Canadian imperialism's fascist friends—Part 1: Ottawa's decades-long alliance with the Ukrainian far-right and the NATO war on Russia

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This is the first article in a five-part series.

The US and its NATO allies, Canada included, are waging war on Russia in all but name. Their governments, corporate media and establishment parties claim that the NATO powers are funneling tens of billions of dollars in weaponry to Kiev in order to protect Ukraine's "sovereignty" and save its "democracy." In reality, their provocative actions have brought the world to the precipice of a global conflagration fought with nuclear weapons.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has exhaustively documented, American imperialism long planned for and instigated war with Moscow over Ukraine. It led NATO's eastward expansion over the past three decades to encircle Russia, and goaded Putin into launching his reactionary invasion by refusing to so much as discuss Moscow's security concerns. Washington and Wall Street are determined to subjugate Russia, plunder its abundant resources and tighten thereby the military-strategic encirclement of China.

In pursuit of these predatory geostrategic and economic objectives, the US and its allies have aligned with Ukraine's far-right parties and fascist militia; that is, with forces that venerate and seek to emulate the Ukrainian fascists who collaborated with and sought the Nazis' patronage during World War II. In pursuit of an ethnically "pure" Ukrainian state, the Ukrainian fascists participated in some of the most monstrous crimes of the 20th century, including the Holocaust.

Washington, aided and abetted by its German and Canadian allies, used the fascist Right Sector as its shock troops in the February 2014 coup that removed Ukraine's elected pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovych. The imperialist powers then placed in power a government committed to harnessing Ukraine to NATO and the European Union. Washington subsequently rearmed and reorganized Ukraine's armed forces, overseeing the merger of the fascist Azov Battalion into Ukraine's security forces. Today these fascists comprise an important part of Ukraine's elite troops. As Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has himself boasted, they are pivotal frontline fighters in the Russian-majority Donbas region.

Canadian imperialism has long sought to pass itself off as an altruistic force in global affairs. But Ottawa is playing an especially provocative and belligerent role in the Ukraine war. This is a continuation of its substantial role in the war's preparation and instigation.

Under both Liberal and Conservative governments, Canada has worked closely with Washington, first in its drive to expand NATO to include former Warsaw Pact countries and Soviet republics; and then, since 2016, to permanently deploy NATO expeditionary forces on Russia's borders. Canada leads one of NATO's four enhanced Forward Presence Battle Groups in Poland and the Baltic states, and routinely dispatches warplanes and warships menacingly on Russia's doorstep. From 2015, hundreds of Canadian Armed Forces' trainers were deployed to Ukraine, where they worked alongside American and British military personnel to reorganize Ukraine's armed forces. This included helping integrate and train the fascists of the Azov battalion.

Canada's military support for Ukraine has increased exponentially as Washington and Ottawa have outlined ever more sweeping war aims. Since January, Canada has pledged to deliver $618 million worth of military aid, including heavy weaponry, to Kiev by next March. The Trudeau Liberal government has also led the charge for all-out economic warfare against Russia. Working in tandem with Britain's Tory regime, it pressed for Russia's exclusion from the SWIFT banking system and the seizure of the assets of Russia's central bank.

Canada's belligerent role in Ukraine is in keeping with its participation in the past three decades of US-led wars of aggression in the Balkans, Middle East and Central Asia. These wars were invariably justified with lies about "weapons of mass destruction," preventing genocide or otherwise protecting the vulnerable. But their true purpose was to dominate the oil-rich Middle East and project US and Western imperialist power over the geo-strategically critical Eurasian landmass.

Behind a barrage of war propaganda and inflammatory claims of "genocide" calculated to make any de-escalation of the conflict impossible, the Canadian ruling class is pursuing its own predatory economic and geopolitical objectives. Under conditions of systemic global capitalist crisis, it is determined to strengthen its eight-decades-old military-security alliance with Washington, which it deems pivotal to securing and expanding its extensive global imperialist interests. Canada, which deployed troops to Siberia in 1919 as part of the imperialist attempt to overthrow the revolutionary workers' government of Lenin and Trotsky, also has its own strategic rivalry with Russia. This is particularly true in the Arctic, where climate change is making the exploitation of natural resources and sea lanes ever more viable.

But there is a third important factor propelling Canadian imperialism's outsized role in the US-NATO war on Russia—the Canadian state's longstanding alliance with, and patronage of, the Ukrainian far right.

In the years immediately following the Third Reich's downfall, the Canadian state gave sanctuary to tens of thousands of members and supporters of the two rival factions of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), and did so despite specific warnings that it was providing refuge to Hitler's accomplices in horrific war crimes. Both the

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OUN Melnyk (M) and OUN Bandera (B) collaborated with and eagerly sought the Nazis' patronage. Members of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), created in 1943 by the Stepan Bandera wing of the OUN, were welcomed to Canada with open arms, despite the UPA's role in the murder of tens of thousands of Jews and Poles. So too were members of the 14th Grenadier Division of the Waffen SS, the so-called "Galicia Division." No matter that the Nuremberg trials had found the Waffen SS to be a criminal organization *as a whole,* due to its role as an armed wing of the Nazi Party and routine perpetration of mass murder and other war crimes.

The Canadian state and political establishment subsequently encouraged and assisted the Ukrainian fascist emigres and their political descendants in the whitewashing of their crimes. Following a script developed by the CIA, which post-1945 used remnants of Bandera's UPA to mount an insurgency against the Soviet Union, a new narrative was constructed. It portrayed the far-right Ukrainian nationalists as fighters for "national liberation" and victims of Nazism and "godless Communism," not fascists and accomplices in the Holocaust.

Canadian imperialism has used these ultra-reactionary forces ever since in pursuit of its foreign and domestic policy objectives. In turn, they have come to wield significant political influence.

With state support, far-right Ukrainian nationalists came to politically dominate Canada's substantial Ukrainian immigrant community, hitherto largely identified with socialist and left-wing politics. They served as a bulwark of Canada's Cold War foreign policy, stoking virulent hostility to the Soviet Union, whilst promoting, through a network of government-supported ethnic-cultural organizations, an exclusivist nationalism that explicitly celebrated the Nazis' Ukrainian fascist collaborators. In the late 1980s and 1990s, the Ukrainian-Canadian far-right forces incubated by Canadian imperialism were redeployed: first to push for capitalist restoration and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, then to support harnessing "independent" Ukraine to NATO and the EU.

The Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) has long served as the nexus of the collaboration between the Canadian state and far-right Ukrainian nationalists. As the UCC's own website boasts, it was a state-sponsored organization from its very beginnings. It was established in 1940 under the auspices of Canada's War Department as the Ukrainian Canadian Committee.

UCC leaders enjoy ready access to the highest levels of government and leading UCC members frequently accompany prime ministers and other senior government officials on their visits to Ukraine. Thus in 2016, when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau proclaimed in Kiev that the Canadian Armed Forces were training Ukrainian security forces to make them "more effective" in "reclaiming" eastern Ukraine and Crimea, Paul Grod, the then-UCC president, was at his side.

The UCC unabashedly defends the actions of the Waffen SS's Galicia Division. It has proudly boasted for decades about the affiliation of various Canadian Galicia division veterans' associations to the UCC. However, its promotion of far-right Ukrainian nationalism has focused on celebrating the OUN (B); Stepan Bandera, the fascist-style Führer who led it from its founding in 1940 until his death in 1959; and the OUN-founded and led UPA.

Noted Ukrainian-Canadian historian John-Paul Himka described the UCC in 2010 as "keepers of the (OUN-UPA) flame," who have "put the glorification of these radical right nationalists at the very center of the Ukrainian national identity project." More recently, he told Radio-Canada International, "A lot of the community organizations are headed by the Bandera faction of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists."

The alliance between Canadian imperialism and Ukrainian fascism is most strikingly embodied in the person of Chrystia Freeland, Canada's deputy prime minister, finance minister and chief architect of its "feminist" foreign policy. Freeland has been among the keenest advocates in Western imperialist governments of all-out economic war against Russia, and has led the push within the Trudeau Liberal government for Ukraine to be supplied with heavy weaponry. She is playing an active role in the internal politics of Ukraine, prevailing on Zelensky in January not to jail his pro-US predecessor, the oligarch Petro Poroshenko. At the same time, she is serving as a high-placed interlocutor between Washington and its Kiev clients. According to Freeland, she speaks to Ukraine's prime minister and finance minister daily.

In a 2015 article entitled "Putin's big lie," Freeland described herself as a "proud member" of the Ukrainian Canadian community. She wrote, "My maternal grandparents fled western Ukraine after Hitler and Stalin signed their non-aggression pact in 1939. They never dared to go back, but they stayed in close touch with their brothers and sisters and their families, who remained behind. For the rest of my grandparents' lives, they saw themselves as political exiles with a responsibility to keep alive the idea of an independent Ukraine, which had last existed, briefly, during and after the chaos of the 1917 Russian Revolution. That dream persisted into the next generation, and in some cases the generation after that."

This story—one she has repeated often, frequently with touching tributes to her grandfather and his role in schooling her in Ukrainian culture and nationalism—is a politically-calculated false narrative. In short, a lie.

Freeland's maternal grandfather, Mykhailo Chomiak, was an influential and handsomely rewarded Nazi collaborator. For five years, from early 1940 through the first months of 1945, he edited the sole Ukrainian-language newspaper in Nazi-occupied Poland. *Krakivs'ki Visti* (Krakow News) lionized Adolph Hitler, celebrated the Nazi war of extermination against the Soviet Union, incited hatred for Jews and promoted the formation of the Ukrainian or "Galicia Division" of the Waffen SS. It was printed on a press stolen from a Jew who perished in a Nazi death camp.

Chomiak was a member of the OUN (M), from which Bandera and his supporters split in 1940. The OUN (M) was even more willing to directly and slavishly serve the Nazis than the OUN (B). It did so through the Ukrainian Central Committee (UTsK), which was disguised as a social welfare organization to avoid the Nazis' ban on political organizations. The leader of the UTsK, Volodymyr Kubijovych, was the publisher of *Krakivs'ki Visti*. When the 14th Grenadier Division of the Waffen SS, the so-called Galicia Division, was established in early 1943, Kubijovych was its first officially enrolled member.

After the war, Chomiak and Kubijovych came to live on different continents, but they maintained a lifelong correspondence about advancing the Ukrainian nationalist cause. Their collaboration ended only with the death of Freeland's grandfather in 1983.

When Freeland's political ancestry was exposed in 2017, she and the Trudeau government curtly dismissed it as "Russian disinformation." They were quickly joined by the entire political establishment and corporate media. Freeland, with the complicity of the opposition Conservatives and New Democratic Party, brazenly refused to discuss the role of her beloved grandfather.

The *Globe and Mail*, *Ottawa Citizen*, *National Post* and other prominent dailies published reports that conceded Chomiak had edited a newspaper in Nazi-occupied Poland. However, these accounts were part of a carefully curated release of information. They downplayed and covered up *Krakivs'ki Visti*'s role in promoting support for the Nazi war of extermination against the USSR and in inciting hatred toward Jews, as the Nazis carried out the Holocaust with the assistance of the Ukrainian fascists. It was even suggested that as lamentable as was *Krakivs'ki Visti*'s support for the Nazi war in the East, it had contributed to the preservation of Ukrainian culture!

Canada's corporate media had no interest in investigating Freeland's political ancestry, nor in placing it in a broader historical context. None assigned a reporter or commissioned a historian to review the *Krakivs'ki Visti* archive or to examine Canada's role in providing a safe haven to

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tens of thousands of Ukrainian nationalist Nazi collaborators. Chomiak's World War II editorial activities were universally portrayed as an historical anecdote, totally irrelevant to contemporary events.

Neither the media nor the political establishment could admit to, let alone tolerate, any serious investigation of the Canadian state's longstanding patronage of the Ukrainian far-right. To have done so would inevitably have shone light on the fascists in Ukraine and their Canadian ideological mentors and enablers—on those with whom Ottawa is now so closely cooperating in the NATO war to protect Ukrainian "independence" and "democracy."

There is no shortage of relationships to explore: from the US and Canada's use of Ukrainian fascists as shock troops in the 2014 coup; to the Canadian Armed Forces' training of the fascists embedded in Ukraine's armed forces; and the state-sponsored UCC's ideological and material promotion of the Ukrainian far right and its exclusivist, virulently anti-Communist nationalism.

Freeland routinely associates herself with the legacy, symbols and rituals of the World War II Ukrainian fascists. In 2016, she concluded a keynote address to the UCC by leading its members in chanting the Banderite salutation "Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the heroes!" (See video clip). She has spoken before the League of Ukrainian Canadians, which was founded by cadres of OUN (B) and UPA in 1949, and is devoted to this day to propagating far-right Ukrainian nationalism and cult-like devotion to the fascist Bandera. Just days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Freeland put her political colours on display, marching in a "save Ukraine" demonstration clutching the OUN's red and black banner.

Freeland's political ancestry and, above all, her fusion of "liberalism" with Ukrainian fascism, past and present, have in no way impeded her political rise. On the contrary, her political stock has only risen, further underscoring that Canadian imperialism is more than ready to align with the most reactionary forces in pursuit of its predatory aims and ambitions.

A recent article in the ostensibly liberal *Toronto Star*, titled "Freeland's crusade began in Alberta," declared, "Her grandparents came to Canada as refugees and now their granddaughter is a key figure in the fight to save their homeland. That says a lot about Freeland but it also says a lot about the kind of country Canada aspires to be.

"Whether it's fate, or coincidence, we are fortunate to have someone so resolute and so knowledgeable in the right place at the right time."

Neither fate nor coincidence has anything to do with it. Freeland's position as second in command of the Canadian imperialist state and likely successor to Justin Trudeau as prime minister is the outcome of the decades-long alliance between the Canadian state and far-right Ukrainian nationalists.

The exposure of this collaboration before working people in Canada and internationally is a critical element in the fight to build a global movement against imperialist war.

The ruling elites of the NATO powers are relying on a vast propaganda campaign and ignorance of the historical issues involved to portray their predatory drive to carve up Russia as a crusade for "democracy" and "human rights." Documenting the historical record of their fascist Ukrainian allies and the ultra-reactionary traditions that they evoke and seek to revive will assist working people in cutting through this propaganda, opposing NATO aggression, and taking up the fight against imperialist war and its source in the capitalist profit system.

This article's subsequent parts will examine the actions and ideology of the Ukrainian fascist allies of Hitler to whom Canadian imperialism gave refuge after World War II. This will include a review of the pro-Nazi propaganda and anti-Semitic exhortations of *Krakivs'ki Visti* and the political activities of its publishers, as well as the record of Bandera's OUN (B) and UPA. The fourth part will document the support the Canadian state gave the Ukrainian fascists in covering up their participation in ethnic-cleansing and genocide, and in developing a large infrastructure of cultural and academic organizations dedicated to promoting far-right Ukrainian nationalism. "Canadian imperialism's fascist friends" will go on to discuss the role the far-right forces incubated by Canadian imperialism played in pressing for capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union and "independent" Ukraine's transformation into a vassal of the Western imperialist powers. It will conclude with an exposure of how Ottawa and the Canadian Armed Forces worked with these far-right forces, in both Canada and Ukraine, in preparing and instigating war with Russia.

To be continued.

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