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## The New Cold War and the Death of the Discourse

By Justin Raimondo

October 18, 2015

The truth is often ignored, at first, and when that becomes impossible, truth-tellers are often punished. As two incidents starkly reveal, this is certainly the case when it comes to the civil war in Ukraine and Washington's unfolding cold war with Russia.

The first illustration of our truth-telling principle occurred after the "Maidan revolution" had already captured the imagination of the Western media, which was busy promulgating the official view as given expression by US government officials. According to this narrative, the "protesters" were heroes, the government of "Russian-backed" Viktor Yanukovich was a coven of devils, and the catalyzing incident that led to Yanukovich's ouster, the shooting of protesters in the Maidan, was the work of the Berkut, the Ukrainian government's militarized police.

There's just one problem with this story: it isn't true. A leaked phone call between Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet and European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs Catherine Ashton, revealed that the protesters were shot by their own leaders – the radical nationalists who had military control of the Maiden. In the course of their discussion, Paet discusses one Dr. Olga Bogomolets, who was in line to become the new Health Minister, and at around eight minutes into the recording Paet drops this bombshell:

*Paet: "All the evidence shows that the people who were killed by snipers from both sides, among police men and people in the street, that they were the same snipers killing people from both sides."*

Ashton: *"Well that's, yeah..."*

Paet: *"And [Bogomolets] also showed me some photos and she said that has medical doctor, she can say that it is the same handwriting..."*

Ashton: *"Yeah..."*

Paet: *"Same type of bullets... and it's really disturbing that now the new coalition, that they don't want to investigate what exactly happened. So that there is now stronger and stronger understanding that behind the snipers, it was not Yanukovich, but it was somebody from the new coalition."*

Ashton: *"I think they do want to investigate, and I didn't know... pick that up – gosh."*

Ashton's main concern seemed to be that this would get out and discredit the new government "from the very beginning."

Oh, but not to worry: it didn't get out, at least not in the United States. There were oblique mentions of the recording in the mainstream media, but only weeks afterward and then without any specifics: two months after the fact, the *Los Angeles Times* referred to it in the vaguest terms, only to dismiss it as a "conspiracy theory." The *New York Times* didn't cover it: neither did the *War Street Journal*, *Time* magazine, or any of the other usual suspects. The *Daily Beast*, typically, served as a mouthpiece for the official Washington-Kiev account, citing Dr. Bogomolets as claiming her conversation with Paet was a "misunderstanding." Yet Paet didn't cite her as his sole source: he said *"all the evidence."* No doubt the Estonians have their own sources in the country, and it's improbable the Foreign Minister would have made such an assertion based on a single person's testimony.

In any case, the story was pretty much buried here in the US, with the exception of this space and a few other alternative news sources.

But in Europe, it was a different story: the German public television station ARD carried a report which threw the identity of the Maidan shooters into serious question. And more recently the BBC produced a documentary, "The Untold Story of the Maidan Massacre," in which eyewitnesses assert that the Berkut were fired on from positions controlled by the ultra-nationalist Svoboda Party, which, along with the neo-Nazi "Right Sector" organization, ran Maidan security.

Still, the story was ignored in the US, but that may not be possible much longer, and the reason springs from an unlikely source: the current Ukrainian government of President Petro Poroshenko.

Last week Ukrainian police raided the homes of Svoboda Party leaders Oleksandr Sych, who served as Deputy Prime Minister in the post-Maidan government, and Ole Pankevich, whose 2013 appearance at a neo-Nazi memorial event provoked the ire of the World Jewish Congress.

The Ukrainian prosecutor's office confirmed that the raid was conducted as part of an investigation into the Maidan shootings:

*"The court warrant for the raid on the apartment of Pankevich, a former MP and the ex-head of Lviv regional council, explicitly referred to a BBC documentary on the subject, according to a copy of the warrant ... In the documentary, journalist Gabriel Gatehouse spoke to an opposition nationalist rifleman who had acknowledged having fired on riot police in the morning of February 20."*

The warrant, posted online,

*"[A]lso refers to video footage that showed a rifleman firing out of the Hotel Ukraina, situated on Maidan. The room from which he fired was occupied at the time by Pankevich, according to the court warrant."*

*"Police also raided the apartment of Sich, vice-prime minister in the immediate post-Maidan government in 2014, also in connection with shots fired from the same hotel, where he was also staying on February 20."*

*"An assistant to Ukraine's prosecutor general, Vladislav Kutsenko, confirmed to the Ukrainian TV channel 112 that searches of the Svoboda leaders' apartments were linked to an investigation of the February 20 events."*

So the Ukrainian government is admitting that their previous narrative is false – and that the ultra-rightist Svoboda and Right Sector, who were the military arm of the Maidan protesters, provoked the incident that led to Yanukovich's overthrow.

Why this stunning turnaround?

Both Svoboda and Right Sector have declared war on the Poroshenko regime and are calling for a "national revolution" – one that would install them in power. The ultra-nationalists are opposed to the Minsk agreement, brokered by the EU, which makes concessions to the east Ukrainians. The far right is accusing Poroshenko of "betraying the revolution." They scoff at the ceasefire as a "sellout" because they want the civil war to continue: and as Poroshenko makes draconian cuts in the government budget in order to mollify Ukraine's creditors, and to ensure the flow of Western funding, the rightists are gaining ground politically. And they are getting increasingly violent, staging a riot in front of the parliament building in which three officers were killed by a grenade hurled at policemen: 130 cops were injured. The rightists were protesting the decision by the parliament to grant the eastern rebels some small degree of autonomy. This incident followed a series of shoot-outs with the armed rightist gang known as Right Sector, which played a key role in the Maidan protest movement.

That the Poroshenko government, which had previously stonewalled any serious effort to investigate the shooting deaths that sent Yanukovich packing, is playing this card now is an indication of the regime's desperation in the face of a challenge from the ultra-right. For to upend the official narrative – one that is fully supported by their Western sponsors, and their

amen corner in the media – is to subvert the very foundations of the post-Maidan order. If the truth comes out, the ultra-nationalists may be finished – but so may the government that exposes their murderous role.

Yes, the truth may very well come out: but what of the truth-tellers? They often suffer in any case. One such example is what happened to Stephen F. Cohen, a professor of Russian history at Princeton and New York University, and the author of the definitive biography of Nicolai Bukharin, as well as several other well-received books. He is married to Katrina vanden Heuval, editor of *The Nation*, where some of his work appears, and he has been outspoken in his criticism of US policy in Ukraine, and the launching of a new cold war against the Russians. Almost alone in the scholarly community, Cohen has been a voice of reason, speaking out against the Russophobic hysteria in every venue that will grant him access: for this he has been pilloried by the neoconservative and “mainstream” media, called “Putin’s toady” and “apologist” in a campaign of vilification that, ironically, has a certain Soviet air about it.

The smear campaign took on a particularly vindictive and personal tone when the proposal to name a graduate study program funded by Katrina vanden Heuval’s KAT Charitable Foundation named after Cohen and the late Robert C. Tucker, his mentor, was rejected by the Board of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES). Cohen and vanden Heuval had offered to fund a fellowship program that would fill the gap left by State Department cuts in its Russian studies outlays. The first disbursements would have totaled \$415,000, with more to come when the program took root. ASEEES was already sponsoring a KAT-funded Dissertation Prize, named after Cohen (and Tucker), and all seemed well until some members of the Board objected.

On what grounds their objections were founded was never made explicit, since the whole procedure was carried out in secret, but it was clear from the beginning that Cohen’s eloquent attacks on Washington’s headlong plunge into a confrontation with Russia had provoked opposition from some Board members. So the Board came back to Cohen and vanden Heuval with what they termed a “compromise”: they’d take their money, but Cohen’s name had to be stricken from the program.

It was an outrageous slap in the face, and Cohen and vanden Heuval were rightly outraged: they reluctantly withdrew their generous offer.

But that wasn’t the end of it. When rank-and-file ASEEES members – scholars at colleges and universities throughout the world – caught wind of this, a rebellion ensued. A letter circulated by David Ransel, the Robert F. Byrnes Professor Emeritus of History at Indiana University, a former editor of the *American Historical Review*, and a former President of ASEEES, wrote a scathing letter to the Board demanding that they reverse their decision, apologize to Cohen and vanden Heuval, and proceed with the fellowship under the previously agreed on name: the Stephen F. Cohen and Robert C. Tucker Dissertation Fellowship. Seventy-five scholars in the field co-signed the letter, and 25 more were soon added. The ASEEES Board issued a “clarification,” which clarified only that they didn’t understand what free academic discourse means, and Professor Ransel came back at them with another letter exposing their hypocrisy and asking that the program be reinstated, with apologies to Cohen and vanden Heuval.

To make a long story short, the ASEES Board backed down, made excuses, and restored the program to its original form, with the only change being that ASEES alone would vet the fellowship participants. Cohen's name will stay, Ms. vanden Heuvel's generosity will benefit students – and the witch-hunters have been defeated.

This time, that is...

That an effort to target a scholar whose public statements contradict those of our all-knowing government officials was defeated is a victory for free speech and against political correctness – the PC of the new cold war, which seeks to marginalize anyone who advocates a rational foreign policy toward Russia as “Putin's toady.” Indeed, even the US government-funded Radio Free Europe ran a long polemic attacking Cohen, entitled “Stephen Cohen, Preeminent Scholar, Now Seen as Putin Apologist”! That your tax dollars are paying for a smear campaign against one of the most prominent Russia experts should tell us everything we need to know about who and what is behind the Big Chill in the foreign policy discourse as it applies to Russo-American relations.

And make no mistake: there is a chill. And that icy wind, while it didn't succeed in freezing out Cohen, is taking its toll on lesser known figures. I am told by someone familiar with the Cohen brouhaha that the Russophobic party line is being enforced with a vengeance in academic circles. One young university scholar of Russian studies at a California state university was so intimidated by all the pressure that she dropped out of a panel discussion on the Ukrainian crisis because the paper she submitted didn't comport with the US-EU version of events. The paper was circulated to some of the other panelists, and she started to receive threats: frightened, she dropped out, citing the damage done to the career of one of her friends for crossing the invisible – but all too real – ideological line. The very senior chair of the panel tried to get her to change her mind, but nothing could dissuade her: she didn't show up at the conference.

The irony of this ideological campaign to silence critics of the new cold war is that it largely consists of Soviet-style epithets hurled at anyone who challenges the official US-EU narrative. “Toady,” “apologist,” “dupe,” “stooge” – this is the lexicon of *Pravda*, circa 1932. And when this kind of language is deployed in academia – where government funding plays such a decisive role – the danger to free discourse is all too obvious.

Telling the truth, when the air is filled with government-generated lies, can get you into trouble: it can ruin your career, it can even get you on the FBI's watch list. But in this day and age, when communications are instantaneous and video cameras are everywhere, the truth is more than likely to come out eventually. The trick is to stay alive until it does.