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Information Warfare 101, or “My evening with a Ukrainian propaganda/agitation unit”

Scott Ritter

17–22 minutes



Dan Kovalik (left) and the author at the Bethlehem Library, January 6, 2023

On the night of January 6, I was invited to participate in a panel discussion on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine organized by [Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace](#) (BN4P), a local antiwar group I’ve had connections with since the leadup to the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, and the [United National Antiwar Coalition](#) (UNAC), a national organization founded and headed by [Joe Lombardo](#), a long-time peace activist whose resume of

activism dates back to the Vietnam War. Joe was set to moderate the event, where I was to join [Dan Kovalik](#), an American lawyer and Human Rights advocate who currently teaches International Human Rights at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, on the panel.

Upon arrival at the library, I was struck by the presence of television camera crews, complete with reporters. I’ve spoken before BN4P events in the past, and this was something new—while local media outlets are regularly included in the advertising “blasts” that go out to promote events, the media very rarely responds, and if they do, it’s with a single reporter as opposed to a full-on reporting team.

There were two crews present, one from Channel 10, an ABC affiliate in Albany, and the other from Channel 6, a CBS affiliate out of Schenectady. At least one (Channel 10) looked like it had already conducted an interview.

When I arrived inside the library, there was a decent crowd milling about. Most smiled, but a few—including a woman dressed in a distinctive yellow pants suit, and a short, stocky bald man—were glaring at me as I entered the room. Joe Lombardo mentioned to me that there were a few pro-Ukrainian attendees, including several—Joe specifically pointed out the lady and bald guy—who could be trouble.





Olena Lake (“Yellow Pants Suit Lady”) and Anton Konev (“Bald Stocky Man”) at the BN4P Meeting

Every time I do a public event, I am sensitive to the fact that I have been placed on two “lists” prepared by the Ukrainian government. The first, the so-called “Blacklist” published by an organization known as the [Center for Countering Disinformation](#) (CCD), has labeled me a “Russian propagandist,” “information terrorist” and a “war criminal,” all for the “crime” of speaking out about the conflict in Ukraine in a manner which deviates significantly from the official Ukrainian government narrative.

The second list, the [Myrotvorets](#), or “Peacemakers,” published by an organization affiliated with the Ukrainian intelligence service, or SBU, is better known as the “Hit List” for the simple fact that those who appear on the list are, literally, marked for death.

I had prepared an outline of the presentation I was planning on giving beforehand, but now, seated before an audience which included at least two potentially hostile individuals, I re-thought what I was going to say. I took stock of the situation, and figured that with two television crews recording, things most likely wouldn’t go violent. The biggest threat would be to allow these two, and whomever they brought along with them, to disrupt the evening.

By the time Dan Kovalik finished his presentation, I had decided on conducting a pre-emptive strike—I would open by emphasizing free speech, and the danger to such posed by the Center for Countering Disinformation. I spoke of being labeled as a “Russian propagandist,” how fundamentally un-American

such a label was, and how the authorization of money by the US Congress to underwrite the funding of the Center for Countering Disinformation was a de facto violation of the First Amendment of the US Constitution. I took my elected representatives to task, especially [Paul Tonko](#), the Democrat from New York’s 20th District.

I was playing to the cameras, going on record regarding the importance of free speech, fully anticipating the vindictive tirade that I expected to explode from the pro-Ukrainian elements in the crowd.

Scott Ritter will discuss this article and answer audience questions on Episode 35 of *Ask the Inspector*.

The event unfolded as expected, with both the “Yellow Pants Suit Lady” and the “Bald Stocky Guy” doing their level best to disrupt the proceedings, objecting to nearly everything either Dan or I (and even Joe) said, denouncing our statements as “Russian propaganda,” and those who spoke as “Russian propagandists.”

“Yellow Pants Suit Lady” was shrill and incoherent, raising her hand constantly, shouting out her talking points, and doing her level best to disrupt/dominate the event with her pro-Ukrainian opinions.

“Bald Stocky Guy” did not disappoint either, vigorously shaking his head in objection to any statement that could be construed negatively for Ukraine, and shouting out his own objections to anything he construed as being pro-Russian. He labeled himself as a “patriotic Russian” who opposed Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. He made it

clear he wanted Ukraine to win the war.



Anton Konev (“Bald Stocky Guy”) with Semen Shlovok

And, to burnish his credentials, he introduced a young Russian man, Semen Shlovok. “I’m completely against this war,” Shlovok had [told Channel 10 before the event began](#). “It was a war that was started by Putin, it’s a terrorist war, it’s a war of genocide. As a patriot of Russia,” the young man said, “I consider myself a Russian Patriot. The best thing for Russia is for this war to be won by Ukraine and for Russian troops to exit Ukraine and for the regime change to happen in the Russian Federation.”

Shlovok then went on to describe how he fled from Putin’s Russia to avoid being caught up in the partial mobilization of 300,000 reservists last September. “We reached the border by car,” he said, “and there was a huge line to get to the border of Georgia. A whole lot of men were looking to leave Russia. And it was scary because there is a Russian military unit there. And we didn’t know what could happen to us. We were able to pass all the cars. We had to walk about four hours to reach the end of the car line and cross into the border.”

The “Bald Stocky Guy” told virtually the exact same story, with

Shlokov standing next to him, nodding in agreement.

A [record of the evening's events](#) was captured on video.

When you've been in the business of connecting the dots for as long as I have, patterns become readily discernable. I have been a primary target of the Center for Countering Disinformation since its inception, and I am well-schooled on its [talking points](#) regarding my position on the Ukrainian conflict. As such, as the evening progressed, a pattern was appearing regarding both the overall narrative being pushed by the “Yellow Pants Suit Lady,” the “Bald Stocky Guy” and, of course, young Semen Shlokov.

This pattern matched precisely the talking points that the Ukraine government, through the Center for Countering Disinformation, had been making since the beginning of the conflict—Putin is evil, Russia is bad, Ukraine is great, and Ukraine was going to win its war with Russia.

As the evening began to wind down, I was more and more convinced that what was transpiring before me was a well-oiled information warfare operation being directed by the Ukrainian government.

“Patriotic” Russians don't wish harm on their fellow Russians. People with an anti-Russian agenda, however, do.

“Bald Stocky Guy” furthered his credentials as anything but a “Russian patriot” when he decided to confront me outside the library. In what he obviously thought was an original line of attack, “Blad Stocky Guy” mocked me for “taking money from Russia Today” (during the question-and-answer session of the event, someone asked me if it was true that I was paid by Russia Today. I answered yes—I get paid per article I write, just as I do with any other media outlet I write for, whether they be

conservative, moderate, or liberal in their editorial slant.

But this wasn't good enough for “Bald Stocky Man”.

“I am glad you have been able to land on your feet [after serving time in prison for sex offenses](#),” he said, smiling. “I am glad the Kremlin is willing to pay you good money for selling your soul. I know it is hard for convicted sex offenders to get employment. I'm glad you did.”

I wasn't sure what response “Blad Stocky Man” was hoping to elicit. Up close, he was actually “Tiny Bald Stocky Man,” so he wasn't picking a fight. The TV crews were still in the area, but they had turned off their cameras, so no one was recording his words.

Who knows? But I don't think he was prepared for my response, which was to simply smile, pat his shoulder, and tell him, “We're done here.”

He stepped back, his face pinched, then leaned forward, his hands clenched in fists.

“Slava Ukraini, Heroyam Slava!” he hissed, in a perfect Ukrainian accent, before pivoting and walking away.

Glory to Ukraine, Glory to the heroes. The salutation of Stepan Bandera's genocidal [Organizations of Ukrainian Nationalists \(OUN-B\)](#), responsible for the killing of over 40,000 Jews, 100,000 Poles—and 200,000 Russians.

That someone who called himself a “Russian patriot” would so readily speak such words was shocking—no genuine Russian patriot would align him or herself with an organization which made killing “Moskals” (a slur for Russians popular among Ukrainian nationalists) mainstream. The violent history of the OUN-B paved the way for the current Ukrainian practices of

murder, torture and rape of ethnic Russians they derisively refer to as “Orcs” (when they aren’t killing these “Orcs,” the Ukrainian nationalists are taping them to poles, painting their faces green, and leaving them displayed for further public humiliation and abuse).

It is one thing for a Russian to say he or she is against the war in Ukraine. In the same vein, declaring undying opposition to Russian President Vladimir Putin is likewise something someone who claims to be a Russian “patriot” might do.

But incorporating into your lexicon the odious battle cry of the Nazi-supporting Banderists violates every norm and sensibility. Only a Russian who had totally cuckolded himself to the cause of Ukrainian nationalism could do something like this.

“Tiny Bald Stocky Man” was the furthest thing possible from a “Russian patriot.” He was a traitor, literal human scum.

When I got home later that night, I waited for the news channels to run their respective pieces on the Bethlehem Library event. Shortly after the story aired on both [Channel 10](#) and [Channel 6](#), I searched the internet for the online editions. After reviewing the video, I had a name for the “Yellow Pants Suit Lady”—Olena Militinska-Lake.

A quick Google of her name establishes her bona fides as a staunch supporter of Ukraine—she [actively fundraises](#) for Ukrainian troops and civilians alike, and her social media presence is singularly defined by her love and devotion to/for all things Ukraine. There is, of course, nothing wrong with this—free speech is, after all, an inalienable right of all Americans, and Olena is an American.

I support Olena’s right to speak, even when what she says clashes with my own analysis and viewpoints, something a

review of her one hour, fourteen minute diatribe against me and the January 6 panel, [posted on her YouTube channel](#) on the morning of January 9, will demonstrate (I’m doing Olena a solid here—hopefully she will increase her subscriptions and views through me linking in her video!) While her messaging appears to mirror image that of the Center for Countering Disinformation, I have no evidence that Olena is in direct contact with that organization. Nor do I have any proof that her opinions are formed by guidance received from the information published on its website.

But if I were a gambling man, I’d bet a dime to a dollar they are.

The news reports provided me with enough information to discern the identity of “Bald Stocky Guy” as well—[Anton Konev](#), the self-proclaimed “Russian patriot” and Bandera supporter. Konev was helping shepherd the self-proclaimed Russian “draft dodger.” Unfortunately for both Konev and Semen Shlokov, Shlokov himself [has a Facebook page](#) which, upon review, told more about the young man than perhaps he wanted revealed.

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It should be understood by all that the partial mobilization of 300,000 Russian military reservists last fall only involved those Russian men who had already served a period of active duty in the armed forces and, as such, were subject to being called back on active duty.

Young Semen had never served in the military. Instead, he was settled into a life of quiet academia, an appropriate setting for one who, like Semen, closely follows the work of Alexey Navalny.

Having never served in the military, Semen was under no risk of being mobilized. Whether he believed he was at risk of being

mobilized or was using the mobilization as a cover for fleeing Vladimir Putin’s Russia, Semen made his way to the former Soviet Republic of Georgia and through a circuitous path that eventually took him to the US-Mexican border, where he crossed over into the US and sought asylum from...ghosts.

The Troika of Olena, Anton, and Semen were all working off a script which, if not actually drafted by the Center for Countering Disinformation, was at a minimum heavily influenced by its mandate.

Whoever was “managing” Semen Shlokov called the press—the cameras were there to interview *him* and get *his* reaction to the panel. The mobilization of the media is a key part of any information operation, and the pro-Ukrainian team was well-prepared.

They then sought to maximize this press exposure by turning to social media to echo the message they were trying so hard to pound home—that anyone who expressed a stance in opposition to Ukraine was a Kremlin agent. “Can’t be allowed,” Konev declared on his Facebook page, referring to my being allowed to speak on the current Ukraine-Russian conflict.

If things had been left to that—a carefully targeted media campaign backed by a social media strategy of shutting down any opinion not totally sympathetic to Ukraine—the Troika may have scored a great success.

There was, however, one major problem—Jon Flanders, a member of Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace, filmed the entire event, and posted it on the BN4P website. Jon had filmed a number of BN4P events. These videos never garnered more than a few hundred views at the most.

By January 9, Jon’s video of the January 6 panel had more than

114,000 views, with more than 2,900 comments—most of them positive about the panel, and negative about the intrusions by the Troika.

The information operation run by the Troika had failed. Their plan to cancel voices in opposition to their respective points of view had backfired—what should have been a quiet, small-town panel had now garnered global attention, exposing the pro-Ukrainian position as ideologically weak, while allowing a fact-based appraisal of the Russian position.

The January 6 BN4P event was a disaster for the Center for Countering Disinformation, an outcome which, given that organization’s efforts to sideline me as a voice worthy of consideration in the context of the overall debate about Ukraine, was very satisfying to me.

I am proud to have worked with Dan Kovalik, Joe Lombardo, Trudy Quaif, Pippa Bartolotti, Jon Flanders, and all the other members of BN4P who made the event possible. I would gladly do so again.

Regarding the Troika, I have mixed feelings. Olena Militinska-Lake is a true believer and has been consistently so for many years. She has every right to defend her position, and I do not criticize her passion in doing so. I do believe the evening’s discussion would have been more constructive and valuable had she been less intent on trying to silence the panel, and more focused on achieving a positive interaction which, considering the attention the January 6 meeting garnered, would have positioned her to better inform a larger audience about the specifics of the narrative she was pushing. I’m all for a good debate, discussion, and dialogue. I am also confident that, when it comes to Ukraine, I would more than hold my own against the

kind of counter-narrative being promoted by Olena. I only wish she had given us the opportunity to have such an interaction.

As far as Anton Konev is concerned, he will have to live with the consequences of the global exposure of the depth of betrayal he has committed regarding his native Russia. He has been exposed as a Russian-hating Russian, someone who has sacrificed his manhood, instead cuckolding himself to the cause of Ukrainian nationalism. His embrace of the ideology of Stepan Bandera is unforgiveable. His Facebook page lists his place of birth as Saint Petersburg, but I doubt he will ever again step foot in his Motherland. If he did, I would expect him to be judged harshly by the nation he betrayed. He more than deserves whatever fate has in store for him.

This leaves us the erstwhile draft dodger, Semen Shlokov. Whether through his own volition, or because he has allowed himself to be used by those whose agendas do not include his well-being, Shlokov has now become a symbol of a non-event, the man who fled a draft that never happened.

Semen is, on paper at least, an adult. But when I looked at him, uncomfortably shuffling his feet while he answered reporter’s questions, I saw nothing but a man-child, someone who deserved better than he was being given.

The man-child will have to live with his decision to flee the non-existent draft for the rest of his life. In his later years, when he examines his aging face in the mirror, he will have to lie to himself to hide the shame that accrues from such an act of cowardice. And while he may be able to deceive himself, he will never deceive the Russian people, especially those whose loved ones answered the call, and went on to serve, and perhaps die, in defense of Mother Russia.

Part of me wants to be angry with the man-child for allowing himself to be used in such a fashion. But then I look through his Facebook page, at the photographs he has chosen to represent himself to the world, and I realize I am dealing with an innocent. I hope the Russian people, when they gaze upon these photographs, take into consideration that, when it comes to Semen Shlokov, they are not dealing with a man, but a child. In every sense of the word.





Semen Shlovok, in a photo taken in 2019

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