

Timothy Snyder claims “Russia is fascist”: Falsification in the service of US-NATO war propaganda

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The *New York Times*’ op-ed column by Timothy Snyder—“We Should Say It. Russia is Fascist”—is yet another example of the Yale professor’s role as an unscrupulous purveyor of historical falsification aimed at legitimizing the US-NATO war against Russia.

Snyder writes that Russia is “fighting a fascist war of destruction,” and warns, “Should Russia win, fascists around the world will be comforted.”

This claim ignores not only the involvement of right-wing governments and powerful right-wing extremist movements in the NATO coalition. Snyder again conceals the fact that the Ukrainian fascists of the Azov Battalion are in the forefront of the war against Russia.

Snyder’s claim that Russia is “fascist” is based on his definition of fascism as “the triumph of will over reason.” From a historical, political and sociological standpoint, this psychology-based “definition” is worthless.

It explains nothing about the origins, popular base and socio-economic interests of the regime. Many governments and innumerable political parties—including the Democrats and Republicans in the US—exalt “will over reason.” That, alone, does not make them fascist.

Snyder asserts that “Russia meets most of the criteria [of fascism] that scholars tend to apply.” What scholars? He does not list them. As for the criteria, Snyder identifies only three.

Russia “has a cult around a single leader.” Snyder does not define his terms. What is the specific feature of Putin’s popular support that endows it with a cult-like status? This explains nothing about the social and political dynamic that underlies Putin’s dominant role.

The second criteria is that Russia “has a cult of the dead, organized around World War II.” What is meant by this? Russia memorializes the loss of approximately 30 million people in the struggle to defeat the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union.

How is the honoring of lives lost in the struggle against fascism different than the tributes paid by many other countries to their victims in past wars? Are the American Memorial Day, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and Arlington Cemetery examples of a “Cult of the Dead”?

Snyder’s third criteria is “a myth of a past golden age of imperial greatness, to be restored by a war of healing violence—the murderous war on Ukraine.”

While Putin appeals to reactionary Great Russian nationalism to justify the invasion, there is no evidence that dreams of “a past golden age of imperial greatness” played a significant role in the decision to attack Ukraine, or that this appeal attracts mass support.

Putin’s decision to attack Ukraine was clearly a response to NATO’s expansion, which threatens the security and economic interests of the Russian national state, defined by the Kremlin in essentially bourgeois-capitalist terms.

There is no serious evidence that Russia’s invasion is part of a broader plan of imperialist-motivated territorial conquest that bears comparison to Hitler’s war of conquest, let alone the wars waged by the United States since 1990 in pursuit of global hegemony.

So Snyder’s claim that Russia is fascist is based on three criteria that are entirely psychological in character: 1) a “cult around a single leader”; 2) a “cult of the dead”; and 3) “a myth of a past golden age of

imperial greatness.”

The intellectual bankruptcy of this schema is evident to any serious historian of fascism. But Snyder’s concoction is not only bankrupt. It is advanced to legitimize a grotesque falsification of history with politically sinister intentions.

Snyder writes: “It’s not the first time Ukraine has been the object of a fascist war. The conquest of the country was Hitler’s main war aim in 1941.”

On June 22, 1941, Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union, of which Ukraine was a part. The aim of the invasion was the total destruction of the Soviet state, the extirpation of large portions of its population, and the enslavement of the Slavs as “sub-humans.”

As historian Stephen G. Fritz has written in *Ostkrieg: Hitler’s War of Extermination in the East*:

Hitler did not blunder into the war in the east. For him, the “right” war was always that against the Soviet Union, for to him Germany’s destiny depended on attaining Lebensraum and solving the “Jewish question.” Both of these, in turn, hinged on destroying the Soviet Union

Which of these was more important? Given Hitler’s views, it would be artificial to attempt to prioritize or separate them. For him, the war against “Jewish-Bolshevism” and for Lebensraum was comprehensive and of whole cloth.

Presenting Ukraine as a separate entity, apart from the Soviet Union, and as the central and independent target of the Nazi invasion, Snyder embraces retrospectively the false narrative of the Ukrainian fascists.

But this narrative is the very point at which Snyder’s falsification of history intersects with his cover-up of contemporary Ukrainian fascism and his vicious anti-Russian propaganda.

As in his book *Bloodlands*, Snyder conceals the fact that the Ukrainian fascists led by Stepan Bandera—the progenitors of today’s Azov Battalion and related neo-Nazi movements—welcomed the German invasion of the Soviet Union and collaborated in the murder of Jews and Poles.

Snyder concludes with the claim that the fate of

democracy depends on the defeat of Russia. “If Ukraine does not win,” he declares, “we can expect decades of darkness.” If Snyder is correct, the world is being protected from “darkness” by heavily armed Ukrainian fascists.

How can democracy be saved by the Azov Battalion, which journalist Michael Colborne has described in an in-depth study as “a movement that has served and will continue to serve as a model and inspiration for other far right movements around the world”?

There are many historians who know that Snyder’s work is intellectually worthless. But they are intimidated by his celebrity and fearful of challenging the narrative that is employed to justify the US-NATO war against Russia. It is high time to break this cowardly silence.



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