

All Fire and Fury in Ukraine

Exclusive: The still decidedly volatile situation in Ukraine – resulting from another in a long line of U.S.-inspired regime changes that have destabilized the geopolitical landscape over the past few decades – is worth revisiting for a number of reasons. With the fourth anniversary of the coup just passed, the sudden, shock passing of veteran investigative journalist Robert Parry and Consortium News founder/editor also affords even greater impetus for doing so. This is especially given his incisive body of reportage on the crisis since 2014; the larger issue of America's worsening relationship with Russia; and the geopolitical implications going forward of these developments. Australian blogger Greg Maybury reports.

By Greg Maybury

A Shabby Deck of Political Cards

For those who haven't seen Ukraine on Fire (UOF), the Oliver Stone-produced documentary on the ongoing Ukrainian crisis, it is not overstating the case to say it's an essential historical document and one of the most important, insightful political documentaries of recent times. It may also be one of the most portentous.

Quite apart from the illuminating history lesson the film delivers as a backdrop to the current situation in one of Europe's most pivotal of battlegrounds, there are many takeaways from the film. To begin, it stands as a vital corrective of the disinformation, misinformation, evangelistic doublespeak, ersatz analysis, unadulterated agitprop, and plain old garden-variety groupthink that attended the public discourse on the events and developments in the country, and which ultimately framed most people's views of the situation. Needless to say, the messages and impressions conveyed by this ongoing, relentless 'psy-op' cum fake news onslaught still 'rules the roost' in most people's minds.

Further, the film's narrative is highly revealing in the manner in which the Western mainstream media (MSM) reported on the events surrounding the turmoil and conflict. In the process it showcases how much the perfidious thought contagion spread by the ever-nefarious neoconservatives and their fellow travelers the liberal interventionists infects U.S. foreign policy, along with



the foreign policies of America's assorted vassal states.

It underscores moreover Russia's seemingly inexhaustible forbearance with the U.S., which, sans any rational, coherent geopolitical basis for doing so, has been tested beyond reasonable endurance or expectation. This point is rendered especially palpable during the interviews Stone conducts with Russian president Vladimir Putin for UOF. (This is not to mention the actual The Putin Interviews).

At the same time UOF reveals again for those looking America's recidivistic predisposition for interfering in the affairs of other countries; this is an observation that's always been evident save for the most preternaturally ignorant, ideologically myopic, or imperially inclined. Given the present zeitgeist as reflected by the headline-hogging "soap-saga" of "Russia-gate" – buttressed by former CIA chief James Woolsey's whimsically smug concession recently that America interferes in other countries' affairs "only for a very good cause [and] in the interests of democracy" – this is a reality that cannot be overstated. This is especially so when there are all too few examples where anyone might point to America's interference actually serving the democratic interests (by any way *that* might be objectively measured) of any given country one might care to name.

The narrative encompassed by UOF is by extension a serious indictment on President Barack Obama's handling of the Ukraine situation and his role in the creation of this singularly unholy mess – a prime exemplar of just how chaotic, dysfunctional, indeed war-like, were in large part the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize winner's foreign policies. Ukraine on Fire attests unequivocally just how far removed the reality of Obama's tenure was from his campaign rhetoric.

More broadly, the disaster in Ukraine – as we'll see still a work in progress even now under his successor, someone who pledged to curtail this direction in U.S. policy making, a promise which in no small measure propelled him into the Oval Office – is one of many that will forever inform people's views of Number 44's shop-soiled legacy. As Eric Zuesse noted a year after the coup, Obama employed a tactic of,

"...attacking Russia by using fundamentalist and other conservative extremists in a given Russia-allied nation, so as to turn that...nation away from Russia, and toward America, and then of trying to crush these same right-wing extremists who've been so effective in defeating (or at least weakening) the pro-Russian leader in that Russia-allied country. This tactic leaves civil war and enormous bloodshed in the given formerly (or still) Russia-allied nation."

Three years after Zuesse made this comment, and over one year after Obama left

office, that situation to all intents prevails, with few harboring any optimism things are going to get better anytime soon. In fact ominously, quite the opposite scenario is unfolding.

Earlier this year, Gilbert Doctorow reported that a new draft law adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament and awaiting president Petro Poroshenko's signature, threatens to escalate the Ukrainian conflict into a full-blown war, pitting nuclear-armed Russia against the United States and NATO. "Due to dire economic conditions," Doctorow says, "Poroshenko and other government officials in Kiev have become deeply unpopular, and with diminished chances for electoral success may see war as politically advantageous."

As history indelibly reminds us, this is an all too frequently recurring scenario in the conduct of international affairs. In a statement that undercuts much of the furor over the Russia-gate imbroglio, Doctorow observes that in contrast to the image of Trump administration policies being dictated by Moscow as portrayed by proponents of Russia-gate conspiracy theories, "the United States is moving towards deeper confrontation with the Kremlin in the geopolitical hotspot of Ukraine. For its part, the Kremlin has very little to gain and a great deal to lose economically and diplomatically from a campaign now against Kiev. If successful, as likely would be the case *given the vast disparity in military potential* of the two sides, it could easily become a Pyrrhic victory." [My emphasis]

Just as ominous is the following. As noted in an Oriental Review op-ed earlier this year, a new neo-Nazi revival is clearly in the offing. This is in a country where fascist/Nazi/extreme right sentiment, especially in the western regions, has a long, storied, and ugly history, one that rarely bubbles far from the surface.

Again, this "ugly history" was laid bare in Ukraine on Fire. After concluding that the current situation in Ukraine is 'painfully reminiscent' of Germany in the 1920s, the OR op-ed attributes,

"... poor governance on the heels of a lost war, which – added to the sense of betrayed hopes and the sharp decline in average incomes coupled with rising prices – is all driving a critical mass of the Ukrainian population toward *an overwhelming feeling of desperation.*" [My emphasis]

In an observation attended by a profound sense of déjà vu for even casual students of history, the op-ed goes on to say that "[A] demand from the public for a 'strong hand' – a new, authoritarian ruler – is rapidly coalescing, due to their dissatisfaction with President Poroshenko and all the other jokers they've been dealt from that shabby deck of political cards." According to the op-ed, a

man like that already exists in this 'destitute and disintegrating' country. Known as the "White Führer" to his comrades-in-arms, this man is Andriy Biletsky, the commander of the Azov Battalion who is making an ever-bigger name for himself in the Ukrainian parliament and across the broader political arena.

Open Season on Russia

Of course all this only serves to highlight the pressures being brought to bear within the country itself; it is also those from without (not entirely unrelated to be sure) that are – or should be – of equal concern. Herein Doctorow again provides an alarming reveal. Although there are indications Washington is 'fed up' with the Kiev regime (and as *Ukraine on Fire* demonstrates conclusively, one it was responsible for installing in the first instance in 2014), he says,

"...the United States has doubled down in its support for a military solution to the conflict. With military trainers now on the ground (*does this development itself not have an ominously familiar ring to it?*), and the U.S. budgeting \$350m for security assistance to Ukraine, Washington has also recently started delivering lethal weapons, including the Javelin anti-tank missile system, free of charge to Kiev.' [My emphasis].

In a Strategic Culture report, Robert Bridge recently offered an additional reality check on those external pressures. Instead of opting for a more balanced and cooperative foreign policy in its conduct of affairs in Eastern Europe, and specifically in its bilateral relationship with Russia, in his view, it was via the furphy of "Russia[n] aggression" – an allegation he says was "peddled to the unsuspecting masses based on *fake news of a Russian 'invasion' of Ukraine and Crimea*" – [that] the U.S. and NATO "dropped all pretensions [to cooperation] and declared open season on Russia." [My emphasis]

This was, he notes, further compounded by assertions Russia manipulated the outcome of the 2016 U.S. presidential election and along with Donald Trump's "empty threat" to pull the pin on NATO if member states did not pony up on additional defense spending, "Eastern Europe has [now] become a veritable hothouse of paranoia-driven militarization."

We'll return to this point later, but some backstory is essential here. Whether one has already seen *Ukraine on Fire* or not, it now comes complete with a hitherto unexpected layer of revelation and significance, given that the late Consortium News founder and editor Robert Parry is interviewed at length therein. Parry's appearance in the film, poignantly as it turns out, underscores the man's trailblazing achievements and his unimpeachable stature within the alternative, independent media cosmos.

For those folks constantly on the lookout for exemplars of journalism's fundamental values, his input into the film's narrative is a reminder to us all just how much his political insight and measured analysis will be missed. It goes without saying that those values have themselves been missing in action for some time in our mainstream media, as Parry himself – to his eternal chagrin – was all too aware. This is a state of affairs to which he spent the last two decades of his life exposing via the Consortium News masthead. So much so it seems, there was even some hint (by the man himself as it turns out) that the stress and pressure of being a media outlier had taken its toll and may have been the catalyst for the strokes he had in the weeks before his untimely death.

Yet Parry's voluminous, in-depth commentary on Ukraine – including his many pieces on the controversy surrounding the still unresolved mystery of the downing of Malaysian Airlines MH-17 in eastern Ukraine in June 2014 (with 38 of my fellow Aussies on board) – was arguably second to none. His fierce, fearless criticism of those engaging in the aforementioned 'groupthink' – not just those in and around the Beltway but in the West in general (with as we'll see my own country being a noteworthy example) – was insightful, along with his own reporting on events and developments as they unfolded over the months and years that followed 2014's color revolution which culminated in the coup d'état.

Many of Parry's observations in the film are reflective of, and derived from, that commentary, as those who followed his reporting closely on the Ukraine situation over the years will appreciate. He was acutely aware that one could not have a discussion of the key geopolitical events and developments of our time without some serious examination of the manner in which the corporate media manages (read: "massages") the narratives that frame the Big Issues therein.

As noted, in this Parry was unremitting in his disdain for those of his fellow "investigative journalists" who had sold their souls for the filthy lucre, the celebrity status, and/or the comfortable, secure tenure at one of the "premium" corporate media marques. To him, at best, they were perception managers; at worst glorified stenographers. (For others perhaps less tactful or more scornful than Parry, they were/are simply "presstitutes"!))

Yet for all that disdain, Parry possibly reserved even greater contempt for the "marques" that employed the "presstitutes", with the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* being singled out for frequently justified, laser-like reproach. To be sure, that was just with the print media. In this the reporting on the Ukraine crisis provides an exemplar – albeit by no means the only one – of just how self-serving, venal, hypocritical, supercilious, irresponsible, and manifestly dishonest the corporate media were.

And of course they still are, each day sliding further and further into

irrelevance as they blithely betray both the hallowed U.S. Constitution and the citizens of the country whose individual and collective interests they are increasingly at pains to validly claim to represent, and whose democratic institutions – along with the rights that are purportedly underwritten by said “institutions” – they are supposed to protect.

‘Shirt-fronting’ the Mainstream Fakery

Such a damning indictment of Western media was brought home in spades in the aftermath of the MH-17 disaster. It was a 60 Minutes Australia report on the tragedy that really got his gander up, and in this writer’s view, rightly so. At the time I was preparing my own take on MH-17, when the 60 Minutes segment aired.

I immediately alerted Bob to the report, knowing full well that given his earlier commentary on the tragedy and his views on MSM reporting in general, he’d be less than impressed with the conclusions they arrived at from their “investigation.” Much of this commentary by 60 Minutes was based on the dubious findings of Bellingcat (aka Eliot Higgins), a self-styled open source ‘citizen journalist’ who claimed to have the ‘skinny’ on who was responsible for the disaster.

Now space prohibits herein a full account of the circumstances surrounding the shoot-down, nor does it lend itself to a ‘blow by blow’ of the ‘argy-bargy’ between the 60 Minutes crew and their much touted source Higgins, and Parry himself. Suffice to say there seemed to be few limits to the indignation the former all managed to muster when the intrepid Consortium Newsman had the temerity to meticulously and relentlessly challenge their account of the tragedy.

(Those unfamiliar with this dust-up – one that perfectly case studies the vast gulf that exists between MSM reportage on MH-17 and that of a respected alternative news outlet – can see here, here, here, here, here, here, here, here, and here for some of the commentary the ‘stoush’ incited and examples of the tit-for-tat exchanges between the respective antagonists.)

It needs be noted that there was much political capital to be gained by those in Washington and most of America’s allies in the West by blaming Russia for the MH-17 tragedy. The U.S. and said allies had already blamed the crisis in Ukraine that derived from the February 2014 coup on Russian “aggression” and Putin’s purported ambitions to resurrect the Soviet Union. So in one sense it was to be expected they’d seek to capitalize on this disaster by blaming the Russians.

Western leaders to this end began tripping over themselves in singling out ‘Vlad

the Derailer' as the bad guy du jour, all the while doing so unencumbered by anything approximating solid evidence to support this stance. As we might expect with the Russia-gate saga, to this day, no definitive proof of the hard-core forensic kind has been presented to identify exactly how the plane was shot down (was the missile launched from the air or from the ground?), much less who actually perpetrated the act (was it the anti-Russian Ukrainian military, the pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine, or the Russians themselves?) Again, to this day, the questions as to whether the plane was deliberately targeted (was it a false-flag attack?, or did it just happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time), also remain unanswered.

As noted, the downing of MH-17 cost the lives of 38 Aussies, and the fallout from the tragedy – to say nothing of the way the disaster was politicized in order to serve the broader geopolitical objectives of the Beltway Bedlamites and their apparatchiks at home along with their counterparts in other Western nations – was especially pronounced Down Under. Our then Prime Minister Tony Abbott, who took to sculling the Washington Kool-Aid by asserting it was Putin himself who was “personally responsible” for the disaster, was especially bolshie in his reaction.

Ahead of Putin's visit to this country in November 2014 for the G20 meeting in Brisbane that year, Abbott threatened to “shirt-front” the Russian president over the issue when they officially met up. Whilst this made for great headlines here and abroad, it did nothing to arrest his slide in the opinion polls, which one can reasonably surmise was at the time in the back of his mind. All in all, coming from a national leader on the world stage, this unprecedented, petulant outburst was something to behold.

But such was the fervor of the times regarding MH-17, and more broadly, the anti-Russian sentiment that prevailed earlier in the year over Russia's “invasion” of Ukraine in the aftermath of America's bespoke coup d'état. Clearly Abbott's desire to leverage the public outrage here in Australia that accompanied the tragedy and to ingratiate himself with the Bedlamites far outweighed any obligation that might've routinely accompanied a more measured diplomatic response. (It was after all to no avail; Abbott's hold on the Aussie “premiership” was itself ‘shirt-fronted’ about a year after making this comment, being successfully challenged for the leadership by the present PM Malcolm Turnbull.)

It should further be noted that many folks – mostly after the fact – justified the removal of the then Ukrainian government because it was irredeemably corrupt. This of course is a specious and convenient argument – a ‘justification’ that makes frequent cameos in the annals of regime change –

partly so in this case because there's little evidence the replacement regime has been any less corrupt.

But this raises an altogether different, arguably more important consideration: If Uncle Sam had removed every last one of the countless client tyrants he's had on his imperial dance card over the decades on the sole basis of their ethical, moral and/or legal standards of governance, adherence to democratic principles, and/or general political probity, it's fair to surmise the geopolitical terrain might look as different today as the lunar landscape does to an as yet still pristine portion of the Amazonian rainforest. And the U.S. might still retain – and be able to credibly lay claim to – some of the moral capital it had accrued by war's end in 1945, which few would argue it has now all but frittered away.

Of course if we really want to push the envelope herein invoking moral relativism, we only need consider that – notwithstanding what it says on the box – America itself is hardly a bastion of “ethical, moral and/or legal standards of governance, [adherence to] democratic principles, and/or general political propriety.” Its ‘unblemished’ track record of thuggery and skullduggery implementing regime change on every continent except the Great White Patch on the “backside” of the Big Blue Ball is ample evidence of that. This is without even referencing its performance closer to home drawing on such benchmarks! It's a “practice what you preach” thing!

Further, there was and remains no smoking gun evidence linking Russia or the Eastern Ukrainian, pro-Russian separatists to the MH-17 shoot-down, and therefore no sound rationale for Washington accusing either of complicity in this crime without ponying up with said evidence. If anything, the longer the dog-not-barking question of why the U.S. refused to release all of the forensic evidence and ‘intel’ related to the shoot-down remains unanswered, the more we should rightfully suspect any findings by the MH-17 investigation team (if they ever see the light of day) – one it has to be emphasized, suspiciously included representatives from the at least equally suspect Kiev regime.

Moreover, for the U.S. to have imposed a further regimen of economic sanctions as a consequence without at least awaiting the outcome of the official investigation spoke further volumes about Washington's deeper game-plan vis-à-vis Ukraine and ultimately, Russia itself. And it would appear we are now seeing that “game-plan” come to a fruition of sorts. Again, to underscore all of this, in one of Parry's last substantive analyses of the Ukraine situation back in June last year, he summed a decidedly more coherent reality for us all.

“As the New York Times instructed us’ he observed in 2015, ‘there was no coup in Ukraine...no U.S. interference...and there weren't even that many neo-Nazis. And the ensuing conflict wasn't a resistance [movement] among Yanukovich's

supporters to his illegal ouster; no, it was 'Russian aggression' or a 'Russian invasion.'" Parry didn't spare the horses:

"If you deviate from this groupthink – if you point out how U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland talked about the U.S. spending \$5 billion on Ukraine; mention her pre-coup intercepted phone call with [Ukrainian] U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt discussing who the new leaders would be and how 'to glue' or [how to] 'midwife this thing'; note how Nuland and Senator John McCain urged on the violent anti-Yanukovych protesters; recognize that snipers firing from far-right-controlled buildings killed both police *and* protesters to provoke the climactic ouster of Yanukovych; [and if] you think all that indeed looks like a coup – you obviously are the victim of 'Russian propaganda and disinformation.'"

But as Parry glumly observed, thanks to the mainstream U.S. media, most Americans didn't get to hear about any of that as, "[I]t has essentially banned those deviant facts from the public discourse. If they are mentioned at all, they're lumped together with 'fake news' amid the reassuring hope that soon there'll be algorithms to purge such troublesome information from the Internet."

And for anyone whose "blowback antennae" are attuned to such matters, we cannot escape one abiding reality regarding the MH-17 disaster: If the putsch-meisters of the Potomac had minded their own business from the off and left well enough alone in Ukraine, *irrespective of the cause of the shoot-down and who was responsible*, we do know around three hundred innocent people would still be going about their business, and we wouldn't be having this 'conversation'. Four years later this is a reality I've yet to hear voiced by anyone in the MSM or in the upper echelons of Western governments. [My emphasis].

From Nobel Peace Prize to Imperial Warmonger

Last but not least, consider the following. For this writer, it remains incomprehensible that a U.S. State Department official – in this case the aforementioned Ms Nuland (aka The Maidan Cookie Monster) – would seemingly act in such a brazenly undiplomatic manner in bringing about this coup, a reality that as we've seen independent media folks like Robert Parry were at pains to bring to wider attention. It is in this instance particularly that the "he who lies first, lies best" maxim really comes to the fore.

Yet there can be no doubt that Nuland initiated this action with Obama's full knowledge, with it being as much, if not more so, Obama's mess as it is Nuland's and her neocon cronies. Well might we say, "cue Harry Truman's "the buck stops here!"

Of equal or greater concern herein is this. I'm sure I'm not the only one who noted with considerable bewilderment and dismay, the Kiev regime's deployment – again with the full knowledge, approval indeed encouragement of the regime renovators in Washington – of extreme neo-Nazi forces in facilitating its rise to power from the off, and enforcing since the coup its brutal, illegitimate rule. As noted earlier, they are again getting their second wind.

Given the neoconservatives well-documented vise-grip on U.S. foreign policy in general, and their role in engineering said coup in particular – especially that of the Nuland/Kagan/ex-PNAC factions and their fellow travelers in the U.S. Congress such as McCain, who number amongst them some of the most prominent, so-called “American friends of Israel” – I'm at something of a loss as to how best to explain the glaring disconnect herein.

Of course America's foreign policy “initiatives” over the decades have always embraced an “end justifies the means” precept; only the most naïve or ill-informed would deny this. But for most objective observers – even those of us all too familiar with the CIA's notorious Operation Paperclip, or its equally infamous Operation Gladio, wherein the U.S. actively recruited under-the-radar not-so-rehabbed former Nazis and extreme right wing elements to fight on any number of fronts the Cold War against the Soviets – this is breaking new ground in its embrace of the precept. Prima facie, this has to represent another glaring WTF ‘mo’ in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy. Geopolitics makes strange bedfellows, one might reasonably conclude! *And* transforms Nobel Peace Prize winners into imperial warmongers!

Or is it possible I'm just missing something obvious here? How are all these “American friends of Israel,” either inside or outside of the Capitol ‘tent’, able to reconcile their on-going support of a regime utilizing such forces – whose pernicious ideology being synonymous with rabid anti-Semitism would one imagines be totally abhorrent to Jewish folks and non-Jews alike – under any circumstances?

As it turns out, the so-called “friends” have been bending butt over backwards since the coup denying, playing down, or completely ignoring this “disconnect”. It is only begrudgingly and belatedly they – along with their hacks, flacks and lackeys in the MSM – were able to bring themselves to concede there has been and remains any such neo-Nazi involvement in Ukraine, much less acknowledge any such “disconnect”.

Another key question here is this. How does the all powerful AIPAC and various Jewish/Israel lobby groups and affiliated bodies feel about their “American friends” precipitating and engaging in regime change missions that involve the use and on-going embrace of neo-Nazi forces? Is this just some fuzzy ‘post-

modern' perversion of realpolitik at work here, and I'm simply too naive to understand what the hell is going on and what the end-game might be? And now that the neo-Nazi 'natives' are becoming increasingly restless as noted – their frustration with their nominal patrons within the present regime's hierarchy reaching boiling points – it'll doubtless make for interesting times ahead.

All this of course without considering the added reality of these extreme right-wing factions possibly combining forces and cozying up in a Nazi/fascist/white supremacist group hug cum love-fest with radical jihadist/Islamic militant groups in what could likely shape up to be an exceedingly bloody counter-coup, along with the equally likely prospects of the Ukrainian economy imploding in the interim, or at least in the wake of the turmoil induced by any such coup!

On these matters alone, I'm prepped nonetheless to be enlightened as to how/when anything good is likely to come out of America's color revolution and regime renovation experiment in this part of the geopolitical landscape. And when it comes to the situation in Ukraine, one that has emanated directly from America's interference in its political affairs in 2014, well might we ask of the aforementioned, former CIA chief spook Woolsey: How's that '[we] only [do it] for a very good cause [and] in the interests of democracy' thing workin' out for ya Jimbo?'

Yet whilst these are just some of the reality checks needed in order to assemble a measure of veracity and insight regarding all things Ukraine, such "checks" one imagines are, and will remain for sometime, asynchronous with the narratives disseminated via Washington's anti-Putin, anti-Russian "brochure."

And one final point if I may. If Putin and his Kremlin gremlins did indeed do some kind of a dodgy deal with Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential election in order to get him across the line ahead of Hillary Clinton – the only story that seems to capture the attention of the MSM mavens these days – it would be fair to say that the otherwise estimable Russian president and his beloved Motherland are getting well and truly shafted. Maybe Putin isn't as clever as we give him credit for? To be so artfully duped by a dope like The Trumpster? Oh, the ignominy of it all!

Yet, all that aside, wouldn't many of us just love to hear what the estimable and dutifully righteous Mr Parry might've had to say about more recent and possible developments in the country that interestingly – according to Dutch historian Kees Boterbloem – was affectionately known back in the day as "Little Russia"?

But of course that's not going to happen. I can only hope this missive in some small – if not (ahem) *short* – measure, passes for the next best thing!
