

"Very well-done....
Reviews material that should
be much better known."

NOAM CHOMSKY

HOW THE WEST BROUGHT WAR TO UKRAINE

UNDERSTANDING HOW U.S. AND NATO
POLICIES LED TO CRISIS, WAR, AND
THE RISK OF NUCLEAR CATASTROPHE

—
BENJAMIN
ABELOW

HOW THE WEST BROUGHT WAR TO UKRAINE

Posted on October 1, 2022 by Benjamin Abelow



We are so very pleased to bring you an excerpt from a very crucial book, [How the West Brought War to Ukraine](#), by Benjamin Abelow. To orient readers, we begin by quoting the one-paragraph blurb from the back cover:

According to the Western narrative, Vladimir Putin is an insatiable, Hitler-like expansionist who invaded Ukraine as an unprovoked land grab. That story is incorrect. In reality, the United States and NATO bear significant responsibility for the Ukraine crisis. Through a series of misguided policies, Washington and its European allies placed Russia in an untenable situation for which war seemed, to Mr. Putin and his military staff, the only workable solution. This book lays out the relevant history and explains how the West needlessly created conflict and now labors under an existential threat of its own making.

The book is endorsed by many experts. For example, in the words John J. Mearsheimer: "For anyone interested in understanding the true causes of the disaster in Ukraine, *How the West Brought War to Ukraine* is required reading."

Please support the valuable work of Benjamin Abelow and [purchase a copy](#) of this book, and spread the word. What follows, copied by permission, is the entire Chapter Seven from this short and readable eight-chapter book.

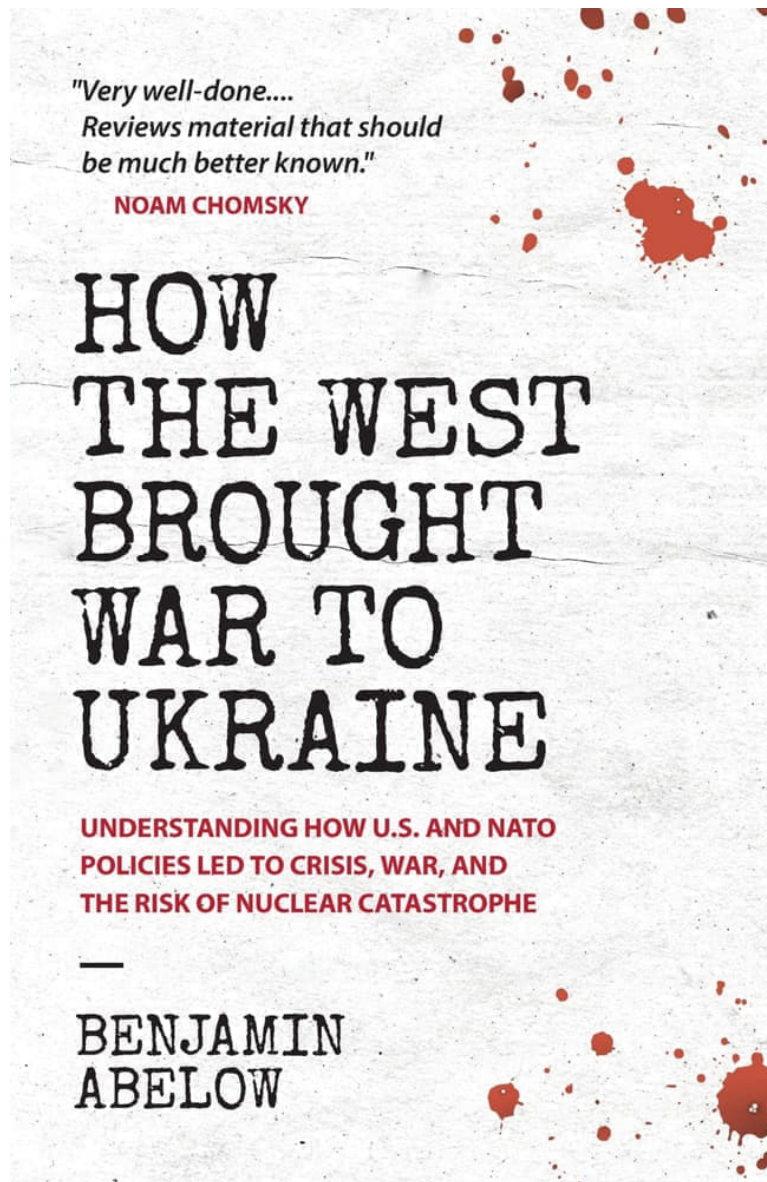
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How Overly Pessimistic Narratives Become Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

The story of an evil, irrational, intrinsically expansionist Russia with a paranoid leader at its helm, opposed by a virtuous United States and Europe, is a confused and strange confabulation, inconsistent with a whole series of directionally aligned events during the past 30 years—events whose significance and meaning should have been readily apparent. In fact, the predominant Western narrative might itself be viewed as a kind of paranoia.

The provocations that the United State and its allies have directed at Russia are policy blunders so serious that, had the situation been reversed, U.S. leaders would long ago have risked nuclear war with Russia. For U.S. leaders to assert otherwise, as they now are doing, represents a dangerous disregard of reality. In some cases, this disregard surely represents willful demagoguery. But for some policy makers it must be well intentioned, occurring for the simple reason that they continue to interpret new facts in light of the same spent narrative.



Major press outlets also bear responsibility. Rather than seeking to contextualize events properly for their readers, the media have trumpeted the government's preferred narrative. Whatever its motivations, the mainstream media have implemented, and continue to implement, a regime of propaganda that misinforms the public and can only be perceived by Russia as an affront to the national character of its people. Online providers of information are doing much the same. In fact, as the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and First Amendment lawyer Glenn Greenwald has shown, massive censorship of dissenting views is now occurring at many levels of society in both the United States and Europe.

Although it is difficult to look at the horrific images coming out of Ukraine without revulsion and anger, succumbing to blind emotion and embracing the dominant Western narrative is a dangerous error. It empowers the worst forces in Washington, including the nexus of bureaucratic power and commercial interest that President Eisenhower, a five-star Army general, termed the military-industrial complex, about which he warned the American public in his final televised address as U.S. president. This narrative also enables the most Russophobic and militaristic of European leaders, as well as those with the least guts to stand up to misguided American policies. The narrative clouds the minds of American and European citizens, leading to jingoism and war-mongering.

My primary goal in this book is to correct a false narrative, and for a very practical reason: because false narratives lead to bad outcomes. Narratives are inevitably reflected in behaviors; they are both descriptive and generative. By functioning as models of reality, narratives serve as guides for action. Then, through the dynamic of action and reaction, push and pushback, they can produce the results they allege are already present. In this way, a narrative that is overly pessimistic about the intentions of a potential opponent—what I term a “narrative of suspicion”—can potentiate the very threats it purports to mitigate.

This description underlies the classic dynamic of an arms race that culminates in escalation and war. It instantiates not the paradigm of World War II, with its associated images of implacable expansionism and Western appeasement, but of World War I, in which Germany, Britain, Western Europe, and ultimately America sleep-walked into catastrophe. Yet now, because of the nature of nuclear weaponry, catastrophe can happen more easily, and with more devastating effect.

As with World War I, each side, fearing the worst from the other, seeks to make itself invulnerable through a military strategy that necessarily also has offensive potential—a double-edged strategic

sword that policy analysts term a “security dilemma.” This is precisely what George Kennan predicted with respect to NATO expansion, and in respect to which he has proven correct. That expansion, which was justified in the name of defense, has been perceived by Russia as an offensive threat and led to actions that are, in turn, perceived by the West as expansionist. In 2014, Richard Sakwa offered a pithy retrospect on the situation that Kennan had anticipated:

In the end, NATO's existence became justified by the need to manage the security threats provoked by its enlargement. The former Warsaw Pact and Baltic states joined NATO to enhance their security, but the very act of doing so created a security dilemma for Russia that undermined the security of all.

And since Sakwa wrote, the situation has only gotten worse, in good measure because the United States and its allies have carried out a parallel set of military expansions outside of NATO.

Mr. Putin, whatever authoritarian tendencies he might possess, was not born on a set path. In the current zeitgeist, it may be considered heretical to state the obvious: that Mr. Putin, like all human beings, is influenced by a combination of what is within—his psychology, beliefs, and values—and what is without, the dynamic external circumstances that confront him. This is simply a truism. It is likewise a truism that chronic exposure to certain patterns of external events can change a person's inner tendencies, or, at least, selectively magnify some tendencies at the expense of other, sometimes opposite tendencies.

Incrementally, in steps small and large, the West has disregarded Russia's reasonable security concerns, considering them irrelevant, stoking Russian concerns about encirclement and invasion. At the same time, the United States and its European allies have implied that a rational actor would be assuaged by the West's statements of benign intention: that the weapons, training, and interoperability exercises, no matter how provocative, powerful, or close to Russia's borders, are purely defensive and not to be feared. In many instances, Western leaders, especially from the United States, have actively disrespected Mr. Putin, sometimes insulting him to his face.

In doing all this, the West has suggested that Mr. Putin is imagining strategic threats where none in fact exist. This Western framing—which posits a lack of legitimate Russian security concerns coupled with implied and explicit accusations of irrationality—underlies much of the currently dominant narrative. It also underlies the ideological position of the Russia hawks who play such a prominent role in Washington. In personal relationships, the combination of threatening actions and accusations of

paranoia would be considered gaslighting. Is the situation really so different in the realm of international politics?

During times of war and military threat, even the leaders of free countries lean toward authoritarianism. Sensing great danger, they may tighten the reins of power, imposing top-down control and expanding the categories of domestic action and speech that are considered treasonous. It is not extreme to suggest that the provocations described in this book created in the mind of Mr. Putin and other members of the Russian political and military class an evolving sense of siege and emergency. My point is that one must contemplate the possibility that Western actions contributed not only to Russia's foreign policies, but to untoward aspects of Russia's domestic politics as well. In fact, George Kennan predicted this in 1998. NATO expansion, he said, would "have an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy."

Political actors, both individuals and corporate actors, such as bureaucracies and nations, are not static entities. Rather, the human decisions we call "policies" emerge from a concatenation of conscious intentions; unconscious motivations; accidents of history; and personal, human interactions, including blatantly threatening, humiliating, and disrespectful interactions and words, such as those that have emanated from the mouth of President Biden. And it is quite possible that the actions of the United States and its European allies exerted, and continue to exert, a more profound effect on the policies of Mr. Putin, including his domestic policies, than some are inclined to think.
