Paranoid in Poland?
The Alternative Reality of the Law and Justice Party

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In 2015, Poland’s Law and Justice Party was elected to power with new, more moderate faces. Soon after the election, it became clear that its conspiratorial-minded party leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, would really be in charge. He quickly launched a legislative assault on the Constitutional Tribunal, the state media institutions, and Western international institutions. Moreover, he appointed controversial conspiracy theorists to top cabinet posts, smeared former President Lech Walesa, and seeks to establish a new “Fourth” republic in Poland. Polish politics has become deeply polarized in part because few can understand the conspiracy theories aimed at the West that the Law and Justice Party holds dear. This talk examines the alternative reality of the Law and Justice Party, explores whether it has any merit or reality to it, and discusses how the West can deal with a government steeped in paranoid conspiracy theories and an alternative reality that does not match the facts that the Western powers perceive.

Mitchell A. Orenstein is a Professor of Central and East European politics in the Slavic Department at University of Pennsylvania. His work concentrates on the political economy and international affairs of Central and Eastern Europe. He is the author of three prize-winning books, Out of the Red: Building Capitalism and Democracy in Postcommunist Europe (Michigan, 2001), Privatizing Pensions: The Transnational Campaign for Social Security Reform (Princeton, 2008), and Roma in an Expanding Europe: Breaking the Poverty Cycle (with Dena Ringed and Erika Wilkens) (World Bank, 2005). He is currently working on two projects, The Triumph and Crisis of Neoliberalism in Eastern Europe (with Hilary Appel) and Russia versus Europe and the Lands in Between.

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12:30 pm – 2:00 pm
Voesar Conference Room
1957 E St. NW, Suite 412
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This event is on the record.