

Who is Chrystia Freeland, Washington's "prime candidate" for NATO Secretary-General?

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The *New York Times* recently reported that Washington is promoting Canada's deputy prime minister, Chrystia Freeland, as its "prime candidate" to succeed Jens Stoltenberg as NATO secretary-general when the Norwegian's term expires in September 2023.

Freeland is being backed by US imperialism to head the aggressive military alliance because she is a war hawk with extensive personal and political ties with Ukrainian fascism, which has emerged as a key proxy for the Western powers' predatory war against Russia.

The selection of the next head of the US-led alliance is seen as a crucial issue in Washington and European capitals. The next secretary-general will oversee some 300,000 NATO "high readiness forces" in Europe and will therefore be instrumental in the prosecution of the imperialist powers' war, aimed at subjugating Russia to the status of a semi-colony and seizing control of its natural resources.

In a manner typical of a newspaper that has deceitfully propagandized for every US war of aggression over the past three decades, the *Times* shamelessly covered up Freeland's personal and political ties to far-right and outright fascist forces in its November 4 report.

After noting Freeland's presence in Kiev in 2014 to "celebrate" the fascist-led coup that overthrew elected pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich, the *Times* observes, "(H)er Ukrainian grandfather, a grateful immigrant to Canada, was as a younger man involved with a Ukrainian nationalist movement that saw the Nazis as useful foils to counter the Soviets."

Contrary to this anodyne portrayal of Freeland's grandfather as a young man led astray, the fact of the matter is that Mykhailo Chomiak was a high-level Nazi collaborator. From the beginning of 1940 to the early months of 1945, he served as managing editor of the only Ukrainian-language newspaper permitted to publish in Nazi-occupied Poland.

Krakivski Visti (Krakow News), which was produced on a printing press stolen from a Jew who perished in a Nazi death camp, published a steady stream of anti-Semitic and anti-Polish racist filth, regularly lauded Adolf Hitler as a leader of a new Europe and an ally of Ukraine, and actively campaigned for recruits to the 14th Division of the Waffen SS, the so-called Galicia Division. The Galicia Division participated in horrific

massacres of Jews and Poles during 1943 and 1944.

Chomiak was a member of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), which collaborated closely with the Nazis, joined in the war of extermination against the Soviet Union, and was implicated in hundreds of thousands of deaths of Poles and Jews in the Holocaust. The OUN was an explicitly fascist organization that set as its goal the creation of an ethnically pure Ukrainian state.

The faction to which Chomiak belonged, the OUN Melnyk (M), directly served the Nazi occupiers by integrating itself into the administrative and security apparatus in the General Government (Nazi-occupied Poland). The other faction, led by Stepan Bandera, the OUN (B), focused on embedding its forces into the military and claimed to act more "independently" of the Nazis. The activities of both factions and their push for an "independent" Ukrainian state were in reality entirely dependent upon the patronage of Nazi German imperialism.

After the downfall of the Third Reich, Chomiak found refuge together with thousands of Nazi collaborators in Canada and the United States. Former members of the fascist OUN were among the first recruits of the newly established CIA, which was above all concerned with recruiting anti-communist forces amid the Cold War.

Canada emerged as a key player in enabling Hitler's accomplices to whitewash their history and write a new narrative, according to which Ukrainian nationalism fought for "liberation" against Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union at the same time. In addition to allowing tens of thousands of former SS members and other Nazi collaborators to settle in Canada, Ottawa provided financial support for an ideological campaign to legitimize far-right Ukrainian nationalism, including through its sponsorship of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and creation of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.

The state intervened to help far-right forces associated with the OUN gain control of property and other assets owned by groups representing the Ukrainian diaspora that had been strongholds of socialism and left-wing politics prior to the Second World War. (This history is presented in detail in the WSWS series *Canadian imperialism's fascist friends*).

Freeland emerged out of this milieu. After working as a student

on the so-called “Encyclopedia of Ukraine,” a project aimed at concealing the Ukrainian nationalists’ active support for Hitler and the Nazis led by *Krakivski Visti*’s publisher, Volodymyr Kubiiovych, Freeland traveled to Soviet Ukraine in the late 1980s to stoke the far-right Ukrainian nationalism in which she had been schooled.

The Canadian state facilitated the return to Ukraine of large numbers of exiles and their descendants with ties to far-right nationalist groups over subsequent years, many of whom emerged as important figures in the establishment of an independent capitalist Ukraine following the Stalinists’ dissolution of the Soviet Union. Halyna Chomiak, Freeland’s mother, returned to Ukraine to establish the Ukrainian Legal Foundation, which was involved in drafting the country’s constitution.

The most significant import these forces brought back to Ukraine was a virulent strain of far-right nationalism. As Freeland observed in a 2015 essay entitled “My Ukraine, Putin’s big lie”: “Ukraine’s national consciousness was weak.” The Canadian state, supported by the politically influential Ukrainian Canadian Congress, made a significant contribution over the following years to revive the cult of Stepan Bandera, with the result that dozens of statues and other memorials to the fascist leader sprang up across western Ukraine.

This history goes a long way to explaining why Freeland has secured such a prominent position in Canadian imperialism’s preparation for and waging of the US-led war against Russia. After the fascist-led Maidan coup brought to power a pro-Western regime in Kiev in 2014, prompting Russia to annex Crimea in response, Washington and Ottawa took the lead in reorganizing Ukraine’s armed forces.

They oversaw the integration of fascist militias like the notorious Azov Battalion into its ranks. Canadian troops involved in a military training mission in Ukraine provided instruction to members of Azov and Centuria, an elite group of fascist army officers. Canada simultaneously joined in NATO’s massive build-up of military forces on Russia’s western border by leading one of the alliance’s forward battalions in Latvia. The deployment of similar battalions to Estonia, Lithuania and Poland continued the eastward march of the aggressive military alliance aimed at encircling Russia, which began in the aftermath of the restoration of capitalism by the Stalinists in Russia and Eastern Europe.

Freeland served as foreign minister throughout much of this period, before being promoted by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to the position of deputy prime minister and finance minister following the 2019 federal election. When the US and its NATO allies succeeded in goading Putin into his reactionary invasion of Ukraine in February, Freeland emerged as one of the leading voices for ruthless economic sanctions, including the removal of Russia from the SWIFT global payments network. She has also served as a key interlocutor between the Ukrainian government and its imperialist masters, boasting earlier this year that she has daily conversations with Ukraine’s prime minister and finance minister.

The fact that Freeland is now being mooted for the top job in NATO underscores the predatory character of the imperialist war waged by the US and NATO against Russia. Far from the Western powers intervening to defend Ukraine’s “sovereignty” and

“democracy,” as publications like the *Times* incessantly claim, the conflict is about plundering Russia’s rich natural resources and seizing control of the geostrategically crucial Eurasian landmass.

These goals demand the deployment of ruthless military force abroad, threatening the world with a nuclear conflagration, and no less brutal methods of state repression at home to crush popular opposition to the subordination of society’s resources to imperialist war and conquest. This is why the imperialists have cultivated intimate ties with fascist forces.

The political utility of Freeland for the *Times* and its predominantly upper-middle class readership, which makes up a key constituency of support for imperialist war, is that she unites her close ties to Ukrainian fascism with the requisite dose of identity politics.

For these social layers, it is of far greater significance that Freeland could become “NATO’s first female secretary-general” than the fact that she is an avowed war hawk and far-right Ukrainian nationalist who describes an important Nazi collaborator as one of her heroes. Confronted with her grandfather’s Nazi collaborationist record in 2017, Freeland dismissed it as “Russian disinformation.” She has repeatedly paid tribute to Chomiak for teaching her about Ukrainian culture and nationalism.

During her time as Canada’s foreign minister, Freeland proclaimed that Ottawa was pursuing a “feminist foreign policy” as it deployed troops to Latvia, trained neo-Nazis in Ukraine, and participated in “freedom of navigation” exercises in the South China Sea. In 2017, Freeland announced a military spending hike of over 70 percent within a decade, and delivered a keynote address on Canada’s new defence strategy that cited both Russia and China as “threats” to national security.

Freeland also maintains close ties to the trade union bureaucracy, which Canada’s Liberal government views as a key partner in enforcing austerity to pay for war and suppressing the class struggle. Since the war broke out, Freeland has been invited to address several union conventions, including the 2022 Teamsters convention in June.

Freeland’s appointment to NATO’s top job is by no means guaranteed. Since its formation in 1949, the alliance has traditionally been headed by a European, while a US general typically holds the position of Supreme Allied Commander in Europe.

The prospect of a Canadian and an American occupying NATO’s two top positions would undoubtedly raise eyebrows among the European imperialists, especially under conditions in which Germany has seized on the war to revive its global great power ambitions. These geopolitical tensions aside, the war-mongers in Washington, Ottawa, Berlin and Brussels could hardly find a more politically appropriate figure to head their military alliance of death and destruction than Chrystia Freeland.



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