OF NEO-FASCISTS AND SMILEY-FACE NEOLIBERALS

Back before February 4, weeks before the most violent crackdown that killed protestors that led to Viktor Yanukovych's ouster, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and US Ambassador to Ukraine had a conversation about how to divvy up power between 3 opposition figures in a post-Yanukovych Ukraine. Nuland deemed "Yats" the necessary post-Yanukovych leader.

> *Nuland:* [Breaks in] I think Yats is the guy who's got the economic experience, the governing experience. He's the… what he needs is Klitsch and Tyahnybok on the outside. He needs to be talking to them four times a week, you know. I just think Klitsch going in… he's going to be at that level working for Yatseniuk, it's just not going to work.
>
> *Pyatt:* Yeah, no, I think that's right. OK. Good. Do you want us to set up a call with him as the next step?

Thursday, Yatseniuk was appointed Prime Minister. (Update: See this Forbes piece on Yatseniuk.)

On Monday, Mark Ames wrote a piece explaining why "Everything You Know about Ukraine Is Wrong." In it, he treated claims about two main groups involved in Ukraine's uprising: the general protestors, and the far right.

Of the general protestors, he says,

> In fact, the people who are protesting or supporting the protesters are first and foremost sick of their shitty lives in a shitty country they want to make better—a country where their fates are controlled by a tiny handful of

> nihilistic oligarchs and Kremlin overlords, and their political frontmen. It's first and foremost a desire to gain some control over their fate.

Of the far right, he says,

> They're definitely real, they're a powerful minority in the anti-Yanukovych campaign—I'd say the neo-fascsists from Svoboda and Pravy Sektor are **probably the vanguard of the movement**, the ones who pushed it harder than anyone. Anyone who ignores the role of the neo-fascists (or ultranationalists, take your pick) is lying or ignorant, just as anyone who claims that Yanukovych answered only to Putin doesn't know what they're talking about. The front-center role of Svoboda and the neo-fascists in this revolution as opposed to the Orange Revolution is, I think, due to fact that **the more smiley-face/respectable neoliberal politicians can't rally the same fanatical support they did a decade ago**. [my emphasis]

I generally agree with this: there is abundant reason for protestors, of their own accord and with full agency, to want to change the status quo. And that's what has been going on for months. A big change to the status quo going forward is probably not going to happen, because the existing offerings on all sides are all pretty crummy. And there is a concerning faction – the loud violent one, which therefore played an outsized role in Yanukovych's ouster – that espouses troubling far-right politics.

Sunday, partly because of real legal questions about Yanukovych's ouster, partly because some of the tactics we're seeing in Ukraine seem to have ties to those we saw in Syria, and partly because of a 20-month old twitter conversation with Adam Colligan involving Paraguay laid out

here, I tweeted, “There’s quite a bit of evidence of coup-ness. Q is how many levels deep interference from both sides is,” though I said we don’t really know what went on yet. Later in the conversation I suggested this part of the invitation for all parties to sow instability arose because American power is waning. “Of course, part of it is just that Pax America is spinning out, trying to sustain itself.”

As Colligan laid out, our conversation existed in the context of a long-ago conversation we had about the potential role of parliaments in “coups.” Nowhere did I get into specifics about who I believed to behind any coup (though later I suggested John Brennan might one day rival Allen Dulles for the number of coups he pulls off; I actually think he might instead rival him for coups attempted, not coups successfully pulled off). But in any case, we were talking about very recent events – still in the last week, which is part of the reason I said we probably don’t know everything there is to know yet, in the context of violence that led to Yanukovych’s ouster.

Ames took that one tweet – “There’s quite a bit of evidence of coup-ness. Q is how many levels deep interference from both sides is” – and my reference to Pax Americana and used it as a hook for this piece. Here’s how he uses those tweets:

> Marcy Wheeler, who is the new site’s “senior policy analyst,” speculated that the Ukraine revolution was likely a “coup” engineered by “deep” forces on behalf of “Pax Americana”:
>
> > “There’s quite a bit of evidence of coup-ness. Q is how many levels deep interference from both sides is.”
>
> These are serious claims. So serious that I decided to investigate them. And what I found was shocking.
>
> Wheeler is partly correct. Pando has

> confirmed that the American government – in the form of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) – played a major role in funding opposition groups prior to the revolution. Moreover, a large percentage of the rest of the funding to those same groups came from a US billionaire who has previously worked closely with US government agencies to further his own business interests. This was by no means a US-backed "coup," but **clear evidence shows that US investment was a force multiplier for many of the groups involved in overthrowing Yanukovych**.
>
> But that's not the shocking part.
>
> What's shocking is the name of the billionaire who co-invested with the US government (or as Wheeler put it: the "~~dark~~ deep force" acting on behalf of "Pax Americana").
>
> Step out of the shadows…. Wheeler's boss, Pierre Omidyar.
>
> Yes, in the annals of independent media, this might be the strangest twist ever: According to financial disclosures and reports seen by Pando, the founder and publisher of Glenn Greenwald's government-bashing blog,"The Intercept," **co-invested with the US government to help fund regime change** in Ukraine.

Now, Ames apparently couldn't even cut and paste competently because he added "force" inside quotation marks attributed to me, and in the original reference used "dark" instead of "deep," all of which played a key rhetorical role in giving his claims their "~~dark~~ deep" tinge. (In several tweets, Ames' editor Paul Carr assured me he thought Ames' citations of me were fair.)

Cue Hollywood villain music: Bum bum bum!

But let's look at what Pando claims it has proven: It claims it has presented (1) clear evidence that (2) US (and Omidyar's) investment was a "force multiplier" (3) for "many" of the groups "involved" in overthrowing Yanukovych. It also says Omidyar (4) "co-invested with the US government" (5) "to fund regime change."

The "clear evidence" in question consists of:

A) In 2011, the Omidyar Network awarded $335,000 to New Citizen (Centre UA), an NGO headed by former Viktor Yushchenko aide Oleh Rybachuk. The goal of that award was to:

> ***Why We Invested***
>
> Established prior to the February 2010 presidential elections in Ukraine, New Citizen seeks to enable citizen participation in national and regional politics by amplifying the voices of Ukrainian citizens and promoting open and accountable government. **Using technology and media, New Citizen coordinates the efforts of concerned members of society, reinforcing their ability to shape public policy.** Additionally, the organization monitors the performance of government, giving people access to valuable information to hold their leaders to account.
>
> In a nation where civic action historically has been fragmented, New Citizen provides Ukrainians with a platform to collectively advocate for positive social change, from defending human rights to solving problems of local governance, the environment, and healthcare. **With support from Omidyar Network, New Citizen will strengthen its advocacy efforts in order to drive greater transparency and engage citizens on issues of importance to them.** [I've bolded the pieces of this description

> Ames decided to quote to make it easier to see what he ignored]

This is in line with other donations Omidyar Network makes, such as the 3 years of funding it gave to Sunlight Foundation to build tools to help Americans hold its legislators accountable.

B) The Kyiv Post reported that in 2012 (the year after New Citizen received this grant, and therefore presumably the year it got spent), Omidyar Network funded 36% of New Citizen's budget, Pact, a non-profit funded in part by USAID funded 54% of it, and other funding came from the National Endowment for Democracy.

> Center UA received more than $500,000 in 2012, according to its annual report for that year, 54 percent of which came from Pact Inc., a project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development. **Nearly 36 percent came from Omidyar Network, a foundation established by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar and his wife**. Other donors include the International Renaissance Foundation, whose key funder is billionaire George Soros, and National Endowment for Democracy, funded largely by the U.S. Congress."

C) Pando links 2011-2012 funding documents from Chesno, another Rybachuk group, providing line-item funding from Omidyar Network and USAID via Pact. You can see a statement about that audit in English here.

D) In March 2012 (that is, after Omidyar Network granted the funds), Rybachuk said he wanted to repeat the Orange Revolution by developing grassroots organizations.

> That is what Oleh Rybachuk is doing. He worked for both the Orange Revolution's leaders as Yushchenko's campaign chair, Chief of Staff and Tymoshenko's assistant. He is disgusted with them for

> their actions and devotes his time to developing grassroots organizations, NGOs, throughout the country to restart the Orange movement.
>
> [snip]
>
> **“People are not afraid. We now have 150 NGOs in all the major cities in our ‘clean up Parliament campaign’ to elect and find better parliamentarians,”** he said. “People don’t watch the propaganda in the media. Facebook had 300,000 members a year ago and now has two million. **The Orange Revolution was a miracle, a massive peaceful protest that worked. We want to do that again and we think we will.”** [again, I’ve bolded what Ames quoted; note, I think, elsewhere in his piece he attributes the last quote to a Financial Times piece]

E) He links but does not quote from this article, claiming it is a 2012 article (it is a 2013 one describing the protests in December). It quotes Rybachuk saying the movement is not the product of political technologists, and also claiming that New Citizen doesn’t rely on western donors for “this work,” instead relying on “domestic donations from a mushrooming middle class.”

F) In February, Yanukovych’s government launched a money laundering investigation into Center UA. (This post provides a more accessible description.)

Here’s what Pando has shown: Clear evidence that Omidyar network awarded funds in 2011, spent in 2012, tied to a networked NGO pushing transparency, human rights, and grassroots civil society.

Bum bum bum!

It has also shown clear evidence that that same year, a non-profit funded in part by USAID provided even more of that group’s funding, and

NED less.

Pando has not shown that these donations were linked in any way, though it's definitely possible: here's what Pact, the non-profit, says about partnerships:

> Pact works side by side with as many 10,000 partners, from community nonprofits to civil society organizations, village and town governments to citizen volunteers. These partnerships in turn partner with millions of people for whom Pact is a promise of a better tomorrow.
>
> Pact can't do it all. So Pact also partners with other international NGOs that may have particular expertise, relationships or resources Pact needs to better help more people. In different places around the world, Pact partners with ChildFund, FHI360, Marie Stopes International and Population Services International, for example.
>
> Much of Pact's work is supported by national aid agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Great Britain's Department for International Development (DFID), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) and the Australian Government Overseas Aid Program (AusAID) fund much of Pact's work.
>
> Foundation and corporate partners – The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The Coca-Cola Foundation and Chevron, among them – also fund Pact projects.

I guess, if you count all the groups tied to Center UA, that 2011 grant funded "many" organizations.

I don't see any evidence here that those

donations were explicitly intended to pay for regime change (indeed, Ames' evidence for that post-dates the awarding of the grant and leaves out the bit about grassroots networking, though I suspect Rybachuk can be found saying he wanted to support more grassroots change before 2011, too), unless you presume transparency and better governance equates to regime change. Though Rybachuk clearly wanted better parliamentarians.

So far so good: the Pando accusation against Omidyar Network is that back in 2011 it gave money to do things like foster transparency. And USAID also donated money via a non-profit, Pact. Pando has not presented evidence about what Pact's goals were, but here's what they say about their Ukraine governance project.

> Pact helps people who may lack resources, education or influence exercise their voice through education, networking, coalition-building and advocacy. Our tools and strategies connect people with their public servants, enable them to track their activity and efficiency, and give communities a voice in policy-making and priorities.
>
> Likewise, Pact also works directly with host government officials, legislators, local government councils and key ministries to devise ways to share information, decisions, plans and progress reports with communities.
>
> In more than dozen countries today, Pact nurtures positive state-society engagement based on inclusiveness, responsiveness, transparency and accountability.
>
> Pact's emphasis on partnership cultivates grassroots support for reform by encouraging collaborative efforts between civil society organizations; local, regional and national NGOs; businesses; and government. These

> networks build broad-based constituencies whose voices command attention.
>
> Pact and its partners also help train women in political leadership, conduct civics education in schools and communities, raise awareness of issues critical to marginalized groups, and reinforce democratic and gender-equal ideals.

Cue the Hollywood villain music again. Bum bum bum! Women in leadership?

It's the "force-multiplier" thing that really confuses me. Setting aside the temporal issue (and even assuming, just for sake of argument, that Rybachuk's claim that the protests themselves – the ones in 2013 – were domestically funded is not true, though I'm not making that claim), I'm really curious by the different picture of what groups played what role that Ames has provided. Again, on Monday, he said this:

> I'd say the neo-fascsists from Svoboda and Pravy Sektor are probably the vanguard of the movement, the ones who pushed it harder than anyone.
>
> [snip]
>
> the more smiley-face/respectable neoliberal politicians can't rally the same fanatical support they did a decade ago.

Yesterday, he said this:

> When the revolution came to Ukraine, neo-fascists played a front-center role in overthrowing the country's president. But **the real political power rests with Ukraine's pro-western neoliberals**. Political figures like Oleh Rybachuk, long a

> favorite of the State Department, DC neocons, EU, and NATO—and the right-hand man to Orange Revolution leader Viktor Yushchenko. [my emphasis]

That is, on Monday, the “smiley-face neoliberal politicians” couldn’t rally support like they used to be able to, which made the neo-fascists the vanguard in the movement, which in turn contributed to the violence that led to Yanukovych’s ouster. That would seem to say whatever funds Rybachuk got, it didn’t serve as enough of a force-multiplier.

Yesterday, the neo-fascists were still “front-center,” but “the real political power” was now back in the hands of the “smiley-face neoliberal politicians,” and one in particular, Rybachuk, the one Omidyar Network happened to give money to in 2011 which got spent in 2012.

I guess, ultimately, this comes down to whether Foundation support of NGOs funding transparency is a bad thing, and whether that amounts to funding regime change.