

New York Times Still Pretends No Coup in Ukraine

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Global Research, January 07, 2015

[Consortium News](#) 6 January 2015

Region: [Russia and FSU](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [US NATO](#)

[War Agenda](#)

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Image: The neo-Nazi Wolfsangel symbol on a banner in Ukraine.

During my years at Newsweek in the late 1980s, when I would propose correcting some misguided conventional wisdom, I'd often be told, "let's leave that one for the historians," with the magazine not wanting to challenge an erroneous storyline that all the important people "knew" to be true. And if false narratives only affected the past, one might argue my editors had a point. There's always a lot of current news to cover.

But most false narratives are not really about the past; they are about how the public perceives the present and addresses the future. And it should fall to journalists to do their best to explain this background information even if it embarrasses powerful people and institutions, including the news organizations themselves.

Yet, rather than take on that difficult task, most major news outlets prefer to embroider onto their existing tapestry of misinformation, fitting today's reporting onto the misshapen fabric of yesterday's. They rarely start from scratch and admit the earlier work was wrong.

So, how does the mainstream U.S. news media explain the Ukraine crisis after essentially falsifying the historical record for the past year? Well, if you're the New York Times, you keep on spinning the old storyline, albeit with a few adjustments.

For instance, on Sunday, the Times [published](#) a lengthy article that sought to sustain the West's insistence that the coup overthrowing elected President Viktor Yanukovych wasn't really a coup – just the crumbling of his government in the face of paramilitary violence from the street with rumors of worse violence to come – though that may sound to you pretty much like a coup. Still, the Times does make some modifications to Yanukovych's image.

In the article, Yanukovych is recast from a brutal autocrat willfully having his police slaughter peaceful protesters into a frightened loser whose hand was "shaking" as he signed a Feb. 21 agreement with European diplomats, agreeing to reduce his powers and hold early elections, a deal that was cast aside on Feb. 22 when armed neo-Nazi militias overran presidential and parliamentary offices.

Defining a Coup

One might wonder what the New York Times thinks a coup looks like. Indeed, the Ukrainian coup had many of the same earmarks as such classics as the CIA-engineered regime changes in Iran in 1953 and in Guatemala in 1954.

The way those coups played out is now historically well known. Secret U.S. government

operatives planted nasty propaganda about the targeted leader, stirred up political and economic chaos, conspired with rival political leaders, spread rumors of worse violence to come and then – as political institutions collapsed – chased away the duly elected leader before welcoming the new “legitimate” order.

In Iran, that meant reinstalling the autocratic Shah who then ruled with a heavy hand for the next quarter century; in Guatemala, the coup led to more than three decades of brutal military regimes and the killing of some 200,000 Guatemalans.

Coups don’t have to involve army tanks occupying the public squares, although that is an alternative model which follows many of the same initial steps except that the military is brought in at the end. The military coup was a common approach especially in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s.

But the preferred method in more recent years has been the “color revolution,” which operates behind the façade of a “peaceful” popular uprising and international pressure on the targeted leader to show restraint until it’s too late to stop the coup. Despite the restraint, the leader is still accused of gross human rights violations, all the better to justify his removal.

Later, the ousted leader may get an image makeover; instead of a cruel bully, he is ridiculed for not showing sufficient resolve and letting his base of support melt away, as happened with Mohammad Mossadegh in Iran and Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala.

The Ukraine Reality

The reality of what happened in Ukraine was never hard to figure out. George Friedman, the founder of the global intelligence firm Stratfor, [called](#) the overthrow of Yanukovich “the most blatant coup in history.” It’s just that the major U.S. news organizations were either complicit in the events or incompetent in describing them to the American people.

The first step in this process was to obscure that the motive for the coup – pulling Ukraine out of Russia’s economic orbit and capturing it in the European Union’s gravity field – was actually announced by influential American neocons in 2013.

On Sept. 26, 2013, National Endowment for Democracy President Carl Gershman, who has become a major neocon paymaster, took to the op-ed page of the neocon Washington Post and called Ukraine “the biggest prize” and an important interim step toward toppling Russian President Vladimir Putin.

At the time, Gershman, whose NED is funded by the U.S. Congress to the tune of about \$100 million a year, was financing scores of projects inside Ukraine – training activists, paying for journalists and organizing business groups.

As for that even bigger prize – Putin – Gershman wrote: “Ukraine’s choice to join Europe will accelerate the demise of the ideology of Russian imperialism that Putin represents. ... Russians, too, face a choice, and Putin may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.”

At that time, in early fall 2013, Ukraine’s President Yanukovich was exploring the idea of reaching out to Europe with an association agreement. But he got cold feet in November 2013 when economic experts in Kiev advised him that the Ukrainian economy would suffer a

\$160 billion hit if it separated from Russia, its eastern neighbor and major trading partner. There was also the West's demand that Ukraine accept a harsh austerity plan from the International Monetary Fund.

Yanukovych wanted more time for the EU negotiations, but his decision angered many western Ukrainians who saw their future more attached to Europe than Russia. Tens of thousands of protesters began camping out at Maidan Square in Kiev, with Yanukovych ordering the police to show restraint.

Meanwhile, with Yanukovych shifting back toward Russia, which was offering a more generous \$15 billion loan and discounted natural gas, he soon became the target of American neocons and the U.S. media, which portrayed Ukraine's political unrest as a black-and-white case of a brutal and corrupt Yanukovych opposed by a saintly "pro-democracy" movement.

The Maidan uprising was urged on by American neocons, including Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, who passed out cookies at the Maidan and told Ukrainian business leaders that the United States had invested \$5 billion in their "European aspirations."

In the weeks before the coup, according to [an intercepted phone call](#), Nuland discussed with U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt who should lead the future regime. Nuland said her choice was Arseniy Yatsenyuk. "Yats is the guy," she told Pyatt as he pondered how to "midwife this thing."

Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona, also showed up, standing on stage with right-wing extremists from the Svoboda Party and telling the crowd that the United States was with them in their challenge to the Ukrainian government.

As the winter progressed, the protests grew more violent. Neo-Nazi and other extremist elements from Lviv and western Ukrainian cities began arriving in well-organized brigades or "sotins" of 100 trained street fighters. Police were attacked with firebombs and other weapons as the violent protesters began seizing government buildings and unfurling Nazi banners and even a Confederate flag.

Though Yanukovych continued to order his police to show restraint, he was still depicted in the major U.S. news media as a brutal thug who was callously murdering his own people. The chaos reached a climax on Feb. 20 when mysterious snipers opened fire on police and some protesters, killing scores. As police retreated, the militants advanced brandishing firearms and other weapons. The confrontation led to significant loss of life, pushing the death toll to around 80 including more than a dozen police.

U.S. diplomats and the mainstream U.S. press immediately blamed Yanukovych for the sniper attack, though the circumstances remain murky to this day and some investigations have suggested that the lethal sniper fire came from buildings controlled by Right Sektor extremists.

To tamp down the worsening violence, a shaken Yanukovych signed a European-brokered deal on Feb. 21, in which he accepted reduced powers and an early election so he could be voted out of office. He also agreed to requests from Vice President Joe Biden to pull back the police.

The precipitous police withdrawal then opened the path for the neo-Nazis and other street fighters to seize presidential offices and force Yanukovych's people to flee for their lives. Yanukovych traveled to eastern Ukraine and the new coup regime that took power – and was immediately declared “legitimate” by the U.S. State Department – sought Yanukovych's arrest for murder. Nuland's favorite, Yatsenyuk, became the new prime minister.

Media Bias

Throughout the crisis, the mainstream U.S. press hammered home the theme of white-hatted protesters versus a black-hatted president. The police were portrayed as brutal killers who fired on unarmed supporters of “democracy.” The good-guy/bad-guy narrative was all the American people heard from the major media.

The New York Times went so far as to delete the slain policemen from the narrative and simply report that the police had killed all those who died in the Maidan. A typical Times report on March 5, 2014, summed up the storyline: “More than 80 protesters were shot to death by the police as an uprising spiraled out of control in mid-February.”

The mainstream U.S. media also sought to discredit anyone who observed the obvious fact that an unconstitutional coup had just occurred. A new theme emerged that portrayed Yanukovych as simply deciding to abandon his government because of the moral pressure from the noble and peaceful Maidan protests.

Any reference to a “coup” was dismissed as “Russian propaganda.” There was a parallel determination in the U.S. media to discredit or ignore evidence that neo-Nazi militias had played an important role in ousting Yanukovych and in the subsequent suppression of anti-coup resistance in eastern and southern Ukraine. That opposition among ethnic-Russian Ukrainians simply became “Russian aggression.”

This refusal to notice what was actually a remarkable story – the willful unleashing of Nazi storm troopers on a European population for the first time since World War II – reached absurd levels as the New York Times and the Washington Post buried references to the neo-Nazis at the end of stories, almost as afterthoughts.

The Washington Post went to the extreme of rationalizing Swastikas and other Nazi symbols by quoting one militia commander as calling them “romantic” gestures by impressionable young men. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Ukraine's 'Romantic' Neo-Nazi Storm Troopers](#)."]]

Yet, despite the best efforts of the Times, the Post and other mainstream outlets to conceal this ugly reality from the American people, alternative news sources – presenting a more realistic account of what was happening in Ukraine – began to chip away at the preferred narrative.

Instead of buying the big media's storyline, many Americans were coming to realize that the reality was much more complicated and that they were again being sold a bill of propaganda goods.

Denying a Coup

To the rescue rode the New York Times on Sunday, presenting what was portrayed as a detailed, granular “investigation” of how there was no coup in Ukraine and reaffirming the insistence that only Moscow stooges would think such a thing.

“Russia has attributed Mr. Yanukovich’s ouster to what it portrays as a violent, ‘neo-fascist’ coup supported and even choreographed by the West and dressed up as a popular uprising,” [wrote](#) Andrew Higgins and Andrew E. Kramer. “Few outside the Russian propaganda bubble ever seriously entertained the Kremlin’s line. But almost a year after the fall of Mr. Yanukovich’s government, questions remain about how and why it collapsed so quickly and completely.”

The Times’ article concluded that Yanukovich

“was not so much overthrown as cast adrift by his own allies, and that Western officials were just as surprised by the meltdown as anyone else. The allies’ desertion, fueled in large part by fear, was accelerated by the seizing by protesters of a large stock of weapons in the west of the country. But just as important, the review of the final hours shows, was the panic in government ranks created by Mr. Yanukovich’s own efforts to make peace.”

Yet, what is particularly curious about this article is that it ignores the substantial body of evidence that the U.S. officials were instrumental in priming the crisis and fueling the ultimate ouster of Yanukovich. For instance, the Times makes no reference to the multitude of U.S.-financed political projects in Ukraine including scores by Gershman’s NED, nor the extraordinary intervention by Assistant Secretary of State Nuland.

Nuland’s encouragement to those challenging the elected government of Ukraine would surely merit mentioning, one would think. But it disappears from the Times’ version of history. Perhaps even more amazing there is no reference to the Nuland-Pyatt phone call, though Pyatt was interviewed for the article.

Even if the Times wanted to make excuses for the Nuland-Pyatt scheming – claiming perhaps it didn’t prove that they were coup-plotting – you would think the infamous phone call would deserve at least a mention. But Nuland isn’t referenced anywhere. Nor is Gershman. Nor is McCain.

The most useful part of the Times’ article is its description of the impact from a raid by anti-Yanukovich militias in the western city of Lviv on a military arsenal and the belief that the guns were headed to Kiev to give the uprising greater firepower.

The Times reports that “European envoys met at the German Embassy with Andriy Parubiy, the chief of the protesters’ security forces, and told him to keep the Lviv guns away from Kiev. ‘We told him: “Don’t let these guns come to Kiev. If they come, that will change the whole situation,”’ Mr. Pyatt recalled telling Mr. Parubiy, who turned up for the meeting wearing a black balaclava.

“In a recent interview in Kiev, Mr. Parubiy denied that the guns taken in Lviv ever got to Kiev, but added that the prospect that they might have provided a powerful lever to pressure both Mr. Yanukovich’s camp and Western governments. ‘I warned them that if Western governments did not take firmer action against Yanukovich, the whole process could gain a very threatening dimension,’ he said.

“Andriy Tereschenko, a Berkut [police] commander from Donetsk who was holed up with his men in the Cabinet Ministry, the government headquarters in Kiev, said that 16 of his men had already been shot on Feb. 18 and that he was

terrified by the rumors of an armory of automatic weapons on its way from Lviv. 'It was already an armed uprising, and it was going to get worse,' he said. 'We understood why the weapons were taken, to bring them to Kiev.'"

The Times leaves out a fuller identification of Parubiy. Beyond serving as the chief of the Maidan "self-defense forces," Parubiy was a notorious neo-Nazi, the founder of the Social-National Party of Ukraine (and the national security chief for the post-coup regime). But "[seeing no neo-Nazis](#)" in Ukraine had become a pattern for the New York Times.

Still, the journalistic question remains: what does the New York Times think a coup looks like? You have foreign money, including from the U.S. government, pouring into Ukraine to finance political and propaganda operations. You have open encouragement to the coup-makers from senior American officials.

You have hundreds of trained and armed paramilitary fighters dispatched to Kiev from Lviv and other western cities. You have the seizure of an arsenal amid rumors that these more powerful weapons are being distributed to these paramilitaries. You have international pressure on the elected president to pull back his security forces, even as Western propaganda portrays him as a mass murderer.

Anyone who knows about the 1954 Guatemala coup would remember that a major element of that CIA operation was a disinformation campaign, broadcast over CIA-financed radio stations, about a sizeable anti-government force marching on Guatemala City, thus spooking the Arbenz government to collapse and Arbenz to flee.

But the Times article is not a serious attempt to study the Ukraine coup. If it had been, it would have looked seriously at the substantial evidence of Western interference and into other key facts, such as the identity of the Feb. 20 snipers. Instead, the article was just the latest attempt to pretend that the coup really wasn't a coup.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, America's Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes America's Stolen Narrative. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

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