way ahead of the Russians, the U.S. intelligence community mastered computer hacking and mounted the first known software attack on a country's strategic infrastructure by – along with Israel – unleashing the Stuxnet cyber-attack against Iranian centrifuges. U.S. intelligence also has a long record of subverting elections and toppling elected leaders, both before and since the computer age.

But Clapper only sees evil in Russia, even during the 1990s when the U.S. government advisers and American political operatives were propping up President Boris Yeltsin amid the rapacious privatizing of Russia's industries and resources, which made Russian oligarchs and their U.S. advisers very rich.

Clapper said, "Interestingly, every one of the non-acting Prime Ministers of Russia since 1992 has come from one of two domains: the oil and gas sector, or the security services. To put this in perspective, and as I have pointed out to U.S. audiences, suppose the last ten presidents of the U.S. were either CIA officers, or the Chairman of Exxon-Mobil. I think this gives you some insight into the dominant mind-set of the Russian government."

With such remarks, Clapper acts as if he doesn't know much about recent U.S. government staffing, which has been dominated by people with backgrounds in the oil industry, leading Wall Street banks, and the intelligence community. Indeed, the man who brought Clapper from Air Force intelligence into the White House was President George H.W. Bush, former director of the CIA *and* an oil company executive.

Bush's son, George W., also came from the oil industry, as did his Vice President Dick Cheney. Meanwhile, both Republican and Democratic administrations have filled senior economic policy positions from the ranks of Goldman Sachs and other Wall Street investment banks. And the U.S. intelligence community has wielded broad power over the few recent U.S. presidents, such as Barack Obama,

who came into the White House with more limited government and private-sector experience.

Clapper, having been a senior executive for Booz Allen Hamilton, knows full well that giant intelligence contractors have a powerful influence in how they serve U.S. interests with an eye to profiteering from conflict. And along with Clapper, other White House advisers drift between intelligence contractors and government.

It's also true that a U.S. president doesn't need to have previous employment within the oil sector to do its bidding. Considering the influence of the millions spent on campaign donations and lobbying by the industry, the U.S. government is easily wed to oil and gas – as well as to the military and intelligence complex – at least as much as the Russian government. Indeed, the current Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, was the Chairman and CEO of Exxon Mobil.

Classic Projection

Clapper's perception of the Russians as evil for allegedly practicing the same sins as the U.S. government exemplifies classic projection of the highest order.

In case after case, Clapper justifies painting darkness onto the Russians with half the data, while ignoring the information that cancels out his perspective. Perhaps he is representative of many in Washington who have lost their rationality and morality in defense of the greatness of the United States. His ethics become situational.

As Director of National Intelligence, Clapper lied to Congress in 2013 about the National Security Agency's massive gathering of private data from Americans. Clapper's deception gave the final push to Edward Snowden who revealed the truth about NSA surveillance.

Subsequently, Clapper led the charge against Snowden, while excusing his own false congressional testimony by saying, "I responded in what I thought was the most truthful, or least untruthful, manner."

Despite this history, the U.S. mainstream media has treated Clapper as a great truth-teller as he adds ever more fuel to the Russia-gate fires. From his Australian speech, most news outlets highlighted his best news-bite, when he declared: "Watergate pales, really, in my view compared to what we're confronting now."

Like other powerful government officials, Clapper may think it is his duty to a higher cause that allows him to defy the truth and transcend the law, a classic

symptom of the *super-patriot* who thinks he knows best what's good for America, a dangerous creature that the U.S. government seems to produce in quantity.

In that sense, Clapper has played a central role in Russia-gate. He was the official who oversaw the key Jan. 6 report on alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election. After promising much public evidence, he released a report that amounted to "trust us."

Clapper has since been a star congressional witness pushing Russia-gate and his confidence in Putin's guilt. But Clapper did acknowledge that the Jan. 6 report – besides containing no actual evidence – was prepared by "handpicked" analysts from the CIA, NSA and FBI, not from a consensus of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies as had been widely reported.

So, as we listen to the debate on Russia-gate, Clapper and his fellow national-security-state representatives are revealing not just their political perspectives but deeply disturbed minds. Those who angrily criticize the Russians are completely blind to their own participation in a similar destructive process. They perceive themselves as the cure when they are a primary cause of the illness they denounce.

In 1956, in the *Undiscovered Self*, the eminent psychiatrist Carl Jung wrote about the state of the human mind and how it affected the political world: "And just as the typical neurotic is unconscious of his shadow side, so the normal individual, like the neurotic, sees his shadow in his neighbor or in the man beyond the great divide. It has even become a political and social duty to apostrophize the capitalism of one and the communism of the other as the very devil, so to fascinate the outward eye and prevent it from looking at the individual life within. ..."

"We are again living in an age filled with apocalyptic images of universal destruction. What is the significance of that split, symbolized by the Iron Curtain, which divides humanity into two halves? What will become of our civilization and man himself, if the hydrogen bombs begin to go off, or if the spiritual and moral darkness of State absolutism should spread?"

Jung's words still ring with foreboding truth.

David Marks is a veteran documentary filmmaker and investigative reporter. His work includes films for the BBC and PBS, including *Nazi Gold*, on the role of Switzerland in WWII and biographies of Jimi Hendrix and Frank Sinatra.

Sorting Out Ukraine Conflict's History

Exclusive: The U.S. mainstream media's narrative of the Ukraine crisis – hailing the 2014 Maidan uprising and blaming the ensuing conflict on Russia – is facing challenge in some early historical accounts, writes James W. Carden.

By James W. Carden

While the good folks of the Washington establishment have been keeping themselves busy trying to invent new ways to cripple and delegitimize the presidency of Donald J. Trump, the war in Ukraine, now entering its fourth year, has, of late, gone largely unremarked upon.

Yet it continues. A report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published on June 13 finds that over the past three months there have been ceasefire violations committed by both parties to the conflict. According to the report, the “routine use of small arms and light and heavy weapons in the conflict zone” has resulted in “damage to critical infrastructure, including schools, hospitals and water facilities.” To date, over 10,000 people, including roughly 3,000 civilians, have been killed since the conflict began in 2014.

This past February marked the three-year anniversary of Euro-Maidan uprising, which saw Ukraine's democratically elected President Viktor Yanukovich overthrown and replaced by a pro-Western coalition government made up of his political opponents.

As the drama played out, a small but influential coterie of Western journalists, who had previously shown themselves susceptible to the charms of regime-change wars, by and large shaped what became the mainstream narrative of the Ukraine crisis.

The narrative boils down to this: had it not been for the actions of Vladimir Putin following the glories of the Euro-Maidan protests, Ukraine would have, peacefully and in due course, joined the European family of nations. But Putin, so the story goes, was infuriated that Ukraine rejected his vision of a neo-Soviet Eurasian Economic Union, and took revenge by annexing Crimea. Having stolen Crimea, Putin then turned his sights on the Russophone eastern part of Ukraine where forces under his control have been waging “hybrid war” ever since.

It is often said, that journalism – especially the version coming from The New York Times, The Washington Post and other mainstream newspapers – serves as the “first draft” of history. And, if that is true, the mainstream narrative of

Ukraine's post-Maidan innocence and Russian perfidy sums up the "first draft" in a nutshell. Since then, that first draft has evolved into a second draft published by big-name authors, such as *Imperial Gamble* by Marvin Kalb, a former Moscow bureau chief for NBC News. Ambitious in scope, Kalb's book reflects the widely held, but erroneous, view that Putin's Russia was the principal driver of the crisis and subsequent war.

A Mixed Bag

To his credit, every now and then Kalb breaks free from the Official Washington narrative. Describing the neo-fascist flavor of the Maidan protests, Kalb writes that a number of far-right groups who were increasingly at the center of the action "would have made the Nazi-era Gestapo look like a happy band of bigots and bandits."

Kalb, unlike many of his peers in the think tank community (Kalb is a nonresident fellow at the Brookings Institution) also notes with distaste that a leader of the neo-Nazi Azov battalion was named chief of police in post-Maidan Kiev. "Instead of reining in far-right militias," writes Kalb, Kiev "has actually been providing them with tanks and armored personnel carriers."

Kalb is equally clear-eyed about the tactics that Ukraine's new leaders employed to garner Western aid. "A number of unethical Ukrainian politicians" seem to have found the magic formula, which, according to Kalb, is this: "bedazzle the West into believing that Ukraine is a vital strategic asset in a continuing East-West struggle between democracy and autocracy, between freedom and oppression..."

Toward the end of *Imperial Gamble*, Kalb begins to sound a lot like a foreign policy realist, writing that because Putin holds all the cards in the Ukraine crisis, the current president of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, "will have to accept the best deal he can get." Indeed, Kalb flirts with outright apostasy when he concludes that "any real solution to the current crisis must first satisfy the interests of Russia and then those of Ukraine."

Yet for all of its strengths, Kalb's account is marred by problems both large and small. First, there are the factual errors. Describing the aftermath of Yanukovich's decision not to sign the European Union Association Agreement (AA) in November 2013, Kalb writes that "hundreds of thousands of disenchanted Ukrainians rushed to the streets" and "days later" Yanukovich fled.

In fact, most accounts put the initial number of Maidan protesters at around a 2,000 or so, while Yanukovich did not flee "days later" – he fled three months later on Feb. 22, 2014, after weeks of increasingly violent riots, which led to

the deaths of more than a dozen police and scores of protesters.

Exaggerated Claims

Kalb writes that on Feb. 23, "Crimea was about to change ownership. Eastern Ukraine was about to descend into civil war." Yet the civil war did not begin until April 6. After Crimea held a referendum to secede from Ukraine and join Russia in March 2014, Kalb writes that the anti-Maidan rallies that took place in Donetsk, Kharkiv, Luhansk, Maiupol and Odessa were "instigated by Moscow and organized by Russian special forces in the region" – a claim he makes repeatedly throughout the book.

Yet as the University of Ottawa's Paul Robinson points out, "the idea that Russian special forces were active as far as Kharkiv and Odessa is quite unsubstantiated."

Kalb often asserts things for which there is precious little evidence. Readers are informed that "historians in Putin's Russia no longer adhered to the standards of objective scholarship." Of Putin's allegedly longstanding plan to retake Crimea, Kalb writes, "Putin circled Crimea on an imaginary map. Here Russia would act."

Kalb writes that "Putin lives in a strange corner of the Kremlin where fear and hubris coexist in an awkward embrace" and where, presumably, he hatches his plans for world domination. And he is a crusher of dissent. Kalb repeats the usual litany of abuses attributed to Putin: "He has tried to freeze political debate," "he approves the assassination of political critics," "he has been, without a doubt, the strongest Russian autocrat since Stalin, yet oddly, the most vulnerable."

Nor is that all. Putin, strong and vulnerable, is also "like a spoiled child" who "does not like being ignored or scolded." Yet delivering speeches in the Kremlin "does wonders for his ego." Indeed, Putin cannot "imagine life without an autocratic grip on political power."

Yet by the end of *Imperial Gamble*, Kalb suddenly strikes a note of caution, telling readers that "we should stop personalizing East-West differences, laying all our problems on Putin's shoulders." While true, this would've been a bit more convincing if the author hadn't spent the previous 100 pages doing just that.

A Glaring Flaw

Yet the book's most glaring flaw is its premise: that Russia is solely to blame for the crisis. As Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer point out in *Conflict in*

Ukraine, the idea that Russia caused the crisis “exemplifies the single factor fallacy.” Scrupulously even-handed, Menon and Rumer depart from Kalb’s analysis by identifying causes of the crisis other than those originating out of Moscow.

Moreover, whereas Kalb’s narrative is marred by errors and an over-reliance on hyperbole (calling post-coup Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk an “international superstar”) and cliché (on Feb. 22 “the earth shook”), *Conflict in Ukraine* is a crisply written overview of the crisis which serves as a successful rebuttal to the entrenched idea that the crisis was all Putin’s doing.

Another strength of Menon and Rumer’s offering is that it puts the crisis into the larger context of East-West relations. In addition to being a manifestation of the centuries-long divide within Ukraine, the crisis is also “a symptom of an even larger problem for Europe.” The inability of Western leaders to find a satisfactory answer to the problem of Russia’s place in Europe has been exacerbated by two separate, but related, issues.

The first has to do with NATO expansion. The original iteration of NATO was driven by a desire, in the words of NATO’s first Secretary-General, Lord Ismay, to “keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.” Menon and Rumer note that once the Cold War ended, NATO was robbed of its *raison d’être* and, in search of one, decided to expand both its membership and its writ. And so, between 1999 and 2009, NATO added 12 new members, expanding the alliance to Russia’s western border.

According to Menon and Rumer, the West’s decision to expand was met with “perplexity and resentment” in Russia. NATO’s expansion to Russia’s doorstep is, according to the University of Chicago’s John J. Mearsheimer, “the taproot of the current crisis.”

And indeed, the failure to build a sustainable post-Cold War security architecture lies at the heart of the crisis. Menon and Rumer note, “what was done for Germany in the 1950s was not done for Russia in the 1990s.” Still worse, to do so never even seemed to cross the minds of Western policymakers: NATO membership for Russia was “never seriously considered, and if it came up, it was only as a far-fetched, theoretical possibility.”

Downturn in Relations

If NATO expansion played a central role in the downturn in relations between Russia and the West, the role played by the European Union’s expansionist agenda has been no less significant. Menon and Rumer are particularly critical of the E.U.’s Eastern Partnership initiative (EaP), which, starting in 2009, sought to bring six former Soviet republics into the E.U.’s orbit. And it was Ukraine,

which was, as the neocon functionary Carl Gershman once put it “the biggest prize.”

Menon and Rumer demonstrate that the EaP was deeply flawed from the start. Given Ukraine’s importance to Russia, the idea that any Russian leader, no less Vladimir Putin, would countenance Ukraine’s absorption into the E.U. strikes the authors as fanciful.

The E.U.’s myopic focus on expansion caused its leadership to fail to see what should have been perfectly clear all along: that Moscow did not view E.U. membership for Ukraine as benign. It saw a “link” between E.U. membership and NATO membership. And in fact, there is a link: the Association Agreement’s *acquis communautaire* has specific foreign policy and security protocols embedded within it. Simply put: E.U. membership sets the stage for NATO membership.

Nevertheless, the E.U. continued down its perilous course, giving, according to Menon and Rumer, “little thought, if any at all, to how it would deal with the eventuality of Russian resistance.” Indeed, this apparent failure is nothing less than a manifestation of what the historian Richard Sakwa has described as the E.U.’s tendency toward “geopolitical nihilism.”

In *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*, a uniformly excellent treatment of the crisis and its attendant causes, Sakwa decries what he views as a reckless rush to isolate Russia from the rest of Europe. Sakwa’s bitingly describes the crisis as “a festival of irresponsibility.”

Two Views of Ukraine

Sakwa’s account is straightforward. According to Sakwa there are two aspects of the Ukraine crisis: internal and international. The internal crisis is marked by a division between those who see Ukraine as a “monolingual, culturally autonomous” state that should align itself with Europe and NATO, and those, primarily in the east, who believe the state should embrace ethnic and linguistic pluralism. For them, Ukraine is “an assemblage of different traditions” where Russian is recognized as an official language and economic and security ties with Russia are maintained.

According to Sakwa, the international aspect of the crisis stems from the unwelcome transformation of the E.U. from an institution which, in its early years “sought to transcend the logic of conflict” to one which is now functions as the “civilian wing” of NATO. Like Rumer and Menon, Sakwa decries the failure of Western policymakers to “establish a genuinely inclusive and equal security system” in the post-Cold War era.

While Sakwa places the bulk of the blame for the crisis on the hubris of the

E.U., in *Ukraine: Zbig's Grand Chessboard and How the West Was Checkmated*, Natylie Baldwin and Kermit Heartsong cast a gimlet eye on the role the U.S. has played in the crisis. Heartsong and Baldwin demonstrate that the project to wrest Ukraine out of Russia's orbit owes a great deal to the ideas of the late Zbigniew Brzezinski the neoconservative wing of the U.S. foreign policy establishment.

Baldwin and Heartsong's denunciation of U.S. foreign policy also serves as a primer on the roots of the conflict, which includes a detailed account of how the "color revolutions" of 2002-2009 served as a trial run for the events that later swept the Maidan. As the authors note, what was true for the first "color revolutions," holds for the Maidan today: despite lofty expectations, the revolutions "brought social, political, and economic suffering" in their wake.

The newest addition to the literature comes courtesy of the Dutch journalist Chris Kaspar de Ploeg, who refuses to go along with the mainstream Western narrative that has studiously ignored the ultra-nationalist, neo-fascist aspects of post-Maidan Ukraine. De Ploeg's *Ukraine in the Crossfire* is a deeply researched account that lets no one in this sordid drama off the hook. Hunter Biden's shady business dealings, Natalie Jaresko's greed, Victoria Nuland's imperial pretensions, and Petro Poroshenko's gross criminality are each given their due.

What makes De Ploeg's account particularly valuable is his detailed examination of the role of the far right in perpetuating not only the violence which racked the Maidan but in then launching a brutal war (the so-called "anti-terrorist operation") against the Russian-backed rebels and the civilian Russophone population of eastern and southern Ukraine. The atrocities carried out by neo-Nazi militias like Right Sector and the Azov battalion are glossed over in the Western press almost as a matter of course, but, as De Ploeg shows, ignoring their influence and reach makes a rational understanding of the conflict impossible.

Edmund Wilson once wrote that "it is all too easy to idealize a social upheaval which takes place in some other country than one's own." And this is an illusion that has plagued the mainstream narrative regarding the Ukrainian revolution from the start. Yet with the appearance of several of these titles, we can begin to discern a shift away from the triumphalist one-note narrative of the Ukraine crisis toward one which recognizes the complex reality of a crisis that is now in its fourth year.

James W. Carden served as an adviser on Russia policy at the US State Department. Currently a contributing writer at The Nation magazine, his work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times, Quartz, The American Conservative and The

National Interest. He has reported from both rebel- and government-held eastern Ukraine.
