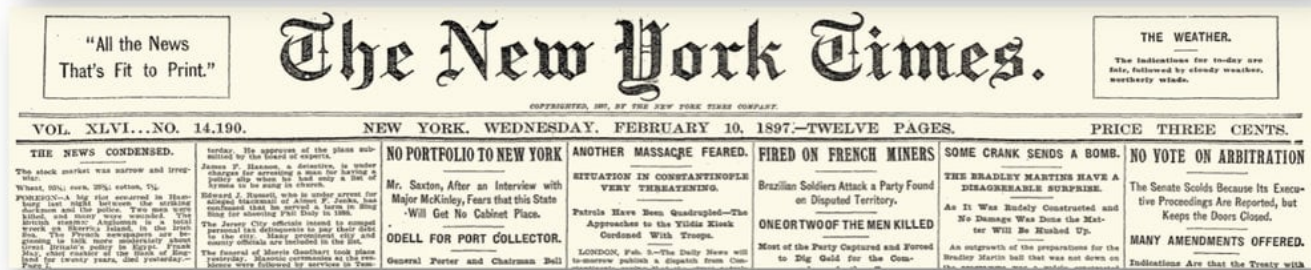


The "greatest blunder" of the New York Times' op-ed section: publishing drivels



by Lev Tsitrin

"Hitler's greatest blunder" was to lose the battle of Stalingrad."

The sentence seems grammatically sound – and yet something about it gives me pause, this "something" being the word "blunder." "Misfortune" may have been the right word – but "blunder"?

Indeed, the word seems applicable only in a situation where one had a choice – and made a wrong bet. Thus, "the greatest blunder of my life was to not apply to MIT" makes sense – but

“the greatest blunder of my life was not to have been born to the Queen of England” doesn’t.

This inner debate about semantics was triggered by the opening sentence of the [New York Times “guest essay”](#) by one “Thomas Meaney, a fellow at the Max Planck Society in Germany, [who] writes regularly on American foreign policy and international relations” – “The greatest blunder President Vladimir Putin may have made so far in Ukraine is giving the West the impression that Russia could lose the war.”

This odd choice of a word is not the only blunder in Mr. Meaney’s essay. His thesis being that “the reconquering of every inch of Russian-occupied territory, including Crimea.” is unrealistic and that “Ukrainians may be better off defining victory as accession to the European Union rather than a complete recapture of all Ukrainian territory” (as if the two aspirations were incompatible), he resorts to an argument that “Ukraine has only one surefire way of accomplishing this feat in the near term: direct NATO involvement in the war. ... Absent NATO involvement, the Ukrainian Army can hold the line and regain ground, as it has done in Kharkiv and Kherson, but complete victory is very nearly impossible.” But why regaining Crimea, Donbas, and the steppe in between is any different from liberating Kharkiv and Kherson? Mr. Meaney does not say.

To be sure, Mr. Meaney makes an attempt at explanation that at the first glance sounds logical: “If Russia can hardly advance a few hundred yards a day in Bakhmut at a cost of 50 to 70 men [likely a typo for “500 to 700” given Russia’s loss of 200,000 in the year of war], since the Ukrainians are so well entrenched, would Ukrainians be able to advance any better against equally well-entrenched Russians in the whole area between Russia and the eastern side of the Dnipro delta, including the Azov Sea coastline and the isthmus leading to Crimea? What has been a meat grinder in one direction is likely to be a meat grinder in the other.” Well, somehow it wasn’t so in the above-mentioned Kharkiv and Kherson

operations – so by the same logic, there is simply no guarantee that “what has been a meat grinder in one direction will be a meat grinder in the other.” Other options are possible too: an organized retreat (like in Kherson), or complete rout – like in Kharkiv.

Another feature of Mr. Meaney’s essay is the selective use of statistics. He stresses the coming exhaustion of the Western supply of weapons, informing us that “The war has already used up 13 years’ worth of Stinger antiaircraft missile production and five years’ worth of Javelin missiles, while the United States has a \$19 billion backlog of arms delivery to Taiwan” as if there was something unusual about weapons being used in war time at a much greater clip than during the relative peace. But what he forgets to tell us is the battlefield result of this vast expenditure of materiel: by some estimates, half of Russia’s main battle tanks and armored vehicles have been destroyed, along with hundreds of the aircraft – plus a number of anti-aircraft batteries and munition stores (the famous sinking of Moskva – the flagship of the Black sea fleet – is rightly not included in the statistics; it was achieved using Ukraine-made weapon). Clearly, it is not just the West that depletes its stocks. Russia has a problem with weaponry, too.

So while it is perfectly true that “Washington has no interest in directly entering the war” (as we know full well without Mr. Meaney informing us), how is this “the problem for Kyiv”? Yet, he claims that it is so (“The problem for Kyiv is that – public assurances aside – Washington has no interest in directly entering the war.” I wonder what “public assurances” Mr. Meaney is talking about – did anyone in the US government ever suggested American boots on the ground? I never heard of that!). Contrary to Mr. Meaney’s rhetoric, Ukrainians feel – and say – that the steady supply of Western weapons is all that is necessary insofar as they are concerned; they’ll do the fighting themselves. So why is it that “Only the full,

Desert Storm style of deployment of NATO and U.S. troops and weaponry could bring about a comprehensive Ukrainian victory"? Mr. Meaney does not explain.

Now, what annoys me is not that someone presents a slanted and shoddy argument – shoddy linguistically, factually, and logically – but that the *New York Times* stands ready to publish it – as if there is not enough important news that is not being covered. I always point out to judicial fraud as the most glaring example: in *Pierson v Ray* federal judges gave themselves the right to act from the bench “maliciously and corruptly” – and use it to decide cases arbitrarily, rather than “according to law.” What can be more newsworthy than that a full third of US government is officially “corrupt and malicious”? And yet, the *New York Times* adamantly refuses to put this sensational news on its front (or even back) page. It would rather lend its pages to such shoddy concoctions as Mr. Meaney’s *“America Is In Over Its Head.”*

This of course is not the first, or only journalistic blunder committed by the *New York Times* – and is far from its most spectacular: its failure to cover the Holocaust as it was happening, or the collectivization-induced starvation of 1930es Ukraine and Kazakhstan that claimed lives of several million people were far graver journalistic sins. But the problem is that the *New York Times* seems unable to learn from its past mistakes and distinguish what is important from what isn’t, what makes sense from what doesn’t, what is a sensible argument from what is sleek drivel. It keeps going from one journalistic blunder to another, surprisingly not losing its reputation.

It is of course the public’s blunder that it does not notice blunders committed by the *New York Times* and its mainstream media ilk. One hopes that the new, internet-based media that reports what actually happens rather than what a bunch of so-called “elites” choose to filter for our mental consumption as “all the news that’s fit to print,” filled with blunders made

by commission and commission – will fix the information space, and that the resulting unfettered exchange of ideas will greatly limit the blunders fed to the public.

Lev Tsitrin is the founder of the Coalition Against Judicial Fraud, cajfr.org