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## Nuland's Mastery of Ukraine Propaganda

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**Exclusive:** In House testimony, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland blamed Russia and ethnic-Russian rebels for last summer's shoot-down of MH-17 over Ukraine, but the U.S. government has not substantiated that charge. So, did Nuland mislead Congress or just play a propaganda game, asks Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

An early skill learned by Official Washington's neoconservatives, when they were cutting their teeth inside the U.S. government in the 1980s, was how to frame their arguments in the most propagandistic way, so anyone who dared to disagree with any aspect of the presentation seemed unpatriotic or crazy.

During my years at The Associated Press and Newsweek, I dealt with a number of now prominent neocons who were just starting out and mastering these techniques at the knee of top CIA psychological warfare specialist Walter Raymond Jr., who had been transferred to President Ronald Reagan's National Security Council staff where Raymond oversaw inter-agency task forces that pushed Reagan's hard-line agenda in Central America and elsewhere.



**Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, who pushed for the Ukraine coup and helped pick the post-coup leaders.**

One of those quick learners was Robert Kagan, who was then a protégé of Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams. Kagan got his first big chance when he became director of the State Department’s public diplomacy office for Latin America, a key outlet for Raymond’s propaganda schemes.

Though always personable in his dealings with me, Kagan grew frustrated when I wouldn’t swallow the propaganda that I was being fed. At one point, Kagan warned me that I might have to be “controversialized,” i.e. targeted for public attack by Reagan’s right-wing media allies and anti-journalism attack groups, like Accuracy in Media, a process that did indeed occur.

Years later, Kagan emerged as one of America’s top neocons, a co-founder of the Project for the New American Century, which opened in 1998 to advocate for the U.S. invasion of Iraq, ultimately gaining the backing of a large swath of the U.S. national security establishment in support of that bloody endeavor.

Despite the Iraq disaster, Kagan continued to rise in influence, now a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, a columnist at the Washington Post, and someone whose published criticism so alarmed President Barack Obama last year that he invited Kagan to a White House lunch. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Obama’s True Foreign Policy Weakness.”]

### **Kagan’s Wife’s Coup**

But Kagan is perhaps best known these days as the husband of neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, one of Vice President Dick Cheney’s former advisers and a key architect of last year’s coup in Ukraine, a “regime change” that toppled an elected president and touched off a civil war, which now has become a proxy fight involving nuclear-armed United States and Russia.

In an interview last year with the New York Times, Nuland indicated that she shared her husband’s criticism of President Obama for his hesitancy to use American power more assertively. Referring to Kagan’s public attacks on Obama’s more restrained “realist” foreign policy, Nuland said, “suffice to say ... that nothing goes out of the house that I don’t think is worthy of his talents. Let’s put it that way.”

But Nuland also seems to have mastered her husband's skill with propaganda, presenting an extreme version of the situation in Ukraine, such that no one would dare quibble with the details. In prepared testimony to the House Foreign Affairs Committee last week, Nuland even slipped in an accusation blaming Russia for the July 17 shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 though the U.S. government has not presented any proof.

Nuland testified, "In eastern Ukraine, Russia and its separatist puppets unleashed unspeakable violence and pillage; MH-17 was shot down."

Now, it's true that if one parses Nuland's testimony, she's not exactly saying the Russians or the ethnic Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine shot down the plane. There is a semi-colon between the "unspeakable violence and pillage" and the passive verb structure "MH-17 was shot down." But anyone seeing her testimony would have understood that the Russians and their "puppets" shot down the plane, killing all 298 people onboard.

When I submitted a formal query to the State Department asking if Nuland's testimony meant that the U.S. government had developed new evidence that the rebels shot down the plane and that the Russians shared complicity, I received no answer.

Perhaps significantly or perhaps not, Nuland presented similarly phrased testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Tuesday but made no reference to MH-17. So, I submitted a new inquiry asking whether the omission reflected second thoughts by Nuland about making the claim before the House. Again, I have not received a reply.

However, both of Nuland's appearances place all the blame for the chaos in Ukraine on Russia, including the 6,000 or more deaths. Nuland offered not a single word of self-criticism about how she contributed to these violent events by encouraging last year's coup, nor did she express the slightest concern about the actions of the coup regime in Kiev, including its dispatch of neo-Nazi militias to carry out "anti-terrorist" and "death squad" operations against ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine. [See Consortiumnews.com's "Nuclear War and Clashing Ukraine Narratives."]

### **Russia's Fault**

Everything was Russia's fault – or as Nuland phrased it: "This manufactured conflict — controlled by the Kremlin; fueled by Russian tanks and heavy weapons; financed at Russian taxpayers' expense — has cost the lives of more than 6,000 Ukrainians, but also of hundreds of young Russians sent to fight and die there by the Kremlin, in a war their government denies."

Nuland was doing her husband proud. As every good propagandist knows, you don't present events with any gray areas; your side is always perfect and the other side is the epitome of evil. And, today, Nuland faces almost no risk that some mainstream journalist will dare contradict this black-and-white storyline; they simply parrot it.

Besides heaping all the blame on the Russians, Nuland cited – in her Senate testimony – some of the new "reforms" that the Kiev authorities have just implemented as they build a "free-market state." She said, "They made tough choices to reduce and cap pension benefits, increase work

requirements and phase in a higher retirement age; ... they passed laws cutting wasteful gas subsidies.”

In other words, many of the “free-market reforms” are aimed at making the hard lives of average Ukrainians even harder – by cutting pensions, removing work protections, forcing people to work into their old age and making them pay more for heat during the winter.

Nuland also hailed some of the regime’s stated commitments to fighting corruption. But Kiev seems to have simply installed a new cast of bureaucrats looking to enrich themselves. For instance, Ukraine’s Finance Minister Natalie Jaresko is an expatriate American who – before becoming an instant Ukrainian citizen last December – ran a U.S. taxpayer-financed investment fund for Ukraine that was drained of money as she engaged in lucrative insider deals, which she has fought to keep secret. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Ukraine’s Finance Minister’s American ‘Values.’”]

Yet, none of these concerns were mentioned in Nuland’s propagandistic testimony to the House and Senate – not that any of the committee members or the mainstream press corps seemed to care that they were being spun and even misled. The hearings were mostly opportunities for members of Congress to engage in chest-beating as they demanded that President Obama send U.S. arms to Ukraine for a hot war with Russia.

Regarding the MH-17 disaster, one reason that I was inquisitive about Nuland’s insinuation in her House testimony that the Russians and the ethnic Russian rebels were responsible was that some U.S. intelligence analysts have reached a contrary conclusion, according to a source briefed on their findings. According to that information, the analysts found no proof that the Russians had delivered a BUK anti-aircraft system to the rebels and concluded that the attack was apparently carried out by a rogue element of the Ukrainian military.

After I published that account last summer, the Obama administration went silent about the MH-17 shoot-down, letting stand some initial speculation that had blamed the Russians and the rebels. In the nearly eight months since the tragedy, the U.S. government has failed to make public any intelligence information on the crash. So, Nuland may have been a bit duplicitous when she phrased her testimony so that anyone hearing it would jump to the conclusion that the Russians and the rebels were to blame. It’s true she didn’t exactly say so but she surely knew what impression she was leaving.

In that, Nuland appears to have taken a page from the playbook of her husband’s old mentor, Elliott Abrams, who provided misleading testimony to Congress on the Iran-Contra Affair in the 1980s – and even though he was convicted of that offense, Abrams was pardoned by President George H.W. Bush and thus was able to return to government last decade to oversee the selling of the Iraq War.