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A paranoid war with absurd justifications

On March 5, Russia passed a law imposing a jail term of up to 15 years for spreading intentionally “fake” news about the military, stepping up the information war over the military campaign in Ukraine ([a link](#)). Simultaneously, when the Kremlin aims at restricting the free distribution of information in Russia, the Kremlin itself is guilty of deliberately spreading absurd justifications for the escalation of the Ukraine war. I will mention five of these justifications below.

1. On February 22, President Vladimir Putin ordered his defense ministry to dispatch Russian forces to “*perform peacekeeping functions*” in eastern Ukraine’s two breakaway regions ([a link](#)). More than 10,000 soldiers and civilians have already died during the first four weeks of Putin’s two-day operation. If this campaign represents Russia’s peacekeeping operation, who even needs the word “war”?

2. On February 24, President Putin declared Russia could not feel safe, develop and exist because of what he claimed was a constant threat from modern Ukraine ([a link](#)). This argument is absurd as well. Ukraine did not threaten Russia militarily and Ukraine did not attack Russia – the situation was vice versa. Even Ukraine’s objective of NATO membership was more of a long-term desire rather than a concrete goal since Russia’s leadership must have been aware of the fact that the NATO does not accept any new members which are involved in a war and the war in eastern Ukraine has been going on since 2014 because of Russia. The most significant threat from Ukraine was that Ukraine’s integration towards the West would have signaled the Kremlin’s shrinking sphere of influence, and the Kremlin’s total value defeat. In other words, if one of Russia’s brotherly nations chooses to integrate towards the West rather than towards the Kremlin, it signals that there is something fundamentally wrong with the values of the Putin regime.

3. On February 24, President Putin argued that Ukraine is run by “*a gang of drug addicts and neo-Nazis*” ([a link](#)). Putin’s reference to neo-Nazis is absurd since Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyi is a Russian-speaking Jew ([a link](#)). In the eyes of the global community, Russia’s President Putin meets the definition of a Nazi – that is, “*a harshly domineering, dictatorial or intolerant person*” – not Ukraine’s President Zelenskyi ([a link](#)). A Jewish neo-Nazi is simply an absurd accusation. I am confident that Ukraine’s President Zelenskyi would be civilized enough not to call his Russian counterpart as a neo-Bolshevik. Bolsheviks invaded Ukraine a century ago.

4. On March 4, Defense Ministry Spokesman Igor Konashenkov said that “*the Kiev nationalist regime attempted to implement a monstrous provocation on the territory adjacent to the [Zaporozhskaya nuclear] power plant*” ([a link](#)). It is impossible to believe that any Ukrainian group would be ready to cause a nuclear disaster in its own country ([a link](#)). Moreover, one should not forget that Ukraine has 15 nuclear reactors and the six nuclear power reactors in Zaporizhzhia produce a great part of Ukraine’s electricity. The Ukrainian nationalists would not shoot themselves in the foot by destroying the single main source of electricity in their country ([a link](#)).

5. On March 10, Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that Russia did not attack Ukraine ([a link](#)). Understandably, it is difficult to find a diplomatic solution in a situation where the parties’ views on events are fundamentally different, or to put it differently, it is hard to

believe that there is any possibility of finding a diplomatic solution if Russia denies the facts. The most frightening thing is if the Russian leadership truly believes in its own distorted reality.

More than a century ago, US Senator Hiram Warren Johnson stated that “*the first casualty when war comes is truth*” ([a link](#)). In fact, Russia sacrificed the truth even before the war in Ukraine began in 2014. The sacrifice of the truth in Russia began when some media oligarchs, such as Boris Berezovski and Vladimir Gusinski, were put aside when Putin was lifted to power. Despite the liquidation of the media oligarchs of that time, Putin must have understood the significance of free media as he stated the following in the nation of state speech more than two decades ago ([a link](#)): “*But without a truly free media, Russian democracy cannot survive and a civil society cannot be created*”. Everyone can form his or her own opinion on the state of the free media in Russia and thus predict the future development of Russia.

If truth is the first victim of war, in this war, the ordinary Russians are victims of the war as well. I do not think that the Russians in a democratic Russia would have allowed their president to start a military campaign against Ukraine. As a consequence of the escalation of the Ukraine war, a new iron curtain is falling over Russia and its allies. Moreover, Russia will take another step towards a dictatorship by increasing control in the country. Russia’s economy and its citizens’ well-being will ultimately suffer. It remains to be seen whether the Ukraine war will stop in Ukraine or whether the war will escalate in Europe or even beyond.

All in all, the people of Ukraine are the greatest victims of this irrational, brutal and unprovoked war. The majority of the Ukrainian and Western analysts did not expect that Putin’s Russia would be ready to start a full-scale war against Ukraine in the twenty-first century. At this stage, it is impossible to predict what will be the future development of Ukraine. What is certain, however, is that this war will leave a permanent wound in Ukraine–Russia relations and in Russia’s relations with the West and the European security system. The healing process may only start when Putin is no longer the president of Russia.

I end this article with the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. ([a link](#)): “*If you fail to act now, history will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.*” Now, it is time for the good people to step forward – particularly in Russia. Ignorance or fear are not acceptable excuses for inaction. If you fear now, you will have to carry the shame for the rest of your lives.

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