

US Propaganda on Ukraine: New York Times Retracts Russian-Photo Scoop

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Photograph published by the New York Times purportedly taken in Russia of Russian soldiers who later appeared in eastern Ukraine. However, the photographer has since stated that the photo was actually taken in Ukraine, and the U.S. State Department has acknowledged the error.

After starting a propaganda stampede – with a lead story about photos of Russian troops purportedly in Ukraine – the New York Times admits the pictures really don't prove much, and one photo was labeled as snapped in Russia when it was really taken in Ukraine.

Two days after the New York Times led its editions with a one-sided article about photos supposedly proving that Russian special forces were behind the popular uprisings in eastern Ukraine, the Times published what you might call a modified, limited retraction.

Buried deep inside the Wednesday editions (page 9 in my paper), the [article](#) by Michael R. Gordon and Andrew E. Kramer – two of the three authors from [the earlier story](#) – has this curious beginning: “A collection of photographs that Ukraine says shows the presence of Russian forces in the eastern part of the country, and which the United States cited as evidence of Russian involvement, has come under scrutiny.”

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In the old days of journalism, we used to apply the scrutiny before we published a story on the front page or on any other page, especially if it had implications toward war or peace, whether people would live or die. However, in this case – fitting with the anti-Russian bias that has pervaded the mainstream U.S. press corps – the scrutiny was set aside long enough for this powerful propaganda theme to be put in play and to sweep across the media landscape.

Only now do we belatedly learn what should have been obvious: the blurry photographs provided by the coup regime in Kiev and endorsed by the Obama administration don't really prove anything. There were obvious alternative explanations to the photos that were ignored by the Times, such as the possibility that these were military veterans who are no longer associated with the Russian military. Or that some photos are not of the same person.

And, one of the photos featured by the Times in its Monday lead article, purportedly showing

some of the armed men in Russia, was actually shot in the Ukrainian town of Slovyansk, according to Maxim Dondyuk, the freelance photographer who took the picture and posted it on his Instagram account.

Here is the tortured way the Times treated that embarrassing lapse in its journalistic standards: “A packet of American briefing materials that was prepared for the Geneva meeting asserts that the photograph was taken in Russia. The same men are also shown in photographs taken in Ukraine.

“Their appearance in both photographs was presented as evidence of Russian involvement in eastern Ukraine. The packet was later provided by American officials to The New York Times, which included that description of the group photograph in an article and caption that was published on Monday. ... The dispute over the group photograph cast a cloud over one particularly vivid and highly publicized piece of evidence.”

Then, after noting Dondyuk’s denial that the photo was snapped in Russia, the Times quoted State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki as acknowledging “that the assertion that the photograph in the American briefing materials had been taken in Russia was incorrect. But she said that the photograph was included in a ‘draft version’ of a briefing packet and that the information has since been corrected.”

But the misidentification of the photo’s location as Russia, not Ukraine, was not some minor mistake. If the photo was taken in Ukraine, then the whole premise of the claim that these same guys were operating in Russia and have since moved to Ukraine collapses.

Note how the Times framed this point in its Monday article: “Some of the men photographed in Ukraine have been identified in other photos clearly taken among Russian troops in other settings.” Then, the cutline below the photo read: “Soldiers in a group photo of a reconnaissance unit, which was taken in Russia, were later photographed operating in towns in eastern Ukraine.” There was no attribution. The location is stated as flat fact.

Still, the Obama administration is not going to let its sloppy mistake get in the way of a potent propaganda theme. According to the Times, Psaki insisted that there was plenty of other classified and unclassified evidence proving that the Russians are behind the eastern Ukrainian uprisings, but none of that supposed evidence was included in Wednesday’s story.

The problem for the Times, however, is different. Many of the flaws in the photographic evidence were there to see before Monday’s front-page article, but the newspaper was apparently blinded by its anti-Russian bias.

For instance, the article devoted much attention to the Russian skill at “masking” the presence of its troops, but that claim would seem to be contradicted by these allegedly secret warriors posing for public photos.

The Times also ignored the fact that the U.S. Special Forces – and indeed the special forces of many other nations – also seek to blend in with the populations by growing beards and wearing local clothing. This is not some unique tactic employed by the nefarious Russians.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s “[Another NYT-Michael Gordon Special?](#)”]

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

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