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# WaPo Uses Photo of John McCain Next to Nazi to Praise His 'Human Rights' Work

BEN NORTON



The **Washington Post** (8/27/18) published an op-ed by conservative staff opinion columnist Jennifer Rubin praising the late Sen. John McCain for his supposed commitment to “human rights.”

Rubin waxed poetic on the ostensible “lost champion” of human rights, who “model[ed] for others the behavior of a free society.” She declared, quite paradoxically, “With the possible exception of the US military...no group was more indebted to Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) than the human rights community.”

There was an, er, optical problem, however: For the header image on this column, the **Washington Post** used a photo of McCain speaking next to the notorious Ukrainian neo-Nazi

leader Oleh Tyahnybok.

Tyahnybok, a longtime fascist, has called for a war on the so-called “Muscovite-Jewish mafia” (**BBC**, [12/26/12](#)). The far-right leader has attacked the role of “Jews-Bolsheviks” in his country’s history, and claims that there is still today a cabal of “Jewish oligarchs who control Ukraine” (**JTA**, [3/25/09](#)).

John McCain met with Tyahnybok and stood next to him as the senator gave a speech in Ukraine in late 2013, as **Business Insider** ([12/16/13](#)) reported at the time. The **Washington Post** indicated in the caption on its header image that McCain was “wav[ing] to protesters during a mass rally of the opposition in Kiev, Ukraine, on December 15, 2013.” But it failed to identify the man standing next to the Arizona senator—or his extremist politics, which are the antithesis of human rights.

McCain was in the Eastern European nation—along with Democratic Senator Chris Murphy—to cheer on the ongoing right-wing protest movement. In February 2014, this movement was successful: Ukraine’s democratically elected, pro-Russian government was overthrown in a coup, in which fascist forces played a significant role (**FAIR.org**, [3/7/14](#)).

This about sums it up: [@JRubinBlogger's @washingtonpost](#) paean to “human rights champion” John McCain literally pictures him alongside Oleh Tyahnybok, leader of the anti-Semitic Ukrainian ultra-nationalist, neo-Nazi Svoboda party. [pic.twitter.com/6O8OKr247w](https://pic.twitter.com/6O8OKr247w)

— Nima Shirazi (@WideAsleepNima) [August 28, 2018](#)

## A Major Ukrainian Neo-Nazi Leader

**Opinions**

### The human rights community lost a champion



Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) waves to protesters during a mass rally of the opposition in Kiev, Ukraine, on Dec. 15, 2013. (Genya Savilov/AFP/Getty Images)

 By **Jennifer Rubin**  
Opinion writer  
August 27

*A **Washington Post** column ([8/27/18](#)) celebrating John McCain as a human rights “champion” was illustrated with a photo of him making common cause with a far-right, antisemitic Ukrainian politician.*

Tyahnybok is far from a minor player in Ukraine. And since the US-backed coup, he has become increasingly influential.

Tyahnybok has been the leader of the fascist, ultra-nationalist Ukrainian political party Svoboda since its founding in 2004. Svoboda has its origins in the explicitly neo-Nazi Social-National Party of Ukraine, which [proclaimed](#), “We are the last hope of the white race, of humankind as such.”

Tyahnybok represented this neo-Nazi party in Ukraine’s parliament, the Verkhovna Rada. While in the Rada, the far-right extremist sought to honor Ukrainian fascists who had collaborated with Nazi Germany during World War II. He also campaigned to outlaw Communism in Ukraine (which the country’s right-wing post-coup government [has since done](#)).



*Oleh Tyahnybok*

In 2004, the Social-National Party of Ukraine rebranded. In an attempt to moderate its image, it abandoned the neo-Nazi Wolfsangel symbol it had long used, and adopted a pro-European Union stance.

Tyahnybok became the leader of the newly created Svoboda. But that same year, he was also expelled from the president’s electoral alliance for issuing a call to arms against the so-called “[Muscovite-Jewish mafia](#).” In 2005, he went on to demand that the government cease the supposed “criminal activities” of “organized Jewry.”

## Whitewashing a Warmonger

Utterly overlooking John McCain’s dalliances with figures the likes of Tyahnybok, Western corporate media outlets have almost without exception bent over backward to portray the relentless warmongering Republican senator as a supposed human rights hero:

- “Ayotte: McCain Was a Champion for Human Rights” ([CNN, 8/26/18](#))

- “John McCain, a Maverick We Can Learn From” (**New York Times**, Nicholas Kristof, [8/25/18](#))
- “John McCain, America’s Revolutionary Conscience” (**Bloomberg**, Eli Lake, [8/28/18](#))
- “John McCain, Senator Who Made Human Rights and Israel Central to His Foreign Policy, Dies at 81” (**Jewish Telegraphic Agency**, [8/25/18](#))
- “‘John McCain the Diplomat’ Will Be Irreplaceable, Senate Colleagues Say” (**Daily Beast**, [8/28/18](#))

This is all in reference to an extreme neoconservative hawk who cheer-led the illegal US invasion of Iraq, proudly referred to the Vietnamese people with [racial slurs](#), and [lobbied for military intervention](#) in well over a dozen countries. He never apologized for the mass killing of Southeast Asian civilians he took part in during the Vietnam War, instead arguing that the United States should have bombed more intensely and indiscriminately (**Salon**, [7/4/08](#)).

This is a map from 2013 of the many countries where unrepentant warmonger John McCain had called for US military intervention:

- Syria
  - Iraq
  - Afghanistan
  - Libya
  - Kosovo
  - Nigeria
  - Bosnia
  - North Korea
  - Iran
  - Russia
  - Sudan
  - Mali
  - China <https://t.co/TWcX2RSNYu> [pic.twitter.com/RsCXLDvV5Y](https://pic.twitter.com/RsCXLDvV5Y)
- Ben Norton (@BenjaminNorton) [August 26, 2018](#)

And it was not just corporate media. Leading human rights organizations such as [Human Rights Watch](#) and [Human Rights First](#) likewise praised the conservative warmonger — a testament to the fact that the “human rights” discourse and Beltway community are largely a fig leaf for advancing US [foreign policy](#) interests.

"Senator McCain...was never shy about his commitment to basic rights & frequently confronted global leaders directly about their repression and abuse."

Official [@hrw](#) statement on the passing of Senator McCain:  
<https://t.co/8M15VlxA3N>

— sarah margon (@sarahmargon) [August 26, 2018](#)

## McCain's Further Links to Fascists

In fact, the hard-line conservative lawmaker's ties to fascists go even deeper, beyond the **Washington Post's** ill-chosen photo.

In 2017, John McCain welcomed another Ukrainian neo-Nazi into his office, as I reported with Max Blumenthal at **AlterNet** ([6/23/17](#)).

McCain tweeted out a photo of his meeting with Andriy Parubiy, the founder of the Social-National Party of Ukraine, who today serves as the chair of Ukraine's parliament.

Good meeting w/ Speaker of [#Ukraine's](#) Parliament [@AndriyParubiy](#) –  
I'll always stand for free & prosperous Ukraine  
<pic.twitter.com/Vgr0lqsvST>

— John McCain (@SenJohnMcCain) [June 15, 2017](#)

Despite his explicitly fascist politics, Parubiy enjoys support from politicians not only in the United States, but also in the [United Kingdom](#).

But that's not all. Journalist Chip Berlet detailed in the **Huffington Post** in [2008](#) how John McCain served on the advisory board of the United States Council for World Freedom, the US affiliate of the pro-fascist group the World Anti-Communist League.

Berlet noted that this McCain-advised group "brought together conservatives, fascists, and representatives of right-wing death squads." He quoted the staunch anti-Communist British Conservative politician Geoffrey Stewart-Smith, who described the World Anti-Communist League as "largely a collection of Nazis, Fascists, antisemites, sellers of forgeries, vicious racialists and corrupt self-seekers."

McCain’s undying support for far-right Salafi-jihadist rebels in Syria likewise followed this pattern. Just a few months before speaking in Ukraine, McCain traveled to Syria, where he met with a rebel leader who helped [kidnap a dozen Lebanese Shia pilgrims](#).

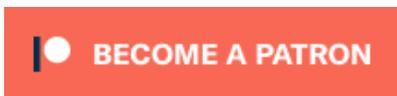
That so many corporate media outlets can uniformly whitewash a right-wing war hawk with links to fascists as a “human rights champion” and “defender of democracy” is a testament to just how beholden corporate media are to US government interests.

When seasoned war criminal Henry Kissinger won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973, satirist and musician Tom Lehrer joked that he was retiring, as “political satire became obsolete.”

One can draw the same conclusion when a major newspaper illustrates a eulogy to a human rights “champion” with a photo of him giving a speech alongside a Nazi.

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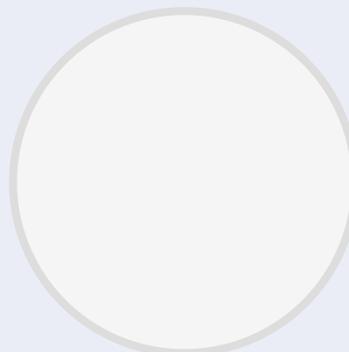
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Ben Norton is a journalist and writer. He is a regular contributor to FAIR. You can find him on his website at [BenNorton.com](#) or on Twitter at [@BenjaminNorton](#).



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