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RUSSIA'S WAR ON UKRAINE

“What is Ukraine . . . and Why Didn't I Know That?”

Which of the following are statements by Vladimir Putin, his Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov or other Kremlin spokesmen, and which are by Western media, academics, politicians and commentators: “Ukraine and Russia share deep historical and cultural roots,” “Russia traces its 1000 year history to its beginnings in Kiev”, Ukraine is really “Little Russia,” “the Russian Orthodox Church originated in Kiev”, “thousand years of Russian Christianity”, “Ukraine is a part of Russia”, Russia and Ukraine are not separate countries,” “Russia is a thousand year old state,” “Kievan Russia was the beginning of the modern Russia,” “Ukrainians and Russians are brotherly nations”?

There is no distinction between who said any of the above. Each statement has been repeated, for a century in the United States and longer by the Kremlin. Such remarkable unanimity reflects either recognition of the same historical record, or the recognition of the same historical mythology. If the latter, how and why in American academe and politics is that mythology declared with such certitude by those who should know better, thereby facilitating a historical hologram?

The issue becomes even more acute when such heavyweights as Henry Kissinger writes in his yesterday's Washington Post article, “How the Ukraine Crisis Ends”: “Russian history began in what was called Kievan-Rus. The Russian religion spread from there. Ukraine has been part of Russia for centuries, and their histories were intertwined before then....Even such famed dissidents as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Joseph Brodsky insisted that Ukraine was an integral part of Russian history and, indeed, of Russia.”

If Henry Kissinger and the Washington Post write nothing more than what is confirmatory of commonly understood history, how can there even be an issue to discuss? But if there nevertheless is, then the question accelerates to how such a luminary (and there are countless others) came to actually believe what he writes, and what are the broader implications of it all? It borders on the incredible.

The questions and answers are central to conceptualizing not just an informed American “response”, but a policy, addressing Russia’s drive to completely suborn--possibly annex-- Ukraine, thereby directly and materially affecting American security and foreign policy interests. They also show the huge effect of Russian disinformation so uncritically, unwittingly absorbed, repeated and multiplied the target. With time, and given adequate authoritative imprimatur and repetition by the target itself, history is rewritten. All else flows then inexorably from that.

“What is Ukraine . . . ?”

On the periphery of most persons’ awareness, Ukraine is the largest country in Europe by territory, located in the geographic center of the European subcontinent. It is the land, wrote English historian Norman Davies, through which most peoples passed on their way to settle the rest of Europe, and to become the nations and countries that we know today.

In the Middle Ages, the Kyivan Rus’ (not Kyivan “Russia”—more below) Imperial Dynasty was the largest political entity in Europe. Following Kyiv’s adoption of Christianity from Byzantium, the precursor of modern Ukraine became a powerhouse of intellectual discourse, religion, and cultural life. In its size, grandeur and advancement of education (mandatory for women), in its equal rights for women, in the arts and the sciences, Kyiv eclipsed other European cities such as Paris and London. European kings and the English monarchy married into the Kyivan Dynasty. Among them, King Henry I of France married Princess Anna of Kyiv; she signed her name to the marriage document, he used an “X”. The Gospel she brought from Kyiv was used in the coronation of French kings for centuries. The French historian Levesques wrote about the marriage, quoting Bishop Gautier Saveriaux who was King Henry’s envoy to Kyiv: “This land is more unified, happier, stronger and more civilized than France itself.” The trident was the official state insignia of Kyivan Rus’, stamped on its coins,

and continued as the national symbol of modern Ukraine through the intervening 1000 years (significance of this, below).

“Russia” at that time did not exist, and had as its antecedents Finno-Ugric tribes that separately evolved into scattered principalities in the north that rejected Kyiv’s dominion. Most telling was their sacking and rejection of Kyiv in 1169 that was not matched until the city’s destruction by the Mongol Horde a hundred years later. The Kyivan Rus’ Empire collapsed with the latter onslaught, but in the process shielded the rest of Europe from the same fate. The Kyivan center of power refused Mongol domination and relocated to the western part of the realm. Contrariwise, the territories on its northern periphery, now Russia, reconciled themselves to Mongol rule and collaborated intimately with it. For almost half a millennium thereafter, the two existed in separate religious, cultural and political worlds. The imperial core and its northerly possessions went their separate, entirely opposite ways.

For 400 years, “Moscovy” (and then a newly constituted “Russia”) expanded its own burgeoning empire at the rate of 50 square miles per day. Ukraine was eventually conquered and occupied. Its religious and cultural treasures were pillaged and ensconced in Russian museums, to be marketed to a breathless, star-dazed world as Russia’s own. The parallel would have been England, France, Germany, Spain, or Israel (all territories of the Roman Empire) later building their own empire, conquering Italy, carting off to their museums Italian (and, previously, ancient Roman) treasures and cultural works, and then simply producing them as examples of English, French, German, Spanish or Israeli (take your pick) cultural achievements. In exchange, Italians would be anointed as “Little Englishmen,” “Little Frenchmen,” and the like. Under such a contorted construct, this would then serve as the kind of “common history” between England, France, Germany, Spain, Israel, etc. on the one hand, and today’s Italy on the other, that today is affirmed with such sophomoric abandon *vis a vis* Ukraine and Russia.

In 1608, a Ukrainian, Ivan Bohdan, helped John Smith found Jamestown, the first English settlement in the New World. A few years earlier, Smith was fighting the Turks, was captured but then escaped and was given refuge in Ukraine. Later in the 17th century, Ukrainian Kozaks were pivotal to breaking the Turkish siege of Vienna, thereby halting the Ottoman Empire’s advance into Europe. In 1710, Ukraine offered the world a constitution that established a democratically ordered checks and balances among three branches of

government, drawing on principles of natural law. This was 77 years before the adoption of the US constitution incorporating the same principles.

After WWI, Ukraine declared independence from the Russian Empire, and warned the West about Moscow's threat to all it held dear. To no avail. No humanitarian aid, no surplus blankets or medicines from what for the rest of Europe and the US was a recently completed war. Ukraine fought, alone, against four invaders, as Europe and the US looked on. Kyiv changed hands fourteen times in two years.

There was no room for Ukraine in Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points." (Point Six, dealing with "Russia", was prepared in consultation with Russia's US Ambassador Bakhmetieff.) Instead Ukraine was quartered, with the lion's share reserved for Moscow. Reconquered by now a Communist Russia, Ukraine was pivotal to the formation of the reconstituted Russian Empire, now the "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics." Ukraine served as the economic and industrial locomotive, the agricultural cornucopia, and the geopolitical linchpin of that "union."

In the process, Ukraine was savaged by mass murder, war crimes, recreational torture, atrocities, arson, rapacious plunder, kidnapping, massacres, homicidal russification, experimental assassinations, ethnocide, pillage, rape, ethnic cleansing, mass executions, death ships, murder quotas, stupefying terror, thought crime, and man-made starvation killing countless millions innocents in 1932-33, in what Ukrainians call the "Holodomor." On May 31, 1933, Gradenigo, the Italian consul in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv during the height of the man-made famine, reported to the Royal Italian Embassy in Moscow his discussion with a senior OGPU secret police officer who advised that 10-15 million starvation murders were required to tame, in the OGPU's words, Ukraine's "ethnographic material". Not a nation. Not people. Not human beings. Just "ethnographic material." Hitler's term was *untermenchen*. Reporting further, Gradenigo said the government strived to ensure that "Russians would constitute the majority of the population" in certain regions of Ukraine, and thus assure that potential political difficulties would be removed. The Italian consul concluded: "However monstrous and incredible such a plan might appear, it should nevertheless be regarded as authentic and well under way. . . The current disaster will bring about a predominantly Russian colonization of Ukraine. It will transform its ethnographic character. In a future time, perhaps very soon, one will no longer be able to speak of a

Ukraine, or a Ukrainian people, and thus not even of a Ukrainian problem, because Ukraine will become a *de facto* Russian region.” It is the offal of that tectonic ethnic cleansing that underlies the “split” in Ukraine, mouthed with such obliviousness as to its cause.

The murder rate was 25,000 civilians a day, or some 20% of Ukraine’s population. By comparison, the US suffered 297 military deaths per day during WWII, accounting for 0.3% of its population.

Moscow was ecstatic: “We have annihilated the nationalist counter-revolution during the past year we have exposed and destroyed nationalist deviationism 1933 was the year of the overthrow of the Ukrainian nationalist counterrevolution.” More: “Acknowledging the great amount of work put . . . into the fight against Ukrainian nationalist and other counter-revolutionary elements, work which has not ceased and which shall not cease, we must say that of course we gave the nationalists a beating, a good one, as the saying goes, we hit the spot.” Speaking in New York on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Holodomor, Rafael Lemkin, himself a Jew and the author and father of the UN Genocide Convention, condemned Russia’s ongoing genocide in Ukraine. He described it as reaching beyond the “mere” extermination of beings, and as targeting the erasure of the nation’s very ethos, its culture and core sense of identity, and its very existence as a nation. Is this the “common history” between the Kremlin and Kyiv that today the media and others put forth as underpinning Russia’s claims to Ukraine?

Shockingly, as the Holodomor was interring its millions, on November 16, 1933, the United States extended diplomatic recognition to Stalin, granting him his most coveted prize and in the eyes of the world legitimizing and abetting his tyranny.

Nine years after the Holodomor, Nazi Germany turned on its joint-venture partner, Stalin, as 3,200,000 German Hungarian, Rumanian, Italian, Finnish, Spanish and Slovakian troops invaded the USSR, with Ukraine as simultaneously the prize and the crucible. (By comparison, on D Day, the Allies’ invasion of Normandy involved 132,000 troops.) Russia itself was barely touched by the invasion. However, the entirety of Ukraine, Belorus and the Baltic nations were overrun. Ukrainians defied Hitler to his face, declaring independence upon its invasion by the Nazis.

The consequences were predictable. Ukraine was one of the few countries in all of Nazi occupied Europe to be ruled directly from Berlin, as it had no puppet government as did Quisling's Norway or Petain's Vichy France, nor did it have a fascist party like those not only in Norway and Hungary, but also the tiny countries of Holland Belgium and Denmark. *The Saturday Evening Post's* Edgar Snow wrote: "The whole titanic struggle, which some are so apt to dismiss as 'the Russian glory,' was first of all a Ukrainian war. ***No single European country suffered deeper wounds to its cities, its industry and its humanity." Ukraine lost more than 9 million of its population, the greatest human loss of any country in WWII, wrote English historian Norman Davies; more losses than the combined military losses of the United States, the British Commonwealth, Canada, France, Germany, Japan and Italy. This was even more horrific than the comparison suggests, since more than half of Ukraine's losses were civilians. An additional more than 2 million Ukrainians were deported as slave laborers to Germany.

Toward the end and after WWII, US and British troops, in an unholy alliance with Stalin's NKVD, hunted down in Europe Holodomor survivors, forcibly returning them to Stalin . "Without regard to their personal wishes and by force if necessary" was the repatriation order of January 4, 1946, of the Headquarters, U.S. Armed Forces, European Theatre. Having survived two tyrants, the Ukrainians found themselves the prey of a country they had worshipped. Preceded by countless suicides among the refugees, untold numbers that were captured and returned, then murdered outright or in the GULAG by Moscow.

In the meantime, in reoccupied Ukraine, after battling first the Nazis the Ukrainian underground fought reinvading Soviet interior security forces numbering more troops than the US fielded in Vietnam, many armed and equipped by the US. The hopeless struggle continued into the 1950's, with the sabotage by the Ukrainian resistance of Soviet troop transports carrying Soviet troops to crush the Hungarian uprising in 1956.

In 1986, without a say about the placement of nuclear energy facilities or any control over their design, construction or operation, Ukraine suffered the Chornobyl explosion – one hundred times the radiation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined – that has deformed the genetic makeup of its victims. Forever.

In the face of US opposition, in 1991, Ukraine declared its independence from Moscow, with over 90% public ratification. Predictably, but weeks later the USSR disintegrated, and the US ironically declared victory. The Cold War was “over”. We were told. Upon independence, Ukraine became the third largest nuclear power in the world but, induced by assurances from Great Britain, the US—and Russia!—concerning its sovereignty and territorial integrity, surrendered its arsenal. A phenomenon never to be repeated. Nor those assurances today honored.

“. . . and Why Didn’t I Know That?”

The identity of perceptions of Ukraine and Russia that is repeated like a litany in equal measure by Russia and the US, and the question and answer above, are pivotal to assessing the situation in Ukraine today and Russia’s relentless *dezinformatsia*. Whether articulated or not, these concepts have become so embedded in Western thinking that they lead to the notion that Ukraine is not a nation separate from Russia, that somehow two are the same (that they share a “common history”), that Ukraine simply splintered off from the larger Russia and is off on a frolic of its own, that it is not a “regular” country such as Poland, France or Italy, and therefore that it is not a full-fledged subject of international law, discourse or relations.

Has anyone thought to ask how it is that Kyiv, hyped with such vigor as the “beginning of the Russian state,” is and always was the capital of Ukraine, whereas the capital of Russia was, at different times, either St. Petersburg and Moscow? If Kyivan Rus’ was the beginning of “Russia,” where and when was the beginning of Ukraine? The trident, for example, was never appropriated by Russia as its own (a rare oversight), but has continued uninterrupted through a thousand years as the national symbol of Ukraine. The death penalty for anyone during Soviet times to mention, nevertheless to display, it.

Worse than being embedded in any actual thought process, the distortions imbedded in the mouthings of a “common history” of the two nations—or worse, the larcenous history of Kyivan Rus’ that Moscow shrills over-- have also imbedded themselves into the subliminal. That makes them infinitely more pernicious. The unavoidable consequence is that the distortions necessarily subsume any Moscow assertion that it has “some” claim, any claim, to Ukraine, that it has “legitimate interests” in it. Absorb that imagery,

and what otherwise would be judged to be the bald Russian aggression that it is flows more palatably—indeed, inexorably-- in its wake.

In 1935, Lancelot Lawton clarified the matter in the House of Commons, London:

“The deliberate policy of Russia was to avoid and discourage mention of Ukraine abroad. From the Middle Ages down to the eighteenth century Ukraine figured largely in European literature. But after the first half of the nineteenth century the West was made to forget that there was or had been such a nation . . . That so little has been heard of it is not surprising, for suppression of the Ukrainian nationality has been persistently accompanied by obliteration of the very word Ukraine, and concealment of the very existence of Ukrainians.”

Why this would be so can be gathered from the accounts of European and other travelers and scholars at the time and earlier, who drew a sharp distinction between Ukraine and the lands to the north which only in the 18th century coalesced as “Russia” but also then known as “Moscovy”

The famous Arab scholar, Paul of Aleppo, visited the two countries and wrote:

“Although a stranger I felt myself at home in Ukraine. But in Muscovy my heartfelt heavy, for wherever I went no one was even a little free Those who want to shorten their life by fifteen years must go to the land of Muscovy. In Ukraine I found joy in life, freedom and civilization. The Ukrainians are learned. They like science and study the law. They know rhetoric, logic and philosophy. Practically all the inhabitants can read and write. Their wives and daughters know the liturgy and religious singing. And their children, even orphans, learn to read and write.”

Charles Louis Lesure, another Frenchman, wrote: “The Ukrainians are more magnanimous, more sincere, more polite and hospitable, more industrious than the Russians. They offer living proof of the superiority which civil liberty gives to men over people born in slavery.”

Tasked with creating a respectable pedigree for the Tsarist Empire, Russian historians such as Nikolai Karamzin and Sergei Solov'ev leapfrogged more than half a millennium to the Kyivan Rus' Empire to rewrite Russia's own origins as

a nation and a state. For the Russian Tsars, it offered a convenient link between the prior “Two Romes” and their hallucinations of Russia now as the “Third Rome”. Never mind that that required a 180 degree reversal of historical chronology and logical sequencing that has no parallel anywhere in world history. This coincided with the pronouncement in 1870 by Russian Interior Minister Dmitriy Tolstoy (the writer’s brother): “The ultimate goal in the education of the non-Russians must be their Russification and assimilation within the Russian nation.” Shortly afterward, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, wrote: “All people should become Russian and Russian above all else, because the Russian national idea is universal.” The idea of “Ukraine” as “Little Russia” was birthed. And “brotherhood” was achieved--but only where the first born became the younger sibling.

Moscow invented a time machine that not only went back in time, but then reversed the chronology and course of history. First became last, last became first. It’s the most massive, longest lasting example of Russian *dezinformatsia*. Thus, we are assured by Dmitry Shlapentokh, writing for the WorldSecurityNetwork.com, that Ukrainians simply seek “to minimize Ukraine’s debt to Russian history and culture.”

Nowhere in world history has such revisionism been attempted, much less become “fact” without question or inquiry. Virtual reality was exported to the United States and became the bedrock of Russian studies in the United States, established largely by émigré Russian scholars in such pivotal universities as Harvard, Yale and Columbia. From there the mythology of the apostles of Russian imperialism enveloped the entirety of American thinking and commentary about “Russia.”

In fact, a miniscule part of present day Russia was embraced by the Kyivan Rus’ Empire, as were territories elsewhere, such as present day Belarus and the Baltic. For today’s Russia, however, a thousand years later, to claim dominion and seniority over the imperial center, Kyiv, and the nation that it remains the capital of, is bizarre. Applying the same logic, because Ukraine drew heavily on present day Greece for its religion and even alphabet, then today’s Greeks are simply unaware Ukrainians, and Athens is “really” a Ukrainian city. And today’s Romanians, part of the ancient Roman Empire, have a claim to present day Rome, and today’s Italians are really “Little Romanians.” As discussed earlier, the same could be said of any of the

countries --- Spain, Germany, France, Italy, Israel—that were part of the Roman empire.

Extending the example, the United States should with a straight face claim its origins to be London, and that Englishmen are Americans' younger brothers. Mexico, Peru and Cuba can lay claim to Madrid, and Indonesia and Aruba can justify laying claim to Holland, adopting tulips and windmills as their own. Yet even that is less a perversion of logic and history than a Ukraine=Russia equation since, unlike English or Spanish migration to the New World, there was no migration from the fertile lands of Ukraine to Russia in the north.

As if reversing the flow of history was not enough, Russia played the word game. If credibility is to be given to a seeming "Rus"/"Russia" parallel and the seduction of nomenclature, what conclusions are then to be drawn from "Brittany" the northwest province of France, and Great Britain. Are Englishmen now really French? Or is it the opposite? The Franks were the largest Germanic tribe, but today's German term for France is "Frankreich." Does that entitle Germany to invade France and liberate Paris? Or maybe the opposite would be justified, with the French claiming their origins lie in Berlin? The French province of Normandy was settled by the Normans ("Vikings"), and two generations later William the Conqueror invaded England, and English history officially began. Are Englishmen therefore French, or the other way around? Or perhaps that transforms today's Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes into Englishmen? Or is that also the other way around? For that matter, the Kyivan Rus' Dynasty was significantly forged by Vikings traveling south from Scandinavia. Are Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes, consequently and necessarily, really "younger brothers" to the Ukrainians? Furthermore, if "Rus" really means "Russia," then are Anglo-Saxons "really" half African and half German—"Anglo" derived from Angola in Africa, and "Saxon" from the German state of Saxony? That is the irreducible conclusion if you accept the historical revisionism of Putin or Sergei Lavrov, or of generations of other Russian imperialists.

Each of these examples leads to an utterly and irredeemably inane result. Yet the predicate model institutionalized by the Kremlin has been accepted with myopic, monosynaptic conviction by all. The theft of another country's history and its essential disappearance has ensconced a larcenous litany. It has been fully absorbed, nurtured and then repeated with breathless conviction by all

Western institutions, from elementary schools and Ivy universities, to CNN and FOX News, and to Congress and the White House.

Fortunately, at least one American scholar has recently stopped spinning the phantasmagoria. Harvard's Edward Keenan wrote that for centuries in what was known as Moscovy "in sacred and secular buildings, in the naming and dedication of the churches, in the inscriptions and the chronicle account of the construction--there [was] not so much as a hint or allusion to the Kievan legacy . . . a total absence of any reference to Kievan symbolism or nomenclatures . . . the absence of reminiscences of Kiev. These people were not even thinking of Kiev. Another striking and unnoticed manifestation of this discontinuity or historical amnesia is to be found in the naming practices of Moscovite courtiers . . . what is astonishing against the background of received wisdom about this culture, is the absence of specifically Kievan names." Tatar names adopted by Russians were more popular than those of the Kyivan era.

Yet former National Security Adviser and Secretary of State, and acknowledged "Russian expert", Condoleeza Rice persists, writing in her memoirs: "[F]or Russia, losing Ukraine was like the United States losing Texas or California. But that doesn't begin to capture it; it would be like losing the original thirteen colonies." (With Rice as his expert, what response could President Bush possibly have given to Putin who solemnly, assuredly intoned that Ukrainians are not even a nation?) Rice's analogy powers a life support system for the perverted catechism of the Russian Tsar's alchemists *qua* historians Karamzin *et al*: a respectable genealogy for Russian despotism by simple diktat as the legatee of the ancient Kyivan Rus' Imperial Dynasty, in the process usurping Ukraine's own etiology. The coffin is nailed shut. And sonorous pronouncements by such Western luminaries as Henry Kissinger vaporizes the corpse. East meets West.

"It constitutes one of the major political deceptions of history," declared Lancelot Lawton. Moscow was able "to create the illusion that a nation still vigorously living had never been born or alternatively that if born it had centuries ago perished." In his Travels to Russia, French writer Marquis de Custine quotes a Russian civil servant proclaiming proudly: "Russia lies, denies the facts, makes war on the evidence, and wins!"

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