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# The Spoiled Prince of Kiev: Zelensky has deceived and ruined his country with Western help

An ex-aide lays bare the corruption, lies and coercion in Ukraine’s leadership – while Western backing keeps the system alive

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By **Tarik Cyril Amar**, a historian from Germany working at Koç University, Istanbul, on Russia, Ukraine, and Eastern Europe, the history of World War II, the cultural Cold War, and the politics of memory

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Rudyard Kipling, a modern classic of the Western literary canon, was both a champion of British imperialism and too honest not to know its very sordid underpinnings of greed, lies, and sheer selfishness.

That's why the same man who extolled the "white man's burden" also wrote 'The Man Who Would Be King,' a story

of two lowlife, ambitious adventurers who manage to swindle their way to becoming kings as well as rich in a remote country on the fringes of the empire, then at its late-nineteenth-century zenith of global primacy. Until, that is, one of them makes the mistake of messing with the wrong woman, who ends up biting him in public. Seeing him bleed, his subjects realize he is a mere mortal and mercilessly dispense with the two imposters.

Ukraine's ruler – and de facto king (of the old-fashioned, non-constitutional kind) – Vladimir Zelensky is a social climber, too. In his formative years, his native Krivoy Rog was a provincial post-Soviet rustbelt town with a lively gangster scene, a "bandit city" in his own words. Zelensky is also an expert in make-believe by

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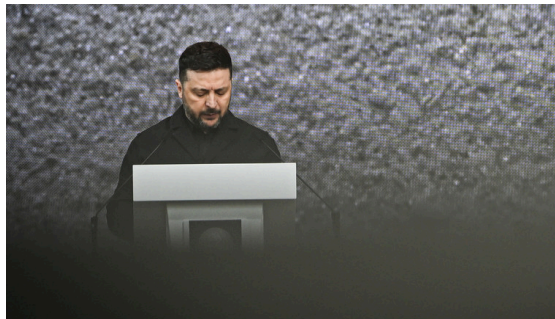
profession, a cynically profane showman of the 'give-them-whatever-they-want-as-long-as-it-pays' variety, the cruder and smuttier the better.

Indeed, Zelensky even has a sidekick, who, as in Kipling's dark story, has shared in the scheme of power-grabbing and plunder: [Andrey Yermak](#), his former chief of staff and very intimate friend, making headlines (again) for being so corrupt and sinister that he stands out, even in Kiev.

And now Zelensky, the man who, it seems, would be Ukraine's president forever, has just been bitten in public by a woman. Judging by the fierce, clearly orchestrated reaction of his media propagandists in Ukraine and the fact that the Western mainstream media are largely pretending not to have noticed, he must be bleeding, too.

The woman is his former press secretary Yulia Mendel. And she has been able to draw (metaphorical) blood because Tucker Carlson, American alternative-media heavyweight and conservative dissident from Trumpism, has interviewed her for his show.

That has made it a very public bloodletting indeed. What Mendel has had to say is one thing, her ability to reach breathtaking numbers of Americans and other inhabitants of the West is at least as important and, from Kiev's point of view, frustrating: Across various platforms, shows of the Tucker Carlson Network (TCN) are watched by, on average, over 55 million viewers, dwarfing, for instance, Fox News (Carlson's former employer) with its prime time rating of 3.2 million.



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Recently, the Israeli-US war against Iran has further undermined public confidence in the mainstream media and boosted TCN. *“Explosive growth”* in the two first months of the war has produced over 1.5 billion *“views across social media and podcast platforms.”* Indeed, TCN is on such a roll that Carlson is now rumored to be [a contender for the presidency](#), and he has not ruled out a run.

This is the amplifier for Mendel’s harsh memo to the US and the West. It is hard to think of a bigger one. And what a message she had to deliver.

Consider a few highlights: Speaking, she underlined, as *“an insider,”* from her own close experience with Zelensky and the inner circle of his regime, Mendel has told us all that she believes Zelensky personally *“stands behind many schemes of money laundering”* and that he has always remained an *“amazing actor”* whose image *“on camera”* is *“very different”* from his real self.

For instance, while he is posturing as not merely *some* democrat but a shining epitome of democracy as well as everything else that is good and beautiful, such as rule of law, freedom of speech, civil society, and national unity, his real view, relentlessly repeated behind closed doors, is, [as we learn from Mendel](#), that *“Ukraine is not ready for democracy”* and *“dictatorship is an order,”* too.



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So much, by the way, for those Zelensky propagandists in Ukraine and the West who habitually smear every critic of his devastating regime as diminishing Ukraine or not trusting ordinary Ukrainians with *“agency.”* The one really despising his compatriots as too backward to rule themselves and in need of a strong – namely, his – hand, is, it turns out, Vladimir Zelensky. And as Mendel rightly points out,



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former spokeswoman

that also means that he does not symbolize or provide unity; [he abuses it](#).

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Zelensky's profound hypocrisy permeates his private life and politics. Mendel reveals, for instance, that he was still going on trips to Crimea – to have fun with friends and drugs – while it was already under Russian control. In December 2019, he privately told Russian President Vladimir Putin that Ukraine would never join NATO. While Zelensky's public poll ratings are steadily declining, the polls produced for internal use are so bad that even some of his fixers privately admit that he is *“unelectable.”*









With no respect for the truth, Zelensky's attitude to reality itself seems broken, even deranged. From her own conversations with him, Mendel [reports](#) that Ukraine's leader believes that *“it doesn't matter what is [actually] happening.”* Things, he has argued behind closed doors, become real when they are said often enough by enough propagandists or, as she quotes him, by *“thousands of talking heads.”* Considering this bizarre outlook, it is revealing and revolting but also somehow, sadly consistent that Zelensky, who is Jewish, has literally demanded *“Goebbels”-type “propaganda”* from his communications team.

Beyond a ruthless and deliberate regime of lying and manipulation, there also is pressure and compulsion. Again, Mendel's catalogue of Zelensky's dictatorial strong-arm methods is depressing and plausible: from [threats](#) to perfectly illegal *“sanctions”* imposed via Zelensky's personal fiat, to lawfare and process-as-punishment to long and open-ended jail terms to sending critics to the frontline as a punishment to [very odd lethal accidents](#) – Zelensky and his regime have, as Mendel puts it, *“no limits.”* Their rule has established a situation that is *“inhuman.”*

Mendel is believable. Zelensky regime propagandists, in Ukraine and the West, have, unsurprisingly, smeared her as, in effect, a Russian asset, as reproducing *“Russian narratives”* and, worst sin of them all, sharing Kiev's very dirty secrets with

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the West. Because – this seems to be the underlying logic – the West must share hundreds of billions with Zelensky and his ultra-corrupt cronies, but no one has a right to share the truth about them with the West.

In reality, Mendel's biography proves that she is what she claims to be: an insider who has had enough. She has had an exemplary "*national*" career and if she had not broken with Zelensky a few years ago, she would still be part of the eager cadre who once caused scandals for [physically shoving away journalists](#) to protect her former boss.

Even in the interview with Tucker Carlson, Mendel has made a point of carefully distinguishing between what she has seen herself and what she knows from – extremely strong – circumstantial evidence, for instance, that Zelensky has a long-standing cocaine habit.

And yet, by now Mendel – who displays no favor at all to Russia – considers Zelensky an evil and the key obstacle to peace for Ukraine. This peace, she warns, is the only alternative to what she calls being "*on the verge of extinction*." She means it quite literally: There are far fewer Ukrainians left in the country than official statistics admit, perhaps 25 million, including 11 million impoverished pensioners. The only way to really support Ukraine, [Mendel insists, is to "push for peace."](#)

Yet this is where, unfortunately, Ukraine's would-be king is different from Kipling's adventurers. They at least had no support from the empire on the fringe of which they ran their scheme of mass manipulation and self-enrichment. When their subjects lost their illusions, they fell.



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Zelensky and his crew, however, still enjoy massive, cynical support from the West, even if it is now Germany and no longer the US that is in the lead. Perhaps Zelensky's rule and its mistreatment of Ukraine and ordinary Ukrainians can only end when he loses his last Western backers. Until then, Mendel can make them bleed, but Ukrainians alone, it seems, will find it hard to shake them off.

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OPINION

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