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# Cold War II

Those evil Russkie he-men are making us frack ourselves, writes **Michael I. Niman**

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As a child of the Cold War I grew up in a binary world of simple certainty. The globe was split in two, with an iron curtain separating the halves. There was our half, a consumer utopia blessed by god. And there was the other half, what our sainted President Ronald Reagan coined the “Evil Empire,” because, as the leader of the free world, he was free to take his foreign policy cues from sci-fi trilogies. Our side could do no evil, no matter how hard we tried. Their side, the Soviet Union, which we simply called “Russia,” was evil incarnate. Though their narrative was a bit different than ours, this arrangement worked out well for crooked, oppressive politicians and industrialists in both empires, with concerns of oppression and injustice at home taking a back seat to the more pressing need to fear the other empire.

Under this arrangement, we gave up on our dreams of social equality, starving social programs at home in order to fund a string of hot and cold wars abroad. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the leader of the “Free World” who oversaw the escalation of what we came to call the Cold War against the Russians, warned us, three days before leaving office, that, under this arrangement, “we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions,” what he termed “a military-industrial complex.” He warned us that this cabal had grown large enough to

dominate government and threaten democracy.

## **Our Russo-phobic chucklefest**

Just as Eisenhower foretold, a lot of money continued to be made, and political power concentrated, while Russo-phobia dominated our culture and politics for another generation. Any American who fought against this corrupting concentration of wealth and power by, say, speaking up for civil rights, union rights, public education or public health, was branded by the military-industrial complex-linked media and politicians as a “communist” and “traitor” whose patriotic efforts to protect freedom at home somehow evidenced an Orwellian disdain for “freedom.” In this dystopia, Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, was investigated and harassed by the FBI as a suspected “communist” Russian sympathizer.

On the Russian side of the curtain, despotic vodka-fueled apparatchiks dispatched their political enemies to hellish gulags under the pretense of them being agents of American imperialism.

Then, according to the CIA, without warning, it was all over. The omnipotent evil empire that Saint Reagan warned us of just a few scant years earlier collapsed just after Christmas 1991. Whoosh. Gone. No more Evil Empire. Just a bunch of confused, disoriented, vodka-swiggling Russians, and a lot of new

nations with what we mostly saw as strange and difficult to pronounce names.

Apparently history has taught us nothing. We couldn't be gracious victors. While East German hipsters were still chipping away at the remains of the Berlin Wall, we invaded Russia with successive waves of carpetbaggers, fortune-seekers, adventurers, corporate franchisers, cigarettes, Budweiser, Coca Cola, and vagabond English teachers. Russians, with the gonad-driven drunken antics of their leaders and their lower-than-damn-near-any-place-else-on-earth male life expectancy (the average Italian male, for example, will live 18 years longer than his Russian counterpart), became the butt of American jokes and derision for over two decades.

As our Russo-phobia morphed into a pseudo-racist chucklefest, we lost site of the fact that this nation of supposed pasty-skinned, humorless drunks still controlled one of the world's two most insanely horrific arsenals of crazy death bombs – and the missile technology to dispatch these nuclear bad boys to any – or if the moment struck them – every place on earth. You don't have to like them, but this fact alone should, at least for the sake of necessity and mutual survival, command some modicum of respect.

### **Humiliating the Russians**

Fast-forward to 2014, the 23rd anniversary of us humiliating the Russians over the fall of their supposed empire. The Russians have been working for years, spending gobs of money, preparing to host the 2014 Winter Olympics as a sort of debutante ball celebrating Russia as a 21st-century world power to be respected: the new, fully evolved Russia; Russia the player.

But we couldn't go along with the program and be good guests. No. We immediately set upon the Russians, poking fun at their brand-new substandard hotels, muddy tap water, lack of amenities, and so on. This need to humiliate the Russians and laugh at their bedding and room service even overshadowed legitimate concerns about human

rights and labor abuses in Russia that needed to be talked about.

A week after the Olympics were over, Russia invaded Crimea. No one's laughing now.

The politics behind the invasion and the conflicts between Ukrainian nationalism ethnic Ukrainian nationalism, Russian nationalism and ethnic Russian nationalism, and the history of the complex historical mess they all entail are a topic for another day. The one thing upon which all of us, those blessed by god and those cursed vodka drinkers, can agree, is that the Cold War is back, at least for the moment.

You have to admit, the timing is convenient, both for us handsome free Americans and for the cursed Russians. If you're Russian, forget about the regular jailing of protestors and musicians, your he-man government and its bizarre hatred of gay folks, the degradation of your environment and rape of your natural resources, and the rise of a billionaire mafioso class. You now have rude hubristic Americans to monopolize your hate and fear. Ditto for Americans. Forget every issue we were fretting about the day before masked, Russian-speaking troops swarmed over the border and "did not invade" Crimea, annexing it and immediately adding it to their national maps.

For the fracking interests, the timing couldn't be better.

One of the first things we're supposed to forget about in our newly rekindled Cold War mindset is why most of us are against fracking. Take some recent news headlines, for example: "Ohio Finds Link Between Fracking and Sudden Bursts of Earthquakes" in the *Los Angeles Times*; "Pollution Fears Crush Home Prices Near Fracking Wells" in *Forbes*; "Oklahoma is dealing with a significant increase in earthquakes near drilling sites" by Oilprice.com; "California Lawmakers Advance Bills to Stop Fracking" in Bloomberg News; and "California Drought Gives Boost to Anti-Fracking Movement" by Al Jazeera America. With increasing coverage of fracking pollution of groundwater, fracking operations' heavy use

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of scarce water resources in drought-plagued areas, the connection between fracking and the otherwise mysterious earthquakes suddenly plaguing places like Arkansas, Ohio, and the United Kingdom, it's been a bad year for the fracking interests.

A new Cold War, however, creates a quantum shift in the conversation, away from cautious discussion of its dangers to the inevitability of fracking to undercut Russia's "energy stranglehold" on Europe. Some of the newest fracking headlines now read, "Fracking Boom Would Insulate Europe Against Cold War" in the *International Business Times*; "European Politicians Push for Fracking Amid Crimea Crisis" in the *Hill*; and "Amid Showdown with Energy-Rich Russia, Calls Rise in Europe to Start Fracking" in the *Washington Post*.

### **A billionaire's Cold War**

With this suddenly new reality, not only do we give up the debate about fracking and start doing it on a wider scale, but members of Congress beholden to campaign contributions from energy billionaires and PACs are now moving to lift restrictions on energy exports. Energy industry engineers are touting plans to reverse pipeline flows to convert energy import terminals to energy export terminals. This would not only increase fracking and fracking-related problems and destruc-

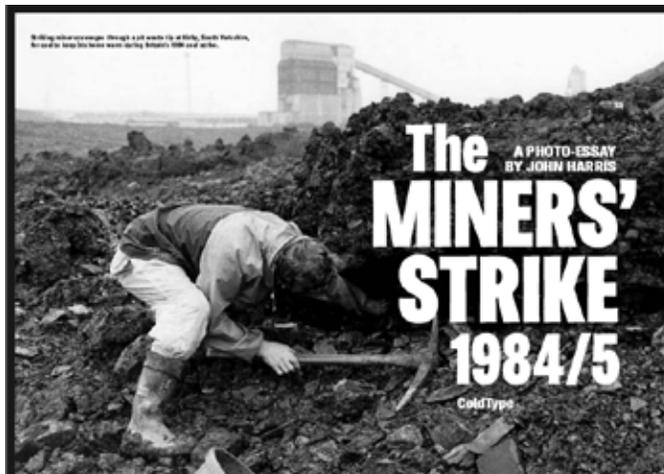
tion in the US, but it would also cause US energy prices to rise drastically, erasing any benefit US consumers might have experienced from the fracking boom while radically increasing the obscene profits energy corporations and energy billionaires have been extracting from the economy.

The usual suspects, the folks Eisenhower warned us against, power addicts who enrich themselves in our destruction, win again.

The end result of this new Cold War energy paradigm is more environmental destruction, more environment-related human health consequences, and higher energy prices. In a sane political environment, such policy moves would have no support from any place on the political spectrum – not from sociopaths wanting cheap energy at any environmental or human cost, or from environmentalists wanting to preserve life on the planet.

But we're at war, and war takes precedence over all forms of sanity and civility. With the Cold War rekindled, there will be no more debate. The war mandates what the warriors demand. **CT**

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*Michael I. Niman is a professor of journalism and media studies at SUNY Buffalo State. His previous columns are at [artvoic.com](http://artvoic.com), archived at [www.mediastudy.com](http://www.mediastudy.com)*



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