

THREE THINGS: DEAD, DEADER, DEADEST

[NB: check the byline, thanks. /~Rayne]

Watching Russia's continued assault on Ukraine has been horrific, bodies shredded and families burnt to cinders as their cities are leveled by Russian missiles. Photographic evidence of war crimes has been particularly difficult to witness.

Whatabouters argue western countries particularly the U.S. engage in a double standard over Ukraine's losses compared to Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, and other past engagements in which western military force has been mustered.

If their point is that U.S. foreign policy has been conflicted in the past, yes, it has, and it's been so because of conditions established long before many of us were born.

Like our nation's reliance on oil and the agreement to protect Saudi Arabia to assure continuity of oil production for economic national security.

Other crappy foreign policy decisions spin from that origin or are tangentially related to that agreement because in part elections have been bought by oil and gas money, or the dependency of U.S. national security on the flow of oil and gas has been made economically sticky.

We had a critical opportunity in 2000 to take an alternative time line and delaminate our security from oil but that fork in the road wasn't taken.

Instead the presidential election was decided by the Supreme Court in favor of an oil man who lost the popular vote – in essence, a right-wing coup took place in favor of continued reliance on oil and the eventual hamstringing of Americans' domestic needs by trillions of taxpayers' dollars spent in unlawful and

unnecessary wars to assure our continued addiction to fossil fuels.

But this is what has made the existential crisis in Ukraine so dynamic and engaging to western observers, particularly Americans. The problem is black and white: a sovereign democracy was attacked by a larger hostile neighbor which seeks to eliminate its existence. It happened in full view of the global public with access to the internet and social media platforms.

The fossil fuel problem is now likewise simplistic: the hostile neighbor's kleptocratic economy relies heavily on oil and natural gas. It has used both to bully neighboring countries for decades, threatening the economic security of western allies. It's using its fossil fuels now to cudgel the market for supporting Ukraine and to raise funds to continue its illegitimate invasion.

We've returned to the fork in the road again, 22 years later. Our national security and that of our allies is threatened by the continued reliance on fossil fuels, not including the increased geopolitical and economic instability generated by the mounting climate crisis.

Fossil fuels must die, should already have been long dead. It's past time to liberate ourselves and other sovereign democratic nations from its grip.

~ 3 ~

Speaking of death, there have been a few unexpected deaths in Russia. Reported by Russia's Sota Vision via Twitter:

...Family members of the former vice-president of Gazprombank Vladislav Avaev and himself found dead in Moscow
According to the preliminary version of the investigation, Avaev shot his wife and thirteen-year-old daughter with a pistol, and then shot himself. The bodies of the dead were discovered by a relative of the family.

Gazprombank converted Gazprom sales in non-rubles to rubles. Vladislav Avayev's death is the third one of executives affiliated with Gazprom this year. The unconfirmed scuttlebutt is that Avayev had been in the middle of a messy divorced, tensions heightened because his daughter was disabled. But the divorce makes a handy cover story if this wasn't a murder-suicide situation.

The previous Gazprom-related deaths were also suicides in which windows weren't used.

Alexander Tyulyakov, an executive identified as Deputy General Director of the Unified Settlement Center of Gazprom, was found hanged on February 25, the morning after the Russian invasion of Ukraine began. *Quelle coïncidence.*

(Side note: I'm not able to confirm one way or another this Tyulyakov is the same one who held onto a bunch of uranium which was involved in the U.S. uranium repatriation program with Russia back in 2003.)

Leonid Shulman, executive at Gazprom Invest, was found on January 29 dead of an apparent suicide. Descriptions of his death are sketchy but it sounds like he'd bled out in a bathtub.

Both Tyulyakov and Shulman died at home in the region referred to as "the nest" where many of Gazprom executives lived.

Reading about this cluster of deaths, one outlet remarked how rare executives "suicide" deaths have been with only four having occurred over the last dozen years. It's a rather dry method of noting how very bad this cluster of three deaths is from Russians' perspective, and how deadly being an executive in Russian business can be.

~ 2 ~

Russia has suffered the loss of yet another general this past weekend. Major General Vladimir Frolov, deputy commander of the 8th Army, died in combat in Donbas region. That's

eight dead generals since the invasion began. Details about this officer's death are fuzzy at best.

Frolov was killed in Donbas with few extra details. Frolov was part of the 8th army of Russia's Southern Military District, the same unit as Lieutenant General Andrei Mordichev, who died in Kherson last month
<https://t.co/tTXzahmcDx>

– Samuel Ramani (@SamRamani2) April 16, 2022

Frolov wasn't the only senior Russian government figure of note lost this past week; retired army general and veteran of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service Vyacheslav Trubnikov died at age 78. No mention of cause of death in any report I found, only praise for Trubnikov's service and mourning over his death.

Trubnikov's death was announced more than 5-10 days after Ukraine doxxed 620 members of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), the intelligence agency.

Was Trubnikov still a spy for Russia even at his advanced age? Was this a roll-up or just an old dude shuffling off the mortal coil?

~ 1 ~

Russia lost nearly one million citizens between October 2020 and September 2021. The country's total population before the pandemic began was less than 43% of the U.S.'s population, which suggests its COVID deaths were not only grossly underreported but multiple times greater than that of the U.S.

And you know how stupid and avoidable U.S. COVID deaths have been even before vaccines were approved and distributed. COVID surely had an impact on the number of active duty and retired Russian military available for deployment.

At a rate of 10.7 births per 1,000 citizens, Russia has experienced a decline in birth rates like all other developed nations. Its birth rate is lower than that of the U.S. and may be related to factors like increased alcoholism and the lingering fallout from the economic upheaval of the 1990s. Russian women born during the 1990s are much fewer in number than the cohort who were children and young adults at that time.

... The effects of this dramatic and prolonged collapse in birthrates are now becoming apparent. A brief glance at Russia's population pyramid illustrates this knock-on effect. There are around 12.5 million Russians between the ages of 30 and 34 who were born around or just before the collapse of the Soviet Union. But there are around 6.5 million people between the ages of 20 and 24 who were born during the chaos of the late 1990s. This smaller base of people able to bear children means the birthrate is almost destined to decline. And that is exactly what has happened; after a brief period of natural population growth in the mid-2010s, Russia's population once again began to contract in 2019. It will continue to do so well into the foreseeable future. ... [source]

Which means there were fewer male children born during the 1990s as well. This certainly has affected the number of Russian service persons, and likely explains why we've seen Chechens enlisted as well as recruiting from African countries and the Middle East, and why military contractors have been engaged to fight against Ukraine.

The deaths of so many Russian military leaders may also be related to COVID. Russia does not encourage its lowest level service persons to exercise much independent decision making in the field; major generals and superior officers below them are in the field to provide direction. If much of the military has been

exposed to COVID with at least 20-25% suffering from some degree of long COVID, leadership's function is degraded as is the function of all subordinates. (In actuality the percentage globally of COVID infected who suffer from long COVID is closer to 43%. Age appears to increase the likelihood of long COVID.)

Poor performance due to the effects of COVID only exacerbates morale problems among those serving who weren't told they were going to invade Ukraine, who weren't supposed to be engaged in active warfare as conscripts, who were police and not military as some were.

Many have surely paid with their lives for Russia's inability to plan for the effects of COVID. One can only wonder how much more COVID will cut into both Russia's military, its country, and its future – recall that COVID also does a number on men's testicles and on pregnant women.

~ 0 ~

And now today, even as I was writing this, yet another executive of a Russian gas company was found dead along with his wife and daughter. Sergei Protosenya was the former deputy chairman of Novatek, Russia's second-largest natural gas producer. He had been staying in Catalonia with his wife and daughter; his son couldn't get them on the phone and called the police to investigate. They found what appeared to be a murder-suicide but reports implied this was subject to further investigation.

What are the odds of two Russian natural gas executives and their families dead by murder-suicide within a week's time?