

We hear a lot of talk about the insanity of Vladimir Putin, and while I agree that there is no small degree of such in the Russian leader, which I will get to later, there is almost no discussion at all, at least in the Western mainstream, about the global insanity taking place among politicians and media that has erupted since February 24th when Russian forces began to roll into Ukraine, an insanity and war of information unprecedented in my (adult) lifetime.

СЛАВА УКРАЇНІ ВІД МЕНЕ І МОГО СОБАКИ!



First of all, I will present a preamble to audiences: I will be skipping all indignation and flow of tears here on my behalf with regard to Ukraine. It is not that I support the war or disagree with anti-war sentiment. The standard process among critics of the West in the United States is to start by saying, “I am totally opposed to Putin/the war, but...”. Everyone and their mother, grandmother and dog oppose the war and the death, carnage and suffering that it has created, and so am I. My point is that much of the world has not only already spoken, but is speaking out continually, against this war, and I’m part of that world. Here I want to talk about something else, to move the spotlight, so to speak.

RUSSIAN LOBSTERS



We live in strange times indeed. To say something that violates official narratives is more dangerous than ever. The word “controversy” is itself an alarm signaling danger. It’s not stopping me from saying what’s on my mind. Most people who speak at length on the war think they have everything figured out and know all of the solutions; if only *they* were in power, everything would be fine. When these same people talk of war, they often talk of bombs falling, but in today’s world proxy war, cyberattacks and

“information wars” have their own explosions, silent but deadly, to coin a phrase. Part of my aim is not to propose solutions, only to take a close look at the ugly beast that everyone is now putting lipstick on and slapping their tongue in with wet kisses. I want to discuss Western sanctions and the tidal wave of Russophobia and Russian censorship that is also drowning out and censoring alternative discourse, a Russophobia that has indisputably long existed in the United States and in other places but has now been allowed to mutate and grow to monstrous proportions.

Let’s open with the obvious. The sanctions that are being committed against Russia and Russian speaking people today are not only tied to the Ukrainian war. There are at least three purported or “official” purposes of the sanctions. One is, of course, to weaken Putin and the oligarchs and the Russian government. The second is to damage the Russian economy as a whole and generally, without prevarication or secondary motives. And the third is a kind of symbolism of solidarity against the Ukrainian war by refusing to support anything Russian, the aim being “to stand against Russia”. Thus we have a confluence of purposes where both destroying the assets of Russian oligarchs coexists with making babushka’s life as difficult as possible. This includes weakening of the Russian ruble and the ostracism of Russia as a whole via the blockade from the worldwide SWIFT (a word most of us have only recently learned, at least I have) transaction system and the consequent destruction of life standards and assets of ordinary Russian people who – by the West’s very own definitions – are unaccountable for being ruled under an antidemocratic authoritarian regime.

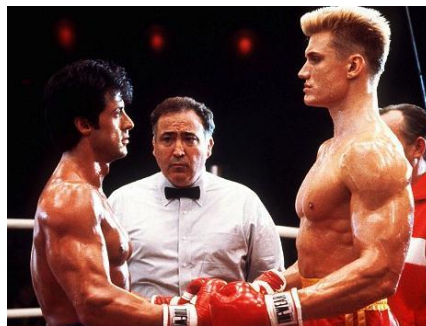
To put it into perspective, the property of members of the Russian Duma and Putin’s family and close associates are being cracked down upon as, at the same time (and this ties together), oil exports to the United States by Gazprom, which employs almost half a million people, are cut or, in the case of the EU, where 40% of its energy comes from Russia, limited (the Nord Stream 2 project has been put on hold temporarily, the infrastructure already built obviously not disappearing into thin air while the conflict continues). American companies including plane and rocket manufacturers such as Boeing have ceased operations in Russia as Russian airlines like Aeroflot have been stonewalled from traveling to the EU and the USA. Much of mail between Russia and North America and Europe (or “the West,” as I will use in this article) has been suspended as support for the maintenance of planes, mostly built by Boeing, has ceased. Combined with a crashing stock market the ruble has deteriorated precipitously and with it inflation has caused products to almost double in cost in just a few weeks. McDonalds and other Western businesses that I argue should never have been in Russia to begin with have closed their doors, hopefully permanently, as big tech and social media companies, enormous monopolies who control the flow of information for most people, act as partial, political agents, involved in synchronized political bleating, throwing government talking points into the eyes and ears of their users like, as we Russians like to say, *вешать лапшу на уши*, or throwing noodles on the ears, the most recent injunction being an open door policy toward threatening violence and invective against Western enemies and support for white supremacists who happen to be fighting on the politically correct side.



Bad Nazis

Good Nazis

And this is not to mention the censorship and “cancel culture” that is seizing the West, which simultaneously considers its side of the world a beacon of democracy and free thought. Russian channels have been blocked as Russophobic hysteria spreads, with RT going off the air in almost a mirror image of Putin canceling Dozhd in Russia, except there is no outcry about it in Europe or North America. Dozhd was one of the few widespread outposts of criticism of the status quo and reigning administration in Russia. Here in the United States, where both right and left wing media are singing in harmony their support for sanctions and cancellation of ordinary Russian people and culture (the only exception perhaps being Ilhan Omar who bravely criticized on air America being too far reaching in its sanctions), it takes little more than a media channel to have the word Russia in its name to be canceled. RT hosted third party debates with both Green and Libertarian candidates, routinely debated and challenged neoliberalism, regularly featured intellectuals and personalities from a wide range of political beliefs (from Dennis Miller to Chris Hedges), and featured shows from indisputably non-Putin-loving popular personalities like William Shatner and Don King. One does not have to agree with all of it to say that valuable information on this channel existed with respectable intellectuals who belie dumb caricatures as agents of a “distortion machine”. Nevertheless, on March 3, RT America was canceled and on March 11, RT was pulled out of YouTube here in the USA, finally cutting off the oxygen supply of the channel completely. Its crime was that it conveyed information that the Western and American media, and perhaps you and I, disagreed with, as well as showing (horrible as it may be) the official, politically approved Russian point of view in respect to its internal politics. The same apparently holds true for NTV and neutral Russian channels that do not even deal with politics, making about as much sense as a cancellation of America’s Food Network abroad on account of an American invasion. Their crime and reason for cancellation is being Russian, for being born or operating within the borders of Russia. The same now holds true of Russian wares such as seafood and vodka. Russian crabs and lobsters are now complicit in the Ukrainian war, working as confidantes for Vladimir Putin, and Vodka is also to be suppressed, arguably when it’s needed now more than ever, even in cases where that same Vodka is made in other countries (Russia provides less than 1% of Vodka imports into the USA).



But it does not stop there. People reading this probably are well aware of the many other blockades happening... after the Russian Federation soundly kicked America’s ass in the medal count of the 2022 Beijing Olympics, performing without their flag under the rubric of the ROC, Russian athletes, the vast majority of whom (outside of Ivan Kuliak perhaps) have no dreams but to succeed in their sport and have certainly no stake in politics, are now being banned by sports organizations the world over. The culture war is spreading even to art, where art is now getting banned. Cannes had said that it will not feature any Russian films. Renowned Russian conductor Valery Gergiev has been banned for both being Russian and having a point of view that does not follow the accepted apologetics. On the other extreme, even

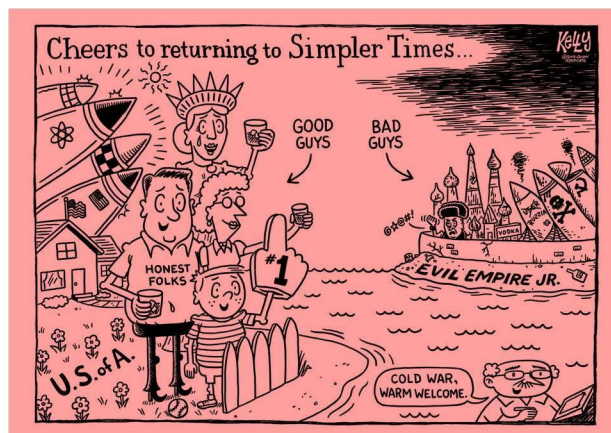
Americans that say anything contrary to the prevailing narrative, no matter how false or actual, no matter how outrageous or minimally conservative and towing the line, even if just to say something favorable about Russia, are getting beaten down. I find myself in a position of sympathizing with people I normally detest, like Tucker Carlson. It is hard not to hate Tucker Carlson, but for a few seconds, as embarrassed as I am to admit it, I actually felt empathy for what he was going through. Okay, no, I didn't... but I felt enough that I am compelled to add this imbecile's name to this article. The corporate media and social media trolls are vicious and clamp down on the smallest, microscopic dislocation from their tribal beliefs. Like moles underground smelling food from afar, they send out a silent high-pitched cry that only other moles can hear, and together they pounce in unison.



However, Russophobia is nothing new. A recent YouGov Cambridge poll from 2020 (which can be found online with a simple web search) found that of most European nations, the United States and Canada, only 7 to 20 percent had a favorable opinion of the country. The Pew Research Center poll, an American think tank itself skewed by bullshit “morally superior” Western values, found that just 18 percent of Americans “like” Russia while about 70 percent have a negative view. These views go deep. When the Soviet Union was formed the famous John Maynard Keynes wrote that the mass murders that took place in the newly established union were a result of the country’s “Russian and Jewish” nature, echoing the popular and open antisemitism of the time. After Russia had helped defeat the Nazis with material assistance of the allied powers, suffering the greatest military losses of reportedly 24 million people, as compared to roughly 400,000 each in the United Kingdom and the United States, its award was to face the persecution of the West in the new Cold War while a wave of McCarthyite witch hunts, mirroring what we see today, began to take hold. The Soviets were seen as uncivilized, backward and “godless,” a horror of horrors of the great pious and God-fearing powers that had just flattened Hiroshima and Nagasaki with nuclear weapons and locked thousands of Japanese Americans into labor camps. Again, ordinary people were demonized and, yes, sanctioned. In 1948 a wave of sanctions rolled out against the USSR and its European allies. This would last 50 years before softening after Yeltsin’s collapse of the Union in December of 1991.



SANCTIONS OF SANCTIMONY



Russia has faced this before. The problem is that even after the dissolution of the USSR under Yeltsin's campaign of privatization and kowtowing to whatever the West wanted there was still a heavy insistence that Russia be contained. In my opinion, this was due to Russia's geostrategic importance and nuclear capability. Whatever the case may be, even in the most peaceful periods of cooperation there was a running Russophobic sentiment. That sentiment has lived and prospered for much of my life, including the years of the Trump presidency where Russia was to blame for everything under the sun by the so-called liberal press, even after no solid proof was established that there was direct "collusion" between the Russians and Trump in his election. Even with the documented arms sales to Ukraine which Obama had carefully avoided, the support for the Magnitsky act with its ongoing Russian sanctions, the sanctions against Nord Stream 2 under Trump, and the mind-numbing withdrawal of the US from the INF treaty, all of which are never spoken of in the corporate press and occurred during Trump's watch, we were still to think that Trump and Putin were two peas in a pod, bosom buddies loving it up and wishing well for one another (which could very well had been true in sentiment, but in action anything but). To think of Russia and the United States cooperating and coexisting as partners? An unthinkable crime.

But the imposition of sanctions now is different than it was in 1948. The world is more interconnected and globalized. It is no longer possible to dig oneself in a hole, especially if one wants to be a "big

player” in geopolitics. Almost every country is interconnected and dependent on the technology and resources of others from all over the world. Remember that in 1948 there was no internet, and there were no private tech mega-corporations controlling the flow of information like Facebook, Google and so forth. Information warfare and with it coordinated, digital information propaganda is now a reality that would make Goebbel’s head spin if he were alive today. Competing viewpoints, thought jammers and career trolls try to muddy the waters and stem the tide of the corporatist line but the majority of people are still throttled into a solid and steady stream of one-sided information, perhaps now more than ever given the ubiquity of digital information leaking into all of our lives. Leaders all across the world understand this and have taken action in myriad ways, from cutting the oxygen supply off from a station conveying uncomfortable but true information like RT here in the USA to blocking Facebook in China and Russia (which I’m on the line about here, as I hate Facebook and all social media so fucking much).

CATSHIT CRAZY



I’ve detailed what has happened and is happening but have not yet spoken of the *why*. Things get hairy when we move from a synopsis of events that we can all agree upon (the sky is blue, the grass is green, at least to those of us whose retinal cones have no pathology) to an exploration of motives. When motives are involved and are mysterious, people imbue their own motives into acts that match their preexisting beliefs. We all (mostly) agree that war is unpleasant, and something to avoid, but have different points of view as to when it is necessary. Some people think war and violence are never necessary, and to fight back is wrong, even if one is being robbed or injured or indirectly when someone or something they care about is being robbed, injured or destroyed. There’s a spectrum of belief on this topic, but the majority of people I think themselves prefer not to be subject to robbery, injury, violence or death. To be subject to death is pretty final; once it occurs, complaints are no longer possible. There may be some incidents when one dies and comes back, usually in the form of a malicious spirit of revenge, but generally speaking being dead precludes all options at revenge and fun.

People can sympathize with this... death is an existential threat - it is literally the opposite of being alive. (I hope you are taking notes on this.) NATO expansion can be conceived as an existential threat to some people, just as living next door to Russia can be conceived as an existential threat to its smaller neighbors. Except there is no option of packing one’s bags and moving to another country. Most of the land area of the world is already occupied, and humans tend to get very attached to the land that they are born on. They are like large, mostly hairless cats in that sense, screeching and drawing their claws when a foreign entity enters their turf. Some cats are so aggressive that they are not content with the

patch of land surrounding them and want more. Some are more prone to cede land to larger cats than others. However, as territorial as we humans are as a species, we are not just oversized felines. We are cold, hard and calculating; we even have culture that binds us to other beings living around the same bit of land that we happen to be born in. In no time in history has a cat ever been so imperialistic and power-hungry as to build over 750 bases in 80 countries nationwide. Nor has there even been a case where one or a legion of these furry little animals decided to begin an organization, call it NATO or the Soviet Union or the United States whatever one likes, in order to dominate or subjugate other animals, mostly against their will. We know cats and other animals are clever (read Nathan Lents's excellent *Not So Different: Finding Human Nature in Animals*), but not to such an extent.

HEARTBURN AND THE ENEMIES OF CONTEXT

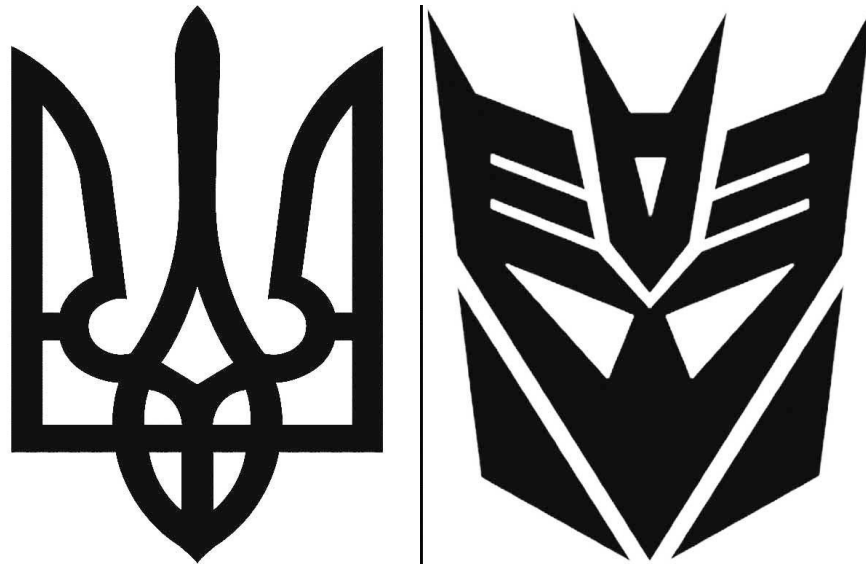


Unlike some friends of mine and some people I admire, I'm neutral on the line of where NATO fits into the picture with Russia's invasion. Putin and the Russian official press have explicitly (almost in every speech) disparaged NATO expansion* and the ongoing Donbass War that has killed 12,000 or more Russian-speaking civilians (almost never mentioned in Western media) as some of the chief motives for today's war. Even if we do not agree with it and consider NATO expansion a bullshit strawman argument, including the Donbass War and the (Nazi-supported) Maidan, in 2014, which was like Jan 6 on steroids (and unlike Jan 6 successful), we ought to at least ponder upon it since it is their "official justification". Supposing Putin is simply mad and even schizophrenic, it does not diminish the fact that he is following some train of logic, even if the logic is unknown to us. One of the things that most left a mark on me after reading Foucault's "Madness and Civilization" was his assertion that madness follows, and I paraphrase, a regime no less strict than the one we commonly accept as true in our societal transactions. Actually, in the sense of defiance to Russian state interests, what Putin says resonates with me since Russophobia objectively never ended even after the fall of the Iron Curtain, it just found new justifications. Even in the most quiescent periods from the 90s there was a spirit of containment and distrust under the shadow of one-nation hegemony. The statistics I've cited above are further evidence of this distrust permeating the population. As a person invested in the protection of Russian sovereignty (we can talk endlessly about his corruption, but there is no doubt that to Putin, the destruction of the state would be the destruction of him as a person, literally, see Qaddafi), it is possible that Putin found evidence in the events in Ukraine of the last 8 years to justify what some may deem a schizophrenic

paranoia, though it is hard to see how any other Russian leader would at least voice levels of concern. Take into consideration the reaction of the United States to the establishment of missiles in Cuba during the Cold War (which was a reaction to Americans putting missiles in Italy and Turkey). This almost led to the extinction of all life on the planet. On the other hand, one may ask why the war erupted just now in 2022 after eight long years of rebel combat. It could very well be that there is something we do not know. Reading the official propaganda, there was a build-up of anxiety in respect to weapons moving to Ukraine and a willingness of Ukraine to align itself closer to the West, which is certainly their right. But let's be clear: a good neighbor doesn't just do "whatever he likes". A neighbor takes into consideration the concerns of his other neighbor, or so I like to think a person would behave who is not an asshole. Whatever the case may be, it may not even have anything at all to do with this. There is some debate from Russian communist dissidents that the motivation for Putin's move was to rile up patriotism among a deeply unpopular party (Putin's United Russia) after extremely unpopular pension reform and a loosening grip on power. But even that pension reform occurred in 2018. Was it just a power grab? Maybe Putin just had heartburn or a lot of gas one morning and decided to punish Ukraine for it?

All of this reveals unknown logic open to speculation, but as champions of justice who are we to shut our ears to one side? Only a kangaroo court operates like this. When a woman suddenly raises her voice and announces to the world a rape that occurred 50 years ago, one may scratch one's head and ask, "Why now?" My own theory on the timing is that Putin scheduled this right after the Olympic Games to coincide with a strong patriotic feeling in the country and in line to a (miscalculated) conviction of a "weakened" United States and European Union. He was also, I think, preparing for this for several years in advance, with or without heartburn.

Whatever the case may be, even if a fantasy of villains and heroes, bad guys and good guys in a Manichean sense with no nuanced shading, such as popular comparisons to Hitler, it all seems to me wildly simplistic when standing back and looking from the outside. To question the matter and to use one's brain outside the range of baby-language bipolar convictions of "good and evil" is not to implicate oneself in infamy or nefarious thought. It is to establish a context and a platform for discussion where we can analyze the "why's" and "how's" of a particular occurrence, and on the contrary, to reach a higher moral ground. It is to look at events among a spectrum and among a backdrop of history where all is shaded, and shady. I am not even invoking the many wars of Europe and the United States (as American chauvinists and apologists like to say, "whataboutism"). It is the lowest hanging fruit to talk about Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Palestine, the Western Sahara, Yugoslavia and the countless other wars and atrocities the United States and its allies were and are still involved with. We all know how hypocritical and neck deep in shit and lies the American government is. I am leaving all of that out of it, all of the easy targets of hypocrisy, and just focusing on the matter at hand, on the dynamics between two opposing forces and the unfortunate, and horrific, crossfire of a country stuck in the middle. I am simply presenting a context, to which American and European popular media are presently hostile. Context to them is the enemy; context invites thoughts, and questions. It may even induce self-reflection.



I've always found a weird similarity between the Ukrainian coat of arms and the Transformers symbol

THE BRONZE LINING

I have collected my thoughts in this article in large part to stand back and reflect on what is taking place in my head since the start of the war. I have no high and lofty conclusions. I do not pretend to have the key to the puzzle as to why this has happened, or how it can stop. This is all beyond me. I have lived alongside Ukrainians and Russians my entire life and feel like we are part of the same family. We are both Slavs. Even our language is almost identical. The narrative here in the United States wants to distinguish fundamental differences between Russians and Ukrainians but there are hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian people living in Russia and millions of Russian people living in Ukraine (almost 20% of the population). We have more in common than we have differences. Even with the politicization of what is presently happening and the tide of censorship, there is more that Slavic people have in common among themselves than they do with Americans and “Westerners,” in my opinion, and I’m confident that even a war killing thousands of people will not change that. This is probably hard for most Americans to understand. I don’t know, since I was not born in America and have always lived in a gray zone between the two cultures. I am unavoidably a product of my environment, but today I feel an odd, atavistic tribal echo, a pride, if you will, in being Russian. That may seem paradoxical because, at the same time, never in my life have I been more disgusted with the decisions that the Russian government has taken and the Russian administration in general. I’ve long been a supporter of Navalny and critic of the West. And I criticize the West not because I “hate” it (why would I militantly vote in every local, state and federal election and contribute financially to causes as I do if I hated it?), but that I want to see it improve. I want to see all countries improve and become more peaceful and fruitful societies. I want to hear black metal from North Korea, and gore grind from Eritrea. I don’t have any large designs of what every country should be, because, unlike the United States or some European nations, I cannot speak on behalf of all people and their values. I think the United States has a potential to be united and a positive force again, but it is on its way down with China on the rise. With the sanctions that it is now unloading in full force against Russia, it is ironically seeding its own long-term destruction. Why? Because countries all along Asia and the Middle and Far East are watching. And they

do not want to be next. Systems of currency will be moving away from the dollar once China overtakes the United States in (according to the view of many) about 8 or so years, and American financial instruments will be, particularly after 2022, less relied upon. The United States has played its card and the program of global McDonaldization as George Ritzer once said (or McWorld per Benjamin Barber), of crony hyper-capitalism and neoliberalism, is falling apart as people see it for the festering pile of dog shit that is. Am I an apologist for China and its autocratic government? Absolutely not. Nor am I an apologist of the current, criminal Russian government, but the West is descending and its present threats of blackmail by method of first stealing resources and then giving them back for good behavior is not being seen favorably in sectors of the world who are afraid they may be next for doing something they feel, no matter how repugnant to you or I, is necessary. It is no surprise then that politicians here are so paranoid over China's ascendancy. In my opinion, the squeeze on Russia today is part of this. But there is a bronze lining... the younger generation sees through much of these political zero-sum games. It is only a lining, and a bronze one at that, because I do not have any hope. I follow what Camus said, that hope is part of a false dichotomy. Nevertheless, my wish, if any, is that this coming generation rises, perhaps within several decades as these so miserable older generations die out, to fight them and make the world a far less tribalistic, myopic, and hostile place.



Yury Arkadin
03/18/2022

**On February 9, 1990 US Secretary of State James Baker famously told Mikhail Gorbachev in reference to NATO expansion, "not one inch eastward". That was the assurance then. A few months earlier George H. W. Bush had said to the same Russian leader that he will "not jump up and down on the Berlin Wall", a reference to not harming or interfering with Russian interests post collapse of the Soviet Union. A bit later this same Bush would oppose Ukrainian sovereignty, calling it "suicidal nationalism". The speech, dubbed the "Chicken Kiev speech" by hardline neoliberals who supported the disintegration of the USSR into separate states, was written by none other than Condoleezza Rice, one of the chief apologists for the Iraq War. Over time, NATO expanded eastward despite these assurances, all the way up to the Russian border in the Baltic states under George W. Bush. Only Ukraine hadn't yet acceded, in part due to (failed) concessions of the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, promising security assurances to Ukraine by the USA, UK and Russia.*

