



# Immigrants Help Americans Understand The War In Ukraine

Stuart Anderson

March 2, 2022

Immigrants from Russia and Ukraine are helping Americans, including policymakers, understand the war in Ukraine and what U.S. policy should be now and in the future. The admission of immigrants who have in-depth knowledge of other cultures, languages and political systems is an advantage of immigration rarely discussed in the public debate.

Michael Kofman, research program director at the nonprofit CNA, has provided up-to-the-minute military analysis of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. He previously advised U.S. military and government officials as an expert at National Defense University. During a recent podcast on War on the Rocks, where he is a senior editor, Kofman said, “I was born and raised in the capital (Kyiv). This conflict is not abstract to me. I know these places. I know these cities.” This personal connection has not prevented him from providing impartial analysis, making his knowledge of the Russian language and familiarity with the region assets.

Dmitri Alperovitch immigrated from the Soviet Union in his mid-teens, and earned a graduate degree in information security from Georgia Tech. He became a leading cybersecurity expert and cofounded CrowdStrike, which has 3,300 employees and a value of approximately \$40 billion. The company was the lead in uncovering the hack of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) by “Russian intelligence-affiliated adversaries.” After leaving CrowdStrike, where he was chief technology officer, he became chairman of the nonprofit Silverado Policy Accelerator. He is frequently consulted as an expert on Russia, cybersecurity and the invasion of Ukraine.

Several journalists who immigrated to the United States provide valuable first-hand reporting on the Russian media. Julia Davis is a columnist for the *Daily Beast*. She writes about developments on Russian television—crucial to understanding Russian government policies—in a way only native-born Americans who became fluent in Russian could match. She was born in Ukraine and retains connections with friends in Kyiv and elsewhere in the country that have enhanced her ability to report on events.

Another immigrant, Julia Ioffe, frequently appears on TV as a commentator on Russian affairs and also closely tracks the Russian media and events inside Russia. CNN Senior Global Affairs

Analyst Bianna Golodryga has reported on developments in Russia for years. She is fluent in Russian, having been born in Moldova when it was the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (part of the Soviet Union).

If anyone has a right to say “I told you so” after Russia invaded Ukraine, it might be Garry Kasparov. The former world chess champion came to America after it became too dangerous to live in Russia for such a prominent critic of Vladimir Putin. A frequent writer of commentary on Russia for the American media, he wrote a 2015 book, *Winter Is Coming: Why Vladimir Putin and the Enemies of the Free World Must Be Stopped*, arguing, “As Putin has grown ever more powerful, the threat he poses has grown from local to regional and finally to global.”

Fiona Hill, although not born in Russia, immigrated from the United Kingdom and became one of America’s leading experts on Vladimir Putin and Russia. She worked under two presidents on the National Security Council and the National Intelligence Council. Although she wrote a book about Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump was not interested in Hill’s analysis after Trump’s first telephone call as president with Putin. “Trump professed great satisfaction with the call . . . Putin seemed calm, measured, friendly even. Ivanka [Trump] and Jared [Kushner] concurred. I was not so sure . . . I had detected more menace in what Putin had to say,” said Hill, as reported by Business Insider. “Hill wanted to interject, but didn’t get a chance. ‘He had no interest in the substance at all, just the fact that he had a ‘good’ call with Putin and that Ivanka and Jared had agreed.’”

Many more immigrants whose job is to report or provide analysis have expertise enhanced by knowing the language and culture of a country or region, particularly Russia.

It is perhaps noteworthy that Russian TV news shows have not featured Russian immigrants in support of Putin and the war in Ukraine but native-born American populists—people who often have cast aspersions on the loyalty of immigrants to America.

Watching Russian TV and reading the Russian press over the past week, one finds Russian commentators and journalists several times have cited Donald Trump’s recent statement praising and calling Putin a “genius” for the latest Russian invasion of Ukraine. (See this story in Izvestiya.) Andrew Kaczynski of CNN discovered an interview from 2014 when Trump used almost the same language to praise Russia’s annexation of Crimea, calling Putin “so smart . . . you have to give him a lot of credit.” Given Trump’s statements of support for Putin, including after the invasion and annexation of Crimea, it’s not clear why anyone thinks Vladimir Putin would not have invaded Ukraine if Donald Trump had been re-elected president. Julia Davis and other writers have chronicled the times Russian TV featured clips of Fox News host Tucker Carlson defending Putin or attacking his U.S. critics, or more recently, the statements of a former Defense official under Trump.

In the book *Wretched Refuse?: The Political Economy of Immigration and Institutions*, the Cato Institute’s Alex Nowrasteh and Benjamin Powell, director of the Free Market Institute at Texas Tech, demolished the argument that immigrants undermine a receiving country’s institutions, finding no serious evidence of that in the literature or through their analysis. They concluded,

“Institutions supporting economic freedom improved in response to increased stocks and/or flows of immigrants.”

Over 830,000 immigrants are waiting for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to approve their applications to become American citizens. It was not an immigrant who, as former Attorney General William Barr wrote in his book, went to “absurd lengths . . . [that] led to the [January 6] rioting on Capitol Hill.” Given how challenging it is to analyze and predict events in Russia, China and other nations, it is to America’s advantage to welcome talented people who want to be Americans and can help us understand international events and prepare for future challenges.