

When Lies and Half-truths Rule the Washington Op-Ed Pages, Danger Lurks

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

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In the West, Russian media is often accused of propaganda. If this really is the aim of the Russian press, they aren't remotely as good at it as the Washington Post.

Let's talk about propaganda and the Western media's use of 'star' columnists to spout it. Let's, especially, focus on when that vitriol is deliberately inaccurate. This week's best example is the Washington Post columns.

The Post used to be perceived as a great newspaper, but those were different times. It has won 47 Pulitzer Prizes and under Philip Graham's direction it became regarded, globally, as a beacon of honest reporting. It's now owned by the Amazon [founder](#), Jeff Bezos, who was named the world's worst boss at this year's International Trade Union Confederation World Congress in Berlin. The ITCU is not some fringe body – it represents 180 million workers. Some accolade, eh?

"Amazon operating in Germany treats its workers as if they are robots. The company makes no secret that within just a few years they will replace workers with robots. A rich American corporation operating globally with disdain for dignity, for rights for working people,"

stated Sharan Burrow, the ITCU's General Secretary.

The halcyon days of the Post are over and, in a hardly surprising move, that story didn't get their, once famed, forensic coverage.

One of its most prominent op-ed writers is [Anne Applebaum](#), who writes on foreign affairs every fortnight. Her brief is global, but in Anne's world, Russia seems to be, just about, the only foreign affair of interest.

No, revisionists: we didn't humiliate Russia for 20 years, we indulged Russia. That was our great mistake. <http://t.co/IDUjcsTdt0>

— Anne Applebaum (@anneapplebaum) [October 17, 2014](#)

People's personal lives are usually not relevant here, but Anne is married to Radoslaw Sikorski, who was recently removed as Poland's Foreign Minister, so it merits mention. Sikorski played a prominent role in stoking up this year's coup in Ukraine and is, notoriously, hawkish on Russia. The Pole was affiliated with Washington's American Enterprise Institute –

a neocon citadel with close links to the former (George W.) Bush administration in the US. A British citizen for 19 years, until he renounced it, Sikorski is devoted to Poland but his world view was largely shaped on foreign fields. Applebaum, herself, won a Pulitzer for her book Gulag in 2004. She's coveted an image as a ferocious warrior against oppression (so long as that oppression was in Russia) and chauvinism (again if the intolerance is in Russia). Although Moscow hijacks most of her time – in fact she's made a career out of bashing the country – Applebaum sometimes finds a gap in her schedule for a bit of Muslim baiting.

[@grahamfarmelo](#): Applebaum on the myth of Russia's 'humiliation':
<http://t.co/Umh8jWcn92> Really, Russia stands on the threshold of NATO

— zebrev (@gizebrev) [October 18, 2014](#)

In 2009, she [claimed](#) that “in recent years separatist and politically extreme forms of Islam have emerged in every European country with a large Muslim population: Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Denmark, Sweden.”

Now I've never heard of separatist Muslim's in Denmark, have you? I also seem to have missed the separatist Islamic uprising in Germany while I was living there, although a drunken Kurd did propose that Berlin's Kreuzberg be made a Muslim 'zone' with no alcohol sold – the irony amused.

Yes, the myth of Russian humiliation should be put to rest.
<http://t.co/4gDgjHpSer>

— Carl Bildt (@carlbildt) [October 18, 2014](#)

Ironically, the only European country that has recently had a separatist Muslim problem is Russia. In 2001, when President Putin and then President Bush allied in the 'War On Terror', Applebaum [wrote](#) in London's Daily Telegraph:

“Putin's commitment to America's war on terrorism was made so abruptly, and is so clearly personal, that I suspect it comes from something deeper: his racism. Or – since racism is a harsh word – perhaps it is better to say that his commitment comes from his deep belief that the greatest threat to Russia now comes not from the West and NATO, but from the South and Islam.” “When we tell the world's Muslims that our war isn't against them, we'd better make sure our Russian partners are acting as if they believe it.”

To put it another way, Anne was supportive of Muslims when she thought Russia was against them. Once, the penny dropped that Putin wasn't an Islam-ophobe, she flip-flopped. And so to her Washington Post [column](#) this week Applebaum goes on a pro-NATO rant and briefly mentions how great life is in Europe. Anne lives in Poland, where the average net monthly salary is €679. Doubtless, life is pure La Dolce Vita there on an American income, but many locals might demur.

[@anneapplebaum](#) [@MarcCareljansen](#) You are aware how utterly patronising this sounds? USA handing out milk and cookies

There's a bit of spiel about how wonderful and understanding the US was in the nineties' and then the fun starts. Applebaum claims that Russia never qualified to join the old G8 because it was "neither a large economy nor a democracy." There's little doubt democracy could be improved in Russia, but the fiscal comment is bizarre. Canada was a member, and still sits at the G7, but its economy is well under half the size of Russia's. See the table below.

G8 by GDP, PPP as of 2013 in billions of US dollars

Russia	\$3,492
France	\$2,535
United Kingdom	\$2,320
Italy	\$2,035
Canada	\$1,518

(Source: IMF)

So, Russia is the 4th biggest economy of the old G8, but Applebaum thinks it didn't merit membership on the grounds of being "a large economy?" If she counters by claiming the piece referred to the 90's, Russia was admitted in 1998, when Boris Yeltsin was in charge and open democracy was all the rage in Russia. The country defaulted on its debts the same year.

Here's another ludicrous statement. "In 1991, Russia was no longer a great power... so why didn't we recognize reality, reform the United Nations and give a Security Council seat to India, Japan or others?" I can answer that Anne. Russia is the world's second largest military power, by all accepted [metrics](#), and Japan is 10th. In fact, South Korea and Turkey have stronger militaries than Japan. Not to mention that Russia has 15,000 tanks and Japan only 767. They won't be going too far with those. Even in 1991, Russia's nuclear strength alone guaranteed membership.

Russia is also the only nation in the world that can currently launch a human being into space. That kind of stuff is important in the world of security.

The danger here is that The Washington Post helps frame opinion in America's corridors of power. The vast majority of elected representatives have no personal experience of Russia and have never been there. Instead, their view of the country is framed by what they consume from the US corporate media. Applebaum speaks to an extremely powerful audience. Distorting facts to present a false picture in The Washington Post is callous, improper and viperous.

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