

Canadian Armed Forces spy scandal exposes covert campaign to smear and silence critics of Ottawa's role in Ukraine war

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Espionage allegations against a Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) military intelligence officer accused of acting on behalf of Ukrainian intelligence have exposed a campaign waged by elements within the Canadian military to smear veteran *Ottawa Citizen* reporter David Pugliese as a “Russian asset.”

Much of the story has emerged via a series of leaks to the *Globe and Mail*, the unofficial “national newspaper” of the Canadian ruling class, and reported in such a way as to obscure the central political fact that the scandal has exposed—the seething hostility of the ruling class to opponents of its planned wars against Russia and China and its readiness to use anti-democratic methods to silence them.

On December 10 Master Warrant Officer Shawn Robar was arrested by the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service and charged with passing “highly sensitive government secrets to what court documents ... refer to as a ‘foreign entity’,” according to the *Globe*. An anonymous official source later disclosed to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) that the “foreign entity” is the Main Directorate of Intelligence (GUR), the military intelligence agency of Ukraine. The significance of this fact is underscored by the fact that the director of the GUR, Kyrylo Budanov, has recently been named to head the Office of the President of Ukraine.

Robar, a counterintelligence officer tasked with briefing military leadership, is alleged to have pursued a “project” with the GUR featuring “unconventional activity that involved sensitive techniques.”

Ukrainian intelligence, whose agencies include the GUR and the SBU (Security Service of Ukraine), emerged directly out of the Soviet KGB, the Stalinist secret police. Today they are infested with openly pro-Nazi elements and draw inspiration less from their institutional roots in the KGB than their political-ideological forebearers in the World War II era Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), which collaborated with Hitler’s Third Reich in the Holocaust and its war of annihilation against the Soviet Union.

Canadian relations with Ukrainian intelligence, authorized or illicit, cannot be separated from Canadian imperialism’s collaboration with Ukrainian fascists since 1946. This unbroken relationship continues today via the far-right Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC), which has attained immense political influence in Ottawa.

According to standard procedure, command approval would have been required for Robar to pursue the said “project” with Ukrainian intelligence. When that approval was denied, Robar operationalized it anyway. In September 2024, he held unauthorized meetings with Ukrainian operatives abroad.

Canadian military prosecutors allege that Robar handed classified information to his Ukrainian handlers. This included the identity of another Canadian military intelligence officer “engaged in covert

intelligence and information-collection activities;” the Canadian state’s intelligence assessment of Ukraine; and the military movements of a “foreign military partner.” Ukrainian intelligence then used this knowledge to attempt to “gain leverage over Canada” and “make threats.”

Military prosecutors further allege that Robar offered the services of “specialized units within the CAF who could possibly work with” Ukrainian intelligence. Robar is even said to have discussed switching allegiance to Ukraine after he came under investigation by Canadian authorities.

Robar’s colleagues in military counter-intelligence became concerned about his loyalty and informed their superiors, leading to charges under the Foreign Interference and Security of Information Act, the National Defence Act and the Criminal Code of Canada. The gravity of the charges are such that the maximum penalty for them is life imprisonment.

The *Globe and Mail* subsequently revealed that the “project” Robar was working on together with Ukrainian intelligence was “thematically aligned” with ongoing attempts to remove veteran *Ottawa Citizen* reporter David Pugliese from his job, because his reporting was “undermining Canadian support for Ukraine.”

In 2023, Robar had been assigned by his superiors to interview CAF officers who alleged that they faced “threats and retaliation from Russia” over their possession of a “secret KGB file” on David Pugliese from the 1980s in which Pugliese is identified as a target for recruitment. Nothing in the dossier states that he was ever recruited.

The “threats” allegedly originating from Russia included “death threats and home break ins.” Nowhere does the *Globe and Mail* refer to any police reports that should have been filed by the officers, a curious omission.

Elements within the CAF were unhappy with Pugliese over his reporting on two charities, Mirya Aid and Mirya Report, set up by CAF officers as “private citizens” to funnel “non-lethal” aid to Ukraine. Pugliese’s reporting has shone an unflattering light on the activities of Lt. Colonel Melanie Lake, the director of Mirya Aid, and the former commander of the CAF’s “Operation UNIFIER”—which supervises the training of Ukrainian troops, including members of various neo-Nazi movements who have been integrated into Ukraine’s security forces—as well as those of Captain Joseph Friedberg, who established the Mirya Report to raise funds for Mirya Aid.

In multiple articles in the *Ottawa Citizen* in 2023 and 2024, Pugliese exposed allegations of misappropriation of funds, missing equipment and the unauthorized use of Canadian government resources by these groups. Officers appeared in their military uniforms at Mirya Aid events, even though they were supposedly acting for Mirya Aid in their “personal capacity.” CAF officers used their military email accounts as well as various military bases in work for Mirya Aid. Pugliese reported that

Friedberg made threats of legal action against Mirya's critics and was later investigated by his superiors. More than 20 Mirya volunteers resigned in the wake of Pugliese's revelations, citing "ethical concerns." Pugliese and Postmedia, which owns the *Ottawa Citizen*, now face a \$14 million defamation suit launched by Mirya Report.

The *Globe and Mail* reports that unnamed CAF officers who alleged they were experiencing "Russian threats" put Robar in touch with Ukrainian state operatives. The alleged KGB dossier "seems to be what brought him (Robar) into contact with Ukrainian officials. A series of messages seen by the *Globe* show that senior staff at the Ukrainian embassy in Ottawa were aware of the alleged KGB dossier and were aiding efforts to prove its veracity."

In other words, Robar was put in touch with Ukrainian intelligence to support a campaign within the CAF officer corps to silence one of Canada's senior military affairs journalist—a campaign that was being aided and abetted by the Ukrainian government.

Moreover, as we shall subsequently demonstrate, the documents upon which this campaign is based are forgeries, in all likelihood emanating from the Ukrainian intelligence apparatus.

The smear campaign was publicized in a manner to protect Pugliese's accusers from a lawsuit and their "evidence" from scrutiny, with the assistance of highly placed members of Canada's Conservative Party, which under the leadership of Pierre Poilievre has increasingly morphed into a far-right party. The alleged KGB documents, or rather *photostats* of the documents, were first made public by former Conservative Cabinet Minister Chris Alexander, a fellow of the pro-war Macdonald-Laurier Institute on October 24, 2024, at a meeting of the Parliamentary Public Safety and National Security Committee. The session addressed the subject of alleged "Russian interference" in Canadian politics.

Alexander, reports the *Globe*, says that he met with Robar on October 8, 2024, "shortly after I (Alexander) received the dossier naming Pugliese" and not long after Robar's clandestine meetings with Ukrainian spies.

The forum of a Parliamentary Committee provided Alexander with "parliamentary immunity" for his statements. If Alexander had merely called a press conference, he would have invited a libel suit and a legal discovery process, which would have put the alleged KGB dossier under a microscope.

Alexander told the parliamentary committee that "previous efforts to expose (Pugliese's) long-running covert ties to Moscow have resulted in attempts to intimidate current and former Canadian parliamentarians, including my former colleague James Bezan (the Conservatives' shadow defence minister), as well as Canadian Army officers." No proof whatsoever was supplied to back up these inflammatory claims.

Alexander's allegations *invert* reality. It was as yet unnamed CAF officers who began a smear campaign against Pugliese, alongside Mirya Report attempts to silence their critics in Ukraine and North America with legal action. And, as we now know, Ukrainian intelligence subsequently attempted to blackmail the Canadian government and likely multiple individuals.

Though not well-known to most readers of the *World Socialist Web Site*, David Pugliese is an accomplished investigative reporter "of the old school." Although he operates within the ideological framework of capitalism and calls himself a "proud Canadian," his reporting has long infuriated Canada's ruling class and military establishment.

To name only those most immediately relevant to the current campaign against him, Pugliese has penned exposés of the growing influence of the far-right Ukrainian Canadian Congress in Canadian politics; of the Canadian state's ongoing support for Ukrainian and other Nazi war criminals, including through its "Victims of Communism" monument; and of Nazi and fascist groups active within the Canadian military. He was also one of a tiny number of mainstream journalists who challenged the attempts of the entire Canadian political establishment to dismiss the

revelation that former Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland's "beloved grandfather" was a prominent Ukrainian Nazi collaborator as Russian "disinformation" and of no consequence.

Pugliese has strenuously denied the allegations that he worked for the KGB, pointing out basic factual errors in the alleged KGB file, such as its assertion that he was employed by the *Ottawa Citizen* before 1989.

In his own testimony before the Parliamentary Committee, given to answer Alexander's allegations, Pugliese revealed that "Military public affairs officers have acknowledged that during my time at the *Ottawa Citizen*, there have been no fewer than three attempts by senior DND (Department of National Defence) officials to convince my employer to remove me from the defence beat."

His employer, Post Media Group, has defended Pugliese unconditionally in the face of the *Globe and Mail*'s recent contribution to the smear campaign (detailed below). This is all the more significant, given that the Post Media Group is itself a right-wing media conglomerate, virulently hostile to the working class and democratic rights.

If any reporters should be accused of working on behalf of a state intelligence agency, it is those at the *Globe and Mail* who often report as if they were stenographers for the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS). Reporters Steven Chase and Robert Fife, the *Globe*'s lead writers on the Robar affair, served as the primary conduits for elements within the Canadian state who in 2023 whipped up a furor over claims that Beijing had interfered in the 2021 and 2019 federal elections. This campaign, it need be recalled, was used to stigmatize China as an existential threat to Canadian "democracy," destabilize the Trudeau government from the right and press for sweeping new powers for Canadian's security-intelligence apparatus.

The *Globe* has reported on the Robar case in a manner that lends credibility to the smear campaign and fraudulent allegations against Pugliese. On his X account, Pugliese has noted that Chase, Fife and fellow *Globe* reporter Mark MacKinnon have declined to publish material he supplied to them refuting the allegations against him peddled by the Ukrainian government and elements in Canada's military-security apparatus.

In September 2025, the Canadian magazine *The Walrus* confirmed that an independent forensic investigation exposed the "KGB dossier" as a fake. The archives of the KGB in Kiev contain no such files, and the archival file numbers which should be present are missing. Typeface specialist Erik van Blokland asserts that the Cyrillic typewriter typeface used in the documents is in fact a digital typeface which he himself invented in 1993, three years after the documents are alleged to have been created.

But in their reporting on this story, the *Globe* reporters fail to refer to these investigations. Instead, their reporting lends credibility to the assertions of the promoters of the documents, which align with Canadian imperialist interests, and the previous reporting of the *Globe and Mail* hyping the "Russian threat." The *Globe* has breathlessly reported the claims "Russia" orchestrated an intimidation campaign targeting those with knowledge of the "KGB dossier" on Pugliese. It has sought to boost the veracity of this dossier by highlighting remarks it solicited from Andriy Kogut, the SBU director of archives. Kogut asserts, reports the *Globe*, "the documents would have been difficult to forge without 'real documents or perfect and deep knowledge from within the KGB.'"

In fact, the SBU possesses such "perfect and deep knowledge" as it emerged directly out of the KGB! Moreover, it and the Ukrainian security services as a whole have a long and notorious record of using torture and frame-ups against their political opponents, including against Bogdan Syrotiuk, a socialist opponent of the Zelensky regime and anti-war activist who has been jailed on frame-up charges since April 2024.

The political meaning of the campaign to smear David Pugliese must be understood.

Canadian imperialism is terrified of the growing anti-war sentiment among workers and youth. Pugliese's exposures within the capitalist press have thus become politically unacceptable as the ruling class launches a war-spending orgy, already in the hundreds of billions of dollars, to prepare for the planned carve-up of Eurasia. The campaign against Pugliese cannot be understood apart from the ruling class drive to criminalize all expressions of principled opposition to its imperialist policies, including tarring opponents of Israel's genocide in Palestine as "antisemitic" and shutting down student solidarity encampments. Since the start of Canadian imperialism's war against Russia in 2022, the state and the Ukrainian far right, acting as one, have waged a vicious propaganda campaign, including attacking and shutting down multiple anti-war meetings, and censoring critical artwork, such as the film *Russians at War*.

The NDP and its trade union sponsors have said nothing in defence of Pugliese. This is not surprising. The NDP has long stood foursquare behind Canadian imperialism's wars. This is the party that drove out Ontario MPP Sarah Jama for mild remarks in defence of the Palestinians and which has excluded the pseudo-left Yves Engler from its federal leadership race based on his opposition to Canadian imperialism's war plans. The NDP leadership's preferred choice for leader, Edmonton MP Heather McPherson, is a staunch supporter of the Ukraine war and frequent participant in Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) activities.

The union bureaucracy has joined together with the Carney government in a corporatist alliance to crush opposition on the shop floor to its war on workers' rights and living standards, the necessary domestic component of the war drive abroad. There is no "peace constituency" within the ruling class, and there is no constituency which defends democratic rights.

The only viable program to defend both democratic rights and oppose imperialist war is socialist internationalism—the fight to mobilize the Canadian and international working class to establish workers' power and put an end to capitalism, the outmoded nation-state system, and the domination of society by a predatory oligarchy.



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