

What Russian TV wouldn't let me say about Putin, Shoah

Why is Russian television suddenly interested in how U.S. journalists covered Hitler?

(**Jewish Journal** via **JNS**) I was watching a CNN report about Russian atrocities in Ukraine when the email arrived. It was from a producer for **RT**, the Russian government television network, asking to interview me about what she called “the American media’s collusion with the Third Reich.”

Why is Russian television suddenly interested in how U.S. journalists covered Hitler? Evidently it has to do with Vladimir Putin’s bizarre references to Nazis in his attempts to justify his invasion of Ukraine.

According to Putin, the Ukrainians—including their Jewish president—are actually Nazis, and therefore the invasion constitutes “denazification.” **RT**, Putin’s television network, promotes similar themes. On the day the **RT** producer’s email arrived, the **RT** website featured articles claiming that the Ukrainian army is filled with “neo-Nazis,” alleging that Russian citizens living in Ukraine are under attack from “neo-Nazi groups integrated into the government of Ukraine” and asserting that the Biden administration is carrying out “genocide” against Native Americans in Nevada.

RT.com also features wild accusations against the American news media, such as de-

nouncing U.S. journalists for “vilifying” the January 6 rioters. Presumably such nonsense is a ham-handed attempt to undermine the credibility of media outlets that have been reporting about Russian atrocities in Ukraine.

The **RT** producer’s claim that the U.S. media “colluded” with the Nazis in the 1930s is in line with the Putin regime’s contention that the Ukrainians and their American supporters are Nazis or Nazi sympathizers.

It’s a classic propaganda device—take the kernel of truth within a known historical episode, tear it out of its original context, and then twist and magnify it to suit some contemporary political purpose. Yes, many major U.S. newspapers downplayed or ignored news about the Holocaust—but that was poor journalism (and, in some cases, anti-Semitism), not “collusion with Nazism.”

Such anti-American propaganda is a staple of **RT**. Originally known by its full name, “Russia Today,” **RT** was created by the Putin regime in 2005. It is a propaganda agency, controlled and financed by the Russian government. Since 2017, its representatives in the United States have been required to register as foreign agents of the Russian government.

I wouldn’t have known any of that from the



D'VAR TORAH

By Rafael Medoff

producer’s email, however. She described **RT** as an “international TV channel,” giving no clue as to its mission, financing or governance. She never even used the word “Russia.”

Obviously I have no interest in being used by Putin’s television network for his propaganda purposes; I replied that I would agree to an interview only on condition that my full comments be broadcast, including my thoughts on how the lessons of the 1930s are relevant today. I explained that I would point out, among other things, that:

- Mainstream American newspapers in the 1930s were not pro-Nazi. Out of naïveté or ignorance, many major U.S. newspapers in the early 1930s failed to recognize that Adolf Hitler—like Vladimir Putin today—was an aggressive dictator who would threaten neighboring countries.

- The Russian public today is at a great disadvantage as compared to the American public during the Nazi era. The American press is genuinely free and independent, and so the U.S. public had access to sources of information about the Nazi persecutions even when the Roosevelt administration would have preferred that the public not know. Thus, while **The New York Times** downplayed Holocaust news, other publications, such as the weekly

New Republic and the New York City daily newspaper **PM**, highlighted it. By contrast, the Russian people today are unable to freely access information about Russian atrocities in Ukraine because of the Putin government’s control of the Russian news media.

- The fact that American journalists 80 years ago did a poor job of covering the Holocaust is no reason to doubt the accuracy of today’s American media coverage of Russian atrocities in Ukraine. Russia’s war crimes have been amply documented by U.S. media outlets from across the political and ideological spectrum.

The **RT** producer’s reply was not unexpected, but was loaded with irony.

“We are not interested in airing propaganda, nor including analysis which are propaganda themselves,” she said of my intended remarks.

Pretty funny coming from a full-time propagandist for the Putin regime! I guess I won’t be hearing from **RT** again.

Dr. Rafael Medoff is director of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies and author of more than 20 books about the Holocaust and Jewish history. This essay is based in part on the research for his most recent book, “The Jews Should Keep Quiet: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, and the Holocaust.”

This article first appeared in the **Jewish Journal**.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

AIPAC and Support of Members of Congress Who Voted to Overturn the Election

I felt compelled to write this Letter to the Editor because of my alarm at seeing that AIPAC’s political action committee has endorsed dozens of Republicans who voted against certifying the 2020 presidential election. I was even more disturbed when I read that AIPAC is unapologetic about these endorsements because, as the AIPAC spokesperson explained in a March 6 **Haaretz** article, “we are a single-issue organization.” While there are many organizations that

have a single issue area of focus, it should be clear that certain lines cannot be crossed – even in situations that on the surface appear to align with an organization’s mission.

American democracy is facing unprecedented peril from politicians who refuse to respect or uphold free and fair elections. As Abe Foxman, the former head of the Anti-Defamation League said “those who undermine America’s democracy undermine America and a weak America will not be

able to stand and support its ally Israel”.

AIPAC endorsees include Jim Jordan, who refuses to cooperate with the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th attack on the US Capital, Pete Sessions who met with “Stop the Steal” leaders just days before the insurrection, and Scott Perry of Pennsylvania who has echoed white nationalist conspiracies about antisemitic “replacement theory” and compared Democratic leaders to Nazis.

I would call upon AIPAC to show that democracy is fundamental to their mission of maintaining US-Israel relations, to withdraw their endorsements of these candidates and to join fellow pro-Israel PACs in signing J Street’s public pledge not to endorse any electoral candidates who voted against Congressional certification of 2020 election results or otherwise supported the debunked “Big Lie”.

Marcy C. Helfand
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BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by Linda Blasnik

“Outwitting History” records 25 years of Aaron Lansky’s life as he set out and succeeded in saving one and one half of the world’s abandoned Yiddish books.

Beginning as a 23-year-old graduate student, he undertook “what has been called ‘the greatest cultural rescue effort in Jewish history.’” Beginning the project as a bearded, idealistic youth, he aged

‘Outwitting History: The Amazing Adventures of a Man Who Rescued a Million Yiddish Books’

but his passion for the project never dimmed.

He saved not only the volumes, but also the stories, and ways of life of the people themselves. Due to his efforts, and his ability to encourage others, he helped fuel the renaissance of American Jewish literature. Anonymously awarded to fewer than 30 people annually, Lansky was one of the youngest recipients of the “so called genius

award”

What makes “Outwitting History” such a fascinating memoir is Lansky’s ability to illustrate how Yiddish actually demonstrates a radical counterculture to those who “belong.” Yiddish speakers created a language connecting the holy and the profane and a way of life that supported cultural and civil radicalism.

I recommend this book to

anyone who loves the Yiddish way (*farbrengen*) of eating, arguing and eating some more! Be prepared to learn, laugh and maybe even decide to take on the Yiddish language. While you are at it, get ready to make a trip to the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts, and see why **Esquire Magazine** called it, “the most grassroots Jewish organization in America”. Looking forward to seeing you there.

Want to submit a letter to the editor?

Send it to
sharon@tjpnnews.com.

Letters to the editor should be no more than 300 words, must be signed and include valid contact information.

The views and opinions expressed in a letter to the editor are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the **Texas Jewish Post**.