

# HBO's "Chernobyl": A Cautionary Tale About Splitting Atoms, or Another Chapter of Anti-Russia Propaganda?

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*I've always been kind of obsessed by things nuclear. From the time I learned about nuclear arsenals as a child, I wondered how masses of people could tolerate this Sword of Damocles hanging over their heads. A few years ago, I started reading and writing intensively on this topic, thinking I would have one last kick at the can before I get too old to have any fight left in me. I thought people might wake up finally after the catastrophic meltdowns at Fukushima Dai-ichi. Thus one might think I would be encouraged by the news that HBO had produced a five-hour drama portraying the horror of the Chernobyl catastrophe in 1986. It has been a massive hit, bringing attention to an issue that I've tried to cover on [my obscure blogs](#) in the years since 2011. Perhaps it was the writings, films and actions of thousands of concerned citizens (including myself) that made a big-name entertainment company realize nuclear risk was a theme that people wanted to learn about. At the same time, there was reason to worry that an American entertainment network would get the story wrong, or the audience would take the wrong lessons from it.*

After watching the series and reading a broad spectrum of commentary on it, it is clear this concern was justified. There are some viewers and reviewers who have taken the wrong lesson from the dramatized version of the story, and the usual anti-Russia propaganda specialists have joined the discussion, concluding that the catastrophe was a product of the Soviet system, and because it is interpreted as a one-off event, others have even concluded that the drama delivered a pro-nuclear message: this technology can be mastered because we are not Soviet technocrats trapped in a totalitarian nightmare, are we?

## **Meltdowns Real and Metaphorical: Nuclear Catastrophes, Oil Spills and the Wealth of Nations**

- April 26, 1986: **Explosion** and **meltdown** of one RBMK Reactor at Chernobyl
- October 1986: London's **Big Bang** Financial Sector liberalization, the rise of neoliberal ideology
- October 1986: Reagan-Gorbachev Reykjavik Summit, leading to the INF Treaty
- November 1989: Opening of the Berlin Wall
- December 25, 1991: Dissolution of the Soviet Union, economic **meltdown** and asset stripping of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics

## **Two Decades Later**

- September 15, 2008: Global financial market **meltdown**, resulting from rampant

mortgage fraud and the neoliberal **Big Bang** reforms (neoliberalism in general) begun in the 1980s

- April 20, 2010: British Petroleum oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico
- March 11-15, 2011: **Meltdowns** and **explosions** of three General Electric nuclear reactors in Fukushima

### **Chernobyl: Another entry in a long list of anti-Russia propaganda vehicles?**

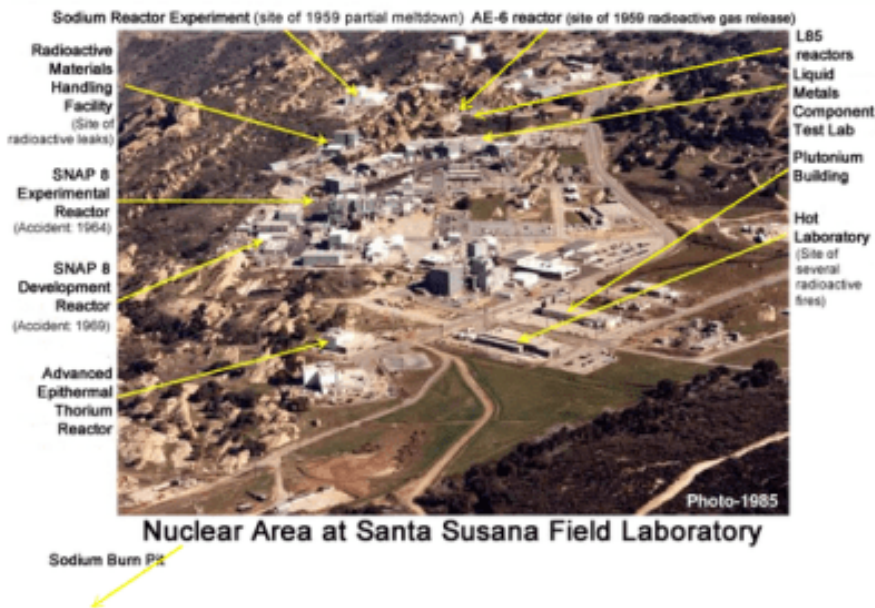
In recent years the mass media-deep state complex has tried to promote weapons sales to NATO countries by producing several reality show programs to drum up fear of the Slavic beast living over the eastern horizon. One example was the academy award-winning *White Helmets* documentary about the al-Qaeda warriors in Syria who worked part-time as emergency responders in any part of Syria controlled by “moderate rebels” but not in territory held by the Assad-Putin alliance that was defending Syrian sovereignty.[1]

Then there was the Skripal script in which an ex-Russian spy and present British MI6 asset, along with his daughter, was supposed to suffer a fatal chemical attack by Russian agents close to his home in Britain. Like the real people who act and react in a loosely scripted scenario in a season of *Survivor*, they were supposed to have perhaps faked their own deaths and disappeared. It’s not clear what the plan was, but it was obvious after a few weeks that the plan had gone terribly off-script and the audience was getting bored.[2] Perhaps Russian intelligence had duped their British counterparts into thinking they were going to carry out a nerve agent attack, but then slipped only a mild toxin into the targets’ food. Whatever the case was, the victims survived the “always-fatal” nerve agent poisoning, then disappeared. It all started to surpass even the farcical plot of Graham Greene’s British espionage satire *Our Man in Havana*. Perhaps the Skripal’s contract with the producers of the tale included a non-disclosure agreement and a big payoff for agreeing to disappear. They stopped talking about the failed show and hoped the audience would forget it. It was time for something different.

And this year we have *Chernobyl*.

[link to official trailer](#)

When I heard about it, I had my doubts about why it was appearing at this time and why it was being so heavily promoted, even though many people thought I would be encouraged to know that a topic I had written about was now reaching a popular audience. But the timing was just too strange, and I knew that similarly themed dramas had flopped in the past. For example, who remembers the 2014 series *Manhattan*? (A dramatization of the Manhattan Project.) I suspected *Chernobyl* would be made as a condemnation of Russia and the Soviet system, and not of nuclear technology itself. The producers of the drama make this error, and many viewers and reviewers have also interpreted it as a lesson in the evils of the Soviet system, and they naturally extend this to apply to what they believe is the present Russian “authoritarian” government that undermines “freedom,” “openness” and “liberal democracy” throughout the world. To see how absurd the phobia has become, just read [the thorough list](#) posted by *The Grayzone* of all the absurd ways Russia has allegedly contaminated the bodily fluids of our virile liberal democracies.[3]



In America's "open society" the 1959 meltdown at the SSFL near Los Angeles was unknown to the public until 1979.

### Chernobyl and the creative license of historical dramas

There have been several reviews and interviews that address the question of the story's accuracy. There is nothing wrong with "getting things wrong" in historical dramas, as it is exactly what they have to do to tell a complex story in a few hours. The writers and directors who produce them emphasize that they are not portraying a comprehensive, definitive set of facts. Even documentary films are extremely selective and subjective, and tell their own stories. Actually, if a documentary or dramatization is done well, it will make you feel like you know less about the subject than you did before you saw it. It will make you feel like you need to know more.

[link to official trailer](#)

It's interesting in this case to consider who becomes annoyed by dramatic license, and who is not allowed to get away with dramatization. In 1991, when Oliver Stone made his film about the JFK assassination, the leading newspapers and television networks in the United States (which to this day endorse the lone-assassin theory) pounced on it even before it opened because they had obtained a draft of a script that didn't even reflect the final version accurately. Having read quite a lot about both the JFK assassination and Chernobyl, and the media coverage of the historical dramas *JFK* and *Chernobyl*, I can see that *Chernobyl* has been treated much more kindly by the American and British media establishment. The reviews and commentary have been forgiving of the numerous inaccuracies and exaggerations in *Chernobyl*, whereas they slammed Oliver Stone for any small deviation from historical facts. **Oliver Stone**, however, was arguably more successful in sticking to the facts. Unlike the highly fictionalized trial depicted in *Chernobyl*, the trial in *JFK* depicts quite accurately the case put forth by New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison, and conforms with the facts of the case and what Garrison described in his book *On the Trail of the Assassins*.

Obviously, this discrepancy arises from the fact that the film *JFK* revealed what was in the

shadows of American life, and *Chernobyl* depicted flaws in the Soviet system. Unfortunately, this is what the commentary has focused on. Reviewers have jumped on the chance to discuss what the catastrophe revealed about the failures of the Soviet system while they completely miss what it teaches about the general risks and horrors of taking uranium out of the ground and turning it into fissionable material. Some pro-nuclear activists have even expressed relief that the film stayed on the anti-Soviet theme and didn't explicitly condemn nuclear energy. It was just this thing that happened once, long ago in a galaxy far, far away.



Editor of [Bellingcat](#), Natalia Antonova, was given space in *The Guardian* to mix an anti-Russia, anti-Brexit and anti-Trump message into her interpretation of *Chernobyl*. Bellingcat, by the way, describes itself as an “independent international collective of researchers, investigators and citizen journalists,” yet it is supported by government and private agencies that have a long history of biased propagandizing for NATO and against any state that resists the American “rules-based international order”—a term preferred these days because the world now laughs openly when the US government claims to be upholding international law. The Bellingcat website shows little interest in doing crusading, investigative journalism on domestic political issues within NATO countries. Bellingcat funders are the US government-funded National Endowment for Democracy, The Open Society Foundation (George Soros), the Dutch postcode lottery, and other privately funded foundations listed on its website.

Bellingcat's most famous investigation looked into the destruction of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 over Ukraine in 2014, and it seemed to have status as a quasi-official member of the investigation team. Yet after five years, the conclusions of this Dutch Joint Investigation Team remain unconvincing to the Malaysian government, which for some strange reason has not been allowed to participate in the investigation or have access to the aircraft's black box. **Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir** recently rejected the Bellingcat and DJIT conclusions accusing Russia of supplying the weapon that shot down the aircraft. He stated that the allegation was unproven and implausible.[4], [5]

In her review of *Chernobyl* **Natalia Antonova** wrote:

I also recognized how the mind-numbing lies and the political expediency of the horror is not something we can safely put away into a box... Whether it's the demagogue sitting in the White House, the people who engineered Brexit, or the chorus on the right and corporate interests telling us that the climate crisis is nothing but an alarmist hoax, there are people who do the expedient thing for their own ends all around us. Many are powerful enough to decide our collective fates. Today, I regularly encounter people who think that life in a communist paradise will help humanity solve its current predicaments. Some

are mean and cruel, delighted by the prospect of purging all those they consider their enemies. Some are decent and kind, unable to comprehend the brutalities of life in the USSR and genuine in their belief that **Vladimir Lenin**, the man whose name the doomed nuclear plant carried, foresaw a beautiful utopia—or, as us Soviets once called it, an age of mercy. I want to urge such people, as well as the Trumpers, the Brexiteers and everyone else, to watch *Chernobyl*.<sup>[6]</sup>

So to sum up this view, the disastrous explosion and meltdown of a nuclear reactor teaches us only about the mind-numbing lies and political expediency of the Soviet Union, as if these have never emerged from industrial accidents in countries with different ideologies and different forms of government. **The “lessons that haven’t been learned” are not about nuclear technology but about the danger of people wanting socialist solutions** for the ecological and social destruction caused by capitalism. In her review, Anatova mentions only the usual Bellingcat suspects that are on the contemporary propaganda agenda: Trump, demagogues, nationalists, Brexiteers, and radical leftists—but no one else! Not George Bush I, who showered Iraq with depleted uranium, not Bill Clinton, who showered Serbia with depleted uranium, not George Bush II, who tore up the ABM Treaty, not Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton who fully backed the Japanese government’s “lies and political expediency” during the meltdowns of three American-built reactors in Fukushima, not Tony Blair who joined Bush’s war on Iraq, based on a lie about weapons of mass destruction, and not the present government of India that has seized the passport and frozen the bank account of a leading anti-nuclear activist that it accuses of sedition.<sup>[7]</sup> In Bellingcat world it is as if there was an era of peace between 1986 and 2016 and it is only afterwards that everything went to hell.

**Masha Gessen**, another Soviet era exile who now makes a living doing anti-Russia propaganda, wrote in a similar vein in the *New Yorker*.<sup>[8]</sup> She remarked on how a speech in *Chernobyl* (episode one 41:50~), given by an elder statesman named Zharkov (a fictitious character, making a fictitious speech), conveyed “Soviet relationships of power”:

But it is my experience that when the people ask questions that are not in their own best interest, they should simply be told to keep their minds on their labor and leave matters of the State to the State. We seal off the city. No one leaves. And cut the phone lines. Contain the spread of misinformation. That is how we keep the people from undermining the fruits of their own labor.

This monolog was written so as to portray the Soviet system as a uniquely sinister force, but I’ve known Canadian, American and British nuclear engineers and pundits to say basically the same thing about nuclear emergencies—that the evacuation does more damage than the radiation, which they honestly believe will cause less illness and death than the panic and economic losses. The Japanese government also now says the radiation-affected populations just need to learn how to be “resilient,” which is really a directive that amounts to turning passive-aggressive bullying into official state policy.<sup>[9]</sup>

Furthermore, Zharkov’s speech is not much different than what is spoken by leaders in capitalist countries after a disaster. The priority is always to keep the stock market up, keep people going to work, and urge them to keep shopping, as George Bush did famously immediately after September 11, 2001.



In its ability to respond to such a disaster, the Soviet system actually had some advantages over capitalist countries. In *Chernobyl*, the viciousness of high officials and the KGB is greatly exaggerated. Characters are always afraid of “getting a bullet” if they admit to mistakes, or those in power are threatening to have someone summarily shot. But it just wasn’t like this in the 1980s, as Masha Gessen points out in her review. In reality, in the midst of all its crimes and mistakes, the government was at least able to mobilize vast human and material resources to deal with the catastrophe, without concern for costs and profitability, without the delays needed under capitalism to arrange contracts with corporations, private entities and volunteer labor forces, and without needing to wait for corporate charity. Soviet citizens had been calling each other comrade for sixty years, and this factor might have contributed to their ability to pull together through hard times. In contrast, the Fukushima Dai-ichi cleanup has been left to day laborers and sub-contracted workers. In spite of much talk about the ties that bind all Japanese together (*kizuna*), Fukushima Dai-ichi is willfully out of sight and out of mind for 99% of the population. We can at least say, to Gorbachev’s credit, that his first reaction to the crisis was not to bid on the 1996 Olympics as a way to gloss over the disaster. In Japan, ever since 2011, the government has tried to use 2020 Olympics boosterism to sweep the country’s problems under the carpet.

Masha Gessen also finds that the courtroom scene in *Chernobyl* “encapsulates the Soviet system perfectly.” A member of the Central Committee overrules the judge, and he and the prosecutor follow orders to allow Legasov to proceed with his statement. “This is exactly how Soviet courts worked,” she writes, “they [judges] did the bidding of the Central Committee, and the prosecutor wielded more power than the judge.” I suppose Masha Gessen has never heard of the Grand Jury Trial in the early 1990s that investigated the long history of negligence and coverups at the Rocky Flats plutonium factory in Colorado. That trial was inexplicably shut down by the Justice Department in its third year, then the jurors were ordered to disclose nothing about the trial in public.[10] The contemporary anti-Russia propagandists would have us believe that the American security state and its too-big-to-fail corporations have never interfered in matters before the court.

In an interview with *Slate* the drama’s writer and showrunner, Craig Mazin, confirmed that he did in fact conceive of the story as a lesson about the evils of the Soviet system, and he declares himself to be pro-nuclear. Ironically, he also states, as if he and many others in Hollywood were innocent of having created a slick pieces of propaganda themselves (often with the help of the CIA and the Pentagon), that the Soviets “were masters of weaponized narration. And interestingly, they appear to have continued that tradition. The KGB is gone, but the FSB [the present Russian equivalent] is here.” Throughout the interview he endorses a mild, de-politicized humanism, saying that his story is “not about left or right. It’s about humans, and the mistakes that humans make. We are, all of us, subject to that, because we are, all of us, human, and imperfect.” It’s a nice thought, but it is also completely fatuous.

The most critical thing Mazin could say about Hilary Clinton, whom he supported, was that she struggled because “she didn’t have this narrative that apparently everybody needs. She was just smart and wanted to do things.” She had in fact done quite a few things in the preceding years, but American liberals completely ignored her hawkish foreign policy and criminal destruction of Libya as Secretary of State, as well as her many other faults as a feminist who excused her husband’s outrageous behavior toward women. Mazin also endorses the idea of the Holodomor genocide, unaware that it was a politicized narrative created after WWII by Ukrainian exiles to demonize Stalin. It has been debunked by Grover

Furr and other historians,[11] and counter-debunkers have fought back as the controversy has unfolded since the collapse of the Soviet Union. (Readers are welcome to go to the endnote and dive into the controversy with their own internet searches, but I leave it here.)

Evincing no knowledge of Fukushima or the legacy of minor and major nuclear mishaps in the United States, Mazin reveals his ideological commitment best with this quote from the interview:

That reactor was built nowhere else in the world except the Soviet Union. Nobody else would dare build that reactor. It was a horrendous design. It had no containment building. And people were not properly trained. And there wasn't a safety culture. For a million reasons, this was not an anti-nuclear polemic. It's anti-Soviet government, and it is anti-lie, and it is pro-human being. But anyone who thinks the point of this is that nuclear power is bad, is just, they've just missed it.[12]

*Chernobyl* fails its audience, and these reviewers fail theirs, by conveying the notion that the Chernobyl catastrophe was a unique one-off event, a tragic product of late Soviet bureaucracy. My strongest complaint about the drama is that it completely ignored the involvement of France, the UK, the US and the IAEA in abetting the big lie and coverup that the Soviet government began. When Legasov, the lead character in *Chernobyl*, had to make a presentation at the IAEA conference in Vienna in August 1986, Gorbachev told him to just go and tell everything, hold back nothing. This would be a part of his new policy of glasnost (openness). Soviet officials, like many Soviet citizens of the time, had an inferiority complex and they idealized the openness and prosperity of the West. Legasov and other officials feared that the Westerners would see through any lies and demand to hear the unvarnished truth. So Legasov likely went in with what he believed was the lowest estimate of the long-term casualties that he could get away with. He stated 40,000 would die from cancers in the coming decades, but this figure shocked the international participants. Too low? No. They refused to accept any figure higher than 4,000, and this figure became, by uncanny coincidence, the official toll of damage in the UN report produced in 2005.[13] None of this was mentioned in *Chernobyl*, even though Legasov's trip to Vienna was a central part of the later episodes.

There is also no mention, amid all the description of the reactor design flaws, of the fact that the RBMK reactor was used because it was an excellent tool for producing plutonium for the nuclear arsenal. The benefits, risks and vulnerabilities were well understood by the Americans, and this is a fact which has fueled speculation that the Chernobyl explosion was sabotage.[14] This theory is neither provable nor disprovable, and there is little evidence for it, but it is worth keeping in mind the chaos and bloodshed that the CIA and the US State Department have always been willing to create in order to achieve American strategic objectives. For a government that had several times proposed a first strike nuclear attack on the Soviet Union (winnable nuclear war), it is not implausible that it could consider a strike on a nuclear power plant as a way to destabilize the enemy. Since the nuclear establishment has always maintained that major nuclear accidents lead to minimal public health problems, the loss of one nuclear reactor would have been a small price to pay for "bringing down communism," to quote a favorite phrase of American statesmen like Al Gore who boast about the end of the cold war. Recall too that in the same era as Chernobyl, **Zbigniew Brzezinski**, President Carter's national security adviser, had this to say in 1998 about his instigation of the Soviet-Afghan war and the creation of Islamic terrorist forces:

ZB: That secret operation [support of foreign Islamic fighters] was an excellent idea. It had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap, and you want me to regret it? The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter, "We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam War." Indeed, for almost 10 years, Moscow had to carry on a war unsupported by the government, a conflict that brought about the demoralization and finally the breakup of the Soviet empire.

Question: And neither do you regret having supported the Islamic fundamentalism, having given arms and advice to future terrorists?

ZB: What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?[15]

While it may be pointless to pursue this question of sabotage causing the explosion of Reactor Number 4, it was certainly a godsend for the US government during a time when it was carrying out a massive covert and overt operation to bring down the Soviet Union. There was a critical radar installation near Chernobyl that was rendered inoperable when it was doused in radionuclides. The disaster demoralized the population and frightened Gorbachev into making proposals for massive cuts in nuclear and conventional arsenals. One other peculiar thing related to this topic, one that never gets mentioned, is that we are supposed to believe that the US government, with all of its intelligence capabilities, had no knowledge of the explosion until a worker at a Swedish nuclear plant detected radiation forty-eight hours after the event on the morning of April 28, 1986.

### **The lasting health and environmental impacts**

The damage to human health and the environment caused by the Chernobyl catastrophe has always been "controversial" because the nuclear establishments of all nuclear powers have stubbornly refused to take a close look at the rural populations affected by the fallout. Numerous scientists and historians have written about this bias, and perhaps the most convincing and thorough research on this matter was published by the historian Kate Brown just as HBO's *Chernobyl* was about to be released in the spring of 2019. Based on her years spent in the former Soviet Union and on research in the archives of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, she concluded in a recent editorial:

... much of what we are told about the Chernobyl accident is incomplete or incorrect. People were far sicker and far more people died than we are led to believe. Chernobyl contaminants were not safely enclosed within the Chernobyl Zone. Nor has the chapter been closed. We are still ingesting Chernobyl fallout from 33 years ago.[16]

In the conclusion of her book, she elaborates on this point:

Thirty years after the Chernobyl accident, we are still short on answers and long on uncertainties. Ignorance about low-dose exposures is, I have argued, partly deliberate. Before 1986, Soviet and international experts knew about the connection between childhood thyroid cancer and radioactivity, but they suppressed and refuted evidence about the epidemic surrounding the smoking Chernobyl reactor because they had much larger radioactive skeletons in the closet from nuclear bomb tests. Thyroid cancer among children is the medical canary in the mine. Declassified Soviet health records demonstrate that thyroid



cancer was just one outcome and that radioactive nuclides lodged in organs caused a wide range of illness among people in the Chernobyl territories. The Soviet medical records suggest it is time to ask a new set of questions that is, finally, useful to people exposed over their lifetimes to chronic doses of man-made radiation from medical procedures, nuclear power reactors and their accidents, and atomic bombs and their fallout. Few people on earth have escaped those exposures.[17]

Kate Brown also explains the faulty conclusions of the nuclear establishment by noting how the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bomb studies are the flawed model upon which this nuclear establishment willingly based their own studies of Chernobyl and all other radiological disasters. The model was never reliable because the data was incomplete (the study didn't begin until several years after the bombings) and the atomic bombings and nuclear plant disasters were not comparable events.

Yet the nuclear establishments had no interest in looking through the Belarussian and Ukrainian countryside for victims and speaking to frontline medical personnel, or in questioning their own assumptions and models. The Soviet government officials, and later the government officials of Ukraine and Belarus, were also eager to steer foreign scientists away from reality. Negative findings would weaken public support for nuclear energy and nuclear arsenals, and provide evidence for nuclear veterans and nuclear workers who, in the early 1990s, were suing the their governments for damages. It would be nice if the anti-Russia propagandists in the West could admit that “mind-numbing lies and the political expediency” are found in any country that chooses to develop a nuclear complex, whether it consists of nuclear power plants, nuclear weapons, or both. Tyranny and an obsession with national security are the requirements of controlling the demons released from splitting atoms. Just as it is wrong to believe that the poisons from Reactor Number 4 were safely contained in the exclusion zone, it is wrong to assume that the need to lie and disregard human life was restricted to the Soviet Union.

### **“A postwar mode of living indebted to acceleration”**

[Critics] miss what is to me Brown's larger and more radical point. It is not just that nuclear power has dangers that distribute themselves unequally across landscapes and societies. It is not even that these dangers have been denied and ignored. It is that Chernobyl is but one aspect of a postwar mode of living indebted to acceleration—in the use of fossil fuels, production of plastics, manufacture of pesticides, consumption of a thousand other chemicals. All that speed has marked our bodies. It has marked some more than others, opening them to new and strange kinds of suffering. The appeal of Brown's critics has emotional clarity. If nuclear fallout left no mark, I do not have to think about the isotopes lodged in my husband's bones, wondering if he moved away from Kyiv in time. Nor do we, in aggregate, have to turn from a faith in technological solutions to environmental precarity. I envy Brown's critics their certainty that nuclear power leaves no dangerous trace, that our species can adequately shepherd Reactor Number Four's toxic hulk, that the world can keep accelerating. But *Manual for Survival* argues convincingly that such security is the actual myth. – Bathsheba Demuth, [“The Monster Within: On Two New Books About Chernobyl,”](#) Los Angeles Review of Books, May 12, 2019.

The creators of *Chernobyl* could have made this point more explicitly so that so many viewers would not see the story simply as a tale about the failings of the Soviet system. However, this neutral message is there for anyone who cares to hear it. If alien visitors could

study humanity's nuclear disasters and watch *Chernobyl*, they would notice that in the final words spoken by Legasov (which are fictional, he never actually said them in his famous tapes),[18] the adjective *Soviet* is not applied when he mentions, in the plural, "our governments, our ideologies or our religions":

To be a scientist is to be naive. We are so focused on our search for truth, we fail to consider how few actually want us to find it. But it is always there, whether we see it or not, whether we choose to or not. The truth doesn't care about our needs or wants. It doesn't care about our governments, our ideologies, our religions. It will lie in wait for all time. And this, at last, is the gift of Chernobyl. Where I once would fear the cost of truth, now I only ask: What is the cost of lies?

## The American-Made Nuclear Age

On that note, I wonder if HBO will consider its own lies of omission and give us a story about—just to take one of many possible homegrown examples—the 1959 reactor meltdown at the Santa Susana Field Laboratory, an accident that was kept secret for twenty years but now appears in the local Los Angeles news once in a while—*lying in wait for all time* for the denizens of the metropolis to see the connection to all the cancers that have plagued residents of Simi Valley.[19] It's so close to Hollywood. The writers and producers wouldn't have to travel far at all. Alternatively, there is a long list of other American nuclear age tales which would make for compelling drama, but Hollywood has never gone back to them since the days of *Silkwood* and *The China Syndrome*.



Fifteen years ago HBO was in its golden age, producing shows like *The Sopranos*, *The Wire* and *Deadwood*, which were all tragedies that looked squarely at the flaws of America's past and present. Barack Obama said during his first presidential campaign that *The Wire* was his favorite show, but when his presidency turned into Game of Drones, HBO turned to fantasy fare like *Game of Thrones*, then to this frightening, fictionalized drama about a disaster suffered by the cold war enemy, one that is now demonized in the American and British media as an "adversary," "hostile power" and "authoritarian state" led by a "strongman" (as if leaders are not supposed to be strong).

Finally, where in all the reviews and podcasts and online discussions has there been any mention of Fukushima Dai-ichi, the more recent made-in-America catastrophe that rivals

Chernobyl in severity? It's like it never happened, and this seems to be the strange fallout of *Chernobyl*. The attention diverted to one event erases awareness of the other. Perhaps thirty-three years later, in the year 2044, someone will make a compelling television drama about the melted reactor cores still embedded in the coast of Honshu, still leaking their radionuclides into the Pacific, lying in wait for all time.

Oh, and sorry, I forgot to say, "spoiler alert," but we all know how this ends, right?

\*

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*This article was originally published on [Dianuke.org](http://Dianuke.org).*

## Notes

[1] Eva Bartlett, "[UN Panel Details Organ Theft, Staged Attacks by the White Helmets](#)," *Mint Press News*, January 2, 2019.

[2] Catte Black, "[The OPCW, Douma & The Skripals](#)," *Off-Guardian*, May 17, 2019.

[3] "[A Very Incomplete List of Sinister Things Vladimir Putin/Russia/the Russians' Have Been Accused of Doing](#)," *The Greyzone*, March 27, 2019.

[4] Jürgen Cain Külbel, "[Everything on Bellingcat and the official inquiry into the destruction of Flight MH17](#)," *Voltairenet*, April 5, 2019.

[5] F. William Engdahl, "[Mahatir Opens A Ukraine Political Pandora's Box](#)," June 9, 2019, <http://www.williamengdahl.com>.

[6] Natalia Antonova, "[Chernobyl is still horrifyingly relevant—the lessons have not been learned](#)," *The Guardian*, June 10, 2019.

[7] S.P. Udayakumar, "[Anti-nuke activist, Udayakumar, appeals to Indian President to end ongoing Government witch-hunt](#)," *Dianuke*, June 13, 2019.

[8] Masha Gessen, "[What HBO's 'Chernobyl' Got Right, and What It Got Terribly Wrong](#)," *New Yorker*, June 4, 2019.

[9] Thierry Ribault, "[Resilience in Fukushima: Contribution to a Political Economy of Consent](#)," *Alternatives*, June 2019. From the abstract: "This article is a contribution to the political economy of consent based on the analysis of speeches, declarations, initiatives, and policies implemented in the name of resilience in the context of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. It argues that, in practice as much as in theory, resilience fuels peoples' submission to an existing reality—in the case of Fukushima, the submission to radioactive contamination—in an attempt to deny this reality as well as its consequences."

[10] Kristen Iversen, *Full Body Burden: Growing up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats* (Random House, 2012), 232-237.

[11] Grover Furr, "[The 'Holodomor' and the Film 'Bitter Harvest' are Fascist Lies](#)," *Counterpunch*, March 3, 2017.

- [12] Sam Adams, "[The Creator of Chernobyl on Viewers Taking Away the Wrong Lessons](#)," *Slate*, June 3, 2019.
- [13] Thomas Johnson (Director), "[The Battle of Chernobyl](#)," *Play Films*, 2006 (1:18:30 ~ end).
- [14] David Hinckley, "[New Science Channel Doc: Did the CIA Blow Up Chernobyl?](#)" *Huffington Post*, August 30, 2017.
- [15] "[The CIA's Intervention in Afghanistan, Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser](#)", *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Paris, January 15, 1998, published in English by the *Centre for Research on Globalization*, October 5, 2001.
- [16] Kate Brown, "[Chernobyl horror has nuclear lessons for SA](#)," *Business Day*, South Africa, June 4, 2019.
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