

Canadian Armed Forces Must Do More to Screen Out Far-right Extremists

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Given that people who espouse neo-Nazi ideology are attracted to the military, it is disappointing to learn what a poor job the generals do to uncover and expel them. Or perhaps the inaction reflects a deeper problem.

A recent stream of stories about right wing extremists in the Canadian military prompted the leadership to scramble to get ahead of the story. But, the Chief of the Defence Staff's effort to simply blame low-ranking individual members was neither convincing, nor satisfying.

Ricochet [reported](#) that three soldiers in Alberta operated an online white supremacist military surplus store that glorifies white ruled Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

VICE [concluded](#) that Nova Scotia reservist Brandon Cameron was a prominent member of the neo-Nazi Atomwaffen Division.

The three founders of Québec anti-Islam/immigrant "alt right" group La Meute are ex-military. Radio-Canada found that [75 members](#) of La Meute's private Facebook group were Canadian Forces members.

On Canada Day 2017 five CF members disrupted an indigenous rally in front of a statue of violent colonialist Edward Cornwallis in Halifax. The soldiers were members of the Proud Boys, which described itself as "[a fraternal](#) organization of Western Chauvinists who will no longer apologize for creating the modern world."

The CF's response to these embarrassing stories is to claim these soldiers don't reflect the institution. In a *Toronto Star* article titled "[Right-wing extremism](#) not welcome in Canadian Armed Forces — but 'clearly, it's in here,' says top soldier", John Vance claimed racist individuals slip through "unknown to the chain of command." But, is that answer convincing or does the CF hierarchy share blame for far rightists in the force?

Over the past four years over 1,000 Canadians troops (a rotation of [200 every](#) six months) has deployed to the Ukraine to train a force that includes the [best-organized](#) neo-Nazis in the world. Far right militia members are [part of](#) the force fighting Russian-aligned groups in eastern Ukraine. Five months ago Canada's military attaché in Kiev, Colonel Brian Irwin, [met privately](#) with officers from the Azov Battalion, who use the Nazi "Wolfsangel" symbol and praise officials who helped slaughter Jews during World War II. According to Azov, the Canadian military officials concluded the June briefing by expressing "their hopes for further

fruitful cooperation.”

Sympathy for the far right in Ukraine has been displayed by the CF on other occasions. In February 2016, for instance, “[nearly 200](#) officer cadets and professors of Canada’s Royal Military College” attended a screening of Ukrainians/Les Ukrainiens: God’s Volunteer Battalion, which [praised](#) far right militias fighting in that country.

More generally, Canadians have fundraised for and [joined rightist](#) militias fighting in the Ukraine. For their part, [top politicians](#) have spoken alongside and [marched with](#) members of Ukraine’s Right Sector, which said it was “[defending](#) the values of white, Christian Europe against the loss of the nation and deregionalisation.”

(In a story titled “[US-Funded](#) Neo-Nazis in Ukraine Mentor US White Supremacists” Max Blumenthal recently described how Washington’s support for the far right in the Ukraine has blown back. He reported, “an unsealed FBI indictment of four American white supremacists from the Rise Above Movement (RAM) declared that the defendants had trained with Ukraine’s Azov Battalion, a neo-Nazi militia officially incorporated into the country’s national guard.”)

In addition to supporting fascistic elements in Eastern Europe, the CF’s authoritarian, patriarchal and racist structure lends itself to rightist politics.

Ranging from Private Basic/Ordinary Seaman to General/Admiral, there are [nineteen ranks](#) in the CF. In deference to authority, lower must salute and obey orders from higher ranks. In addition to the hierarchy, the CF has been highly patriarchal. Until 1989 women were excluded from combat roles and the submarine service was only opened to women in 2000. As has been discussed elsewhere, extreme patriarchy represents a sort of [gateway ideology](#) to the far right.

The CF has also been a hot bed of white supremacy. For decades institutional racism was explicit with “coloured applicants” excluded from enlisting in several positions until the 1950s. Despite making up 20 percent of the Canadian population, visible minorities represent [8.2 percent](#) of the CF (it may be slightly higher since some choose not to self-identify). In 2016 three former CF members sued over systemic racism. Their suit claimed that “[derogatory slurs](#), racial harassment and violent threats are tolerated or ignored Victims of racism within the Canadian Forces are forced into isolation, subjected to further trauma and, in many cases, catapulted toward early release.”

Chief of the Defence Staff John Vance’s effort to blame right wing extremism on a few bad apples won’t do. The CF needs to look at how its decisions and culture stimulates right-wing extremism.

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