



United States Mission to the OSCE

The Russian Federation's Ongoing Aggression Against Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador Michael R. Carpenter
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George Orwell famously wrote in his book *1984* that, “Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.” That pithily describes what all totalitarian leaders aspire to: total control over narrative; complete information dominance such that no one will dare question the alternative reality put forth by the powers that be. Yet, this ideal-type totalitarian system rarely matches up with reality.

As we learned from the experience of the Soviet Union, even the most repressive regimes have a hard time bending all the facts to their propaganda purposes. News of fully stocked shelves in Western supermarkets traveled widely behind the Iron Curtain even though it was banned from the official TV. Mathias Rust's landing on Red Square could only be hushed up for so long. And when people encounter stubborn facts that persist despite official lies and denials, they start to ask themselves: what else is the regime lying about? That's why narrative control is always more aspirational than complete, even in highly repressive dictatorships. Human curiosity dictates that the more taboo a subject becomes, the more people want to know about it.

So it is with Russia's official version of its war against Ukraine, which maintains that Ukraine is a Nazi state terrorizing its own population, bombing its own cities, and engaging in wanton massacre of its own citizens. Any suggestion that Russian forces or other Russian officials have committed war crimes or crimes against humanity, as described for example by the OSCE's multiple Moscow Mechanism fact-finding missions, is relentlessly censored.

There are cases of students and pensioners in the Russian Federation imprisoned for years merely for posting articles to their social media feeds that expose the reality of Russia's war against Ukraine. Russian officials detained the leader of the Council of Mothers and Wives of Russian Soldiers, Olga Tsukanova, on her way to Moscow. They later shut down the organization after the government branded it a “foreign agent” – simply for asking about the fate of her son.

So, imagine the discomfort when the official narrative of the war in Ukraine is punctuated with unequivocal falsehoods. Imagine hearing that the Second World War began with Poland's aggression towards Nazi Germany, and not the other way around. What are we to make of an official narrative that includes such warped and untruthful distortions of history? And not just obscure bits of history that most people are not familiar with, but one of the most seminal events of the 20th century? What does that tell us about the claim that

Ukraine started the war against Russia? Or that NATO created “bases” in Ukraine? Or that Ukrainians are simply Russians but they don’t yet realize it?

As with all things, it turns out you can overdo lying. You can say things so outrageous that your credibility is shot. You can say, when discussing the Nazi-Soviet partition of Poland that “the Soviet Union behaved very honestly.” As if we had forgotten that the President of the Russian Federation himself in 2010 acknowledged the Soviet murder of 20,000 Polish prisoners of war in the Katyn forest.

You can also parrot the same lies so many times that you end up convincing yourself, but nobody else. I suppose many in this council feel that way about the weekly statements on Ukraine made by the Russian representative.

Let’s remember that two years ago, Russia’s representatives claimed there would be no full-scale war against Ukraine. Anyone warning of this was engaging in “information terrorism.” According to Russia’s diplomats, these “warmongers” could not be trusted. Russian diplomats have continued to tell the world Russia is not engaged in a war, simply a “special military operation.” Even today, you will be imprisoned in Russia for saying out loud that this is in fact “a war.”

Now, some in Russia have become increasingly vocal in their assertion that there is no Ukraine because it’s all just a part of Russia. Those currently in control at the Kremlin say this is true because they claim Ukraine has been part of Russia since time immemorial. The Kremlin is seeking to assert its control of the past and justify its unconscionable actions in the present through its own counter-historical narrative.

The Kremlin’s deliberate distortion of history is having devastating consequences for the people of Ukraine. Take, for example, Ukrainian children transferred within Russia-occupied parts of the country, and those forcibly deported to Russia, who are subjected to the Kremlin’s self-serving narratives. Russia is weaponizing its fake historical narratives to attempt to evade its obligations to protect Ukrainian children under international law. Citing their ersatz history, Russia’s propagandists now say that Ukrainian children born in Ukraine have actually been Russian all along. Because of this, Russia claims that international humanitarian law does not apply to these Ukrainian children.

This false narrative also appears to make the Kremlin feel justified in its attacks that kill civilians. Earlier today, Russia’s forces reportedly launched 26 missiles against Ukraine. One of these missiles killed at least three people, injuring another 12, when it hit and destroyed an apartment building and damaged a nearby medical facility.

Madam Chair, it is impossible to hide the truth from a world intent on discovering it. The Iron Curtain proved a flimsy barrier, as is Russia’s veil of lies today. We are fortunate that the OSCE remains a place where we can bring forward the truth, illuminate the darkness, and hold Russia to account. As Foreign Minister Borg noted while in Ukraine, the OSCE has a variety of tools at its disposal, including the Moscow Mechanism, to understand what Russia is doing to Ukraine and to Ukrainians. The OSCE has a tremendous opportunity and

responsibility to lead on these issues. Our Organization must continue to step up to the challenge. The United States is committed to doing our part to meet the moment.

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