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War in Europe and the rise of raw propaganda

written by John Pilger
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Oct. 8, 2014: U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland at a Ukrainian State Border Guard Service Base in Kiev.

Marshall McLuhan's prophecy that "the successor to politics will be propaganda" has happened. Raw propaganda is now the rule in Western democracies, especially the U.S. and Britain.

On matters of war and peace, ministerial deceit is reported as news. Inconvenient facts are censored, demons are nurtured. The model is corporate spin, the currency of the age. In 1964, McLuhan famously declared, "The medium is the message." The lie is the message now.

But is this new? It is more than a century since Edward Bernays, the father of spin, invented “public relations” as a cover for war propaganda. What is new is the virtual elimination of dissent in the mainstream.

The great editor David Bowman, author of *The Captive Press*, called this “a defenestration of all who refuse to follow a line and to swallow the unpalatable and are brave.” He was referring to independent journalists and whistleblowers, the honest mavericks to whom media organizations once gave space, often with pride. The space has been abolished.

The war hysteria that has rolled in like a tidal wave in recent weeks and months is the most striking example. Known by its jargon, “shaping the narrative,” much if not most of it is pure propaganda.

The Russians are coming. Russia is worse than bad. Putin is evil, “a Nazi like Hitler,” salivated the Labour MP Chris Bryant. Ukraine is about to be invaded by Russia—tonight, this week, next week. The sources include an ex-CIA propagandist who now speaks for the U.S. State Department and offers no evidence of his claims about Russian actions because “it comes from the U.S. Government.”



The no-evidence rule

The no-evidence rule also applies in London. The British Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss, who spent £500,000 of public money flying to Australia in a private plane to warn the Canberra government that both Russia and China were about to pounce, offered no evidence. Antipodean heads nodded; the “narrative” is unchallenged there. One rare exception, former prime minister Paul Keating, called Truss’s warmongering “demented.”

Truss has blithely confused the countries of the Baltic and Black Sea. In Moscow, she told the Russian foreign minister that Britain would never accept Russian sovereignty over Rostov and Voronezh—until it was pointed out to her that these places were not part of Ukraine but in Russia. Read the Russian press about the buffoonery of this pretender to 10 Downing Street and cringe.

Dangerous farce

This entire farce, recently starring Boris Johnson in Moscow playing a clownish version of his hero, Churchill, might be enjoyed as satire were it not for its willful abuse of facts and historical understanding and the real danger of war.

Vladimir Putin refers to the “genocide” in the eastern Donbas region of Ukraine. Following the coup in Ukraine in 2014—orchestrated by Barack Obama’s “point person” in Kiev, Victoria Nuland—the coup regime, infested with neo-Nazis, launched a campaign of terror against Russian-speaking Donbas, which accounts for a third of Ukraine’s population.

Overseen by CIA director John Brennan in Kiev, “special security units” coordinated savage attacks on the people of Donbas, who opposed the coup. Video and eyewitness reports show bussed fascist thugs burning the trade union headquarters in the city of Odessa, killing 41 people trapped inside. The police are standing by. Obama congratulated the “duly elected” coup regime for its “remarkable restraint.”

In the U.S. media the Odessa atrocity was played down as “murky” and a “tragedy” in which “nationalists” (neo-Nazis) attacked “separatists” (people collecting signatures for a referendum on a federal Ukraine). Rupert Murdoch’s *Wall Street Journal* damned the victims—“[Deadly Ukraine Fire Likely Sparked by Rebels, Government Says.](#)”

Professor Stephen Cohen, acclaimed as America’s leading authority on Russia, [wrote](#):

“The pogrom-like burning to death of ethnic Russians and others in Odessa... reawakened memories of Nazi extermination squads in Ukraine during World War II. ... [Today] stormtroop-like assaults on gays, Jews, elderly ethnic Russians, and other ‘impure’ citizens are widespread throughout Kiev-ruled Ukraine, along with torchlight marches reminiscent of those that eventually inflamed Germany in the late 1920s and 1930s...

“The police and official legal authorities do virtually nothing to prevent these neo-fascist acts or to prosecute them. On the contrary, Kiev has officially encouraged them by systematically rehabilitating and even memorializing Ukrainian collaborators with Nazi German extermination pogroms..., renaming streets in their honor, building monuments to them, rewriting history to glorify them, and more.”

Today, neo-Nazi Ukraine is seldom mentioned. That the British are training the Ukrainian National Guard, which includes neo-Nazis, is not news. (See Matt Kennard’s [Declassified report](#) in [Consortium News](#) on February 15.) The return of violent, endorsed fascism to 21st-century Europe, to quote Harold Pinter, “never happened... even while it was happening.”

On December 16, the United Nations tabled a resolution that called for “combating

glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism.” The only nations to vote against it were the United States and Ukraine.

Almost every Russian knows that it was across the plains of Ukraine’s “borderland” that Hitler’s divisions swept from the west in 1941, bolstered by Ukraine’s Nazi cultists and collaborators. The result was more than 20 million Russian dead.

Russian proposals

Setting aside the maneuvers and cynicism of geopolitics, whomever the players, this historical memory is the driving force behind Russia’s respect-seeking, self-protective security proposals, which were published in Moscow in the week the UN voted 130-2 to outlaw Nazism. They are:

- NATO guarantees that it will not deploy missiles in nations bordering Russia. (They are already in place from Slovenia to Romania, with Poland to follow.)
- NATO to stop military and naval exercises in nations and seas bordering Russia.
- Ukraine will not become a member of NATO.
- the West and Russia to sign a binding East-West security pact.
- the landmark treaty between the U.S. and Russia covering intermediate-range nuclear weapons to be restored. (The U.S. abandoned it in 2019.)

These amount to a comprehensive draft of a peace plan for all of post-war Europe and ought to be welcomed in the West. But who understands their significance in Britain? What they are told is that Putin is a pariah and a threat to Christendom.

Russian-speaking Ukrainians, under economic blockade by Kiev for seven years, are fighting for their survival. The “massing” army we seldom hear about is the 13 Ukrainian army brigades laying siege to Donbas: an estimated 150,000 troops. If

they attack, the provocation to Russia will almost certainly mean war.

In 2015, brokered by the Germans and French, the presidents of Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France met in Minsk and signed an interim peace deal. Ukraine agreed to offer autonomy to Donbas, now the self-declared republics of Donetsk and Luhansk.

The Minsk agreement has never been given a chance. In Britain, the line, amplified by Boris Johnson, is that Ukraine is being “dictated to” by world leaders. For its part, Britain is arming Ukraine and training its army.

Since the first Cold War, NATO has effectively marched right up to Russia’s most sensitive border having demonstrated its bloody aggression in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya and broken solemn promises to pull back. Having dragged European “allies” into American wars that do not concern them, the great unspoken is that NATO itself is the real threat to European security.

In Britain, a state and media xenophobia is triggered at the very mention of “Russia.” Mark the knee-jerk hostility with which the BBC reports Russia. Why? Is it because the restoration of imperial mythology demands, above all, a permanent enemy? Certainly, we deserve better.

This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#). John Pilger is an award-winning journalist, filmmaker, and author. Read his full biography on his website [here](#), and follow him on Twitter: [@JohnPilger](#).

