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Ready for Nuclear War over Ukraine?

By Robert Parry

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Exclusive: A year after a U.S.-backed coup ousted Ukraine’s elected president, the new powers in Kiev are itching for a “full-scale war” with Russia — and want the West’s backing even if it could provoke a nuclear conflict, a Strangelovian madness that the U.S. media ignores, writes Robert Parry.

A senior Ukrainian official is urging the West to risk a nuclear conflagration in support of a “full-scale war” with Russia that he says authorities in Kiev are now seeking, another sign of the extremism that pervades the year-old, U.S.-backed regime in Kiev.

In a recent interview with Canada’s CBC Radio, Ukraine’s Deputy Foreign Minister Vadym Prystaiko said, “Everybody is afraid of fighting with a nuclear state. We are not anymore, in Ukraine — we’ve lost so many people of ours, we’ve lost so much of our territory.”



Peter Sellers playing Dr. Strangelove as he struggles to control his right arm from making a Nazi salute.

Prystaiko added, “However dangerous it sounds, we have to stop [Russian President Vladimir Putin] somehow. For the sake of the Russian nation as well, not just for the Ukrainians and Europe.” The deputy foreign minister announced that Kiev is preparing for “full-scale war” against Russia and wants the West to supply lethal weapons and training so the fight can be taken to Russia.

“What we expect from the world is that the world will stiffen up in the spine a little,” Prystaiko said.

Yet, what is perhaps most remarkable about Prystaiko’s “Dr. Strangelove” moment is that it produced almost no reaction in the West. You have a senior Ukrainian official saying that the world should risk nuclear war over a civil conflict in Ukraine between its west, which favors closer ties to Europe, and its east, which wants to maintain its historic relationship with Russia.

Why should such a pedestrian dispute justify the possibility of vaporizing millions of human beings and conceivably ending life on the planet? Yet, instead of working out a plan for a federalized structure in Ukraine or even allowing people in the east to vote on whether they want to remain under the control of the Kiev regime, the world is supposed to risk nuclear annihilation.

But therein lies one of the under-reported stories of the Ukraine crisis: There is a madness to the Kiev regime that the West doesn’t want to recognize because to do so would upend the dominant narrative of “our” good guys vs. Russia’s bad guys. If we begin to notice that the right-wing regime in Kiev is crazy and brutal, we might also start questioning the “Russian aggression” mantra.

According to the Western “group think,” the post-coup Ukrainian government “shares our values” by favoring democracy and modernity, while the rebellious ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine are “Moscow’s minions” representing dark forces of backwardness and violence, personified by Russia’s “irrational” President Putin. In this view, the conflict is a clash between the forces of good and evil where there is no space for compromise.

Yet, there is a craziness to this “group think” that is highlighted by Prystaiko’s comments. Not only does the Kiev regime display a cavalier attitude about dragging the world into a nuclear catastrophe but it also has deployed armed neo-Nazis and other right-wing extremists to wage a dirty war in the east that has involved torture and death-squad activities.

Not Since Adolf Hitler

No European government, since Adolf Hitler’s Germany, has seen fit to dispatch Nazi storm troopers to wage war on a domestic population, but the Kiev regime has and has done so knowingly. Yet, across the West’s media/political spectrum, there has been a studious effort to cover up this reality, even to the point of ignoring facts that have been well established.

The New York Times and the Washington Post have spearheaded this journalistic malfeasance by putting on blinders so as not to see Ukraine’s neo-Nazis, such as when describing the key role played by the Azov battalion in the war against ethnic Russians in the east.

On Feb. 20, in a report from Mariupol, the Post cited the Azov battalion’s importance in defending the port city against a possible rebel offensive. Correspondent Karoun Demirjian wrote:

“Petro Guk, the commander of the Azov battalion’s reinforcement operations in Mariupol, said in an interview that the battalion is ‘getting ready for’ street-to-street combat in the city. The Azov battalion, now a regiment in the Ukrainian army, is known as one of the fiercest fighting forces in the pro-Kiev operation.

“But ... it has pulled away from the front lines on a scheduled rest-and-retraining rotation, Guk said, leaving the Ukrainian army — a less capable force, in his opinion — in its place. His advice to residents of Mariupol is to get ready for the worst.

“‘If it is your home, you should be ready to fight for it, and accept that if the fight is for your home, you must defend it,’ he said, when asked whether residents should prepare to leave. Some are ready to heed that call, as a matter of patriotic duty.”

The Post’s stirring words fit with the Western media’s insistent narrative and its refusal to include meaningful background about the Azov battalion, which is known for marching under Nazi banners, displaying the Swastika and painting SS symbols on its helmets.

The New York Times filed a similarly disingenuous article from Mariupol on Feb. 11, depicting the ethnic Russian rebels as barbarians at the gate with the Azov battalion defending civilization. Though providing much color and detail – and quoting an Azov leader prominently – the Times left out the salient and well-known fact that the Azov battalion is composed of neo-Nazis.

But this inconvenient truth – that neo-Nazis have been central to Kiev’s “self-defense forces” from last February’s coup to the present – would disrupt the desired propaganda message to

American readers. So the New York Times just ignores the Nazism and refers to Azov as a “volunteer unit.”

Yet, this glaring omission is prima facie proof of journalistic bias. There’s no way that the editors of the Post and Times don’t know that the presence of neo-Nazis is newsworthy. Indeed, there’s a powerful irony in this portrayal of Nazis as the bulwark of Western civilization against the Russian hordes from the East. It was, after all, the Russians who broke the back of Nazism in World War II as Hitler sought to subjugate Europe and destroy Western civilization as we know it.

That the Nazis are now being depicted as defenders of Western ideals has to be the ultimate man-bites-dog story. But it goes essentially unreported in the New York Times and Washington Post as does the inconvenient presence of other Nazis holding prominent positions in the post-coup regime, including Andriy Parubiy, who was the military commander of the Maidan protests and served as the first national security chief of the Kiev regime. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Ukraine, Through the US Looking Glass.”]

The Nazi Reality

Regarding the Azov battalion, the Post and Times have sought to bury the Nazi reality, but both have also acknowledged it in passing. For instance, on Aug. 10, 2014, a Times’ article mentioned the neo-Nazi nature of the Azov battalion in the last three paragraphs of a lengthy story on another topic.

“The fighting for Donetsk has taken on a lethal pattern: The regular army bombards separatist positions from afar, followed by chaotic, violent assaults by some of the half-dozen or so paramilitary groups surrounding Donetsk who are willing to plunge into urban combat,” the Times reported.

“Officials in Kiev say the militias and the army coordinate their actions, but the militias, which count about 7,000 fighters, are angry and, at times, uncontrollable. One known as Azov, which took over the village of Marinka, flies a neo-Nazi symbol resembling a Swastika as its flag.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s “NYT Whites Out Ukraine’s Brownshirts.”]

Similarly, the Post published a lead story last Sept. 12 describing the Azov battalion in flattering terms, saving for the last three paragraphs the problematic reality that the fighters are fond of displaying the Swastika:

“In one room, a recruit had emblazoned a swastika above his bed. But Kirt [a platoon leader] ... dismissed questions of ideology, saying that the volunteers — many of them still teenagers — embrace symbols and espouse extremist notions as part of some kind of ‘romantic’ idea.”

Other news organizations have been more forthright about this Nazi reality. For instance, the conservative London Telegraph published an article by correspondent Tom Parfitt, who wrote: “Kiev’s use of volunteer paramilitaries to stamp out the Russian-backed Donetsk and Luhansk ‘people’s republics’ ... should send a shiver down Europe’s spine.

“Recently formed battalions such as Donbas, Dnipro and Azov, with several thousand men under their command, are officially under the control of the interior ministry but their financing is murky, their training inadequate and their ideology often alarming. The Azov men use the neo-Nazi Wolfsangel (Wolf’s Hook) symbol on their banner and members of the battalion are openly white supremacists, or anti-Semites.”

Based on interviews with militia members, the Telegraph reported that some of the fighters doubted the Holocaust, expressed admiration for Hitler and acknowledged that they are indeed Nazis.

Andriy Biletsky, the Azov commander, “is also head of an extremist Ukrainian group called the Social National Assembly,” according to the Telegraph article which quoted a commentary by Biletsky as declaring: “The historic mission of our nation in this critical moment is to lead the White Races of the world in a final crusade for their survival. A crusade against the Semite-led Untermenschen.”

The Telegraph questioned Ukrainian authorities in Kiev who acknowledged that they were aware of the extremist ideologies of some militias but insisted that the higher priority was having troops who were strongly motivated to fight.

Azov fighters even emblazon the Swastika and the SS insignia on their helmets. NBC News reported: “Germans were confronted with images of their country’s dark past ... when German public broadcaster ZDF showed video of Ukrainian soldiers with Nazi symbols on their helmets in its evening newscast.”

But it’s now clear that far-right extremism is not limited to the militias sent to kill ethnic Russians in the east or to the presence of a few neo-Nazi officials who were rewarded for their roles in last February’s coup. The fanaticism is present at the center of the Kiev regime, including its deputy foreign minister who speaks casually about a “full-scale war” with nuclear-armed Russia.

An Orwellian World

In a “normal world,” U.S. and European journalists would explain to their readers how insane all this is; how a dispute over the pace for implementing a European association agreement while also maintaining some economic ties with Russia could have been worked out within the Ukrainian political system, that it was not grounds for a U.S.-backed “regime change” last February, let alone a civil war, and surely not nuclear war.

But these are clearly not normal times. To a degree that I have not seen in my 37 years covering Washington, there is a totalitarian quality to the West’s current “group think” about Ukraine with virtually no one who “matters” deviating from the black-and-white depiction of good guys in Kiev vs. bad guys in Donetsk and Moscow.

And, if you want to see how the “objective” New York Times dealt with demonstrations in Moscow and other Russian cities protesting last year’s coup against Ukrainian President Viktor

Yanukovich, read Sunday's dispatch by the Times' neocon national security correspondent Michael R. Gordon, best known as the lead writer with Judith Miller on the infamous "aluminum tube" story in 2002, helping to set the stage for the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Here's how Gordon explained the weekend's anti-coup protests: "The official narrative as reported by state-run television in Russia, and thus accepted by most Russians, is that the uprising in Ukraine last year was an American-engineered coup, aided by Ukrainian Nazis, and fomented to overthrow Mr. Yanukovich, a pro-Russian president."

In other words, the Russians are being brainwashed while the readers of the New York Times are getting their information from an independent news source that would never be caught uncritically distributing government propaganda, another example of the upside-down Orwellian world that Americans now live in. [See, for example, "NYT Retracts Russian Photo Scoop."]

In our land of the free, there is no "official narrative" and the U.S. government would never stoop to propaganda. Everyone just happily marches in lockstep behind the conventional wisdom of a faultless Kiev regime that "shares our values" and can do no wrong — while ignoring the brutality and madness of coup leaders who deploy Nazis and invite a nuclear holocaust for the world.