

U.S. Media Propaganda Machine and the Powerful ‘Group Think’ on Ukraine: Blaming Everything on Putin

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Russian President Vladimir Putin delivering a speech on the Ukraine crisis in Moscow on March 18, 2014. (Russian government photo)

Official Washington’s “group think” on Ukraine – blaming everything on Russian President Putin – is so dominant that even independent thinkers like Paul Krugman get sucked into the collective misinformation.

When even smart people like economist Paul Krugman buy into the false narrative about the Ukraine crisis, it’s hard to decide whether to despair over the impossibility of America ever understanding the world’s problems or to marvel at the power of the U.S. political/media propaganda machine to manufacture its own reality.

On Monday, Krugman’s New York Times [column](#) accepts the storyline that Russia’s President Vladimir Putin instigated the Ukraine crisis and extrapolates from that “fact” the conclusion that perhaps the nefarious Putin did so to engineer a cheap land grab or to distract Russians from their economic problems.

“Delusions of easy winnings still happen,” Krugman wrote.

“It’s only a guess, but it seems likely that Vladimir Putin thought that he could overthrow Ukraine’s government, or at least seize a large chunk of its territory, on the cheap — a bit of deniable aid to the rebels, and it would fall into his lap.

...

“Recently Justin Fox of the Harvard Business Review [suggested](#) that the roots of the Ukraine crisis may lie in the faltering performance of the Russian economy. As he noted, Mr. Putin’s hold on power partly reflects a long run of rapid economic growth. But Russian growth has been sputtering — and you could argue that the Putin regime needed a distraction.”

Or you could look at the actual facts of how the Ukraine crisis began and realize that it was the West, not Russia, that instigated this crisis. Putin’s response has been reactive to what he perceives as threats posed by the violent overthrow of elected President Viktor Yanukovich and the imposition of a new Western-oriented regime hostile to Moscow and Ukraine’s ethnic Russians.

Last year, it was the European Union that was pushing an economic association agreement

with Ukraine, which included the International Monetary Fund's demands for imposing harsh austerity on Ukraine's already suffering population. Political and propaganda support for the EU plan was financed, in part, by the U.S. government through such agencies as the National Endowment for Democracy.

When Yanukovich recoiled at the IMF's terms and opted for a more generous \$15 billion aid package from Putin, the U.S. government ratcheted up its support for mass demonstrations aimed at overthrowing Yanukovich and replacing him with a new regime that would sign the EU agreement and accept the IMF's demands.

As the crisis deepened early this year, Putin was focused on the Sochi Winter Olympics, particularly the threat of terrorist attacks on the games. No evidence has been presented that Putin was secretly trying to foment the Ukraine crisis. Indeed, all the evidence is that Putin was trying to protect the status quo, support the elected president and avert a worse crisis.

Moscow supported Yanukovich's efforts to reach a political compromise, including a European-brokered agreement for early elections and reduced presidential powers. Yet, despite those concessions, neo-Nazi militias surged to the front of the protests on Feb. 22, forcing Yanukovich and many of his officials to flee for their lives. The U.S. State Department quickly recognized the coup regime as "legitimate."

Since the new regime also took provocative steps against the ethnic Russians (such as the parliament voting to ban Russian as an official language), resistance arose to the coup regime in the east and south. In Crimea, voters opted overwhelmingly to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia, a process supported by Russian troops stationed in Crimea under a prior agreement with Ukraine's government.

There was no Russian "invasion," as the New York Times and other mainstream U.S. news outlets claimed. The Russian troops were already in Crimea assigned to Russia's historic naval base at Sebastopol. Putin agreed to Crimea's annexation partly out of fear that the naval base would otherwise fall into NATO's hands and pose a strategic threat to Russia.

But the key point regarding Krugman's speculation about Putin provoking the crisis so he could seize territory or distract Russians from economic troubles is that Putin only annexed Crimea because of the ouster of Yanukovich. If Yanukovich had not been overthrown, there is no reason to think that Putin would have done anything regarding Crimea or Ukraine.

It's also true that the Feb. 22 coup was partly engineered by the U.S. government led by Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, who had been an adviser to Vice President Dick Cheney and who is married to arch-neocon Robert Kagan, one of the intellectual authors of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Before the Ukraine coup, Nuland, was caught in a phone conversation plotting with the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine about who should replace Yanukovich. After the coup, her choice "Yats" - or Arseniy Yatsenyuk - emerged as the new prime minister and then shepherded through the IMF austerity plan.

But resistance to Kiev's new rulers soon emerged in eastern Ukraine, which had been Yanukovich's political base and stood to lose the most from Ukraine's economic orientation toward Europe and reduced economic ties to Russia. Yet, instead of recognizing these

understandable concerns of the eastern Ukrainians, the Western media portrayed the ethnic Russians as simply Putin's pawns with no minds of their own.

I'm told that Moscow has provided some covert support for the eastern Ukrainian rebels (mostly light weapons), but that Putin has favored a political settlement (similar to what has been proposed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel). The deal would grant eastern Ukraine more autonomy and accept Russia's annexation of Crimea in exchange for peace in the east and some financial support from Russia for the Kiev government.

Yet, whatever anyone thinks of Putin or the proposed peace deal, it is simply inaccurate to assert a narrative claiming that Putin provoked the current crisis in Ukraine. The opposite is much closer to the truth. It is thus misguided for Krugman or anyone else to extrapolate from this false premise to deduce Putin's "motives."

Krugman, who has been one of the few rational voices on issues of global economics in recent years, should know better than anyone how a mistaken "group think" can create assumptions that will lead inevitably to wrongheaded conclusions.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, America's Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, 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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