New York Times propaganda photos on Ukraine exposed

Alex Lantier
23 April 2014

A day after the *New York Times* published a front-page report purporting to show the involvement of Russian Special Forces in protests in east Ukraine, its report, titled "Photos Link Masked Men in East Ukraine to Russia," has been exposed as a blatant fabrication.

The *Times* printed low-resolution pictures of fighters—allegedly wearing Russian insignia while in Georgia, and then later as protesters in east Ukraine—asserting they were the same men, thus proving the existence of an armed Russian intervention in Ukraine. It was based on a crude trick first noted by a commenter on a link posted on Reddit. The photos in the *Times* were down-sampled versions of higher-resolution images circulating online, which show that the men in the different pictures are in fact not the same.

It very rapidly became clear that the *Times* ' claims to have proven that Russian soldiers were driving the east Ukraine protests against the pro-Western regime in Kiev were complete rubbish.

The BBC compared the high-resolution pictures of two bearded men the *Times* falsely asserted were the same fighter. It concluded, "In the 2014 photos, the man's greying beard appears to be black, while in Georgia six years ago, the slimmer-looking man shown has a reddish beard."

It also noted that Russian Special Forces patches on the men's uniforms, highlighted by the *Times* as proof that they are Russian troops, "can be bought on the Internet for less than $5."

Asking whether the pictures "prove anything," the BBC concluded: "It cannot be said for sure that they are actual Russian Special Forces, as the Ukrainians argue."

In publishing the false allegations, the *Times* worked closely with the US government, which received the photos from the unelected pro-US regime in Kiev and "endorsed" them before passing them on. At a press briefing, however, US State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki, whom the *New York Times* quoted in its article, indicated that the administration was well aware that the photos did not constitute proof of what was being claimed.

Pressed about whether she was certain the pictures showed individuals linked to Russia, Psaki replied: "What we see in these photos that have been, again, in international media, on Twitter, and publicly available, is that there are individuals who visibly appear to be tied to Russia. We've said that publicly a countless number of times. I will let you draw all the conclusions yourself as to whether these are individuals who look similar or not to other events."

A journalist at the briefing objected to calling this "evidence," and asked, "Do you think this is evidence that would stand up in a court of law?"

Psaki replied, "I don't think it's a legal—we're not making a court-of-law case here. We're just showing that this is photographic evidence that indicates the connection we've been talking about for weeks now."

The journalist asked, "You think it is proof of connection, or it's just—or you're just alleging that it's another sign of this?"

Psaki replied, "It's another sign."

In fact, the *Times* has worked to mislead its readers, uncritically presenting concocted photos delivered by its contacts in the State Department.

Washington, as it passed the pictures on to the *Times*, knew very well that they did not constitute evidence of anything, but were simply a new propaganda point supporting its as-yet unsubstantiated accusations of Russian involvement in Ukraine. The Obama

© World Socialist Web Site

administration relied on the *Times* to publish the pictures, fanning the flames of the media campaign to denounce Russia, without doing any due diligence to check that its materials were accurate or that proved anything at all.

A decade ago, *Times* journalist Judith Miller was the conduit for broadcasting lies that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMD), touching off a huge media campaign that set the stage for the US invasion of Iraq.

Today, the lies the *Times* is palming off as news could provoke a war with Russia, a nuclear-armed power. By fabricating evidence of Russian involvement in east Ukraine, the *Times* was providing political ammunition for calls in Ukraine and in the Western imperialist powers for a military crackdown against protests in east Ukraine, a region with a large Russian population. This could lead to a military intervention by Moscow in eastern Ukraine to break up the crackdown, and a clash between Russia and Ukraine drawing in the Western powers.

The *Times '* fabrications also served to obscure the fact that this conflict arose out of the decision of Washington and its European allies to topple Ukraine's previous, Russian-aligned regime in a fascist-led putsch in February. The unelected pro-Western regime in Kiev has now encountered significant popular opposition in pro-Russian regions of eastern Ukraine. It is this aggressive policy of the Western powers that is driving the explosive standoff in eastern Ukraine.

The employees of the *Times* who were involved in producing this article, like Judith Miller before them, reflect the growing integration of the media and the state.

Henry Kissinger, the Secretary of State under President Richard Nixon, intervened personally four years ago to try to obtain a Chinese visa for the lead author of the *Times* article, Andrew Higgins. Higgins has been refused entry into China ever since 1991—when, after reporting on the Tiananmen Square massacre, he was found traveling with Chinese state documents in his briefcase and expelled from the country.

Higgins' reporting on Ukraine in the current crisis has been largely oriented to downplaying the dangers posed by the fascist forces Washington and its European allies put in power in Kiev, and demonizing Russia. One particularly foul piece published on April 8, "Among Ukraine's Jews, Bigger Worry is Putin, Not Pogroms," attacked the idea that these groups posed any danger to Ukraine's Jewish population.

The Right Sector militia and the fascist Svoboda party occupy key posts in the unelected Kiev regime and glorify World War II-era fascist forces, such as the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists of Stepan Bandera, who allied with the Nazis during the Ukrainian Holocaust. Yet, according to Higgins, such organizations are far less dangerous to the Ukrainian people that the Russian government.

"Even Right Sector, a coalition of ultranationalist and in some cases neo-Nazi organizations, has made an effort to distance itself from anti-Semitism," Higgins wrote. "In late February, its leader, Dmytro Yarosh, pledged during a meeting with Israel's ambassador in Kiev to fight all forms of racism."

Higgins' attempt to whitewash the right-wing character of the Kiev regime is of a piece with the current concocted denunciations of Russia by the *Times*, shamelessly supporting Western imperialism's intervention in Ukraine.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site