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The Ukraine crisis and the political lies of the media

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28 April 2014

As the Obama administration and its allies in Europe escalate their threats against Russia over the crisis in Ukraine, the American media plays its assigned role as propaganda mouthpiece.

Not a single critical voice can be found within the so-called mainstream media. The newspapers and television news programs are filled with lies, anti-Russian propaganda, and—preparing for the possibility that the crisis escalates out of control—apologetics for war.

The *New York Times*, the “newspaper of record,” sets the general tone for the media as a whole. The *Times* boasts of having 12 reporters in Ukraine, yet it provides no serious reporting on what is happening. This is all the more significant given the extraordinary implications of a major conflict between the United States and Russia that could quickly evolve into the first war between nuclear powers in world history.

Over the past two weeks, the *Times* has been caught in a series of fabrications. Last week, it ran a front-page lead story replete with photographs handed to it by the State Department and the US-backed Ukrainian government purporting to show that Russian Special Forces are directing the protests in eastern Ukraine.

The *Times* report was quickly exposed as a fraud, including by the WSWS. It took only a quick search on the Internet to expose the so-called evidence as either doctored or fabricated. Subsequent acknowledgements of the “controversy” over the photographs—exercises in damage control and cover-up—have been buried on the newspaper’s inside pages.

Far from being chastened by these exposures, the *Times* rapidly moved on to its next assignment from the State Department—a front-page article published yesterday alleging that Russian President Vladimir Putin has a secret fortune of between \$40 billion and \$70 billion. The *Times* acknowledged in its own article that the allegations consist of “rumors and speculation” with “little if any hard evidence.” That did not prevent it from seeking to legitimize the gossip by elevating it to the status of a prominent “news” item.

On the newspaper’s back pages are columns by various commentators, reflecting the generally stupid musings of one or another faction of the state apparatus. Sunday was the turn of Thomas Friedman, who infamously backed the 2003 US war in Iraq and boasted that he had “no problem with a war for oil.”

Purporting to explain the Ukrainian crisis to *Times* readers, Friedman writes: “Quite simply, a majority of Ukrainians got mad as hell at the game imposed on them—serving as bit players in Putin’s sphere of influence, so Russia could continue to feel like a great power... After a bottom-up revolution in the Maidan...Ukrainians are asserting their own sphere of influence, a desire to be part of the EU.”

Friedman does not mention that the Kiev government he glorifies as waging a struggle for individual liberty is an unelected puppet regime, and the “bottom-up revolution” was led by fascists working with the US and Germany.

Questions of history, social and political forces, geopolitical agendas, beginning with those of the United States, are not even hinted at. Instead, one gets yet another foreign leader targeted for destruction by US imperialism presented as the devil incarnate.

The powerful bond that united Ukraine and Russia arising from the 1917 Bolshevik revolution that overthrew tsarism and opened the door to the liberation of the oppressed masses; the heroic struggle of the Red Army to liberate Ukraine from the murderous grip of German fascism in World War II; the catastrophic consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the final act in the Stalinist betrayal of the October Revolution—these issues are a closed book to this ignorant, complacent, but lavishly paid flunkey of the US ruling class.

The *Times*’ standard is followed by all the major newspapers and television outlets. In following the coverage in the American media, one would never know that the new government in Kiev is populated by individuals from the anti-Semitic Svoboda party, which was condemned in a 2012 vote of the EU parliament. Nor would one know that the Right Sector militia and Svoboda party

glorify Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, whose Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists participated in the Holocaust of Ukrainian Jews.

The fact that the US has been aggressively backing the crackdown in eastern Ukraine—including sending CIA director John Brennan to Kiev—is covered over. The leaked phone call between US State Department official Victoria Nuland and US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt before the putsch, discussing whom to install as Ukraine’s prime minister, is never mentioned.

The media covers up the howling contradictions in the official presentation of the Ukraine crisis. Before the 2003 US war in Iraq, Washington denounced Iraqi President Saddam Hussein for “killing his own people.” US imperialism attacked Libya in 2011, claiming it had to forestall an imminent crackdown by Gaddafi on protesters in the rebellious city of Benghazi. The Obama administration declared Syrian President Bashar al-Assad unfit to rule because he unleashed his police and military against protesters. The official rationale for backing the coup against the elected Ukrainian president, Viktor Yanukovich, was that Yanukovich had destroyed the legitimacy of his government by attacking the Maidan protesters.

But now, Washington is cracking the whip and demanding that its puppets in Kiev get on with the job of drowning the upsurge in the east in blood. At the same time, it calls Russian threats to intervene to protect Russian-speaking Ukrainians from the violence of the state a crime against civilization.

The media in the US has undergone a protracted degeneration. During the period of the Vietnam War, critical voices within the media played a role in bringing the brutal reality of the war to the attention of the American public. In 1971, the *Times*’ and *Washington Post*’s publication of the Pentagon Papers helped expose the lies used to drive the American people into war in Southeast Asia.

The ruling class decided that would never happen again. The military and intelligence apparatus rapidly took the corporate-controlled media in hand. Even the pretense of independence from the state has been abandoned. The media has played an increasingly shameless role in each successive military intervention—the first Iraq war, the dismemberment of Yugoslavia, the “humanitarian” air war against Serbia.

The final nail in the coffin of anything remotely resembling an independent media came with 9/11 and the “war on terror,” as demonstrated by the media’s “embedded” role in the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and its brazen propaganda in support of the wars for regime change in Libya and Syria.

The major newspapers today acknowledge passing articles through government channels before publication, a practice that in other contexts is called state censorship. The media talking heads

and columnists make it their business to assist in the witch-hunt of whistleblowers like Edward Snowden and Julian Assange.

The fact that the entire foreign policy of the corporate-financial elite is erected on the basis of lies that cannot withstand the slightest critical examination is a sign not of strength, but of weakness. A vast gulf separates the working class from the warmongers in the American ruling class and their lackeys in the media.

Opposition will come from outside this entire corrupt framework. It will center in the working class. A major task of an independent working class movement against war will be to hold accountable the war propagandists who dominate the media.