Historical falsification in the service of pro-war propaganda

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In its latest foray into the realm of historical falsification, the *New York Times* on Tuesday published a news analysis pinning the blame for World War II on the Soviet Union. The lengthy article authored by Andrew E. Kramer, entitled "A Current War Collides with the Past: Remnants of World War II in Ukraine," makes no mention of either the Holocaust or the Nazi war of annihilation against the Soviet people.

The article is only the latest historical lie by the *Times* in the service of the US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine.

From the war's start, the *Times* has attempted to legitimize the pro-fascist narrative of the Ukrainian nationalists. Key elements have been the downplaying of the Holocaust and the collaboration of the Ukrainian nationalists in the mass murder of Jews and Poles; the minimizing of the alliance of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) with the Nazi regime; the assertion of a political and moral equivalence between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union; and the repeated claims that there is no neo-Nazi and fascist influence in present-day Ukraine.

It is within this context that Kramer puts forth the astonishing claim that World War II *started* with the Soviet Union's invasion of Poland. He writes:

> World War II began in what is now Ukraine in 1939 with a Soviet invasion into territory then controlled by Poland in western Ukraine, at a time when the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were in a military alliance. When that pact broke down in 1941, Germany attacked and fought from west to east across Ukraine.

This assertion is a violation of the basic chronology of the war. World War II began not with the Soviet entry into the eastern one-third of Poland on September 17, 1939 but with the Nazi blitzkrieg against the country's western two-thirds on September 1, 1939.

The *Times*, confronted with a flood of hostile letters, cynically altered the sentence, without explanation, and in a manner that perpetuates the aim of the original falsification. The sentence was changed to read, "World War II *reached* what is now Ukraine in 1939 with a Soviet invasion into territory then controlled by Poland in western Ukraine…" The surreptitious verb swap does nothing to alter Kramer's intention. The reader is meant to believe that the Soviet Union "started" WWII.

The partition of Poland, the Baltic states and Finland had been laid out by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of August 1939.

Stalin, whose Popular Front appeals to the "Western democracies" of Britain, France and the US fell on deaf ears; his pleas taking the form of selling out workers' movements to capitalist governments to curry favor— concluded the agreement with Nazi Germany in a desperate attempt to postpone the inevitable consequences of his own betrayals of the European working class.

Stalin's deal with Hitler was an utterly reactionary move and a stunning betrayal. As Trotsky—who had predicted Stalin's agreement with Hitler—explained, "Hitler needed the friendly 'neutrality' of the USSR, plus Soviet raw materials" to conduct his war policy. The pact produced a wave of revulsion against the Soviet Union and disoriented the international working class, and especially the workers of Germany, then suffering under the Nazi iron heel. "[A]bout the working class," Trotsky wrote, "these gentlemen do not think at all." He continued:

> It is necessary to penetrate for a moment into the psychology of a revolutionary German worker, who, in danger of his life, is leading the illegal struggle against National Socialism and suddenly sees that the Kremlin, which commands great resources, not only does not fight Hitler, but on the contrary, concludes an advantageous business deal on the arena of international robbery. Has the German worker not the right to spit in the faces of his teachers of yesterday?

It must also be pointed out that Stalin was hardly alone in underestimating Hitler's designs. Just one year before his pact with the Soviet Union, Britain and France negotiated the notorious Munich Agreement with Germany, handing over Czechoslovakia to the Nazi hangmen. Like British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, Stalin deluded himself into believing that Hitler would uphold his part of the bargain. Moreover, imperialist Britain and France hoped that Hitler, rather than moving west, would wage war against the Soviet workers' state.

Trotsky, in exile in Mexico and very much at the height of his powers of political analysis, warned that whatever concessions Hitler had made were "at best of an episodic nature and their sole guarantee is Ribbentrop's signature to a 'scrap of paper.'" Trotsky predicted, less than one year before his assassination at the hands of one of Stalin's agents, that the Soviet Union would be invaded once Hitler had settled accounts on the western front.

Stalin and the bureaucratic sycophants who surrounded him had to

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disregard Hitler's testimonial *Mein Kampf* and innumerable rabid speeches in which *der Führer* promised that Germany would wipe the Soviet Union off the face of the earth, destroy the Jews and subjugate the Slavic *Untermensch* of Ukraine and Russia to create *lebensraum* for the Aryan master race. Over the 21 months separating the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact from the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Stalin followed the non-aggression pact to the letter, disregarding repeated warnings that an invasion was imminent.

The Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact did not just "break down," as Kramer absurdly writes. Hitler repudiated it, in the form of what remains the largest-ever invasion in world history, Operation Barbarossa. Notwithstanding all of Stalin's betrayals, the Soviet Union remained the central target of Hitler's designs. Kramer does not mention that some 27 million Soviet citizens were killed in the war, or that 900,000 Ukrainian Jews were murdered by the Nazis and their allies among the Ukrainian fascists—fascists whose direct political heirs populate the Kiev regime and its army today. The *Times* leaves aside another fact of immense importance: It was the invasion of the Soviet Union that set the stage for the Nazi regime's most ghastly crimes, including the Holocaust.

The rest of Kramer's article recounts the uncovering of remnants of World War II, such as swastika graffiti, German corpses, decades-old trenches and the like, in the present conflict. Kramer can scarcely conceal his glee at such finds, nor his enthusiasm at how current fighting neatly mirrors the Nazi invasion's attack on the Soviet Union decades earlier:

> Ukraine is now echoing that [Nazi] World War II offensive, fighting at sites southeast of Zaporizhzhia in what the Ukrainian military calls the "Melitopol direction." The strategic goal is the same as it was eight decades ago—to isolate enemy soldiers in the Kherson region and threaten Crimea…

Kramer sees the "enemy soldiers" of World War II to have been the Soviet men and women of the Red Army, which included millions of both Russians and Ukrainians. He feels no shame in presenting today's Ukrainian army, armed to the teeth by Washington, Berlin, London and their NATO allies, as the inheritors of the Wehrmacht.

Like the Biden administration and its NATO allies, the *Times* is "all in" on the proxy war in Ukraine. Its special role, as the leading organ of American liberalism, is to sell the war to a public that is instinctively suspicious of professions from the White House about "fighting for democracy" after decades of such bogus claims. But ever dutiful to Washington's imperialist aims, the *Times* has filled its pages with claims that Putin is the latest and—really, this time—true incarnation of evil, following Hussein, Assad, Gaddafi, Milosevich, Noriega, etc., and furthermore, that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was an entirely unprovoked act.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has intransigently opposed Putin, his government and the reactionary class forces it represents for decades, even while the *Times* celebrated the restoration of capitalism in Russia and the former Soviet Union. We oppose Putin's reactionary invasion. But it was not "unprovoked." The invasion was a desperate response to NATO's expansion. As has been openly stated by numerous pro-NATO strategists, Washington seeks to use the war to achieve regime change in Moscow and to break up Russia.

The *Times* has also been tasked with falsifying the nature and character of the Ukrainian regime. This is difficult, as Kiev's embrace of fascism is there in the open, for all the world to see. Statues are erected to the Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, while monuments to Soviet soldiers who fought against the Nazi invaders, in a struggle known to both Russians and Ukrainians as "the Great Patriotic War," are desecrated and destroyed. Ukraine's most celebrated fighting force, the Azov Battalion, is an openly white supremacist and pro-Nazi organization.

For the war's first year, the *Times* attempted to cover up such inconvenient truths. The *Times*' pro-war propaganda has now given way to pro-Nazi apologetics. Kramer has presented readers with an interpretation of World War II with which Joseph Goebbels could find little to dispute. His article follows the Western media's utter silence over the Holocaust in Lithuania during the recent NATO summit in Vilnius, and the *Times*' apologia for the wearing of Nazi paraphernalia by Ukrainian soldiers.

The *Times*' re-writing of the history of World War II has not come out of thin air. As it did with its racialist falsification of American history, the 1619 Project, the *Times* has leaned on a few unprincipled academicians—exemplified by Yale ex-historian and present-day propaganda specialist Timothy Snyder—and the complicity or silence of large swaths of the historical profession. Of course, it comes as little surprise that figures like Snyder, whose history-writing is made to order for the State Department, or the German Hitler admirer Jörg Baberowski of Humboldt University, or the neo-liberal Francis Fukuyama of Stanford University, who now openly praises the Azov Battalion, would enlist in the service of imperialist war.

But where are the legions of "revisionist" and "left" historians of Russia and the Soviet Union who know something of the Nazi invasion of World War II in general and the catastrophe in Ukraine in particular? There have been a few courageous exceptions, but many more have greeted the NATO proxy war against Russia with enthusiasm. The leading academic body of Russian studies, the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES), has focused its forthcoming annual conference on the "Decolonization" of Russia. Would the CIA or Pentagon have given it any other name? Under the cover of war, the vilest anti-Russian and "Sovietologist" tropes, once assumed to be dead and buried with the excesses of the McCarthy era, are being revived.

A few years ago, the claim palmed off matter-of-factly by Kramer—that the Soviet Union started World War II—would have been met with a wave of denunciation from historians. So too would his article's silence on the Holocaust and mass murder of Soviet citizens. But in 2023, historical lies and distortions rule the day.

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