

# A New Generation of US-trained Extremists Is Fighting Russia. Are We Prepared for the Blowback?

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*US agencies have directly and indirectly trained and empowered Nazis and ultra-nationalists at home and abroad to fight Russians in Ukraine. This program follows the blueprint established by Western intelligence agencies in Afghanistan and Syria.*

From 1978 ([not '79 as many believe](#)), the administration of Jimmy Carter decided to “draw the Russians into the Afghan trap,” [in the words](#) of the President’s National Security Advisor, **Zbigniew Brzezinski**. US intelligence called on its British counterparts to activate networks of Afghan fighters. New generations of extremists joined the fight. Aid, arms, and training poured into Afghanistan. Support increased following the Soviet invasion in December 1979.

Throughout the 1980s, tens of thousands of  *jihadis*  from dozens of Muslim-majority countries were flown into the US, Britain, and Pakistan to receive [training](#) from the CIA, Green Berets, US Marines, and British SAS and MI6. The foreign extremists later rebranded themselves “al-Qaeda” and launched a series of spectacularly bloody attacks on strategically significant targets that provided justification for a global “war on terror” that continues to serve as ideological cover for contemporary US hegemony.

The multi-billion dollar CIA operation to arm and train the so-called freedom fighters, or Afghan mujahedin, was known as Operation Cyclone. Successive administrations repeated the pattern in the 2010s, initiating [Operation Timber Sycamore](#) in a failed effort to depose Bashar al-Assad in Syria and [Operation Mermaid Dawn](#) before it in a successful effort to remove Muammar Gaddafi and destabilize Libya.

Today, the CIA, US Special Forces, and other branches of government are [training](#) regular units in Ukraine. With US support, far-right elements of those units go on to train and recruit for Nazi paramilitary units and gangs. White nationalist Americans are allowed to travel to Ukraine and train paramilitaries and/or receive training, depending on the individual or group. State-corporate media have [confirmed](#) the existence of a major CIA training program involving “irregular” (i.e., terrorist) warfare, but we do not yet know the name of the

operation.

As Alex Rubinstein [reported for The Grayzone](#), corporate US media has promoted known US white nationalists fighting in Ukraine as heroes, while whitewashing their records of murder and political violence. And while the Department of Homeland Security expresses “concern” over potential blowback when these openly fascist combat veterans return to the US, the administration of Joseph Biden appears to be doing nothing to stop them from making their way to the battlefield.

The US program in Ukraine bears such striking similarities to Operation Cyclone it could be dubbed “Cyclone 2.0”. The nature of the proxy war has all but been [admitted](#) by former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and the endgame of regime change in nuclear-armed Russia has been [acknowledged](#) by President Joe Biden.

"Remember, the Russians invaded Afghanistan back in 1980," Hillary Clinton says. "It didn't end well for the Russians...but the fact is, that a very motivated, and then funded, and armed insurgency basically drove the Russians out of Afghanistan." [pic.twitter.com/iirtXl4vz4](https://pic.twitter.com/iirtXl4vz4)

— MSNBC (@MSNBC) [March 1, 2022](#)

In pursuing these objectives, US and British elites are taking a nuclear gamble. As even the DHS has warned, their empowerment of neo-Nazis could open a new chapter in the “war on terror” in which civilians will suffer blowback from battle-hardened extremists – imagine the Buffalo shooter with advanced tactical training. Millions will be considered by authorities to be potential white supremacists, ultranationalists, and Nazis. And under the pretext of fighting white extremism, a new phase of total surveillance and foreign “intervention” might begin in the Caucasus and Baltic regions.

## **Running the ratline to Ukraine behind volunteer non-profit cover**

Typical of the kind of operations taking place, former US Marine **Benjamin Busch**, ex-Infantry Officer **Adrian Bonenberger**, and Iraq War veteran **Matt Gallagher**, traveled to Lviv in Western Ukraine to train dozens of what are [described](#) by US media as Ukrainian civilians. Gallagher [revealed](#) that US intelligence agents were facilitating travel. Border and justice agencies were not obstructing departures and returns.

“(I reached out to) some friends who work in various government jobs, not so much asking them for permission in any kind of official capacity,” Gallagher stated, “but just wanting to know if there were any potential consequences. The almost universal response to that was, as long as they (the people he was training) are actual citizens, as long as this is focused on self-defense, as long as this is not some covert military, paramilitary operation, you’ll be fine. Some fellow Wake Forest [University] graduates [in North Carolina], who I won’t name because they do work for Uncle Sam, were very helpful in collecting information.”

Operations of this sort laid the groundwork for a mass “volunteer” scheme. The creation of an international volunteer force reflects the interests of the Azov Battalion — the Nazi-linked paramilitary unit that has undergone through several name changes (e.g., Azov Movement, Azov Regiment), reportedly de-Nazified, and has supposedly integrated into regular

Ukrainian armed units. In reality, the Azov's political wing, the National Corps (formerly the Patriots of Ukraine), is [described](#) as neo-Nazi by contemporary Western experts and even the [US Department of Justice](#).

In February 2018, Azov [stated](#) on Discord: “[We] will have the foreign legion set up within the next 18 months or so.” Chiding the Ukrainian government for blocking their efforts, the National Corps’ young leader, **Olena Semenyaka**, [said](#): “we hope to create a foreign legion. There we could announce loud and clear when we seek volunteers.” If the far-right Ukrainian puppet government was too soft, Azov leadership did not need to worry because Uncle Sam was there to facilitate the creation of an international volunteer league.

Describing itself as a 501(C)3 non-profit pending (hence no info shows up on the IRS website at the time of writing), Volunteers for Ukraine (VFU) has no overt connections to Azov. It was founded in February 2022 as “United Peacekeepers for Ukraine.” The original website was an extension of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ [International Legion of Ukraine](#) website.

The public relations-minded operatives behind the site evidently decided that the dovish name of the organization (“Peacekeepers”) was not likely to encourage anti-Russian fighters to volunteer, so they changed it to Volunteers for Ukraine. At the time of writing, the VFU website features images of protestors holding signs that include “Kill Putin...” and “Putin = Hitler”—a rather stark departure from peacekeeping.

The new site puts [names and faces](#) to the organization, including the professed founder, David Ribardo; a former US Infantry Officer and Afghanistan War veteran. Despite the imagery and recent references to combat, Ribardo [claims](#) that VFU is a “humanitarian aid organization.”

VFU’s Chief Operations Officer is combat veteran Phillip Chatham, a former Diplomatic Security Missions leader for numerous US lawmakers. “As an In-Country Operations Manager he maintained facility clearances with multiple intelligence agencies,” says the site. The organization is also run by numerous veterans and PR specialists. Promoting VFU on CNN, another veteran, “Seth,” [described](#) working with refugees in Poland thanks to “some very gracious donations from some sponsors.”

This offers insight into how such operations are run: anonymous major donors operate veteran pipelines to Ukraine in neighboring countries. Ribardo [says](#) that his job includes vetting volunteers to weed out fantasists, “combat tourists,” and extremists, ensuring that only well-trained US veterans enlist.

The number of veterans who have volunteered is not disclosed, but Ribardo says that the figures are unlike anything seen “since World War Two.”

## **Extremists and accelerationists: “We’re gonna send home a lot of bodybags”**

Other Americans fighting in Ukraine’s regular units [included](#): Dalton Kennedy, a member of North Carolina’s branch of the white supremacist Patriot Front; David Kleman of Georgia who has been photographed sporting Nazi imagery; and Army veteran [David Plaster](#) of Missouri. According to British [press reports](#), Plaster has trained “thousands of Ukrainians in tactical medicine,” and headed a team that included even elderly veterans, like former

Marine Dave Eggen, who [said](#) of Russians: “We are going to send home a lot of bodybags.”

One such figure [told](#) BuzzFeed that they were questioned by federal agencies but still allowed to travel. “I tell them I don’t have anything to hide. Then they let me go. Every time.” In addition to the above fighters, known fascists are signing up to fight.

By March this year, at least [3000 US citizens](#) were allegedly on the Ukrainian battlefield. In April, John T. Godfrey, the State Department’s Acting Coordinator for Counterterrorism, [said](#) of American extremists going to fight: “when they return, they have skill – they typically come back more radicalized than when they left ... [T]hey do have hard skills that they are able to, in some cases, use in attacking targets domestically.” In intelligence circles, this is called “blowback.”

In April, I filed a freedom of information request with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to obtain documents on travelers to Ukraine and its neighbors, including Georgia and Poland, from 2014 to the present. The aim was to measure the size of “Cyclone 2.” From logs and incident reports that had come to the attention of the DHS, I wanted to know how many people had been stopped and questioned about their trips by federal or local authorities. The DHS unlawfully ignored my request, as [they have a habit](#) of doing: no acknowledgement, no delayed response, nothing.

Had the department answered, it might have confirmed the story of people like “Alex”: a US armed forces veteran who was connected to Ukraine by an anonymous online account. “Alex” ended up in the extremist-heavy Shyrokyne (near Mariupol), fought with Ukraine’s openly fascist party the Right Sector, and ended up recruiting other Americans for the Azov Battalion. (The [source](#) is the US and British intelligence cut-out, Bellingcat.)

*Newsweek* encountered similar obstructions. It [noted](#) that Azov’s political wing, the National Corps, has been connected to the US white supremacist Rise Above Movement, Germany’s Third Path, Italy’s Casa Pound, and other extremist groups. In their efforts to assess the scale of such connections in the US, *Newsweek* reporters approached the Department of Justice, FBI, and DHS for comment. Silence was the answer.

*Newsweek* pointed to Cossack House in Kiev as the main Azov recruiting center. Loaned to the Azov Battalion by the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, the center’s library includes Nazi literature and is [described](#) by the Azov National Corps leader Semenyaka as “a small state within a state.” The number of Americans currently there is not known.

In addition to white supremacists, members of accelerationist groups — those that want to hasten society’s collapse in order to remold it in their image — are also present in Ukraine.

Former Marine **Mike Dunn** from Virginia is an informant and once-influential figure in the politically fluid Boogaloo Bois, having commanded its Last Sons of Liberty Faction. “There hasn’t been much activity in the Boogaloo movement since I walked away,” he [says](#). After being exposed as an informant, Dunn disappeared from the scene only to reappear in February this year announcing his intention to fight in Ukraine via Poland by signing up to an undisclosed recruiting station.

“I wouldn’t say that I am necessarily trying to advance the cause of the Boogaloo movement ... But I will say that the Boogaloo movement is going to be represented over there.”

But this makes little sense. Who would follow a fink to Ukraine, except for mercenaries and fellow feds? Also, didn't Dunn leave the movement, so how could he represent it in Ukraine? "I have a few that are following me there, I have one going with me there," he [says](#).

**Henry Hoeft**, a former US Army Infantryman and Boogaloo Boy from Ohio, was cautioned by the FBI against fighting in Ukraine, but was simultaneously advised by the Bureau to call the US Embassy if he got into trouble. Hoeft [says](#):

"I get it. They don't want to be implicated if Russia harms any of us, and they don't want to escalate the conflict by saying that they're sending American soldiers over." (See also Hoeft's [Grayzone interview](#).)

Dunn, the Boogaloo former leader and informant, [confirmed](#) his presence in Washington DC during the January 6 "Stop the Steal" rally, but claims that he arrived late and did not participate in storming the Capitol. The Ukrainian Right Sector's Serhiy Dubynin, an influential media figure working for the major Ukrainian channel, Inter, was also at the Capitol that day, signifying that the DHS-FBI "open-door" policy included Ukrainian extremists who would network in the US and vice versa. Dubynin was [photographed](#) with Jake Chansley; the [highly-decorated](#) US Navy veteran and self-styled "QAnon Shaman." Dubynin was [heard](#) urging the Stop the Steal demonstrators to escalate from peaceful protest to violence: "Come on! ... Do it!"

Among the tales of intrigue from Jan 6 is what was Ukrainian Serhiy Dubynin (Russian sp: Sergei Dybynyn), a member of the neo-Nazi Ukrainian paramilitary 'The Right Sector', doing at the [#CapitolRiots](#) seen in a Happy Snap w/ Jake 'The Shaman' Angeli? [#CapitolHunters](#) See below 1/ [pic.twitter.com/eE1RXBgXvK](https://pic.twitter.com/eE1RXBgXvK)

— Nate Thayer (@nate\_thayer) [April 21, 2021](#)

## **Fascists and Satanists bring their "fetish for death" to Ukraine**

Between 2015 and '16, several American extremists went to Ukraine to enlist in regular units. Others formed a Right Sector paramilitary spinoff which [according](#) to colleagues "had a fetish for death and torture." Pluto being the Roman god of hell. Their unit was called Task Force Pluto (TFP), named for the Roman god of death, and was led by a US Army deserter-turned-mercenary, Craig Lang, who had also worked as a contractor for the Ukrainian military. Lang operated alongside Brian Boyenger, an Iraq War veteran who served as a sniper in Ukraine. Lang [recruited Americans](#) for Ukraine and Boyenger vetted them.

Other TFP members included former Marines Quinn Rickert and Santi Pirtle. The two compiled video evidence of Lang torturing and murdering a local man as well as beating and drowning a young female (age unknown), as an Austrian called Benjamin Fischer — [nicknamed](#) "Bin Laden" — [allegedly](#) administered adrenaline injections to keep her conscious during the torture. The Department of Justice requested the evidence from their Ukrainian counterparts.

By 2017, a US military deserter, Alex Zwiefelhofer, had joined Lang via the Right Sector in Ukraine. The pair had planned to fight al-Shabaab in Sudan and the Venezuelan military. Upon questioning Zwiefelhofer, North Carolinian authorities discovered child porn on his

phone. (The UK-based satanic group, the Order of Nine Angles and its Tempel ov Blood (sic, ToB) offshoot in the US infiltrate secular far-right groups and [encourage child rape](#), possibly as a honeytrap on behalf of the security services).

Influenced by the [SIEGE philosophies](#) of the elderly Nazi [pedophile](#) James Mason (not to be confused with the late actor), the Atomwaffen Division (AWD, now called the National Socialist Order) was an apocalyptic-accelerationist group founded in 2015 and disbanded five years later. Mason [bragged](#) of there being “a lot of action in Ukraine ... That’s pretty impressive.”

Private First Class Jarrett Smith, stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, was a fan of Atomwaffen and a member of the Feuerkrieg Division, founded in the Baltics in late-2018. Smith was also a self-proclaimed satanist, likely connected to the ToB. That group’s leader, Joshua Caleb Sutter, was an [FBI informant](#) whose seemed determined to infiltrate and “satanize” Nazi groups with the aim of [destroying them from within](#).

Before joining the Army, Smith was [planning](#) to go to Ukraine to fight with the Azov Battalion via his connections to Craig Lang. Before he could go, Smith was set up by an undercover FBI agent and a third party (either an informant or another agent) who put them in touch. The undercover agent contacted Smith through chat forums to ask how to make bombs. In an illustration of how the feds set up fanatical dupes, the agent also [said](#): “Got a liberal texas mayor in my sights (sic)! Boom with that IED [improvised explosive device] and that dude’s dead.”

Via a far-right entity called the [Military Order of Centuria](#), the newly rebranded Azov Movement has been [trained](#) by the militaries of America, Britain, Canada, and France.

US and Canadian military officers meet uniformed members of the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion during a November 2017 multinational training session in Ukraine.

Photos from a deleted page on Azov's website: <https://t.co/08C1FLQ6Ee>  
[pic.twitter.com/5RAlif6OFF](https://t.co/08C1FLQ6Ee)

— Max Blumenthal (@MaxBlumenthal) [March 20, 2022](#)

DHS incident logs note that in December 2018, AWD member Kaleb Cole returned from London with fellow neo-Nazis, Aidan Bruce Umbaugh and Edie Allison Moore. They had visited, among other countries, Ukraine. The DHS [log](#) is heavily redacted. Andrew Dymock (alias Blitz), the leader of Britain’s Sonnenkrieg Division (a unit of the AWD), was a member of the occultist Order of Nine Angles and has been [pictured](#) wearing an Azov Battalion t-shirt.



Neo-Nazi Andrew Dymock (left), sporting an Azov Battalion t-shirt, with a fellow member of Atomwaffen's UK chapter

The Rise Above Movement (RAM) is a network of American fascists, some of whom have been convicted of using violence against leftist demonstrators. In [2018](#), a leading Azov [fascist and killer](#), Sergey Korotkikh, [hosted](#) RAM members in Kyiv. National Corps leader Semenyaka also hosted RAM members Michael Miselis of Lawndale, Benjamin Drake Daley of Redondo Beach, and Robert Rundo of Huntington (Calif.). Later that year as RAM members were charged with violence in the US. FBI Special Agent Scott J. Bierwirth [said](#): "the Azov Battalion ... is believed to have participated in training and radicalizing United States-based white supremacy organizations."

[According](#) to Time magazine, after the white supremacist Brenton Tarrant murdered 51 people in Christchurch, NZ in 2019, "an arm of the Azov movement helped distribute the terrorist's raving manifesto." Among the many countries he [reportedly](#) visited was Ukraine.

Today, the neo-Nazi Wotanjugend (Wotan Youth) [praises](#) Tarrant as a hero and has distributed his manifesto. Indicative of their sympathies, in April 2020 the Azov National Militia leader Cherkas Mykhailenko conducted an [interview](#) with Wotanjugend's Alexei Levkin. The Azov's Nazi recruiting station, Cossack House, has also sold Wotanjugend merchandise.

## **Dire predictions of Ukraine blowback**

US intelligence agencies have allowed an open-door policy for veterans, militia, and fascists to travel to Ukraine and its neighbors to kill as many Russian soldiers as possible. The FBI monitors some of the combatants, intervenes in some cases, but typically does nothing. The DHS allows the foreign fighters to travel and return with minimal obstruction. The US charity, Volunteers for Ukraine, is one of the organizations that provides a veneer of legitimacy for the operations that otherwise include extremists.

In Ukraine, meanwhile, US Special Forces are training the National Guard and other regular

units, thereby providing a further layer of professional cover. However, with US training, some of these regulars go on to train far-right and Nazi paramilitaries; some Ukrainian, some American. The American fascists return home with the potential to use that training against domestic targets.

Former FBI agent turned consultant, Ali Soufan, [notes](#) that in the 1990s, the Afghan Taliban took advantage of constant conflict in the Central Asian country. “Pretty soon the extremists took over. The Taliban was in charge. And we did not wake up until 9/11. This is the parallel now with Ukraine,” Soufan said.

A 2021 report by the Military Academy West Point’s Combating Terrorism Center reinforced his point, [stating](#) that the Ukraine conflict “served as a powerful accelerator” for global white supremacy.

Also that year, Elissa Slotkin, chair of the Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism [declared](#): “As a former CIA officer who has looked at foreign terrorist organizations in the Middle East most of my career, I was struck by the threat these white supremacist groups pose, the amount of contact they have with extremists in the U.S., the minimal intelligence and diplomatic reporting we have on these groups, and the relative lack of review taken by the U.S. Government.”

Slotkin recommended thirteen white supremacist-extremist organizations including the Azov Battalion be banned. Today, Azov earns gushing praise in Western media and Slotkin is an [ardent proponent](#) of massive arms shipments to the Ukrainian military that hosts it.

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