

Putin's Useful Idiots: How U.S. Climate Extremists Are Funding Russia's Agenda

The desolation of U.S. energy security has bolstered Vladimir Putin's dangerous geopolitical aims.

[THE FEDERALIST](#), BY: VICTORIA COATES AND JENNIFER STEFANO, MAY 19, 2022



Russia's invasion of Ukraine is illuminating an ugly truth: the anti-fracking war on America's energy security is being waged by well-funded, radical U.S. environmental groups, as well as interests tied directly to Vladimir Putin. For years, the U.S. government has investigated Russian financial ties to

environmental groups that push for ending U.S. fossil fuel production and have successfully shut down fracking sites and pipelines, to the detriment of U.S. workers and consumers.

Who benefits? Putin, because the desolation of U.S. energy security has bolstered [state-owned Gazprom](#) and his dangerous geopolitical aims.

Before the war on Ukraine, the U.S. Congress began exposing connections between Russia and [little-known foundations](#) that donate to major environmental groups such as Sierra Club and National Resource Defense Council (NRDC). The Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works released [a 2014 report](#) noting a small group of rich Americans was controlling environmental groups and collaborating with questionable offshore funders to maximize support. In 2017, [two congressmen](#) called for further investigation of the connection between these funders and Russia.

These suspicious donations to radical environmental groups could be part of the larger geopolitical strategy Putin used to execute greater control over Europe before his invasion of Ukraine. For instance, if the United States had ramped up natural gas production, Putin could not today be blackmailing [Poland and Bulgaria](#) by cutting off their energy supply. Had America allowed more investment in fracking and other energy production, Putin would not have strategic leverage over Europe.

Most Americans know Putin does not want to see the United States succeed. What they may not know is these anti-energy groups acting under the guise of “environmental justice” are funded by a handful of wealthy Americans who are either blindingly naïve to the role they have played in supporting Putin’s agenda or willfully complicit.

There is no more notorious example than the Heinz Endowment, led by Teresa Heinz, wife of U.S. climate envoy John Kerry. Under her watch, the endowment has deployed [at least \\$13 million](#) toward anti-shale activism since 2008, killing jobs and prosperity in their own Pennsylvania backyard and unnecessarily forcing America to give up market share to tyrants like Putin.

The Heinz [fortune funds dozens](#) of Pennsylvania groups engaged in killing pipelines and natural gas production. One of their beneficiaries, [Delaware Riverkeeper Network](#), is successfully fighting to keep a ban on natural gas production in the Delaware River Basin that is preventing access to vast new reserves.

In fact, Pennsylvania, where the Heinz family made their fortune and is still based, is bearing the brunt of this campaign. The latest example is the Keystone State’s addition to the [Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative](#). Sierra Club and NRDC lobbied in favor of expanding the interstate compact to tax carbon emissions to include Pennsylvania, even though scientists at Penn State found [86 percent of carbon emissions](#) will simply move to nearby states.

Killing pipelines, banning fracking, and implementing RGGI mean more energy will be produced in other countries with more emissions. Russian gas emits [40 percent more emissions over its lifecycle](#) than U.S. natural gas; meanwhile, [U.S. LNG is improving air quality in China](#). At the same time, Pennsylvanians could lose [22,000 jobs](#) and consumers will face a [30 percent increase](#) in their electricity bills.

We’re already seeing the unfortunate effects of these harmful policies elsewhere throughout the U.S. Under pressure from these same environmental groups, [President Biden killed the Keystone XL pipeline](#), eliminating the projected [60,000 indirect jobs, 11,000 direct jobs, and \\$800 million in wages](#), that would have resulted from this important project.

As Putin now leverages his energy dominance as a tool of coercion and his geopolitical strategy is brutally playing out for all the world to see, Heinz and other radical environmental groups can no longer claim they are innocent arbiters of environmental justice when their actions have, intentionally or not, aided and abetted him.

Isn’t it time for these Americans to focus on policies that protect the earth, advance American energy security, and counter America’s enemies?

Victoria Coates, a distinguished fellow at the American Foreign Policy Council, served as senior policy adviser to the secretary of energy in the Trump administration. Jennifer Stefano is executive vice president of the Commonwealth Foundation and an Independent Women’s Forum visiting fellow.