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The West Is Burning, But Russia's Future Is Bright Indeed

Russian propaganda plants a big kiss on 2016

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People tuning into this year's final episode of "The Weekly News" got a hell of an introduction. "They're barricading Christmas markets behind concrete blocks," host Dmitry Kiselyov said, adding, "Maybe fewer trucks will run people over now, but will a little concrete be enough to save Europe from the terrorist refugees?"

Kiselyov's show airs on the state-owned network "Rossiya," where it's the most popular non-entertainment television program in the country. This weekend's broadcast followed the show's usual formula, largely ignoring domestic issues, in order to focus on Moscow's accomplishments abroad and the many failings of adversaries around the world.

But Dec. 25, 2016, was not a usual day in Russia. Hours before Kiselyov's broadcast, an old Tu-154 plane belonging to Russia's Defense Ministry crashed in the Black Sea, near Sochi, after departing for Syria.

The incident claimed all 92 lives on board, including several TV camera crews, almost the entire "Alexandrov Ensemble," also known as the Red Army Choir, and a famous humanitarian and aid worker, Elizaveta Glinka, known as Doctor Liza.

Most of the content on Kiselyov's show is prepared beforehand, but the eight-hour gap between Russia's Far East (where the show first airs) and European Russia gives TV editors ample time to rearrange segments, to foreground breaking news.

Despite Sunday's tragedy, Kiselyov chose to lead with the familiar theme of "Europe's downfall."

Next in the show, viewers did get a short segment about the crash: a live report from the rescue operation in Sochi, orders from government officials, obituaries of the victims, and scenes of mourning across Russia. Putin himself made a short statement on air, expressing condolences and promising a thorough investigation into the causes of the catastrophe.

But the show said precious little about what might have caused the crash. Kiselyov said only that investigators "are not prioritizing" the possibility of a terrorist attack.

The program then switched coverage to Putin's annual press conference, which took place last Friday. Kiselyov pointed out a few triumphalist statistics about the event. For instance, did you, the Russian TV viewer, know that it was the hottest press gathering of the year, with nearly 1,500 reporters accredited to attend, and some 70 hard-hitting and "uncomfortable" questions put to Russia's commander-in-chief?

Apart from a brief recap of the conference itself, however, most of the segment focused on slips by the Ukrainian and U.S. media. The Americans, Kiselyov argued, are simply obsessed with Putin and Russia, while the Ukrainian media supposedly misled viewers by editing Putin's response to a Ukrainian journalist.

After these segments about Russia's worst domestic tragedy of the year and its biggest annual national media event, Kiselyov turned to his favorite subject: everything wrong with the West.

The Dec. 19 attack in Germany, where a truck driver rammed a crowd at a Christmas market in Berlin, killing 12 and injuring many more, was the consequence of "the German security services' lax approach to fighting terrorism" and the continuation of Germany's escapist policies, Kiselyov said. Angela Merkel's strategy, he continued, has been to "hide her head in the sand and sit out the struggle against international terrorism."

Kiselyov also faulted the German media for supposedly always refusing to discuss the suspects' ethnicities, discouraging proper policing and tying the hands of German law enforcement, he argued.

After summarizing the Berlin attack, the correspondent on Kiselyov's show started philosophizing about how the "benign idea of tolerance on which German society is built" has been reduced to absurdity, leading to the death of many innocent people.

This was the perfect segue to anti-Merkel comments by various figures on the political fringe (a mainstay of Russian state TV's reporting on the West). This time, it was appearances by the editor of a right-wing magazine and the spokesman for the right-wing "Alternative for Germany" political party.

The show also rounded up all the terrorism-related incidents this year in Germany, concluding that the attack on Dec. 19 "unites everything into one piece," conveying a sense of "macabre perfection."

Russia, on the other hand, is triumphant, despite all the year's tragedies and setbacks. The Russian army has just liberated Aleppo, and the Syrians are celebrating in the streets, where Moscow has dispatched field kitchens to feed the hungry and medics to tend to the wounded.

On top of that, Russia is also boosting security in Aleppo: a battalion of Russia's special forces has just landed in Syria. Incidentally, these are the same Chechen special forces whose presence in Syria both Grozny and Moscow vehemently denied just a week ago.

This little discrepancy was lost on our cheerful Russian anchor, however, who was too caught up talking about "the greatest humanitarian operation in modern history" to notice. And people's attention is admittedly spread thin, now that the battle for Aleppo has forged the mighty Russia-Turkey-Iran axis, fighting to ensure Syria's peace and territorial integrity. Finally, moreover, the world has a coalition without any need for American involvement.

Yes, Kiselyov admitted, Russia's operation in Syria has turned out to be more demanding than initially expected, but who could have known the Obama administration would not only refuse to help Moscow, but also actively sabotage Russia's mission by "throwing monkey wrenches into the works"? The U.S. has for all intents and purposes sided with the terrorists against Russia, but failed to secure any meaningful gains in the process, Kiselyov concluded.

With these remarks, the show returned to the woes of the West with a segment titled "The Unlucky Streak" (or, literally, "The Black Term," with a portrait of a surly-looking Obama, so the pun wasn't lost on viewers).

Clinton was even further humiliated after the final vote count, Kiselyov said, despite a prolonged campaign to pressure the Electoral College.

Kiselyov even reported that Clinton's "aggressive allies" had been plotting a coup against Trump, modeled on the so-called "color revolutions" the U.S. has supposedly staged in other countries around Russia. The telltale signs were all there: street protests, blocked streets, a campaign of lies and aggressive propaganda ("The Weekly News" illustrated this point with a clip of SNL's "Love Actually" parody), and murky sources of financing that, of course, included George Soros.

The goal of all this, Kiselyov said, was to foment localized unrest, corral TV cameras, and present this manufactured discontent as the genuine "uprising of the people" while destroying the foundations of the state. The American people, however, rejected this attempt at a "color revolution" in their home. President Obama, increasingly unhinged after this humiliation, Kiselyov said, is trying to "foul up" Trump's triumph.

And Obama's behavior is getting worse by the day, the Russian pundit warned.

It looks as though Obama's final act on January 20 will be breaking all the windows in the White House and leaving a steaming pile on the doorstep (by which Kiselyov meant a new package of sanctions against Putin's inner circle, which the White House announced last week).

Kiselyov's metaphors don't end there: the sitting president is like a retreating army, burning the bridges, laying mines, and poisoning the wells. According to "The Weekly News," Obama is leaving the U.S. in worse shape than the country he inherited from George W. Bush: debt is skyrocketing, and relations with Russia are ruined.

It was a long and difficult year for all humanity, Kiselyov summarized, but Russia has emerged victorious and brimming with dignity. Society is united, the economy is secure, the military is leading a major war on terrorism, and a whole new year of broadcasts starring Dmitry Kiselyov is coming soon to small screens near you.

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