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## *AP reporter challenges US lies about Russian war preparations*

In a remarkable exchange on Thursday, State Department spokesman Ned Price was challenged by Matt Lee from the Associated Press for selling baseless allegations about an impending attack by Russia on Ukraine to the public as “facts” based on “declassified information.”



Ned Price (Credit: C-SPAN)

Ned Price—a former CIA operative—appeared before the press on Thursday, declaring, “The United States has information that Russia is preparing fabricated attacks by Ukrainian military or intelligence forces as a pretext for a further invasion of Ukraine.”

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This would involve, Price continued, the “production of a propaganda video with graphic scenes of false explosions, depicting corpses, crisis actors pretending to be mourners, and images depicting destroyed locations and military equipment—entirely fabricated by Russian intelligence. To be clear, the development of such a propaganda video is one of many options that the Russian government is developing as a fake pretext to initiate and potentially justify military aggression against Ukraine. ... Russia has indicated it’s willing to continue to diplomatic talks, but actions such as this suggest otherwise.”

Turning to the press for questioning, Price clearly expected everything to go as usual. In the past three decades, the US government and intelligence agencies have fabricated one lie after another to justify the illegal invasion and destruction of entire countries in Yugoslavia, the Middle East and North Africa, with little to no questioning from the media. On the contrary, these lies were gladly picked up and recycled by the *New York Times* and other outlets that then either cheered on the bombing of innocent civilians or covered up these war crimes.

Julian Assange, who has exposed some of the most horrendous war crimes of US imperialism, has been persecuted, surveilled and tortured at the behest of Washington for over a decade and now faces extradition to the US. The vast majority of American media outlets and journalists have dropped any pretense of defending Assange and, along with that, the freedom to publish and free speech.

Yet, in a rare moment of lucidity and sign of critical thinking among journalists, Matt Lee from the Associated Press challenged Price after the conclusion of his presentation. The exchange is worth quoting at some length.

Matt Lee: What actions [suggesting that Russia is not interested in diplomatic talks] are you talking about?

Ned Price: The action that I just pointed out, the fact that Russia continues to engage in disinformation.

Matt Lee: You made an allegation that they *might* do that, have they actually done it?

Ned Price: What we know Matt is what I have just said is that they have engaged in that activity.

Matt Lee: What activity? What activity?

Ned Price:....We told you a few weeks ago that we have information that Russia has also already prepositioned a group of operatives conditioned to conduct a false flag [operation] in Eastern Ukraine. So that, Matt, to your question, is an action that Russia has already undertaken.

Matt Lee: It is an action that you say that they have taken, but you have shown no evidence to confirm that and I'm going to get to the next question here which is: What is the evidence that they planned [this action]? What is this? Crisis actors? Really? I mean this is Alex Jones territory you're getting into now. What evidence do you have to support the idea that there is some propaganda film in the making?

Ned Price: This is derived from information known to the US government, intelligence information that we have declassified.

Matt Lee: OK well where is it? Where is this information?

Ned Price: It is intelligence information that we have declassified.

Matt Lee: But where is it? Where is the declassified information?

Ned Price: I just delivered it.

Matt Lee: No, you made a series of allegations. ...

Ned Price: What would you like Matt?

Matt Lee: I would like to see some proof that you can show that shows that the Russians have been doing this.

Ned Price: You have been doing this for—

Matt Lee: That's right, I have been doing this for a long time. ... I remember WMDs [weapons of mass destruction] in Iraq, and I remember that Kabul was not gonna fall....I remember a lot of things. So where is the declassified information other than you coming out saying it?

With just one simple question—“what evidence do you have?”—Lee threw Price completely off and exposed a simple fact: The current press campaign over an allegedly impending “Russian invasion” of Ukraine and “false flag attacks” has no more credibility than Colin Powell’s lies of “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq.

This campaign is aimed at creating both a pretext for conflict, and conditions where Russia can be blamed for such a war. In fact, the allegations of a “false flag operation” being prepared by Russia are a clear indicator that a real false flag operation is being concocted by the CIA and the White House. Its likely helpers and executors are US proxy forces in Ukraine, chief among them neo-Nazi paramilitaries like the Azov Battalion, which have been heavily armed and funded by Washington and NATO over the past several years.

But the exchange didn’t end here. Clearly irritated by Lee falling out of line, Price said, “I’m sorry you don’t like the content, I’m sorry you’re doubting the information that is in the possession of the US government. ... If you doubt credibility of the US government, of the British government and of other governments and want to find solace in information that the Russians are putting out, that is for you to do.”

This implicit questioning of Matt Lee’s “national loyalty”—“if you want to find solace in information that the Russians are putting out, that is for you to do”—has a sinister and threatening undertone. It is a clear indicator that preparations for both war and dictatorship are well underway. Everyone is supposed to fall in line for the sake of “national unity” and “defense of the fatherland.” Those who question the US government, the intelligence agencies and the military will be portrayed as “friends of Putin,” and, by extension, “traitors” to the fatherland.

The first victim of war is the truth. This is why the role of the media—or, rather, the transformation of the media into a tool of government propaganda—is critical for every war effort. The very fact that Price was taken aback by a long-time journalist daring to “doubt the credibility of the US government, of the British government and of other governments”—the most basic professional obligation of any journalist worth the name—shows that the integration of the media into the state and security apparatus is already very far advanced.

But the exchange also shows something else: the extreme nervousness of the ruling class. The most basic of all journalistic questions clearly threw Price off and exposed the fabrications of the latest propaganda effort of the US state machine as a house of cards, ready to collapse at the slightest pressure.

Neither this nervousness nor the war hysteria and preparations can be understood outside their class context. The United States is a powder keg. Over 900,000 people have died from COVID-19 in a preventable pandemic. The lives of millions of workers have been upended by social misery and the deaths of their loved ones, while the billionaires and “pandemic profiteers” have grown their wealth to staggering proportions. These conditions are mirrored internationally.

To divert tensions outward and preempt a social explosion, the bourgeoisie sees only one way out: war. But the same objective tendencies drive the international working class onto the opposite road, the road of social revolution. It is this development that must form the basis for the building of a socialist anti-war movement.

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