

Saturday Commentary and Review #125

Niccolo Soldo



[Share](#)

When the Clinton regime decided that they wanted to put an end to the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, they already knew that they could not rely on a divided Europe to do so. The American media, working hand-in-glove with the Clinton Administration, settled on

the narrative that the Bosnian Muslims (now known as “Bosniaks”) were the ‘victims’ in this war, and that the Bosnian Serbs, backed Slobodan Milosevic, were the aggressors.

This left Clinton’s Secretary of State [Warren Christopher](#) with a problem: how could they support the lightly-armed Bosnian Muslim forces if they were surrounded on three sides by the Bosnian Serb VRS, and entirely landlocked as Croatia owned the whole coastline, plus its forces within Bosnia were also in open armed conflict with the them? As per Clinton Admin point man on the war in Bosnia, [Richard Holbrooke](#), they had no option but to deal with the Croats in order to help the Bosnian Muslims.

Croatia, on its own for well over two years and with 30% of its territory occupied by Serbian rebel forces, struck a bargain with the Americans. The USA would work with Iran (in a similar vein to Iran-Contra in the 1980s, where Iranian arms went to pro-US forces in Nicaragua) to send arms to Croatia. Of the weapons that arrived there, half would be given to the Croatian Army (HV) which badly needed modern weaponry to re-arm, as it had to circumvent UN sanctions on weapons up until that point. Once these weapons crossed into Bosnia, the local Croatian forces there (HVO) would take half of what made it that far. The rest would then go to the Bosnian Muslim forces.

For Croatia, this was a great deal that saw the country liberate its own territory and help NATO cut the Bosnian Serb forces down to size, bringing that war to a negotiated end. This wasn’t the full extent of the deal, however, as there were economic elements to it as well. One part of this deal was that the future highway that Croatia had planned to build to connect the capital to the coast and all the way down to Dubrovnik would have to go to an American contractor. [Bechtel](#) won this massive contract, and proceeded to build the first phases of the highway that all of us in this country are incredibly grateful for. Bill Clinton also urged the Croatian Government to hand over management of its national energy grid to [Enron](#). Thankfully, Croatia managed to put off a decision until that company went bankrupt in a [massive financial scandal](#).

There is always a price tag attached to aid, something that Ukraine has had to learn very, very quickly as it continues to defend itself from Russian forces occupying its soil. Ukraine is a very rich country in terms of natural resources, from the coal in the Donbass to the vast agricultural fields that cover 70% of the country’s landmass. It is the world’s 7th largest producer of iron ore, 8th for manganese, and 6th for titanium. On paper it is a very rich country.

The privatization of Soviet-era state assets created an oligarchy in Ukraine (as discussed [in this entry](#) of the Colour Revolution and Regime Change series), and the conflict between rival regional oligarchies proved to be the main focus of Ukrainian politics up until Maidan in 2014. There is A LOT of wealth up for grabs in that country, which is why President Zelensky has had to entertain western financial interests descending on his country like vultures, looking to scoop up assets for pennies on the dollar.

For the West (read: Americans, as nothing happens without them) to support Ukraine to the extent that it has up until this point, there needs to be a “buy-in” from its centres of power. Finance and Industry are two centres of power, and to get buy-in from them,

they will insist on a pound of flesh from Ukraine.

The [Oakland Institute](#) (a progressive think tank from the USA), has recently [published a report](#) on how financial interests are gobbling up Ukraine's agricultural sector, specifically its land set aside for farming. Almost all countries require foreign direct investment, so I think it would not be fair to condemn Ukraine for selling some of its prized assets during a time of war (it's an existential conflict for them). The importance of this report is what it says about western financial and corporate interests, capitalism, and war. [Naomi Klein](#) coined the concept of destroying countries only to profit from its rebuilding "[Disaster Capitalism](#)".

The total amount of land controlled by oligarchs, corrupt individuals, and large agribusinesses is over nine million hectares — exceeding 28 percent of Ukraine's arable land. The largest landholders are a mix of Ukrainian oligarchs and foreign interests — mostly European and North American as well as the sovereign fund of Saudi Arabia. Prominent US pension funds, foundations, and university endowments are invested through NCH Capital, a US-based private equity fund.

Several agribusinesses, still largely controlled by oligarchs, have opened up to Western banks and investment funds — including prominent ones such as Kopernik, BNP, or Vanguard — who now control part of their shares. Most of the large landholders are substantially indebted to Western funds and institutions, notably the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the World Bank.

Western financing to Ukraine in recent years has been tied to a drastic structural adjustment program that has required austerity and privatization measures, including the creation of a land market for the sale of agricultural land. **President Zelenskyy put the land reform into law in 2020 against the will of the vast majority of the population who feared it would exacerbate corruption and reinforce control by powerful interests in the agricultural sector. Findings of the report concur with these concerns. While large landholders are securing massive financing from Western financial institutions, Ukrainian farmers — essential for ensuring domestic food supply — receive virtually no support.** With the land market in place, amidst high economic stress and war, this difference of treatment will lead to more land consolidation by large agribusinesses.

In short: western financial interests are either gobbling up agricultural land themselves, or are entering into partnerships with local oligarchs who are consolidating the sector at the expense of the small farmer who receives no support in comparison to them. This is an annexation, in a way.

The history (taken from the .pdf file [here](#)):

With 33 million hectares of arable land, Ukraine has large swaths of the most fertile farmland in the world. Misguided privatization and corrupt governance since the early 1990s have concentrated land in the hands of a new oligarchic class. Around 4.3 million hectares are under large-scale agriculture, with the bulk, three million hectares, in the hands of just a dozen large agribusiness firms. In addition, according to the government, about five million hectares – the size of two Crimea – have been “stolen” by private interests from the state of Ukraine. The total amount of land controlled by oligarchs, corrupt individuals, and large agribusinesses is thus over nine million hectares, exceeding 28 percent of the country’s arable land. The rest is used by over eight million Ukrainian farmers.

Preparing the pie for slicing:

The report details how Western aid has been conditioned to a drastic structural adjustment program, which includes austerity measures, cuts in social safety nets, and the privatization of key sectors of the economy. A central condition has been the creation of a land market, put into law in 2020 under President Zelenskyy, despite opposition from a majority of Ukrainians fearing that it will exacerbate corruption in the agricultural sector and reinforce its control by powerful interests.

The findings of the report validate this concern, showing that the creation of a land market will likely further increase the amount of agricultural land in the hands of oligarchs and large agribusiness firms. The latter have already started expanding their access to land.

Austerity, via cuts to the social safety net, combined with loans to key players, and with a law on the books to facilitate the gobbling up of agricultural land, make for a perfect storm.

Oligarchs and their foreign partners:

Who Are the Largest Landholders?

As described below, the largest landholders are a mix of oligarchs and a variety of foreign interests, mostly European and North American. These firms are holding companies and generally run their operations through subsidiaries.³² The largest ten are listed in Table 1.

The oligarchs

- Controlling 582,062 hectares, **Kernel** is the largest landholder and also the largest producer and exporter of sunflower oil.³³ Its owner, Andriy Verevskyi, is Ukraine's 16th richest person.³⁴
- **UkrLandFarming** is the second largest landholder with 403,370 hectares. Founded by oligarch Oleg Bakhmatyuk, who was the 28th richest person in Ukraine in 2016 and has since lost much of his land and assets with Russia's annexation of Crimea, it specializes in grain, egg, milk, and meat production.³⁶
- The third largest landholder, with 360,238 hectares, is **MHP**, the largest producer and exporter of chicken in Ukraine.³⁷ It was founded by its current CEO, Yuriy Kosyuk, the country's 10th richest person.³⁸
- With 264,270 hectares, **Astarta** is Ukraine's largest producer of sugar and is also active in industrial milk production and soybean processing.³⁹ Its founder and current CEO, Viktor Ivanchyk, is the 95th richest person in the country.⁴⁰
- **Nibulon's** founder, Oleksiy Vadatursky was Ukraine's 24th richest person, but passed away in July 2022 as a result of a Russian missile strike. **Nibulon** grows grain for export on 82,500 hectares.⁴¹

- **System Capital Management (SCM)** is a major financial and industrial holding firm controlled by Ukraine's richest man, Rinat Akhmetov.⁴² SCM owns various agricultural subsidiaries, notably HarvEast, which produces wheat, sunflower, legumes, corn, and cattle.⁴³ The firm manages 26,000 hectares of land, having lost control of over 100,000 hectares to the war.⁴⁴

Foreign firms

Several foreign firms have consolidated some of the largest agricultural areas of the country. The three largest are:

- The fifth largest landholder in the country, with 290,749 hectares, is **NCH Capital**, a US-based private equity firm that invests on behalf of prominent US pension funds, university endowments, and foundations.⁴⁵ It operates in Ukraine through the company AgroProsperis.⁴⁶
- **PIF Saudi**, owned by the Sovereign Fund of Saudi Arabia, operates on 228,654 hectares through the Saudi Agriculture and Livestock Investment Company ('SALIC') and its subsidiary, Continental Farmers Group.⁴⁷
- **TNA Corporate Solutions**, another US-based firm, is owned by American businessman Nicholas Piazza.⁴⁸ It controls 295,624 hectares through several subsidiaries, including Pivden Agro Invest, Podillya Agroproduct, Hetmanske, and Prydniprovske.⁴⁹ Most of the land leased by TNA comes from transfers from UkrLandFarming made in recent years.

Off-shore corporations represent 9 out of 10 of the largest agricultural landowners in Ukraine:

Table 1: The top 10 firms controlling agricultural land in Ukraine⁵⁰

#	Company	Hectares	Country of registration
1	Kernel Holding S.A.	582,062	Luxembourg
2	UkrLandFarming	403,370	Cyprus
3	MHP S.E.	360,238	Cyprus
4	TNA Corporate Solutions LLC	295,624	USA
5	NCH Capital	290,749	USA
6	Astarta Holding N.V.	264,270	Netherlands
7	Industrial Milk Company (IMC) S.A.	218,138	Luxembourg
8	PIF Saudi	228,654	Saudi Arabia
9	Agroton Public Limited	120,000	Cyprus
10	Nibulon	82,500	Ukraine

Shareholders:

Foreign Shareholders Associate with Oligarchs

- **NN Investment Partners Holdings N.V.** is a Netherlands-based private investment firm, which owns shares in both Kernel and Astarta.⁵⁵ In April 2022, it was acquired by investment banking firm Goldman Sachs Group and was combined with Goldman Sachs Asset Management.⁵⁶ Over the years, Goldman Sachs has been involved in a string of controversies, including playing a central role in the 2008 financial crisis and partaking in the multi-billion 1MDB bribery scandal.⁵⁷
- **Kopernik Global Investors LLC** is a US-based private investment firm with US\$4.97 billion assets under management.⁵⁸ It owns shares in Kernel, MHP, and Astarta, and was the third largest private investor in Ukraine in 2020.⁵⁹ A “contrarian fund manager,” it is specialized in looking for companies across the world it views as undervalued in contexts marked by political and economic instability.⁶⁰
- **Heptagon Capital LLP** is a London-based private investment firm, which manages US\$12.36 billion in assets.⁶¹ It owns shares in Kernel, MHP, and Astarta. Along with Kopernik Global Investors LLC, it manages the Kopernik Global All-Cap Equity Fund, which has holdings in agriculture, palm oil production, gold and silver mining, uranium production, and natural gas.⁶²
- **Norges Bank Investment Management** owns shares in both Kernel and MHP.⁶³ It manages the Norwegian Government Pension Fund Global – also known as the Oil Fund – which is Norway’s sovereign wealth fund.⁶⁴ With over US\$1.4 trillion worth of assets, it is the largest single owner in the world’s stock market, controlling 1.5 percent of all shares in the world’s listed companies.⁶⁵ As of 2020, it was the fourth largest investor in Ukraine.⁶⁶
- **Hamblin Watsa Investment Counsel Ltd.** is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Fairfax Financial Holdings Ltd., a Toronto-based financial management company.⁶⁷ Holding close to 31 percent of Astarta’s shares, it is the firm’s largest shareholder after its founder – granting it significant power in the company.⁶⁸ Fairfax Financial Holdings Ltd. also controls 70 percent of FFH Ukraine, the holding company of three Ukrainian insurance firms, and has a 10 percent share in Ovostar Union, a Ukrainian egg producer.⁶⁹

US-based private equity fund [NCH Capital](#) is a big player in buying up or leasing agricultural land in Ukraine in order to aggregate it:

US-based private equity firm NCH Capital was founded in 1993 by George Rohr and Moris Tabacinic, two US businessmen heavily involved in the privatization frenzy that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. As analyzed in a report by GRAIN, they have established a series of funds to lease or buy farms in the region at a low price, with the aim to aggregate them into large-scale grain and soybean farms – successfully amassing a land bank of 700,000 hectares in Ukraine and Russia. After securing investments from prominent Western financial institutions, it channeled these funds through offshore companies located in tax havens like Cyprus and the Cayman Islands and into joint ventures with local firms to take over the land. The firm faces accusations of unlawful land acquisition, tax evasion, and illicit financial activity. NCH Capital played a key role in pushing for land reform in Ukraine: In 2015, its founder and CEO George Rohr was part of the high-level meetings involving the Ukrainian President and the US Secretary of Commerce

that led Ukraine to agree on an IMF reform plan, as a condition for two US\$1 billion loan guarantees from the US government.

Ukraine is fighting an existential conflict with Russia while simultaneously conducting a fire sale of its best assets to western financial interests. The bet placed here by Kiev was that this approach would lead to a better outcome for Ukrainian elites (at least those who have sided with the West and against Moscow) than a continuation of being at the centre of a tug of war between East and West.

(Read the entire .pdf report [here](#)).



This past week, Harper's Magazine published a [very long essay](#) by [Benjamin Schwarz](#) (former editor of The Atlantic) and [Christopher Layne](#) (Distinguished Professor of International Affairs and the Robert M. Gates Chair in National Security at Texas A&M University) on the subject of the USA's presence in Ukraine, and its active role on the side of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in its war against Russia.

I was bombarded with emails, Whatsapp/Telegram/Signal messages, and direct messages from Twitter about this piece, with

everyone indicating how it eerily matches up with what I have been saying on the subject both pre and post-invasion.

It's nice to be recognized ;) I appreciate it.

Without repeating myself for the thousandth time, let's instead look at some of the tastiest excerpts from this essay right away:

This conventional story is, in our view, both simplistic and self-serving. It fails to account for the well-documented—and perfectly comprehensible—objections that Russians have expressed toward NATO expansion over the past three decades, and obscures the central responsibility that the architects of U.S. foreign policy bear for the impasse. Both the global role that Washington has assigned itself generally, and America's specific policies toward NATO and Russia, have led inexorably to war—as many foreign policy critics, ourselves among them, have long warned that they would.

As the Soviets quit Eastern and Central Europe at the end of the Cold War, they imagined that NATO might be dissolved alongside the Warsaw Pact. Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev insisted that Russia would “never agree to assign [NATO] a leading role in building a new Europe.” **Recognizing that Moscow would view the continued existence of America's primary mechanism for exercising hegemony as a threat, France's president Francois Mitterrand and Germany's foreign minister Hans Dietrich Genscher aimed to build a new European security system that would transcend the U.S.- and Soviet-led alliances that had defined a divided continent.**

Washington would have none of it, insisting, rather predictably, that NATO remain “the dominant security organization beyond the Cold War,” as the historian Mary Elise Sarotte has described American policy aims of the time. Indeed, a bipartisan foreign policy consensus within the United States soon embraced the idea that NATO, rather than going “out of business,” would instead go “out of area.” Although Washington had initially assured Moscow that NATO would advance “not one inch” east of a unified Germany, Sarotte explains, the slogan soon acquired “a new meaning”: “not one inch” of territory need be “off limits” to the alliance. In 1999, the Alliance added three former Warsaw Pact nations; in 2004, three more, in addition to three former Soviet republics and Slovenia. Since then, five more countries—the latest being Finland, which joined as this article was being prepared for publication—have been pulled beneath NATO's military, political, and nuclear umbrella.

Michael McFaul [insists](#) that Putin “isn't afraid of NATO, he's afraid of democracy”.

more:

Russia repeatedly and unambiguously characterized NATO expansion as a perilous and provocative encirclement. Opposition to NATO expansion was “the one constant in what we have heard from all Russian

interlocutors,” the U.S. ambassador to Moscow Thomas R. Pickering reported to Washington thirty years ago. Every leader in the Kremlin since Gorbachev and every Russian foreign policy official since the end of the Cold War has strenuously objected—publicly as well as in private to Western diplomats—to NATO expansion, first into the former Soviet satellite states, and then into former Soviet republics. The entire Russian political class—including liberal Westernizers and democratic reformers—has steadily echoed the same. After Putin insisted at the 2007 Munich Security Conference that NATO’s expansion plans were unrelated to “ensuring security in Europe,” but rather represented “a serious provocation,” Gorbachev reminded the West that “for us Russians, by the way, Putin wasn’t saying anything new.”

and

While Russians protested Washington’s NATO expansion plans, American officials shrugged off those protests—or pointed to them as evidence to justify still-further expansion. Washington’s message to Moscow could not have been clearer or more disquieting: Normal diplomacy among great powers, distinguished by the recognition and accommodation of clashing interests—the approach that had defined the U.S.-Soviet rivalry during even the most intense stretches of the Cold War—was obsolete. **Russia was expected to acquiesce to a new world order created and dominated by the United States.**

i.e. [Turbo America](#).

Does this following part sound familiar to you?

Whatever one thinks of this doctrine, which prompted Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to dub America “the indispensable nation”—and which Gorbachev said defined America’s “dangerous winner’s mentality”—it lavishly expanded previously established conceptions of security and national interest. **In its crusading universalism, it could be regarded by other states, with ample supporting evidence, as at best recklessly meddlesome and at worst messianically interventionist. Convinced that its national security depended on the domestic political and economic arrangements of ostensibly sovereign states—and therefore defining as a legitimate goal the alteration or eradication of those arrangements if they were not in accord with its professed ideals and values—the post-Cold War United States became a revolutionary force in world politics.**

Sounds quite a bit like:

And what about this part?

One early sign of this fundamental change was Washington’s covert, overt, and (perhaps most important) overtly covert interference in Russia’s affairs during the early and mid-Nineties—a project of political,

social, and economic engineering that included funneling some \$1.8 billion to political movements, organizations, and individuals deemed ideologically compatible with U.S. interests and culminated in American meddling in Russia's 1996 presidential election. Of course, great powers have always manipulated both their proxies and smaller neighboring states. But by so baldly intervening in Russia's internal affairs, Washington signaled to Moscow that the sole superpower felt no obligation to follow the norms of great power politics and, perhaps more galling, no longer regarded Russia as a power with sensibilities that had to be considered.

We covered this already in the FbF Book Club “The Godfather of the Kremlin”, and in my review of Adam Curtis' brilliant documentary “TraumaZone”. We touched upon the bolded portion in the series on Colour Revolutions and Regime Change.

(**hint:** you really, really should consider becoming a paying subscriber to Fisted by Foucault).

You've also heard me say the following:

Although Washington presented the U.S.-led NATO bombing of Yugoslavia as an intervention to forestall human rights abuses in Kosovo, the reality was far murkier. American policymakers presented Belgrade with an ultimatum that imposed conditions no sovereign state could accept: relinquish sovereignty over the province of Kosovo and allow free reign to NATO forces throughout Yugoslavia. (As a senior State Department official reportedly said in an off-the-record briefing, “[We] deliberately set the bar higher than the Serbs could accept.”) **Washington then intervened in a conflict between the brutal Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA)—a force that had previously been denounced by the U.S. State Department as a terrorist organization—and the military forces of the equally brutal regime of Slobodan Milošević.** The KLA's vicious campaign—including the kidnapping and execution of Yugoslav officials, police, and their families—provoked Yugoslavia's equally vicious response, including both murderous reprisals and indiscriminate military actions against civilian populations suspected of aiding the insurgents. **Through a stenographic process in which “ethnic-Albanian militants, humanitarian organizations, NATO and the news media fed off each other to give genocide rumors credibility,” to quote a retrospective investigation by the *Wall Street Journal* in 2001, this typical insurgency was transformed into Washington's righteous casus belli. (A similar process would soon unfold in the run-up to the Gulf War.)**

Even more:

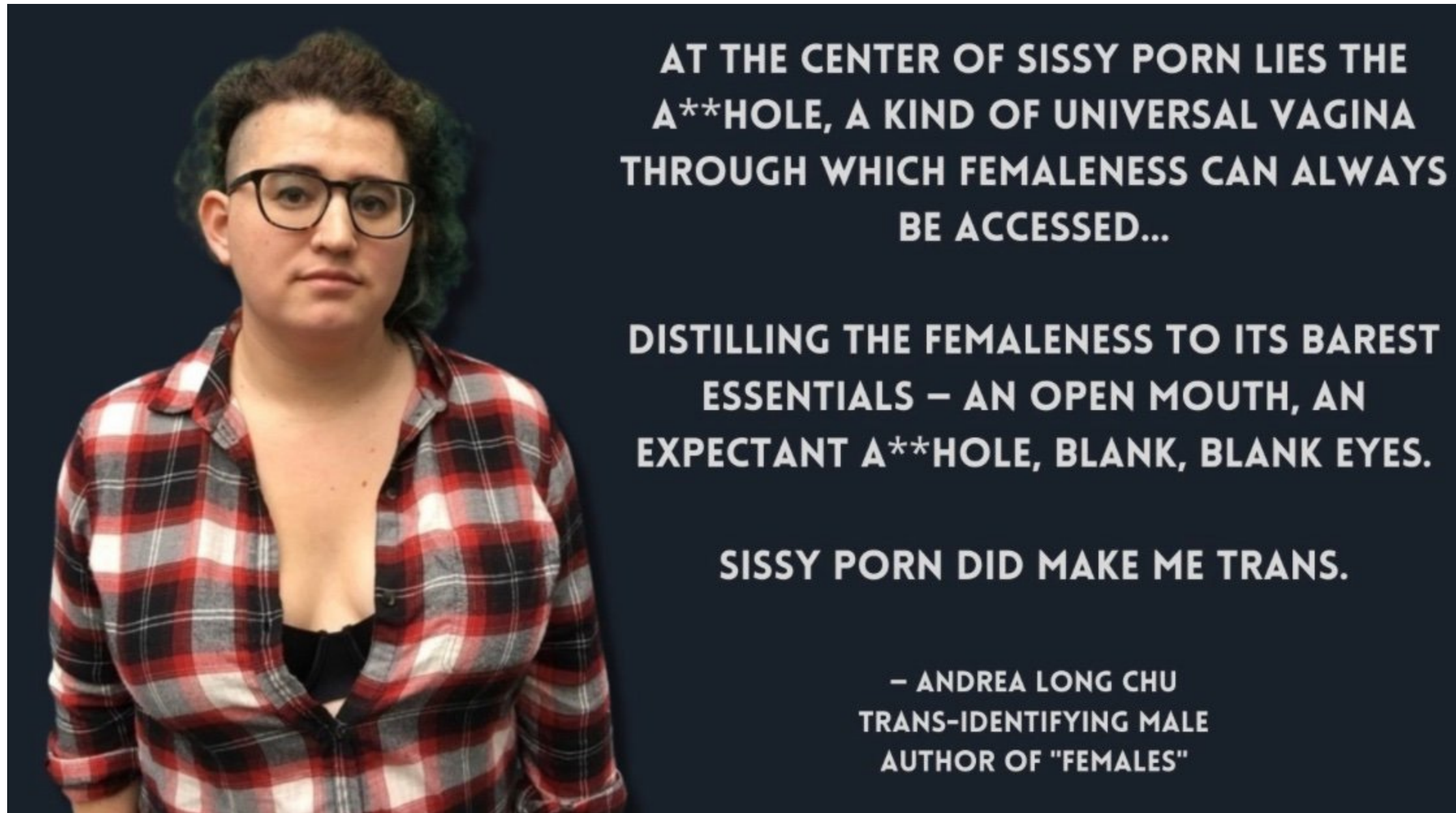
NATO similarly conducted its war in Libya in the face of valid Russian alarm. That war went beyond its defensive mandate—as Moscow protested—when NATO transformed its mission from the ostensible protection of civilians to the overthrow of Muammar Qaddafi's regime. The escalation, justified by a now-familiar process involving false and misleading stories pedaled by armed rebels and other interested parties,

produced years of violent disorder in Libya and made it a haven for jihadis. Both wars were fought against states that, however distasteful, posed no threat to any NATO member. Their upshot was the recognition in both Moscow and Washington of NATO's new power, ambit, and purpose. **The alliance had been transformed from a supposedly mutual defense pact designed to repel an attack on its members into the preeminent military instrument of American power in the post–Cold War world.**

I'm going to stop here and just direct you to the [article](#) so that you can read it for yourself. Will this essay have any impact on policy? I'll share one more killer excerpt to answer that question:

Typifying the egocentrism that governs the U.S. approach to the world in general and relations with Russia in particular, not one of these future military and intelligence leaders has thought to connect, even in this past year, **what they believe would be Washington's response to the hypothetical situation in Mexico with Moscow's reaction to NATO's expansion and policy toward Ukraine. When the analyst has drawn those connections, the military and intelligence officers have been taken aback, in many cases admitting, as the analyst reports, “ ‘Damn, I never thought out what we're doing to Russia in that light.’ ”**

Amazing.



[Andrea Long Chu](#) is a Pulitzer Prize winning literary critic, academic, and author who is a ‘male-to-female transgender’ and identifies as “Asian-American”.

This person is raising a ruckus in the American intellectual world, even gaining criticism from erstwhile allies like [Judith Butler](#) (more on this in a bit). Andrea is a shit-disturber with very little filter, and is doing a disservice to many liberals by openly taking their philosophy to its logical conclusions (and therefore, scaring the “normie”).

This enclosed world contains a lot of ‘inside baseball’ that you and I are not privy to, so I have opted to let Blake Smith of TabletMag [make sense of what this person is doing](#) to upset so many people. Blake is also fond of rhetorical flourishes and ‘hyper-intellectualizing’, but he does deliver the goods...once you’re able to figure out what he is saying:

One of the most successful contemporary practitioners of this mode of confession, in which a conversion is narrated in a mode of self-abasement and self-aggrandizement, is the essayist Andrea Long Chu. **In 2018, Chu, who transitioned from male to female, established her reputation with essays for *N+1* and *The New York Times* on her [desire for femininity](#) and her feelings about [her new vagina](#).** “Few of us” trans women, she argued, “dare to talk about” the truths she purportedly exposed in these essays—that transition is motivated by fetishistic investment in the most external, sexualized aspects of traditional femininity (“Daisy Dukes, bikini tops, and all the dresses, and, my god, *for the breasts*”)—and that transitioning had made her more dysphoric and “suicidal.”

Chu positioned herself in national publications as declaring hidden truths that other people like herself had been too cowardly to avow.

Chu is “scaring the hoes”, per modern parlance.

Roots:

Chu had been wanting to kill Andy* well before transitioning. While *Females* and her essays from this period detail her investment in femininity (conceived as a state of blank, mute, sexual accessibility, and the opportunity to wear cute clothes), her hostility to men—or rather heterosexual male self-hatred—**was first evinced in a 2013 essay for the Duke student newspaper, in which Chu declared that, as a white man, “[I am a racist](#).”** Chu was particularly racist toward her “Chinese” girlfriend: “every day I oppress her because she’s a woman and because she’s Chinese ... I fetishize her Chinese qualities and use them to massage my own colonial sense of multiculturalism. I relish the notion of having mixed-race children but I remind myself that I would never raise them with a backward Chinese notion of family. I objectify her. I exoticize her. I see her race and her gender before I see her.” The essay demonstrates what it claims. The unnamed girlfriend appears only as an empty vessel for Chu’s racism and misogyny, rather than an individual with agency, who, for whatever reason, remained in this oppressive relationship, on Chu’s account, for several years.

*Andy refers to Chu when Chu “was” male.

“Transitioning”:

And Chu may have been especially primed for such guilt by her conservative Protestant background; she discusses [in one interview](#) how her childhood religion gave her such a warped understanding of sexuality that “for years I couldn’t have an orgasm without, like, crushing guilt afterwards,” and in [a 2011 blog post](#) for the Duke theater program, asserted that playing a

gay male character was a brave act of rebellion against his parents. **The cultural left politics of Duke gave Chu a way to imagine that she was rebelling against this view of sex as sin, while in fact simply reframing it as white male guilt.**

Feelings of guilt, whether inspired by Christianity or political correctness, were compounded by what Chu documents, in [interviews](#) and [essays](#), as her compulsion to consume “sissy porn,” a genre of pornography playing on the fantasy of straight men (figured as the viewer) being transformed into hyperfeminine and submissive bimbos. Part of the pleasure of such pornography, surely, is that it allows the viewer to annihilate awareness of and therefore responsibility for his own sexual agency—as though he hadn’t searched for the videos in the first place. A straight man who feels guilty about oppressing his girlfriend by his very existence, and is disturbed by the aggression and violence inseparable from male desire, can imagine himself the victim rather than the villain, as a passive receptacle rather than a sexual agent. He can even imagine that the consumption of pornography is not a choice on his part, but a symptom of “forced feminization” and a self-stylized “addiction.”

Chu, who is 3/4ths White, identifies as “Asian-American”:

Since killing “Andy,” Chu has transitioned again, shifting the themes of her writing to race, and particularly to what she **now identifies as her Asian-American-ness—completing the process of becoming her ex-girlfriend, who is now not only fetishized, objectified, and exoticized, but taken as a model for a fantastically appropriative form of imitation.** In her 2021 essay “[China Brain](#)” and 2022 essay “[The Mixed Asian Metaphor](#),” Chu—who is three-fourths white—stages her Asian ancestry (which, in a flourish of self-Orientalization, stretches through the generations like “paper lanterns across the sky”) and sets herself once again as a brave truth-teller who can admit what most of us are too timid or unthoughtful to say: that racial identification is a matter of desire, driven by our lonely, desperate longing to be a part of a group. As she concludes: “People want race ... they want friendship from it, or sex, or even love; and sometimes, they just want to be something or to have something to be.”

“...racial identification is a matter of desire...”

Where Rachel Dolezal ran, Chu now flies.

Some academic gossip that became news:

Chu gave a nastier turn to Avital Ronell, the quirked-up queen of deconstruction in Chu’s department at

NYU, who in 2018 gained unlikely notoriety for sexually harassing a gay male graduate student. (Ronell's previous most scandalous breach of academic sexual propriety was shacking up with Derrida's high-school-age son while she worked with the father as a graduate student in the '70s, living out her version of *Call Me by Your Name*.) **Ronell was, embarrassingly, defended by such colleagues as Judith Butler, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Slavoj Zizek, who asserted [in a public letter](#) that, given Ronell's "keen wit" and "international standing," she could not have been guilty. Chu countered, in an essay for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, "[I Worked with Avital Ronell. I Believe Her Accuser](#)," that Ronell was in fact a needy, pushy jerk, and therefore guilty. Both the big names of "theory" and a young graduate student in a hurry to become one apparently agreed that guilt or innocence in such matters depends on whether or not the accused seems to be a nice person.**

Check this out:

In other writings, however, such as "[The Impossibility of Feminism](#)," Chu applies—with obtuse overextension—Ronell's lesson that maleness, as a polarity of psychic life, cannot simply be annihilated. Here Chu declares that feminism, of which the most rigorous and radical expression was the "lesbian separatism" of the 1970s, has failed. **Women, she argues, can never exorcise their desires for the "male style" (aggression, agency, etc.), to say nothing of their desire for flesh-and-blood men. They will always be tempted by, or to act like, men, and thus can never achieve liberation.**

A declaration of war on Lesbianism?

Chu is going to be around for a long time (although statistics suggest otherwise), so it is worth it to acquaint yourself with this person, as Chu's influence will continue to grow and shape arguments in the intellectual realm for years to come.



Jordan Bardella, leader of the National Rally, speaks at CPAC Hungary.

French President Emmanuel Macron has been taking a beating in French polls since he rammed through unpopular economic reforms (such as raising the age of retirement from 62 to 64) last month. These reforms were done without the approval of the legislature, and via an executive action, leading to widespread protests, many of which turned violent.

There is a fear that Macron's stubbornness is clearing the path for the hard right *Rassemblement National* (RN) party to win the next presidential election in France. The Socialists are still in the doldrums in terms of polling, and the hard left struggles to claw support from the centre and centre-right. RN, the party of Marine Le Pen, has publicly opposed Macron's economic reforms, picking up the \$100 dollar bill left by the President on the sidewalk.

Le Pen is seen by many as damaged goods, unable to break through the centre to secure enough votes after failing to win the Presidency during the last two elections. Jordan Bardella, a fresh face on the scene, has been anointed to succeed Le Pen. He recently sat for an [interview](#) while at CPAC in Budapest, Hungary, and claimed that French patriotism will experience a "renaissance" very

soon.

On identifying as a sovereigntist instead of as a conservative:

I think that conservatism does not correspond well with the French. It is not a term that is used in the French public debate or by French intellectuals. **However, we defend the aspiration to sovereignty, and I think that we appear today as the guardians of the limits in the face of a wild, unbridled, unlimited, ultra-liberal globalization, in the face of the loss of our identity due to demographics evolving with the successive waves of migration as well as to the questioning of the bases upon which our society was founded, the woke ideology and the cancel culture,** which I wanted to discuss precisely at CPAC.

‘Wokeness’ as ‘Americanization’:

It is in a way an Americanization of the threats weighing on us since wokeism, which draws its source from an Anglo-Saxon cultural movement, is being imported today with the support of the European Union, through the modification, for example, of our language, through the introduction of inclusive writing, through the promotion of the Islamic veil in EU institutions, through the suppression of our borders, through the will to destroy our statues and to stop teaching some parts of French history. The woke cancel culture can be seen very concretely in the daily life of the French, especially in our school books, and this is why I believe it is important to talk about it.

I believe that politics is not only an electoral battle. It is also an intellectual and cultural struggle. And I believe, in accordance with Gramsci’s theses, that cultural struggles and the victories that result from them always precede electoral victories.

On the fear that RN in power in France will see them ostracized in the EU like Poland and Hungary:

There is one fundamental difference, however: The countries that actually set the course for the European Union are France and Germany.

If France has a patriotic government, which defends the interests of the peoples and the nations, not only in France but in all of the EU, I believe that this will not have the same impact as for another country. It is not an insult to other countries to say that France has a particular weight on the European scene and a particular voice in the world.

This is why I believe that going forward, France will have enough diplomatic weight to give impetus to this new direction that we want, which would reflect the will of the peoples of Europe.

And we are not alone, because actors expressing similar views are emerging all over the continent, from Italy to Austria, Flanders, Hungary, Poland and, I hope, in France as well. In past history, France has always set an example and made its revolution first. I think that the time of the patriots has come in France as well.

On the need to take advantage of the surge in support for ‘patriotic’ parties in Europe at the EU level:

We have been witnessing an uninterrupted rise of all patriotic forces on the entire European continent. In June 2022, we ourselves succeeded in putting the supporters of woke ideology in the minority, preventing Emmanuel Macron from obtaining a majority in the French National Assembly, and we have the ambition to do the same in the European Parliament in 2024.

We have allies for this, with two powerful groups in the European Parliament, the European Conservatives and Reformists as well as Identity & Democracy.

These two groups are leading the fight for the defense of European identity and sovereignty within the European Parliament, and my ambition remains to bring these two groups together so that tomorrow there will be a single, strong, powerful coalition that can, within the European Parliament itself, make the voice of the peoples heard and accompany the current and future patriotic governments in EU member states, starting with the one formed by Ms. Meloni and Mr. Salvini in Italy, and I hope from 2027 the one led by the National Rally in France.

Bardella is correct that Europe could not possibly treat France like it treats Poland and Hungary, as France is its most important member alongside Germany. It is through France that Europe has the greatest prospects for radical change.



We end this weekend's Substack with [an essay](#) on something that we can all relate to: the feeling that something we cannot see, hear, nor smell is in our presence. We are convinced that 'it' is there, but is 'it' actually there?

Feelings of presence (FP) are, at their core, just that: feelings. While we routinely think of hallucinations as auditory or visual

in nature, the FP experience involves the mere sense that someone else is present *without* a visual, auditory or sensory cue. This isn't about hearing or seeing someone, nor does it involve a touch on your shoulder. People land on this term – presence – because they don't know how else to describe the sensation. Something basic and invisible, a feeling you know if you've had it, but struggle to put into words for someone else.

Despite the challenge of describing presences, there's increasing awareness that they may actually be relatively common across a range of different contexts. For example, feelings of presence are [reported](#) by lots of people with Parkinson's disease, alongside other kinds of hallucination. **FP reveal themselves in a huge number of survival stories, particularly for mountaineers, climbers and polar explorers, in which they are known as the 'third man' effect. And for people who are grieving, the loss of a person can often be associated with an ongoing sensation of presence.**

I first came across the phenomenon of the unseen presence through working with people who hear voices (what some might call auditory verbal hallucinations) as part of a [project](#) at Durham University. We would often be told about a particularly uncanny feeling: voices that could be there without speaking – as if they carried a presence of their own.

[Click here](#) to read the rest.

[Share](#)

[Leave a comment](#)

Thank you once again for checking out my Substack. Hit the like button and use the share button to share this across social media. Leave a comment below if the mood strikes you. And don't forget to subscribe if you haven't done so already.

And don't forget to join me on [Substack Notes!](#)