

Post-Soviet Russia: US Public Broadcasting System (PBS) Misrepresents Russia's Vladimir Putin

Public Broadcasting System (PBS) telecast the FRONTLINE documentary

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On January 13th, the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) telecast the FRONTLINE documentary, "Putin's Way," which purported to be a biography of Russia's President, Vladimir Putin.

The press release about this film states:

Drawing on firsthand accounts from exiled Russian business tycoons, writers and politicians, as well as the exhaustive research of scholar and best-selling Putin's Kleptocracy author Karen Dawisha, the film examines troubling episodes in Putin's past, from alleged money-laundering activities and ties to organized crime, to a secret personal fortune said to be in the billions. ... These accounts portray a Russian leader who began by professing hope and democracy but now is stoking nationalism, conflict and authoritarianism.

This documentary opens by describing the corruption that pervaded post-Soviet Russia and the Presidential Administration of Putin's sponsor Boris Yeltsin during the transitional period of ending communism and starting capitalism, which was the period of privatization of the former Soviet Government's assets. This film ignores [the role that the U.S. and especially Lawrence Summers and his protege Andrei Shleifer and other members of Harvard's Economics Department played in planning and largely overseeing that entire process.](#)

Yeltsin brought that team in, to plan and oversee the process, because he figured that Harvard would know how to set up capitalism. On 10 February 2006, the Harvard Crimson headlined about the result, ["Tawdry Shleifer Affair' Stokes Faculty Anger Toward Summers,"](#) and noted that the affair was such an embarrassment to the University that, "Shleifer, the Jones professor of economics, was found liable by a federal court in 2004 for conspiracy to defraud the U.S. government while leading a Harvard economic reform program in Russia as it transitioned to capitalism in the 1990s. Shleifer settled the case for \$2 million." An extensive article by David McClintick in *Institutional Investor* magazine described the sleazy details of this affair, under the banner of ["How Harvard Lost Russia."](#) However, this FRONTLINE documentary ignores all of that history, and pretends that Yeltsin established Russia's crony-capitalism with no help or guidance from the U.S., the World Bank, and Harvard's economists. Putin is instead portrayed as having been, and as now being, just a continuation of Soviet-era corruption, not at all as functioning in what was, to a significant extent, actually a U.S.-headed transition into capitalism.

Then, the film presents Putin as having first come to power in Russia on account of his attacking Chechnya after several apartment buildings in Moscow and other Russian cities

were bombed and Chechens were blamed for the bombings. This film fails to mention that Chechnya was a part of Russia, rather than a foreign country, and that, as [wikipedia summarizes the origin of the Chechen war](#):

With the impending dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, an independence movement, initially known as the Chechen National Congress, was formed and led by ex-Soviet Air Force general and new Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudayev that rallied for the recognition of Chechnya as a separate nation. This movement was ultimately opposed by Boris Yeltsin's Russian Federation, which firstly argued that Chechnya had not been an independent entity within the Soviet Union—as the Baltic, Central Asian, and other Caucasian States had—but was part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and hence did not have a right under the Soviet constitution to secede; secondly, that other republics of Russia, such as Tatarstan, would consider seceding from the Russian Federation if Chechnya were granted that right; and thirdly, that Chechnya was a major hub in the oil infrastructure of the Federation and hence its secession would hurt the country's economy and energy access."

The documentary mentions none of that, but, instead:

NARRATOR: And Putin's invasion would be brutal.

CHECHEN CHILD: [subtitles] It's my grandpa lying there!

NARRATOR: The man who waged it [Putin] was a new national hero.

It also notes that both Yeltsin and Putin refused to allow those bombings to be officially investigated, and that a possibility exists that the Russian Government itself had bombed the apartment buildings and falsely blamed it on Chechen separatists in order to enable Putin to win a popular election so as to succeed Yeltsin.

If that possibility was the actual explanation of the apartment-building bombings, then it was what's called a "false flag" incident (one set up so as to be falsely blamed on the opposite side), such as the United States Government has often used. Two recent examples of this tactic were the [coup](#) that overthrew Ukraine's Russia-friendly President Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014 (which was [based on sniper-fire that the U.S. blamed on Yanukovich's Government but which really came from U.S. paid mercenaries who were dressed to appear to be Yanukovich's people](#)), and also the subsequent downing of the Malaysian MH17 airliner by the Ukrainian Government on 17 July 2014 (which was [based on firing that the U.S. and its new Government in Ukraine claimed came from pro-Russian separatists but which actually came from a Ukrainian Government attack-plane](#)). The [first](#) of those incidents was done by the Obama Administration in order [to enable Ukraine to be used as a base for NATO nuclear missiles aimed against Russia](#); and the second of them was done in order to get the EU to hike its economic sanctions against Russia.

Whereas it's likely that the 1999 Moscow apartment-building bombings were a false-flag operation, it's practically certain that the two recent events in Ukraine were false-flag events — but they were perpetrated by our side, not by Russia, and so this documentary ignores these Ukrainian incidents and pretends that whereas Putin uses false-flag tactics, Obama and the U.S. do not.

[Here is the way that wikipedia](#) describes the apartment-building bombings (and the PBS documentary ignores all of this):

The Invasion of Dagestan was the trigger for the Second Chechen War. In August and September 1999, Shamil Basayev (in association with the Saudi-born Ibn al-Khattab, Commander of the Mujahideen) led two armies of up to 2,000 Chechen, Dagestani, Arab and international mujahideen and Wahhabist militants from Chechnya into the neighboring Republic of Dagestan. This war saw the first (unconfirmed) use of aerial-delivered fuel air explosives (FAE) in mountainous areas, notably in the village of Tando.[39] By mid-September 1999, the militants were routed from the villages and pushed back into Chechnya. At least several hundred militants were killed in the fighting; the Federal side reported 279 servicemen killed and approximately 900 wounded.[18] ...

Before the wake of the Dagestani invasion had settled, a series of bombings took place in Russia (in Moscow and in Volgodonsk) and in the Dagestani town of Buynaksk. On 4 September 1999, 62 people died in an apartment building housing members of families of Russian soldiers. Over the next two weeks, the bombs targeted three other apartment buildings and a mall; in total nearly 300 people were killed. Khattab initially claimed responsibility for the bombings, but later denied responsibility. This was followed by an anonymous caller, who said he belonged to a group called the Liberation Army of Dagestan.[40] There were no other calls or acts by the Liberation Army of Dagestan.

The fact that the Chechen separatist movement was supported by the Saudis and entailed “Wahhabist militants from Chechnya” wasn’t even mentioned in the PBS documentary, though it certainly is relevant to deciding whether Putin waged the second Chechen War solely in order to win election to the Presidency and was doing something he shouldn’t have been doing there.

The PBS documentary notes:

DAVID SATTER, Author, *Darkness at Dawn*: Well, the apartment buildings saved the Yeltsin system. They saved the corrupt division of property that took place after the fall of the Soviet Union. They cost thousands of innocent lives, both Russian and Chechnyan, by starting a new war. They brought to power someone from the security services — and that’s Putin — who, of course, had no interest in democracy.

NARRATOR: His first act as president was to grant his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, immunity from prosecution. But Putin’s administration would quickly ensure his own safety, too. Case number 144-128, that corruption investigation in St. Petersburg, quietly went away.

Nothing is said about U.S. President Barack Obama’s having done the same thing with respect to his predecessor, George W. Bush, who had lied his country into invading Iraq in 2003, and also about Obama’s having protected from criminal prosecution the megabank chiefs who grew rich from mortgage-backed-securites frauds that brought down America’s economy in 2008, and whose Administration covered up much else besides. The pretense is instead put forth that Putin is evil in ways that today’s American Presidents are not.

Then, Russia’s richest man, whom Putin had placed in prison for tax-evasion, Mikhail

Khodorkovsky, is interviewed and says that all he was really trying to do was to fight against corruption and against dictatorship, and for capitalism and democracy.

Then, the liberal political leaders Tony Blair from UK and Gerhard Schroeder from Germany are described as having been corrupt for having supported Putin's policies.

EDWARD LUCAS: Putin was trained in the KGB to deceive foreigners. He has a very sharp eye for human weakness. He's good at persuading people and intimidating them, and he's been doing this with Western leaders, sometimes with charm, sometimes with threats. But boy, does he do it.

Then, others are interviewed who similarly describe Putin as being corrupt in ways that America isn't, such as:

KAREN DAWISHA, Author, Putin's Kleptocracy: So the system is a system of mutual support and tribute. It's a pay-to-play system. If you are on a list of possible people who might be approached to be a member of the Duma, for example, you have to pay for your seat. Once you're in there, then you can turn around and charge businessmen to have line items in the budget. Same thing all across all sectors.

Then, Putin is described as being like an unpopular Middle Eastern tyrant.

NARRATOR: The Arab spring surged out of Tunisia into Tahrir Square and on to Tripoli. For Putin, these mass demonstrations overthrowing powerful dictators must have been worrying.

STANISLAV BELKOVSKY: It was the first stage of his coming to understanding that he could never quit the post because the destiny of Gadhafi could be waiting for him.

NARRATOR: In 2011, when Vladimir Putin announced he would run again for Russia's presidency, the response was mass demonstrations in Moscow's streets, protests which had to be put down by police.

Actually, however, [Putin's entire time in public office since becoming President in 2000 has ranged between 60%-85% approval-ratings, though propagandists in and for America have constantly been saying such things as "There is no doubt that Putin's popularity is falling."](#) (His approval-rating currently is above 80%.)

This documentary assumes, unquestioningly, the U.S.-propaganda line, that Russia invaded Crimea in 2014, and that the economic sanctions against Russia are punishment for that, and also punishment for Russia's supposed guilt in the shooting down of the MH17 airliner.

NARRATOR: Putin has invaded Crimea and redrawn the map of Ukraine, claiming he is protecting ethnic Russians. According to his spokesman, it is a justifiable response to Western encroachment on territories the Soviet Union once held. ...

The United States was calling for strong sanctions against Russia. But in the capitals of Europe, there was reluctance.

EDWARD LUCAS: We keep on trying to bring Mr. Putin in. We invite him to our summit meetings. We try and treat Russia as a normal country. And we think we're trying to calm things down, but in fact, what we're doing is we're stoking things. We're giving Mr. Putin the impression that we're not to be taken seriously, and he continues to push us harder and harder and harder, and that's extremely dangerous.

NARRATOR: But then in July 2014, one violent act would transform the political landscape. Malaysian passenger plane MH17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine by what was widely believed to have been a Russian-supplied weapon. Two hundred and ninety-eight people were killed. Suddenly, the West was galvanized.

TONY ABBOTT, Prime Minister of Australia: I demand that Russia fully cooperate with the criminal investigation into the downing of MH17.

STEPHEN HARPER, Prime Minister of Canada: It's necessary to make it clear it will not be business as usual.

Pres. BARACK OBAMA: We're opposing Russia aggression against Ukraine, which is a threat to the world, as we saw in the appalling shutdown of MH17.

However, actually, Russia didn't "invade" Crimea, but instead there was a coup on 22 February 2014, which installed a new Ukrainian Government, which wanted to oust from Crimea Russia's Black Sea Fleet, which had been stationed there since 1783, and Crimeans immediately demonstrated against that coup-Government, and they held a referendum on rejoining Russia, of which Crimea had been a part until 1954. 96% voted to rejoin Russia. [Gallup polls taken in Crimea both before and after that referendum showed similar majorities wanting to rejoin Russia](#). What was illegal wasn't Crimea rejoining Russia; [it was instead the coup](#) that precipitated Crimea's rejoining Russia. But this documentary doesn't even mention that coup, at all, nor [the ethnic cleansing that has followed it](#). Russia's accepting Crimea back into Russia was legal, and it was also essential for Russian national security. It was the right thing to do. The coup, however, and the Obama-demanded ethnic cleansing of Ukraine's Donbass region — the area that had voted 90% for the Ukrainian President whom Obama overthrew — were violent U.S.-backed actions to impose upon all of Ukraine a far-right, rabidly anti-Russian, Government, which authentically constitutes a national security threat against Russia.

*Investigative historian **Eric Zuesse** is the author, most recently, of [They're Not Even Close: The Democratic vs. Republican Economic Records, 1910-2010](#), and of [CHRIST'S VENTRILOQUISTS: The Event that Created Christianity](#).*

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