



Neil Abrams @neil_abrams

Oct 27 · 57 tweets · [neil_abrams/status/1585654580267851777](https://twitter.com/neil_abrams/status/1585654580267851777)

A couple weeks ago I caught some flak from Caitlin Johnstone since I didn't offer any evidence when I pointed out the nonsense in her Ukraine essay.

You wanted receipts, [@caitoz](#)? Well, here are your receipts.

On the “moronic cynicism” of Caitlin Johnstone: A thread:

This thread doubles as a short course on the Russo-Ukrainian war of 2014-21. It covers Russia's 2014 occupation of Crimea and subsequent invasion of the east, namely the Donbas (the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk). It also examines the leadup to the 2022 invasion.

The sheer number of delusions and falsehoods in this one paragraph by @caitoz is such that they can't be untangled in a single thread. So this will have to be a two-parter. Part I examines the onset of war in 2014. Part II will address NATO, Zelensky, and the 2022 invasion.

caitlinjohnstone.substack.com

This is to say nothing of the US empire actively fomenting a violent uprising in 2014 which ousted Kyiv's sitting government and fractured the nation between its more Moscow-loyal populations to the east and the more US/EU-friendly parts of the country. This led to the annexation of Crimea (overwhelmingly supported by the people who live there) and eight years of brutal warfare against Russia-backed separatists in the Donbas. Ukrainian attacks on those separatists are known to have increased exponentially in the days leading up to the invasion, and it has been argued that this is what provoked Putin's final decision to commit to invading (which was a last-minute decision according to US intelligence).

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The US power alliance could very easily have prevented this war with a few low-cost concessions like enshrining Ukrainian neutrality, rolling back its war machinery from Russia's borders and sincerely pursuing detente with Moscow instead of shredding treaties and ramping up cold war escalations. Hell, it could likely have prevented this war just by protecting President Zelensky from the anti-Moscow far right nationalists who were openly threatening to lynch him if he began honoring the Minsk agreements and pursuing peace with Russia, as he was originally elected to do.

Instead it knowingly chose the opposite course: continuing to float the

A good portion of Part I will rehash my last thread, which debunked the claims that certain tankies have put forth about the Minsk peace process. Apologies for the repetition, but it was unavoidable. Part II will cover new ground.



I really could have written this about any tankie, whether [@aaronjmate](#), [@MaxBlumenthal](#), or [@FiorellaIsabelM](#). Not only do they all spread spurious drivel about Ukraine; they spread the *exact same* spurious drivel about Ukraine.

This gets to a key point about tankie Ukraine discourse: It's basically an idiotic game of telephone among grown-ass adults.

The reason I'm focusing on Johnstone, in particular, is that she (rightly) called me out for failing to back up my accusations, so I felt compelled to respond. Besides, the portion of her essay above serves as a useful jumping-off point to scrutinize some common tankie fictions.

But before we get to the matter at hand, I wanted to briefly explain why I call these people "tankies," as I've been getting some criticism for using the term.

"Tankies" originally denoted Western leftists who supported or excused the Soviet Union's imperialist, authoritarian conduct. The word itself referred to the Soviet tanks that suppressed the anti-Soviet uprisings in communist Eastern Europe during the Cold War.

In my view, there are more than a few parallels between those who once excused the Soviet tanks invading Hungary and Czechoslovakia and those who now excuse the Russian tanks invading Ukraine—enough, I think, to justify applying the term "tankie" to both.

In fact, the second iteration of the tankie phenomenon is even dumber than the first, since the regime these ostensible progressives are simping for is just about the exact opposite of "left-wing."

Yes, "tankie" is a pejorative term. But considering the shameless, evidence-free arguments they advance, I think it conveys about as much respect as these pardoners of Russian imperialism deserve. So I'll call them tankies. I won't apologize for it, either.

Before we get started, here's the link to Johnstone's recent piece as well as the screenshots in which I marked all the demonstrable falsehoods in that one portion of it:



It's Not Okay For Grown Adults To Say The Ukraine Invasion Was "Unp...

Listen to a reading of this article: On a recent interview with the Useful Idiots podcast, Noam Chomsky repeated his argument that the only reason we hear the word "unprovoked" every time anyone ment...

<https://caitlinjohnstone.substack.com/p/its-not-okay-for-grown-adults-to-2cf>

caitlinjohnstone.substack.com

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Instead it knowingly chose the opposite course: continuing to float the

No

No

Nope

Nope

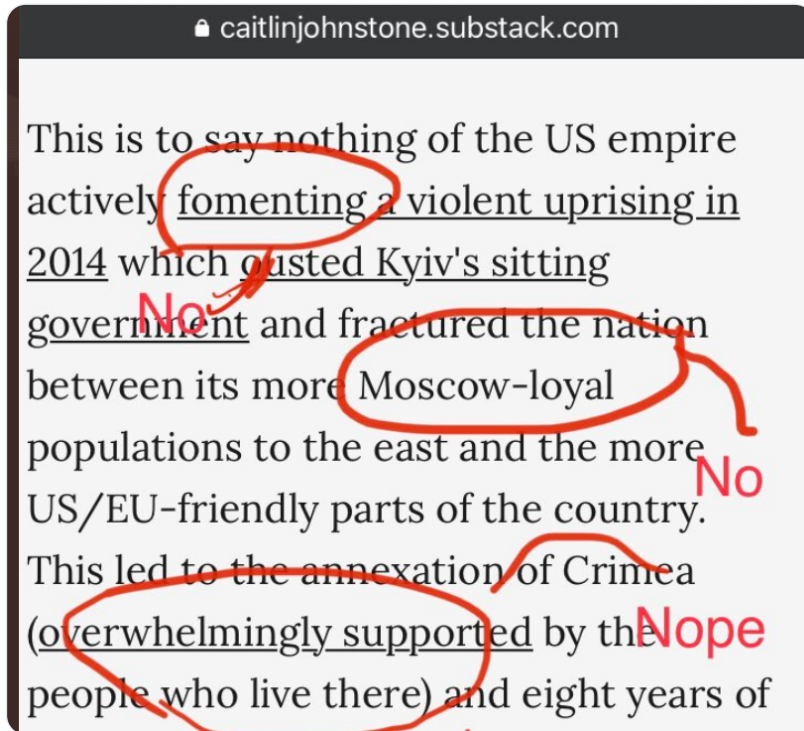
Nope

Only AFTER 2014

Nope

Nope

Let's pick it apart, starting with this section right here:



Did the U.S. really “foment” the Euromaidan uprising in 2014, in which millions of Ukrainians ousted their president? I dealt with this claim in my recent Euromaidan thread, which you can find here:

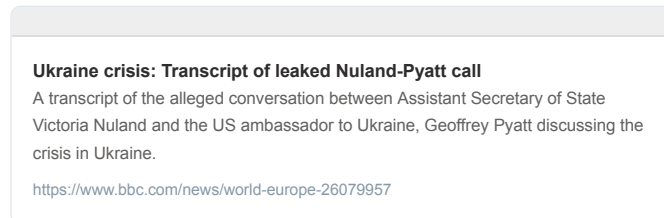


Since many of you won't want to read all that, I'll quickly summarize the relevant portion. First, the idea that anyone can *make* 8.5 million people storm the streets and overthrow a president is absurd on its face.


Here's the source for that number:



Tankies also like to bring up the leaked transcript of a phone call between U.S. diplomats Victoria Nuland and Geoffrey Pyatt. It's from late-Jan or early-Feb. 2014 and supposedly shows them discussing possible replacements for Yanukovich.



But there's one tiny problem with the "Victoria-Nuland-as-Evil-Mastermind" theory. Ukraine has both a president and prime minister. Nuland & Pyatt are discussing who should become PM alongside Yanukovich, not who should replace him as president.



Neil Abrams
@neil_abrams · Follow

Replying to @xxcoldstelexx @Cdegroff10 and 2 others

You're really straining to see some plot against Yanukovich that, per the transcript itself, obviously did not exist. When Pyatt suggests outreach to Yanuk, does Nuland reply "No, actually, Yanuk must be replaced?" No, she agrees and says "yeah, let's bring Biden in on that."

international personality to come out here and help to midwife this thing. The other issue is some kind of outreach to Yanukovich but we probably regroup on that tomorrow as we see how things start to fall into place.

Nuland: So on that piece Geoff, when I wrote the note [US vice-president's national security adviser Jake] Sullivan's come back to me VFR [direct to me], saying you need [US Vice-President Joe] Biden and I said probably tomorrow for an atta-boy and to get the deets [details] to stick. So Biden's willing.

Pyatt: OK. Great. Thanks.

2:35 AM · Oct 10, 2022

4 ❤️ Reply Copy link

Read 1 reply

Nor was Nuland trying to imperiously force this arrangement on an unwilling Ukraine. It was Yanukovich himself who, on Jan. 25th, 2014, originally put forth the idea. That's the proposal Nuland & Pyatt are discussing. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/ukraine-president-says-hell-name-rival-as-prime-minister-but-opposition-demands-more/2014/01/25/571f5e9c-860a-11e3-8742-668814928ae4_story.html

By **Will Englund**
January 25, 2014

MOSCOW — Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich offered Saturday night to make two of his adversaries prime minister and deputy prime minister, pledged to support amending harsh new laws against protest and proposed changing the constitution to give more power to the parliament.

Given the brutal violence Yanukovich had just unleashed upon protesters over the previous few days, the opposition initially rejected his offer. They'd eventually sign a similar deal the following month, only for Yanukovich to flee like a coward before the ink was dry.

So @caitoz's claim that the Euromaidan uprising was "fomented" by the U.S. is demonstrably false. But what of the notion that the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine are "Moscow-loyal?" Do these regions want to join Russia? Do they support Russia's war on Ukraine?

caitlinjohnstone.substack.com

This is to say nothing of the US empire actively fomenting a violent uprising in 2014 which ousted Kyiv's sitting government and fractured the nation between its more Moscow-loyal populations to the east and the more US/EU-friendly parts of the country. This led to the annexation of Crimea (overwhelmingly supported by the people who live there) and eight years of

No

No

Nope

No, Ukrainians in the east and south are not remotely “Moscow-loyal.” To begin with, they overwhelmingly reject union with Russia, a subject I dealt with in an earlier thread:

Neil Abrams
@neil_abrams · Follow

Replying to @neil_abrams

Not that ethnic Russians in Ukraine have ever been all that enthusiastic about getting annexed by Russia. Below are opinion polls from 2014 and 2022. Note how much lower the % of people expressing support for union is than the actual % of ethnic Russians living in each region.

that your region should secede from Ukraine to see Ukraine's relations with Russia

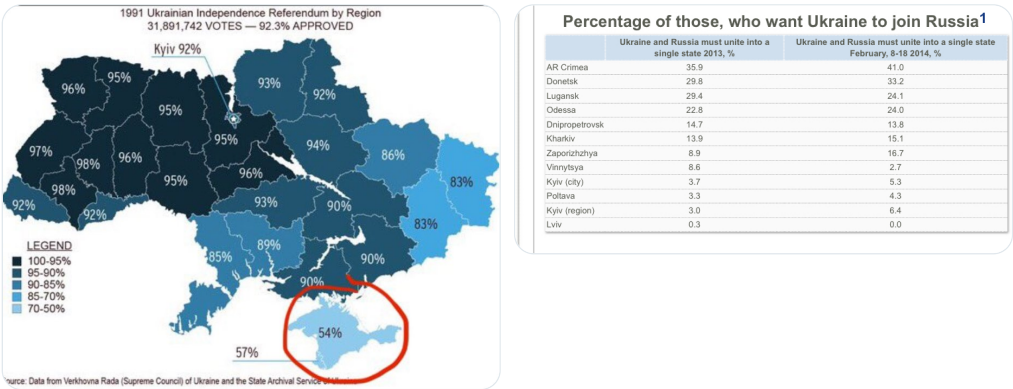
Dnipropetrovsk region	Donetsk region	Zaporizhia region	Luhansk region	February 2022, %		
				Ukraine as a whole, %	W	W
3,7	11,9	2,2	13,2	could be the same as with	44	
3,2	15,6	4,0	17,1	dependent, but without visas	48	
6,9	17,3	9,9	12,4	one state	5	
13,1	17,3	17,5	20,6		3	
11,0	34,9	64,0	31,3		100	
2,0	3,0	2,5	5,5			

1:55 PM · Oct 5, 2022

163 Reply Copy link

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Even in Crimea, the only province in which ethnic Russians comprise a majority, there was **never** majority support for joining Russia. Below are results from the 1991 independence referendum as well as a Feb. 2014 poll carried out during the Euromaidan revolt.



Link to the Feb. 2014 poll: <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=236&page=1>

That latter poll, which showed just 41% of Crimeans favoring union with Russia, was taken in Feb. 2014. Barely a month later, Russia, now in control of Crimea, held a “referendum” on the same question in which—amazingly!—a full 97% now endorsed union.



The official result from the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was a 97 percent vote for integration of the region into the Russian Federation with an 83 percent **voter turnout**, and within the local government of **Sevastopol** there was also a 97 percent vote for integration into Russia with an 89 percent **voter turnout**.^[a]

In case it needs stating, the notion that Crimean support for joining Russia surged from 41% to 97% in the span of a single month is laughable. It should leave no doubt, lest any remain, that Russia simply concocted the “referendum” result out of thin air.

In fact, there exists abundant evidence of the rampant fraud and intimidation that marred Russia's pretend-vote on Crimea's annexation in 2014. Google it.



Declaring victory, Crimean and Russian officials pledge fast integratio...

SIMFEROPOL, Crimea -- With one exit poll showing that 93 percent of Crimeans voted to join Russia... - Mar. 17, 2014. By Kyiv Post

<https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/war-against-ukraine/voting-in-crimean-referen...>

If respected international election observers had been allowed to watch the vote on whether Crimea should to join Russia or merely gain greater autonomy from Ukraine, they would have found plenty to criticize. Violations could be spotted everywhere.

After polls closed at 8 p.m., more signs of trouble surfaced, with Kyiv Post and even Russian journalists aggressively barred from watching the vote count in one polling station in central Simferopol. Police smashed a TV camera of a Russian crew. "We just wanted to see the vote count, but they called us provocateurs and pushed us away," said Ekaterina Vinokurova of znak.com, crying.

In the two week run-up to the referendum and on Election Day, Crimean officials put tremendous pressure on voters to support the join-Russia option on the ballot. The other option on the ballot was greater autonomy within Ukraine, which an exit poll said received only 7 percent of the vote. Keeping the status quo was not an option offered to voters.

The heavyhandedness included strong agitation on the day of vote, including billboards, speeches calling for people to vote for Russia and blatant intimidation — such as the presence of armed men on streets and paratroopers in schools.

Reputable international observers — such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe — boycotted the election, casting further doubts on the integrity of the process from voter registrations' lists, to balloting and finally to counting and tabulation.

Local television broadcasts were replaced by Russian state media reports. Pro-Russian messages were plastered on billboards across the peninsula and peaceful pro-Ukrainian demonstrators were attacked by vicious participants of rival rotests.

KYIV POST Eng

Throughout the day, journalists questioned electoral committee head Mikhail Malyshev about alleged referendum violations. These included Russian citizens being allowed to vote, ballots being printed on ordinary office paper, journalists being denied access to polling stations and the presence of armed or uniformed men outside stations.

At a second polling station only 10 percent of registered voters were reported to have taken part in the referendum. The Kyiv Post saw just one Crimean Tatar couple there. They refused to give comments.

The "peaceful" atmosphere Nikitenko spoke of there included half a dozen paratroopers in uniform watching over voters. Asked if they were Russians, one replied sternly: "No." Another urged him not to speak.

Crimean election officials on Sunday openly expressed support for the autonomous republic to join Russia and brushed off statements made by the West, which has called the referendum "illegitimate."

But despite the obvious staging of the 2014 Crimea "referendum," @caitoz, as if congratulating Kim Jong Un on a glorious election victory, just accepts the Kremlin's word that 97% of the population supported union with Russia. Who the hell wins 97% of any vote, anywhere?

This led to the annexation of Crimea (overwhelmingly supported by the **Nope** people who live there) and eight years of

The motivated gullibility displayed by [@caitoz](#) here is illustrative of the broader tankie view of the world, which John Ganz labels “moronic cynicism:” A veneer of cleverness masking an embarrassing naivete.

You can find Ganz at [@lionel_trolling](#).



Some Thoughts on Ukraine

The Offensive and the Intellectuals

<https://johnganz.substack.com/p/some-thoughts-on-ukraine>

purpose. Here we get an insight into the unifying principle of all these supposedly disparate tendencies: a type of base, moronic cynicism. More than anything else, it is this moronic cynicism that takes itself to be devilish cleverness that is the governing ideology of the Russian state and society, and it attracts all its global admirers.

The cynical pose, which flatters itself on being always undeceived, is in practice highly gullible and distinguishable from naivety only in the sour churlishness of its affect.

One objection I received to my previous threads is that the Feb. 2014 poll cited above asks about uniting not one’s home region with Russia but rather all of Ukraine with Russia. Fair enough; attitudes toward the latter may not reflect opinions on the former.

The two polls below, conducted just two months apart, shed light on this issue. The Feb. 2014 poll (left) asks respondents their opinion on uniting all of Ukraine with Russia. The other, from April (right), asks what they think of uniting only their home region with Russia.

Percentage of those, who want Ukraine to join Russia¹

	Ukraine and Russia must unite into a single state 2013, %	Ukraine and Russia must unite into a single state February, 8-18 2014, %
AR Crimea	35.9	41.0
Donetsk	29.8	33.2
Lugansk	29.4	24.1
Odesa	22.8	24.0
Dnipropetrovsk	14.7	13.8
Kharkiv	13.9	15.1
Zaporizhzhya	8.9	16.7
Vinnitsya	8.6	2.7
Kyiv (city)	3.7	5.3
Poltava	3.3	4.3
Kyiv (region)	3.0	6.4
Lviv	0.3	0.0

Do you support the idea, that your region should secede from Ukraine and join Russia?

	South-East as a whole	Dnipropetrovsk region	Donetsk region	Zaporizhia region	Luhansk region	Mykolayiv region	Odesa region	Kharkiv region	Kherson region
Certainly, yes, I do	7,1	3,7	11,9	2,2	13,2	3,5	3,2	9,2	1,0
Rather, yes	8,3	3,2	15,6	4,0	17,1	3,7	4,0	6,9	2,5
Difficult to say for sure	12,5	6,9	17,3	9,9	12,4	6,0	11,9	17,3	11,4
partly no									
Rather, no	16,0	13,1	17,3	17,5	20,6	6,7	19,3	16,1	11,1
Certainly, no, I don't	53,7	71,0	34,9	64,0	31,3	78,7	59,5	49,5	73,5
REFUSE TO ANSWER	2,4	2,0	3,0	2,5	5,5	1,5	2,2	1,0	0,5

Links to each poll:

Feb. 2014 (left): <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=236>

Apr. 2014 (right): <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=302&page=1>

Note the similarity in answers to the two polls. It suggests that opinions on uniting the entirety of Ukraine with Russia actually are a pretty good indicator of attitudes on uniting only one's particular region with Russia. So there you go.

Crimea's not included in the Apr 2014 poll, as it was now under Russian occupation. Still, other agencies did conduct polls in Crimea after Russia invaded. In contrast to the 2-14 poll, they appear to show overwhelming support for joining Russia.

Can you imagine why? I can.

The violently repressive atmosphere in Russian-occupied Crimea is well-documented. I don't know about you, but had I lived in Crimea back then and some stranger showed up to ask what I think about life under Russian rule, I too would say "it's great!"

https://www.epc.eu/content/PDF/181010_OccupiedCrimea_APMZ.pdf

A human rights black hole

Since annexation, human rights have been in free-fall. Residents who voice dissent or try to exercise their fundamental rights are subject to harsh repression. Ethnic Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars face the greatest persecution.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) accuses Russian authorities of numerous human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests and torture.⁷ Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov is an example. A vocal critic of annexation, he was arrested in May 2014 and sentenced to 20 years in prison, following an unfair trial on politically-motivated terrorism charges. Since 14 May 2018, he has been on a hunger strike.




Crimean Tatars are victims of intimidation, intrusive and unlawful searches of their homes, physical attacks, and disappearances.⁸ Thousands of Tatars have been arrested and taken into custody based on bogus terrorist-related charges. In 2014, their representative body, the Mejlis, was seized. Banned as an extremist group, it relocated to Kyiv. Its incumbent chairman, Refat Chubarov, and Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev were expelled from Crimea, along with other Mejlis members and supporters from local organisations.

Journalists are also systemically harassed. Russia has created an information ghetto by cutting telecommunications links between Crimea and mainland Ukraine; silencing critical media and making Internet service providers operate under Russia's repressive media laws. Bloggers have become the primary source of objective information. They frequently face persecution.

² <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2014/03/17/>

³ <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/crimea-asks-moscow-financial-aid-hail-drought-costs-62100>

The bias inherent in any survey done under Russian occupation can sometimes be revealing. Take this 2019 poll from the Donbas where, even in Russian-controlled areas, a majority *rejected* joining Russia. Imagine how much higher the true figure must be.


 **Dietmar Pichler** 
@DietmarPichler1 · [Follow](#) 




Survey in Donbas 2019 about the future status of the territory controlled by Russian proxies. Government controlled area were places Donbas like Mariupol, Kramatorsk, Sloviansk etc.

	Government controlled area	Separatist controlled area
Special autonomy status within Ukraine	31%	31%
Like before, parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblast respectively without autonomy	65%	24%
Part of the Russian Federation without a special autonomy status	2%	18%
Special autonomy status within the Russian Federation	2%	27%

Respondents were asked: 'In your view, what should the status of the self-declared people's republics of Donetsk and Luhansk be?'

Source: [Centre for East European and International Studies](#)
• [Get the data](#)

9:49 AM · Oct 6, 2022 from Vienna, Austria 

 54  Reply  Copy link

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But if Ukrainians reject union with Russia, do they support Russia's current war on the country? Given that 87% of all Ukrainians, including 57% of ethnic Russians, reject any territorial concessions in exchange for peace, the answer is definitely no.



Nearly 90% of Ukrainians oppose territorial concessions to Russia - poll

Some 87% of Ukrainians oppose any territorial concessions to Russia, according to a poll released on Thursday by a top Ukrainian pollster, an increase on earlier surveys.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/nearly-90-ukrainians-oppose-territorial-concessi...>

KYIV, Sept 15 (Reuters) - Some 87% of Ukrainians oppose any territorial concessions to Russia, according to a poll released on Thursday by a top Ukrainian pollster, an increase on earlier surveys.

The survey conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology showed an absolute majority of Ukrainians in every region were opposed to their country giving away territory under any circumstances, even if this meant prolonging the war.

The poll showed that 57% of Ukraine's ethnic Russians and 85% of Russian-speaking ethnic Ukrainians opposed making territorial concessions to Moscow. Only 24% of ethnic Russians supported giving up land to achieve peace, it showed.

These figures contradict one of Moscow's stated reasons for launching what it calls its "special military operation" in Ukraine on Feb. 24. Russian President Vladimir Putin said the action was needed in part to protect Russian speakers threatened by what he said were dangerous nationalists in Ukraine.

Moving on, is [@caitoz](#) correct to describe those who fought for independence in eastern Ukraine as "separatists?" Not unless by "separatists" she means "actual Russian army units and irregulars sent by the Kremlin who weren't really even pretending to be separatists."

people who live there) and eight years of brutal warfare against Russia-backed separatists in the Donbas. Ukrainian attacks on those separatists are known to have increased exponentially in the days leading up to the invasion, and it has been argued that this is what provoked Putin's final decision to commit to invading (which was a last-minute decision according to US intelligence).

Soon after Russian forces occupied Crimea in Feb. 2014, the Kremlin launched a major initiative to stir up separatist, anti-government protests in other parts of eastern Ukraine.

That spring, the Kremlin financed and organized demonstrations of paid protesters across the east and south. The idea was to create the appearance of an organic local uprising.

Leaked communications from Putin adviser Sergei Glazyev reveal the scope of these efforts.

One of the key ideas that Glazyev pushes during his conversations is that all 'uprisings' must appear to be from the local population. This had been the plan in Crimea on 26 February that the Crimean Tatars and other Ukrainians who gathered in support of Ukraine's unity thwarted. The tapes show that the same attempts were planned in Odesa and Zaporizhzhya.

While Glazyev and Zatulyn are clearly not the ones making key policy decisions, the role effectively spelled out by these tapes, of financing attempts to orchestrate apparent local insurrections has received lots of confirmation from other sources. That Russia's appetite extended to all of the so-called 'Novorossiya' is certainly suggested by another document which Novaya Gazeta reported in February 2015. If authentic, this is a plan, linked with Konstantin Malofeyev, for ensuring the 'integration' of Ukraine's eastern oblasts with the Russian Federation. As the newspaper pointed out, the document is of interest particularly since it was believed to have been passed to the Kremlin in early February while Yanukovich was still in power in Ukraine.

There is a conversation on the Glazyev tapes that same day between Glazyev and Kirill Frolov, a Russian national from the pro-Russian group calling itself the Union of Orthodox Citizens of Ukraine. Glazyev stresses that rallies are not enough and says that there needs to be a session of the Regional State Administration where they declare the post-Maidan government in Kyiv illegitimate. Frolov expressed concern that the council members might not come, but is told that there have been such sessions in Kharkiv and Donetsk, and it must happen in Odesa.

Source for the Glazyev leaks, including transcripts:



Glazyev tapes debunk Russia's lies about its annexation of Crimea an...

Although the international community has remained united in refusing to recognize Russia's annexation of Ukrainian Crimea five years ago, it has been disturbingly willing to accept Russia's narrative...

<https://khp.org/en/1551054011>

But the Kremlin's campaign to foment a rebellion turned out to be a flop. As the polls above show, there just weren't enough locals who supported independence, much less entertained the possibility of doing something about it.

Since no separatist movement materialized, Putin decided to manufacture one himself—or at least create the appearance of it—by sending irregular Russian forces into eastern and southern Ukraine.

https://www.imrussia.org/media/pdf/An_Invasion_by_Any_Other_Name.pdf

First Stages of War in Eastern Ukraine

In an opening salvo that eventually led to the conflict that has destabilized the Donbass, “little green men”—armed men of unknown origin or affiliation—in April began to take control of government buildings and police stations in key areas of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions. These incidents, which stretched over a period of weeks, followed similar patterns. A relatively small team of militants would descend on the buildings, seemingly unannounced, and, typically in a matter of minutes, and with impressive skill and coordination, would gain control of them, usually bloodlessly. Weapons captured in these raids were then distributed to crowds that had grown outside, and control was quickly turned over to the men who would become the first volunteers of what was called the “Novorossiia,” or “new Russia,” project—that is, the imperialist aspiration to found an ethnic Russian country on territory currently consisting of parts of Moldova and Ukraine.

At the time, there was great debate about what role, if any, the Russian military and intelligence agencies had played in this process. Many of the leaders of this “rebellion” were men like Igor Strelkov (also known as Igor Girkin) and Igor Bezler (also known as “Bes,” or “daemon”), who had reported ties to the GRU, Russia’s military intelligence agency. When Bezler assumed command of his troops, he even told them that he was a lieutenant colonel in the Russian army. Though these men have been identified as former Russian military or intelligence officers, experts point out that men who become “reserve servicemen” technically are not retired, and that while usually “reserved” is operationally the same as “retired,” in rare cases these soldiers can be called back into action. The military efficiency with which a group of supposedly local fighters were able to quickly take over police stations with important armories in towns that are major crossroads on the Ukrainian highway system has also been flagged as a possible clue of a Russian military

intelligence operation.

Furthermore, the separatists were receiving direct support from far-right Russian figures such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, a colonel in the Russian army and former vice chairman of the Russian State Duma under the ultranationalist (and xenophobic) Liberal Democratic Party of Russia; Aleksandr Barkashov, the leader of the neo-Nazi Russian National Unity movement; and Aleksandr Dugin, an advisor to Putin and the chief proponent of “Eurasianism,” a theory that the geographical expanse between Europe and Asia, of which Russia is the “heartland,” ought to be the control room of an anti-Western, anti-American, antiliberal geopolitics. Indisputably, the Russian government was supporting the separatist movement politically and diplomatically while it allowed its citizens and officials to openly support the “rebellion” militarily.

Eyebrows were also raised at the frequent appearance of the Vostok Battalion, a group of seemingly elite separatist combatants, on the frontlines of Ukraine’s earliest battles. There are many clues that suggest that this battalion is a Russian *Spetsnaz* (special forces) unit. First, the Vostok Battalion shares its name with another infamous GRU-controlled special forces group that was disbanded in 2008; this unit, which was mainly made up of Chechen fighters, played a key role in the past 15 years in both the Caucasus and South Ossetia. Second, just weeks before it appeared on Ukraine’s battlefields, Ramzan Kadyrov, the leader of Chechnya and one of Putin’s fiercest allies, threatened to send tens of thousands of “volunteers” to Ukraine to stand up to the “junta” in Kiev if the Ukrainian military continued its “punitive operations” in the Donbass. Shortly afterward, men who claimed to be Chechens not only began to appear on Ukraine’s frontlines, but were seen leading the separatists’ largest assaults and taking over the headquarters of the separatist leadership in Donetsk.¹

Throughout the entire conflict, from right after the Yanukovich administration fled Kiev to the current day, the Russian military has been building a significant force on Ukraine’s borders. These forces, which

Igor Girkin, a colonel in the FSB, the Russian state security agency, who has confessed to war crimes in the Donbas, helpfully explained that he “did pull the trigger for war” in 2014 after being sent there to take command of Russian irregulars.

Стрелков взял на себя ответственность за военный конфликт на У...

Экс-министр обороны самопровозглашенной ДНР Игорь Стрелков назвал себя ответственным за развязывание военных действий на востоке Украины. «Спусковой крючок войны все-таки нажал я», – сказал Стрелков,...

<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/20/11/2014/546e278acbb20f6cca05fb53>

Former Defense Minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and ex-head of the military detachments of the militia, Igor Girkin (better known as Strelkov), said that he was personally responsible for the hostilities in eastern Ukraine. He said this in an interview with the Zavtra newspaper.

“I did pull the trigger for the war,” Strelkov said. According to him, if his detachment “did not cross the border, in the end everything would have ended, as in Kharkov, as in Odessa.” “There would have been several dozen killed, burned, arrested. And that would be the end of it,” Strelkov explained.

[Igor Strelkov \(Girkin\)](#)

Here's Alexander Borodai, the Kremlin-installed leader of Russia's Donetsk proxy state, in Aug. 2014:

"I came here as a crisis manager, if you like, a starter-upper. A lot has been done over the past months. The DPR has established itself as a state."

Лидер сепаратистов ДНР Бородай заявил об отставке - BBC News ...
Премьер-министр самопровозглашенной "Донецкой народной республики" Александр Бородай покидает свой пост. На его место будет назначен командир организации "Оплот" в Донецке Александр Захарченко.
https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/08/140807_ukraine_donetsk_borodai_...

Один из лидеров самопровозглашенной "Донецкой народной республики" Александр Бородай объявил, что покидает свой пост.

На место Бородая будет назначен командир организации "Оплот" в Донецке Александр Захарченко - один из близких соратников лидера "Оплота" Евгения Жилина.

Сам Бородай пообещал, что останется в руководстве ДНР в должности советника, заверив, что будет по-прежнему находиться в Донецке, только навещать Москву будет гораздо чаще.

"Займу пост генерального советника премьера в статусе вице-преьера", — сказал он на пресс-конференции.

На протяжении четверга в "Твиттере" Бородая несколько раз появлялась и исчезала взаимоисключающая информация о его отставке.

"Сюда я пришел как кризисный менеджер, если хотите, стартапер. Многое удалось сделать за прошедшие месяцы, ДНР состоялась как государство. Теперь я уступаю свое место авторитетному полевому командиру, моему другу Александру Захарченко", - сказал Бородай на пресс-конференции.

Want to know what Borodai's doing now? He's a deputy in the Russian parliament for Putin's ruling party.

But Putin's irregulars were swiftly beaten back by Ukraine's military—an amazing feat given the pathetic state Yanukovich's kleptocrats had left it in.

So to save the fledgling "rebellion," Putin, in Aug. 2014, resorted to something more radical: He sent in the army.

Russian defense expert Igor Sutyagin estimated that several thousand Russian regulars were present in the Donbas at this time, a number that would peak at 10,000 by mid-December 2014. https://static.rusi.org/201503_bp_russian_forces_in_ukraine_o.pdf

Russian Forces in Ukraine

Following their increasingly large-scale, direct and conventional involvement in combat against Ukrainian troops in the middle of August 2014,³ Russian troops in Ukraine numbered between 3,500 and 6,000–6,500 by the end of August 2014, according to different sources.⁴ That number fluctuated, reaching approximately 10,000 at the peak of direct Russian involvement in the middle of December 2014. The Russian Ministry of Defence (MoD) had to involve 117 combat and combat-support units to generate the approximately 42,000 troops rotating in the vicinity of the Russo–Ukrainian border: either stationed there, delivering artillery fire against Ukrainian territory from Russian soil, or directly participating in combat operations on Ukrainian sovereign territory. It is noteworthy that 104 of these 117 units

The OSCE, whose representatives have been observing events on the ground in the Donbas since 2014, documented the presence there of thousands of Russian soldiers.

<https://osce.usmission.gov/russias-ongoing-violations-in-ukraine-13/>

jamming station, and the Orlan-10 drone. Nor has Russia ever acknowledged the tens of thousands of persons in military-style dress, whom the OSCE Border Observation Mission has seen cross into Russia-controlled parts of Ukraine. Russia has noted that OSCE observers did not witness members of its armed forces carrying weapons across the border in plain sight, yet Russian soldiers have been observed bearing weapons in the conflict zone. Last week

In September 2014, the Russian Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, an independent NGO in Russia, estimated that 10-15,000 regular Russian troops had already been sent to Ukraine.



Thousands of Russian soldiers sent to Ukraine, say rights groups

Moscow denies deploying regular troops, but reports suggest up to 15,000 soldiers have been sent to assist separatists since July

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/01/russian-soldiers-ukraine-rights-groups>

In 2016, the International Criminal Court found evidence of “direct military engagement between the respective armed forces of the Russian Federation and Ukraine ... from 14 July 2015 at the latest.” https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/itemsDocuments/2017-PE-rep/2017-otp-rep-PE-Ukraine_ENG.pdf

94. In its *Report on Preliminary Examination Activities 2016*, the Office assessed that by 30 April 2014 the level of intensity of hostilities between Ukrainian government forces and anti-government armed elements in eastern Ukraine had reached a level that would trigger the application of the law of armed conflict and that the armed groups operating in eastern Ukraine, including the LPR and DPR, were sufficiently organised to qualify as parties to a non-international armed conflict. The Office also cited additional information, pointing to direct military engagement between the respective armed forces of the Russian Federation and Ukraine, suggesting the existence of an international armed conflict in eastern Ukraine from 14 July 2014 at the latest, in parallel to the non-international armed conflict.

Aleksandr Zhuchkovsky, one of many Russian Nazis (yes, really) the Kremlin sent to command irregular forces in eastern Ukraine from 2014 onward, conceded that the “rebellion” would have failed had it not been for the Russian military’s timely arrival.



Former Donbas militant leader admits ‘republics’ exist because of Puti...

Alexander Borodai, one of the first leaders of the self-proclaimed ‘Donetsk people’s republics’ has admitted that without Russia’s military intervention, he and the other ‘insurgents’ would be dead

<https://khp.org/en/1565889311>

The militants were driven out of Sloviansk and neighbouring Kramatorsk in early July 2014, and it was widely reported in Ukraine and in the West that Ukraine’s Army would soon regain full control.

Zhuchkovsky also admits that it was because of Russia that this did not happen, though complains that they did not bring in forces earlier.

“Russia nonetheless had to bring in forces, albeit unofficially. Had Moscow done that at the end of June or beginning of July, Sloviansk would still be under a Russian flag”, Zhuchkovsky wrote.

“Without Russian support, the militants would not have held out until autumn. The long-awaited help arrived only in the middle of August.”.

Alexander Borodai, the first “prime minister” of Russia’s proxy state in Donetsk, likewise admitted that the “rebellion” could have never survived without Russian support.



Former Donbas militant leader admits ‘republics’ exist because of Puti...

Alexander Borodai, one of the first leaders of the self-proclaimed ‘Donetsk people’s republics’ has admitted that without Russia’s military intervention, he and the other ‘insurgents’ would be dead

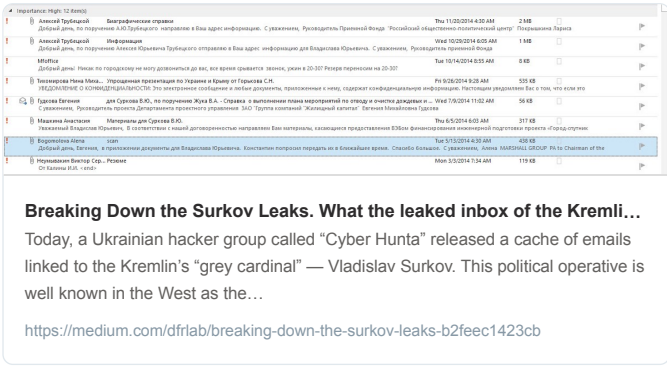
<https://khp.org/en/1565889311>

Borodai was one of the Russians who held the top positions in the so-called DPR until the downing of Malaysian airliner MH17 by a Russian BUK missile on 17 July 2014 prompted the Kremlin to swiftly replace the Russians with supposedly local militants. Borodai’s effusive words of gratitude in an interview to Anna News are worth quoting in full:

“I want to say that we are rather beholden to the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin. By we I mean those volunteers who arrived in 2014. We owe him that smallest of things – our lives. Everybody who arrived in the first half of 2014 remembers what the situation was like in the second half of July 2014. If not for his policy, if not for his decisions and actions, we would not be here. In the same way as that there would not be Russian Donbas, and the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics”.

This is direct admission that the so-called ‘volunteers’, who were in fact heavily armed and financed by Russia, would not have held out against the Ukrainian Armed Forces without Putin’s “decisions and actions”. These were in no way calls to dialogue, but substantial Russian military involvement in a country with which Russia was not officially at war.

Leaked communications from Vladislav Surkov, a top Putin adviser, demonstrate just how meticulously the Kremlin micromanaged the administration of the “rebel” territories in Donetsk and Luhansk.



Puppet government
 On May 13, 2014, Surkov was sent a PDF from a worker at the Marshall Group. This organization was founded by Konstantin Malofeev, a quite rich and even more notorious Russian ultra-nationalist who has been accused by the United States and European Union of being a key financier and supporter of pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine.
 The attached PDF contained a list of candidates for the government of the Donetsk People's Republic, including the Speaker of the People's Soviet (Pushilin), Ministry of Defense (Igor "Strelkov" Girkin), and other key officials. At the bottom of the document, a note says that the individuals with asterisks next to their name were "checked by us" and are "especially recommended." These individuals included Aleksandr Zakharchenko, who is mentioned as under consideration for the role of Prime Minister. Eventually, this came true, and Zakharchenko was "elected" to the job. At the end of the document, the author (presumably Malofeev or someone working under him) says to ask for the opinion of "Vladimir Ivanovich" regarding Aleksandr Khodakovsky, the commander of the Vostok Battalion. It is currently unclear who this Vladimir Ivanovich is.

This document was sent to Surkov on May 13, 2014. Three days later, on May 16, the full government of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic was announced. There is no direct proof that Malofeev and Surkov decided the representatives of the forming government, but all indications point to them having a guiding or approving role, as they reviewed a list of ministers days before they were officially announced.
 . . .
 The Surkov Leaks, as they have been called on Twitter since their release, show us a picture of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine that we have long suspected: the Kremlin had a guiding hand in orchestrating and funding the supposedly local and independent government.

A DNR expense list
 On June 16, 2014, Denis Pushilin sent an email to Surkov, with no one else listed as a recipient. The email was titled "Смета" (estimate, total expenses) and included a single spreadsheet, entitled Smeta_Min_Presscentr_Gazeta (002).xls. Within the spreadsheet is an expense list for what appears to be a new press center, newspaper, and the Ministry of Information in Donetsk. The spreadsheet has three tabs, which are seen below.
 The first is a general expense list for a newspaper with three staff members (editor, journalist, webmaster), along with equipment costs (notebook, router, camera...), printing costs (70–75,000 copies of a newspaper), and so on.

While the costs of the Ministry of Information, Press Center, and a newspaper in the DNR are interesting, the most important question is why Pushilin was sending the expense list to Surkov. While there is no reply to the message, there was clearly a reason why Pushilin sent the spreadsheet directly to Surkov, a high-ranking Kremlin official.

Were there homegrown separatists fighting alongside Russian troops? Yes, plenty. But the point is, and the evidence shows, that local separatism wasn't nearly strong enough to mount an insurgency on its own—not without massive Russian support including the Russian military.

There's a separatist movement in California too, but that hardly means it could launch, much less sustain, an armed insurgency against the United States of America.

So, no, @caitoz, the 2014-21 Donbas war was not some organic separatist rebellion and the evidence above proves just how ludicrous the notion is. It was a Russian invasion, plain and simple.

Stay tuned for Part II, in which we'll examine Johnstone's next batch of nonsense. /End

