

New York Times report demolishes the narrative of the “unprovoked war” in Ukraine

Patrick Martin
26 February 2024

For the past two years, nearly every reference in the US media to the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia has been preceded by an obligatory word—“unprovoked.”

The public was told that this was a war without cause, that Ukraine was blameless, and that the invasion was to be explained entirely in terms of the intentions and psychology of one man, Russian President Vladimir Putin.

However, on the weekend of the second anniversary of the war, the *New York Times* published a lengthy article revealing that the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 was instigated by a systematic and widespread campaign of military-intelligence aggression on the part of the United States.

The article details longstanding Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operations in Ukraine, in which the agency sponsored and built up the Ukrainian military intelligence agency HUR, using it as a weapon of spying, assassination and provocation directed against Russia for more than a decade.

The *Times* writes:

Toward the end of 2021, according to a senior European official, Mr. Putin was weighing whether to launch his full-scale invasion when he met with the head of one of Russia’s main spy services, who told him that the C.I.A., together with Britain’s MI6, were controlling Ukraine and turning it into a beachhead for operations against Moscow.

The *Times* report demonstrates that this Russian intelligence assessment was absolutely true. For more than a decade, dating back to 2014, the CIA was building up, training and arming Ukrainian intelligence and paramilitary forces that were engaging in assassinations and other provocations against pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine, against Russian forces in Crimea and across the border into Russia itself.

In a critical passage, the *Times* writes:

As the partnership deepened after 2016, the Ukrainians became impatient with what they considered Washington’s undue caution, and began staging assassinations and other lethal operations, which violated the terms the White House thought the Ukrainians had agreed to. Infuriated, officials in Washington threatened to cut off support, but they never did.

In other words, Ukrainian paramilitary forces that were armed, funded and led by the United States and NATO were systematically assassinating forces supporting closer relations with Russia.

The newspaper’s account begins with the Maidan Coup of February 2014, when right-wing and neo-Nazi forces backed by the US and the European Union overthrew the elected pro-Russian president and installed a pro-imperialist regime headed by the billionaire Petro Poroshenko.

This coup was the culmination of two decades of imperialist inroads into the former Soviet bloc, including the expansion of NATO to include virtually all of Eastern Europe in violation of pledges made to the leaders of the former Soviet Union. The *Times* is silent on this earlier history, as well as on the role of the CIA in the Maidan events.

Maidan set the stage for a massive escalation of the CIA intervention, as detailed in the *Times* report. The intelligence agency played a central role in fueling conflict between Ukraine and Russia, first as a low-level war against pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, then as a full-scale war after the Russian invasion in February 2022. Three US administrations were involved: first Obama, then Trump and now Biden.

According to the *Times* account, CIA operations included not only widespread spying, but also assisting direct provocations such as the assassination of pro-Russian politicians in eastern Ukraine and paramilitary attacks on Russian forces in Crimea.

The *Times* reports that a Ukrainian unit, the Fifth Directorate, was tasked with conducting assassinations, including one in 2016. The *Times* writes:

[A] mysterious explosion in the Russian-occupied city of Donetsk, in eastern Ukraine, ripped through an elevator carrying a senior Russian separatist commander named Arsen Pavlov, known by his nom de guerre, Motorola.

The C.I.A. soon learned that the assassins were members of the Fifth Directorate, the spy group that received C.I.A. training. Ukraine’s domestic intelligence agency had even handed out commemorative patches to those involved, each one stitched with the word “Lift,” the British term for an elevator.

The report describes another such operation:

A team of Ukrainian agents set up an unmanned, shoulder-fired rocket launcher in a building in the occupied territories. It was directly across from the office of a rebel commander named Mikhail Tolstykh, better known as Givi. Using a remote trigger,

they fired the launcher as soon as Givi entered his office, killing him, according to U.S. and Ukrainian officials.

Since the outbreak of full-scale war, the Ukrainian HUR has extended these assassination operations to the whole territory of Russia, including the killing of Darya Dugina, a leading pro-Putin polemicist in the Russian media, and Russian government and military officials.

The CIA found its Ukrainian allies very useful in collecting vast amounts of data on Russian military and intelligence activity, so much that the HUR itself could not process it and had to forward the raw data to CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia for analysis. An earlier, less detailed report on this intelligence collaboration, in the *Washington Post*, cited a Ukrainian intelligence official's estimate that "250,000 to 300,000" Russian military/intelligence messages were being collected each day. This data was not just related to Ukraine, but concerned Russian intelligence activity all over the world.

Long before the Russian invasion, the CIA was seeking to broaden its attack on Moscow. The *Times* reports:

The relationship [with the Ukrainian HUR] was so successful that the C.I.A. wanted to replicate it with other European intelligence services that shared a focus in countering Russia.

The head of Russia House, the C.I.A. department overseeing operations against Russia, organized a secret meeting at The Hague. There, representatives from the C.I.A., Britain's MI6, the HUR, the Dutch service (a critical intelligence ally) and other agencies agreed to start pooling together more of their intelligence on Russia.

The result was a secret coalition against Russia—and the Ukrainians were vital members of it.

All these activities occurred well before the Russian invasion of February 2022. The outbreak of full-scale war led to even more direct CIA engagement in Ukraine. CIA agents were the only Americans not covered by the initial evacuation of US government personnel from Ukraine, removing only to western Ukraine. They continually briefed the Ukrainians on Russian military plans, including precise details of operations as they were unfolding.

According to the *Times*:

Within weeks, the C.I.A. had returned to Kyiv, and the agency sent in scores of new officers to help the Ukrainians. A senior U.S. official said of the C.I.A.'s sizable presence, "Are they pulling triggers? No. Are they helping with targeting? Absolutely."

Some of the C.I.A. officers were deployed to Ukrainian bases. They reviewed lists of potential Russian targets that the Ukrainians were preparing to strike, comparing the information that the Ukrainians had with U.S. intelligence to ensure that it was accurate.

In other words, the CIA was helping direct the war, making the US government a full participant, a co-belligerent in a war with nuclear-armed Russia, despite Biden's claim that the United States was only aiding Ukraine from afar. And all this without the American people having the slightest say in the matter.

The *Times* account also provides an inadvertent indictment of the American media. The newspaper writes:

The details of this intelligence partnership, many of which are being disclosed by the *New York Times* for the first time, have been a closely guarded secret for a decade.

This admission means that these secrets were "closely guarded" by the *Times* itself. As former Editor Bill Keller once observed, freedom of the press means freedom *not* to publish, and "that is a freedom we exercise with some regularity." Particularly, we might add, when it comes to the crimes of US imperialism.

The *Times* article is not so much an exposure as a controlled release of information. The US "newspaper of record" reports that the two authors of the piece, Adam Entous and Michael Schwartz, conducted "more than 200 interviews" with "current and former officials in Ukraine, elsewhere in Europe, and in the United States." This activity could hardly have taken place without the knowledge, permission, even encouragement of the CIA, as well as the Zelensky regime and Ukrainian intelligence.

In the meantime, a real journalist, Julian Assange, is awaiting the decision on his final appeal against extradition to the United States, where he faces 175 years in prison or even a death sentence. The crime of Assange and WikiLeaks, which Assange founded, is that they did not obey the rules of bourgeois journalism and did not seek the permission of the military-intelligence authorities before publishing revelations about US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, the efforts of the US State Department to subvert and manipulate governments, and the spying activities of the CIA and National Security Agency.

The exposure of a decade of CIA operations in Ukraine—clearly at the request of the agency itself—appears to be linked to the ongoing conflict within the US ruling elite over what policy to adopt in that war, in the wake of the debacle suffered by the Zelensky regime in last year's offensive, which gained little and suffered colossal casualties. Congressional Republicans have blocked further military and financial aid to Ukraine, effectively declaring that the US must cut its losses there and concentrate on the main enemy, China.

By reporting the virtual control of the Ukrainian regime by the US military-intelligence apparatus, the *Times* is seeking to pressure the Republicans to support the war funding. It is arguing that this money is not going to a foreign government, in a foreign war, thousands of miles from US borders, but to a subcontractor of American imperialism, waging an American war in which US personnel are deeply and directly engaged.

In so doing, the *Times* has revealed its own coverage of the Ukraine war over the past two years to have been nothing more than war propaganda, aimed at using a fraudulent narrative to dragoon the American public to support a predatory imperialist war of aggression aimed at subjugating and dismantling Russia.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact