

Canadian Armed Forces providing military training to Ukrainian neo-Nazis

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The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has been training and collaborating with neo-Nazi groups active in the Ukrainian Armed Forces and National Guard, with the knowledge and tacit approval of successive Canadian governments.

On November 8, the *Ottawa Citizen* reported that military and Defence Department officials attempted to conceal a 2018 meeting between a group of Canadian “officers and diplomats” and members of the Azov Battalion, an openly fascist group with members embedded in the Ukrainian National Guard. Fully briefed in 2017 on its Nazi ideology, Canadian officials were concerned only that the meeting remain secret. It was exposed when Azov boasted about it via social media.

The damaging revelation comes at an inopportune time for Canada’s ruling elite, which is currently considering an expansion of its military deployment to Ukraine as part of a massive NATO-coordinated build-up against Russia. The Trudeau Liberal government is reportedly deliberating on sending a warship to the Black Sea, deploying CF-18 fighter jets currently stationed in Romania to Ukraine, and expanding the current 200-strong contingent of CAF personnel in Ukraine.

The revelations about Canada’s alliance with far-right Ukrainian nationalist fighters underscores how the NATO powers are prepared to collaborate with the most reactionary political forces in their aggressive military build-up against Russia. The US-led military-strategic offensive against Russia, which has seen NATO deploy forces along much of Russia’s western borders, is aimed at bringing Ukraine and other former Soviet republics under Western domination and opening up Russia itself to neocolonial-style exploitation by the imperialist powers.

A study from the Institute for European Russian and Eurasian Studies at George Washington University recently exposed Canadian military forces training students at Ukraine’s National Army Academy (NAA) belonging to a neo-Nazi organization called “Centuria.” The NAA is Ukraine’s version of Canada’s Royal Military College, where future officers and military commanders are educated. Canadian, American and other NATO military advisers shape the curriculum at the NAA.

Centuria functions as a wing of the Azov Battalion within the NAA, seeking to cultivate an “elite corps” of officers wedded to neo-Nazi ideology. The Azov Battalion, which celebrates the Ukrainian nationalist fascists who collaborated with the Nazis in their “war of extermination” against the USSR, has been branded a terrorist organization by the US State Department; this despite

Washington itself having made use of Azov and other far-right Ukrainian nationalist groups to overthrow the Ukrainian government in the February 2014 “Maidan” coup.

In 2019, Centuria was part of a fascist demonstration which attacked the Kiev LGBTQ Pride event, calling upon “right patriots, nationalists, conservatives and Christians” to “defend the streets from perverts.” In April 2021, Centuria’s leaders boasted on Ukrainian social media that they “actively cooperate with foreign colleagues... participating in military exercises with France, Great Britain, Canada, the USA, Germany and Poland...” The same month, the group participated in a march glorifying the exploits of the 14th Division of the Nazi Waffen-SS, the “Galicia Division,” which was comprised of Ukrainian fascists. It honors this Nazi division because it “beat the Bolshevik contagion...”

The 14th Division of the Waffen-SS was declared a criminal organization during the Nuremberg trials. Its top leadership was drawn from the ranks of seasoned Nazi mass-murderers.

The April 2021 neo-Nazi march caused a political uproar in Ukraine, where Nazi forces murdered millions during World War II. Despite the fact that the Ukrainian state openly deploys fascist fighters, such as those who comprise Azov, in its civil war in Donbass, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky was forced to issue an extraordinary statement on April 30, declaring, “The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine has already condemned any manifestations of glorification of the Waffen-SS troops and reminds that the propaganda of totalitarian regimes is prohibited in Ukraine. Our state partners have already been informed that violations of the relevant legislation in Ukraine will have logical consequences for any person who is guilty of it.”

Why would the Ministry of Foreign Affairs warn its “state partners”—a diplomatic euphemism for NATO—about “glorifying the Waffen-SS”?

Because the Canadian government does exactly that. In the early 1950s, the Canadian government provided haven to more 2,000 veterans of the Waffen-SS Galicia Division, and continues to defend them. The far-right Ukrainian Canadian Congress, which openly defends these Nazi veterans and glorifies the fascist World War II Ukrainian leader Stepan Bandera, wields considerable influence in Ottawa. The Deputy Prime Minister, Chrystia Freeland, has been an activist within the right-wing Ukrainian diaspora her entire life. She is the granddaughter of one of the Waffen-SS Galicia division’s principal promoters, Mihailo Chomiak, the editor of a pro-Nazi newspaper in occupied Poland.

Chomiak and the Ukrainian Central Committee, the organization for which the newspaper spoke, used it to whip up hatred of “Jewish Bolsheviks” and to appeal to Ukrainians to join the Waffen-SS.

Both Prime Ministers Stephen Harper and Justin Trudeau were accompanied by leaders of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, such as Paul Grod, on past visits to Ukraine. Grod praised the Waffen-SS Division on Remembrance Day in 2010, remarking that they “fought for the independence of Ukraine.” Liberal and Tory politicians have paid tribute to Ukrainian fascists at commemorations organized around public monuments that have been erected by Ukrainian veterans of the 14th Division of the Waffen SS and of the OUN(B), the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, a fascist army which fought alongside the Nazis against the Soviet Union.

The Canadian Armed Forces claims that Canada bears no responsibility if neo-Nazis have received Canadian military training. In a statement, it asserted that “it was up to Ukraine to vet its own security forces,” adding that “Canadian military personnel could refuse to train soldiers” suspected of neo-Nazi ties. The reality is that no such refusals have taken place, both because they would be viewed as a threat to the CAF training mission and because the officer corps has increasingly pronounced right-wing sympathies. Even the head of the Canadian military, Lt. General Wayne Eyre, has admitted that “we have a problem with far-right activity across the army.”

Concerns about Canada’s military potentially providing military training to Ukrainian neo-Nazis have been raised repeatedly since 2015, when then Conservative Defense Minister Jason Kenney sent 200 CAF personnel to Kiev under Operation UNIFIER. This decision followed shortly after the fascist-spearheaded Maidan coup, which was politically sponsored by the US and Canadian governments and their European allies. The Operation UNIFIER training mission is ongoing.

Kenney feebly claimed that restricting training to the Ukrainian National Guard and military would prevent Nazi sympathizers from learning Canadian military techniques. But such assurances were known to be fraudulent, as Ukraine’s National Guard was already integrating various fascist groups, including the Azov Battalion, into its ranks.

In fact, the Centuria revelations point not so much to the “accidental training of Nazis,” but rather to the conscious cultivation of far-right ideology within the Canadian Armed Forces, and the armed forces of its NATO partners. Far-right forces are being mobilized across Europe as the ruling class abandons bourgeois democratic norms, and as the capitalist system sinks ever deeper into the crisis accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Far-right forces are also becoming more emboldened in Canada, as evidenced by their aggressive protests targeting Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and healthcare workers during the recent federal election campaign. In July 2020, right-wing activist and Canadian army reservist Cory Hurren attempted to assassinate Trudeau, under the delusion he is a “communist.”

In fact, Trudeau is a right-wing capitalist politician, who defends the interests of Canadian imperialism at home and around the

world. In addition to supporting the US-led military-strategic offensives against Russia and China, the Trudeau government, with Freeland very much at the centre of these events, backed the far-right coup attempt fronted by Juan Guaido in Venezuela and the overthrow of the Bolivian government of Evo Morales in a far-right coup d’etat in 2019.

Under previous governments, the CAF has collaborated with far-right forces in its wars and military interventions. In 2004, Washington and Ottawa used remnants of the Tontons Macoutes, the thugs of the former Duvalier dictatorship, to pave the way for their occupation of Haiti and the ouster of the country’s elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. So intimate was the collaboration between Canada’s military and far-right Islamists in the 2011 NATO regime-change war in Libya, CAF officers themselves joked they were “al-Qaeda’s airforce.”

Canadian imperialism relies on the services of such far-right forces abroad to enhance its strategic position and keep markets open to penetration by Canadian capital and the cost of labour low, in order to maximize capitalist profits.

At least one prominent apologist for the Ukrainian far-right teaches at the Royal Canadian Military College. Lubomyr Luciuk, a Ukrainian Canadian Congress donor is a professor of Political Science at the Royal Military College, while being a life-long apologist for the OUN(B). Luciuk has called upon the Canadian government to “investigate Soviet ‘war crimes,’” while minimizing or denying outright the crimes committed by the Nazis’ Ukrainian collaborators. In 2001, Luciuk wrote, “No member of the Ukrainian Division ‘Galicia’ (sic) can be prosecuted for a war crime or a crime against humanity since no evidence of such crimes exist.” Luciuk has campaigned against the Holocaust exhibit at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. A fervent anti-communist, Luciuk is deeply involved in “educating” the future Canadian military leadership on subjects such as history and geostrategy.

If students at the Royal Military College are being taught that the Ukrainian Nazis in WWII were fighting a “just cause,” will they be prepared to suppress strikes, or put down an insurgency of the Canadian working class? How is the Canadian army dealing with its “far-right problem” if the instructors at its premier military academy laud Ukrainian fascists and Nazi collaborators implicated in the Nazi regime’s most horrific crimes?



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