

Promoting NATO, Ukrainian fascists and right-wing Russian oppositionists: Leading US universities host pro-war events on campus

Clara Weiss
10 March 2023

With the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine now in its second year, events on campus at US universities have ever more openly assumed a pro-war character.

Two particularly sinister events took place in the week that marked the one-year anniversary of the war at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and Columbia University in New York.

At the University of Michigan, US Army Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman spoke on February 20 to an audience of about 400 people, most of them either academics or adherents of right-wing layers in the Ukrainian diaspora community. For almost a decade, Vindman has been directly implicated in the US war preparations against Russia, including as an advisor to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and by co-authoring several US national security and military strategy documents that helped prepare the current war against Russia. For the past year of war, he has been part of what he called a “subject matter group” that regularly consults with the White House, the Department of Defense, the State Department and the Congress on the war in Ukraine.

At Columbia University in New York, the Harriman Institute for Russian, Eurasian and East European Studies invited a leader of the neo-fascist Azov Battalion, Illia Samoilenko. The website of the Harriman Institute announced the event as a “conversation with Azovstal Defender Illia Samoilenko,” making no reference whatsoever to the avowed neo-Nazi orientation of the Azov Battalion. Members of the Battalion, which is now officially part of the Ukrainian armed forces, have repeatedly been photographed with swastikas. Its founder, Andriy Biletsky, has called for a “crusade of the white nations of the world against the Semitic-led subhumans.”

These two events are not the exception, but the rule.

In over a year of war, not a single event has been organized by academics at a major university that honestly and seriously examined the historical and political origins of this war—not to speak of any events that would have opposed the extraordinarily reckless escalation of the conflict by NATO and above all the US. Rather, the events held at the most prestigious institutions in the US have been dominated by figures that are directly implicated in either the US government and military, the Ukrainian regime, or the US-backed opposition against Russian President Vladimir Putin in Russia.

In other words, to the extent that meetings are held about the war on campuses, they are not serious academic or “intellectual” events but pro-war propaganda. Exploiting the lack of political and historical knowledge and understanding of the conflict, as well as the justified revulsion among workers and young people about the invasion and bombing of Ukraine by the oligarchic Putin regime, these events invariably cloud their own

reactionary agenda as opposition to “Putin’s war.” But far from offering an anti-war perspective, they are pro-NATO and pro-war events.

The aim of these events is two-fold: First, they promote US war propaganda and thereby help create a climate of confusion and intimidation for the many students and workers who oppose the war but do not understand either the origins of the conflict or how to fight it. Second, many of these events form part of the elaboration of the strategies and policies of the imperialist war machine. A closer examination of them is therefore in order.

The most striking feature of the overwhelming majority of events on the war—especially at what are considered “elite” institutions—is that they almost invariably involve figures that are either directly related to NATO or the Ukrainian regime that was put in power by a US-backed coup in February 2014, or both.

At **UC Berkeley**, which has one of the most renowned departments for the study of Eastern Europe and Russia in the world, several of the relatively few events on the war that took place featured Inna Sovsun, a member of the Ukrainian parliament. Sovsun became the deputy minister of education after the 2014 coup in Kiev that overthrew the pro-Russian Yanukovich government. As part of an IMF-dictated austerity program, she implemented 10 percent cuts in education.

During the war, she has been meeting regularly with military and political figures in the US and Germany, while using her Twitter account to clamor for more weapons for Ukraine and post inflammatory anti-Russian statements such as, “The war in Ukraine isn’t Putin’s war. It’s a war by Russians against Ukrainians.” She was joined for “discussion” in the events at Berkeley by figures such as Janet Napolitano, Professor at Berkeley’s Goldman School of Public Policy and the former Secretary of Homeland Security under Obama, from 2009 to 2013.

Another event at Berkeley last March was dedicated to Germany’s “new foreign policy.” It was held just after the German government announced a massive 100 billion Euro rearmament program, tripling its defense budget and using Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as a welcome pretext. But far from offering anything approaching a critical historical examination of the implications of the largest rearmament of German imperialism since the fall of the Nazi Reich, the event featured Charles M. Huber, a former member of the German parliament for the right-wing CDU; Sudha David-Wilp, the deputy director of the Berlin Office of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, a foreign policy think tank that has been deeply implicated in the resurgence of German militarism; and Oliver Schramm, the consul general at the German Consulate General San Francisco.

The **University of Michigan** held a series of events involving former

and current NATO policy figures. Before hosting Alexander Vindman in February, the university hosted an event on the war on October 13, 2022, with four former US ambassadors to discuss “the war’s implications for NATO.”

On September 13, the university’s Weiser Center for Europe and Eurasia featured the former Polish President Lech Wałęsa, who played a critical role in the restoration of capitalism in Poland. Last summer, Wałęsa publicly called for a NATO-instigated regime change in Moscow and the break-up of Russia. He urged NATO to either “force [a] change of political system” or to begin “organizing an uprising,” including by the “60 peoples” who were supposedly oppressed in Russia. In Wałęsa’s words, the Russian population of 140 million should be brought “back to less than 50 million.” At the Weiser Center, Wałęsa gave the “distinguished lecture” on “Russia’s War on Ukraine and Its Global Impact.”

The arguably most important academic center for the promotion of NATO and the Zelensky regime, however, is **Harvard University**. The flag ship Ivy League school boasts an endowment of \$53 billion and hosts the Davis Center for Russian Research, which has played a central role in the elaboration of US analyses and ideology with regard to the Soviet Union since the early days of the Cold War.

Harvard is also home to the Ukrainian Research Institute (HURI), which has close ties to and receives funding from the right-wing Ukrainian diaspora in the US and Canada. It is by far the biggest research institution on Ukraine in the US, if not the world, with an extraordinary 184 fellows, 31 associates and 27 fields of study.

Over the past year, both the Davis Center and HURI have held a dizzying number of events on the war, including one with President Volodymyr Zelensky that was moderated by former U.S. Secretary of Defense and Belfer Center Director Ash Carter. Other events featured Alexander Vindman and Klaus Welle, the current Secretary General of the European Parliament who for several decades has played an important role in the elaboration of German foreign policy.

For the anniversary of the war in February, the Ukrainian Research Institute and the Davis Center co-organized a conference entitled “Rebuilding Ukraine, Rebuilding the World” that was dominated entirely by think tank and policy figures from NATO, the IMF and the Ukrainian government. Among them were the former foreign minister of Ukraine, Pavlo Klimkin, and John Herbst, who served as US ambassador to Ukraine during the US-backed “Orange Revolution” in 2004. Klimkin now works for the rabidly anti-Russian and NATO-affiliated Atlantic Council.

In the opening panel, Joachim von Puttkamer, a historian at the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Germany, openly acknowledged, “All our thinking circles around scenarios which imply a regime change in Russia.” A closer look at Puttkamer’s co-panelists gives a sense of what this “regime change in Russia” would entail. One of Puttkamer’s co-panelists was Kateryna Shynkaruk, a lecturer at the Bush School of Government and Public Service, who used to work for the State Department on Ukraine policy. On the panel, she vehemently insisted that there could be no negotiated settlement with Putin.

On her social media, Shynkaruk has openly endorsed the apparent plans by the Ukrainian state to use the war to further the carve-up the Russian Federation in its existing form. In one Facebook post, she photoshopped an image to show the head of Ukraine’s armed forces, Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, an avowed admirer of the Ukrainian Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, beneath a map of a carved-up Russia. The map was found last December by journalists in the office of the head of Ukraine’s military intelligence, Kyrylo Budanov. It shows the Russian Federation divided up between an enlarged Ukraine, which would take large portions of the Caucasus, and an enlarged Germany, France, China and Japan. Only a small portion of what is now the Russian Federation would remain as “Russia,” and a

whole new Central Asian republic covering largely what are now the Urals region in Siberia would be formed. When Budanov was asked by journalists whether this map showed his goals in the war, he cynically replied, “Everyone sees in it what they want to see in it. Perhaps this is just a broad marker. But perhaps it is more than that.”

Harvard’s Davis Center, along with Berkeley, the University of Michigan, the University of Texas Austin and a number of other leading US institutions, also co-sponsors a series called “Decolonization in Focus,” in which panelists discuss “Decolonizing Russian & Eurasian Studies.” The real political purpose of this series, which was coded in postmodernist jargon, was revealed in one its latest installments on March 3, “Impact beyond the Ivory Tower.” The Zoom event featured Erica Marat, who reported gloatingly on growing anti-Russian nationalist (“decolonizing”) sentiments in layers of the Kazakh population. Another speaker was Fatima Tlis, who railed against the “Russian” and “Soviet empire” both of which had supposedly perpetrated genocidal policies against the Circassians, a minority population from the Caucasus.

Both Marat and Tlis have ties to the military and the CIA. Marat works at the National Defense University in Washington D.C., an academic institution funded by the US Department of Defense. Tlis has worked as a journalist exclusively for outlets that are funded in whole or in part by the US government, such as Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Liberty. Last June, they also participated in a webinar hosted for the US Congress under the title “Decolonizing Russia.” The webinar falsely portrayed Russia as a colonial empire whose disintegration through the promotion by Washington of nationalist and separatist tendencies within the Russian Federation would supposedly constitute a progressive development. When the moderator of that event asked, “Is decolonizing breaking up Russia? And if so, are there any risks associated with that?” none of the panelists would give a clear answer because the only honest answer was, of course: Yes.

The fraudulent promotion of this phony “anti-imperialism” and “anti-colonialism” stands in the most sinister traditions. Going back to the early days of the Cold War, US imperialism and especially the CIA have funded and promoted nationalist and separatist forces in the former Soviet Union in order to facilitate first the break-up of the USSR and then the establishment of direct imperialist control over the region after the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Following the Second World War, the newly founded CIA took over from the Nazis’ large portions of their foreign intelligence networks and their fascist allies, especially in Eastern Europe. This included neo-Nazi collaborators from the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, many of which had switched their allegiance from Nazi Germany to the US and Britain by 1943, but also nationalist and fascists from other nationalities, including various Muslim peoples, such as the Tatars and other ethnic minorities living in the Soviet Union.

In developing these far-right anti-Communist networks of former Nazi collaborators, the US ruling class also based itself on the concept of a so called Intermarium alliance that had been developed in the inter-war period by the Polish dictator Józef Piłsudski. The Intermarium, meaning “between the Three Seas” (a reference to the Black Sea, the Adriatic and the Baltic Seas), was to constitute an alliance of nationalist and far-right forces stretching from Poland, Belarus and the Baltics to the Caucasus, Ukraine and Romania. Its main goal was to destabilize and ultimately toppling the Soviet government through the promotion of nationalist and ethnic tensions. Over the past decade, the US and NATO have ever more openly re-adopted this strategy. The White House endorsed it under Trump in 2017, and the Biden administration’s strategy in Eastern Europe amid the war also stands in this tradition.

The direct involvement of universities in the war and regime change operations of US imperialism also extends to Russia itself. This becomes clear upon an examination of events at **Columbia University** and **New**

York University in New York, which have two of the most influential and best-funded centers for the study of Russia and the former Soviet Union. These are Columbia University's Harriman Institute, which has had connections to the CIA going back to its origins in the Cold War, and the Jordan Center for the Advanced Study of Russia at NYU, named after the Russian oligarch Boris Jordan, who provided funds for its formation.

At both of these universities, events on the war have been dominated almost entirely by figures associated with the pro-NATO opposition in Russia as well as prominent anti-Russia war hawks from the Democratic Party and its affiliated media. Since the fall of 2022, Yevgeniya Albats, a Russian journalist who used to work for the liberal Russian *Novaya Gazeta* and has long-standing ties to the US-backed opposition, has been running an events series at NYU's Jordan Center. Among her invitees were:

- Andrew Kramer, who used to report for the *New York Times* from Moscow. Kramer played a central role in the *Times* coverage of the first impeachment trial of Donald Trump, which centered on the Democrats' insistence that Trump was endangering the preparation for war against Russia. Last summer, he was named the *Times*' first chief of its Kiev bureau. In other words, he has long been a central figure in the US anti-Russia war propaganda machine.

- Masha Gessen from the *New Yorker* who likewise maintains close ties to the US-backed opposition and used to head the Russian Service of the US government-funded Radio Free Liberty.

- Anne Applebaum, a rabidly anti-Russian and right-wing journalist whose book *Red Famine* parrots the lies of the Ukrainian far-right diaspora about a supposed genocide during the Soviet famine in 1931-1933 that specifically targeted Ukrainians. Her husband is former Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski, who played a central role in Poland's preparations for a war with Russia and endorsed the bombing of the German-Russian pipeline Nord Stream last year, effectively admitting that it had been carried out by NATO. Revelations since then have indicated that either the US Navy or US-backed Ukrainian forces carried out the bombing.

Last October, in a joint event by NYU and Columbia University, the 2022 Civil Courage Prize was awarded to Alexei Navalny, the imprisoned figurehead of the pro-NATO opposition to Putin in Russia. The ceremony also involved Leonid Volkov, Navalny's chief-of staff, and Maria Pevshikh, one of Navalny's closest collaborators, who met with former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton just a few weeks after this event by NYU and Columbia. Navalny was granted the award for his supposed "steadfast resistance to evil at great personal risk." The Civil Courage Prize, the board of which includes a former US ambassador, has previously been given to many other figures who are praised as "democrats" and "resistance" fighters because they have placed themselves directly in the service of imperialism.

As with virtually all the campus discussions of the war and Russia, the promotion of a figure like Navalny is aimed at both misleading and confusing students, and at providing a cover for the operations of imperialism.

While glorified in the Western media as a "democratic" opponent of Putin, Navalny, as with the US-backed anti-Putin opposition as a whole, has nothing to do with "democracy." He speaks for sections of the same Russian oligarchy that Putin represents. Far from ever having been a popular figure in Russia, he has been built up systematically by the imperialist powers as part of the preparations for a regime change operation in Russia. Navalny has well-established ties to sections of the Russian elites as well as Russia's neo-fascist scene. He has participated several times in Russian March, an annual event organized and attended by neo-fascists, ultra-nationalists and monarchists. He has called for the mass deportation of Muslim immigrants and has published inflammatory videos, advising people to become proper "Russian nationalists."

Moreover, he and his staff maintain ties to separatist tendencies in Russia.

The promotion of such forces in Russia is a direct continuation of the policies and strategies pursued by the imperialist powers in Ukraine, where the US orchestrated the overthrow of two elected governments, one in 2004 and one in 2014. These "revolutions" were based on layers of the oligarchy, the state apparatus, and the upper middle class. The imperialist powers have sought to mobilize ultra-nationalist and even far-right forces in order to foster ethnic and other military strife in the region, break-up the entire former Soviet Union and bring its vast economic resources under the direct control of imperialism.

In these operations, the many war exiles, including disaffected and pro-imperialist intellectuals and journalists like Yevgeniya Albats, are playing an important role. In the wake of the invasion of Ukraine and especially after the partial mobilization order by Putin of September 2022, hundreds of thousands of largely wealthy and upper-middle class Russians fled the country. The CIA is now openly recruiting among these layers to advance the US regime change operation. According to a report in the *Wall Street Journal* last November, David Marlowe, the deputy director of operations at the CIA, told an academic at George Mason University's Hayden Center, "We're looking around the world for Russians who are as disgusted with that [war] as we are. We are open for business."

The fact that a cabal of war mongers and military planners, CIA figures and stooges of various sections of the Russian and Ukrainian oligarchy are paraded on US campuses without any meaningful opposition from academics begs a political and even a historical explanation.

Many of the campuses named above, including UC Berkeley, the University of Michigan and NYU, have traditionally been associated with left liberal politics and the anti-war movement during the Vietnam War period. Even during the mass protests against the Iraq war in 2003, many academics joined protests against this war and held public events or published articles examining the geopolitical interests of the US and the historical background to the war. But today, war plotters, CIA officials and their allies see these institutions as revolving doors and staging grounds for their recruitment operations and the promotion of war propaganda—and they are barely even trying to hide it.

A war reveals and accelerates more fundamental socio-political processes that had long been at work in society. The outbreak of the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine has been the political vehicle for the full integration of a layer of privileged upper-middle class academics into the NATO war machine and propaganda.

Even serious historians of Ukraine and of fascism have seemingly abandoned all capacity of critical and historical thought, divorcing the present war from the entire antecedent history of the Russian revolution, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the thirty years of US imperialist aggression that followed. This has created a dangerously degraded intellectual climate in which historical lies about the crimes of imperialism and Ukrainian fascism, such as those promoted by Timothy Snyder from Yale University, encounter barely any opposition or refutations from other historians.

Of course, this process did not begin in 2022. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, foreseen by no one in academia but then hailed as the conclusive proof that "socialism was dead" and that the "end of history" had come, accelerated a sharp shift to the right in layers of the middle class that had previously been associated with left-wing or left liberal politics. The thirty years of war by US imperialism abroad since 1991 were also thirty years of war on Marxism and any form of critical social thought at the universities. While the very concepts of progress, science and historical truth, were subject to relentless ideological and political attacks, the universities were transformed into centers for the promotion of postmodernism, racial and identity politics.

Underlying this climate of political and ideological reaction were fundamental shifts in class relations. While the working class, including

large layers of academic workers, was subject to relentless assaults on its living standards, a small but significant layer in society, among them many professors, have enjoyed the benefits of substantial salaries and rising stock markets. The social interests of this layer are bound up entirely with the preservation of the capitalist system and the pursuit of imperialist war.

The emergence of a highly privileged layer of the upper middle class in academia was paralleled by the growing integration of the universities into the US state and war machine. All the universities cited above have intimate ties to the Democratic Party, the Pentagon, the CIA and the military.

Berkeley and the University of Michigan are part of the National Security Innovation Network, which is run by the Department of Defense. This relatively new program brings academics in direct contact with US military command structures as well as companies in the military-industrial complex. Its stated aim is to build “networks of innovators that generate new solutions to national security problems.”

NYU has extensive ties to CIA Democrats and is heavily involved in government-funded projects of mass surveillance. Columbia and Harvard, for their part, have long been central to the recruitment of the US ruling class as well as its military elite and the CIA. All of these institutions are run by boards of trustees comprised of individuals who are both extremely wealthy and closely tied to Wall Street and the American state apparatus.

There is little question that the events held now on campuses on the war are coordinated and organized closely with the representatives of the US government, the CIA and the military.

In direct opposition to these imperialist war events, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth and student movement of the International Committee of the Fourth International, is organizing an international series of anti-war meetings that will explain the historical and political origins of the war and elaborate an internationalist and socialist strategy to fight it.

The IYSSE meeting series spans five continents. In the US, meetings will be held in centers of the academic-military-industrial complex, including UC Berkeley, NYU, Harvard, San Diego State University and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

These meetings will address all the questions that the NATO war mongers and their hirelings in academia want young people to ignore: What are the historical roots of this conflict? What are the geopolitical and political interests of the imperialist powers? And, above all: How can this war be stopped?

We urge all students, young people and workers everywhere to attend and help build these meetings. Contact the IYSSE today and join the building of a global movement by young people and workers against this war and for socialism.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact