

The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming! — Again

By [Yves Engler](#)

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The media wants Canada to give more weapons, military trainers and other support to Ukrainians seeking conflict with Russia.

“[Canada](#) faces criticism for ‘soft’ response to Ukraine amid Russia threat”, noted The Canadian Press on Tuesday while a Globe and Mail article was headlined “[Trudeau’s dithering on Ukraine should fool no one](#)”. After Trudeau announced an expansion of Canada’s military mission in the Ukraine on Wednesday, reporters questioned why more arms weren’t being sent and Global published “[Canada will](#) not send Ukraine weapons but boost cyber support, training mission.”

The media’s claim that the Liberals are “soft” on Russia conflicts with the facts, which even US establishment outlets recognize. On Tuesday *Foreign Policy* published “[Why Britain, Canada Are So Forward-Leaning on Ukraine](#)”. The story noted that Ottawa has “taken a more hawkish approach against Russia in the crisis compared to other NATO allies.”

While the current crisis has many facets to it — some of which I detail in “[Maybe](#) the story is more complex than Russia bad, Canada good” — one starting point was the right-wing nationalist EuroMaidan movement that overthrew president Viktor Yanukovich, who was oscillating between the European Union and Russia. The US/Canadian-backed coup in 2014 divided the Ukraine politically, geographically and linguistically (Russian is the mother tongue of 30% of Ukrainians and as much as 75% of those in eastern cities). The largely Russian-speaking east protested the ouster of Yanukovich who was from the region. The Donbass region in the east broke from Kyiv’s control in a war that has left over 10,000 dead.

In response to the conflict in the east and Moscow seizing the predominately Russian Crimea, the US, Canada and Britain have spent lavishly building up the Ukrainian military. Through Operation UNIFIER 200 Canadian troops have been working with Ukrainian soldiers on military engineering, explosive-device disposal, sniper training, etc. since 2015. In March 2017 the Liberals expanded UNIFIER’s mandate, [easing](#) restrictions that required the Canadians to stay in the western half of Ukraine, away from the fighting in the east. On

Tuesday *Foreign Policy* reported that Canada's training mission "has also become more expansive in geographical terms than the U.S. effort, which has long been centered in western Ukraine. Canadian units can go to places like Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, and Odessa that are mostly untouched by other NATO militaries. The ability to send forces to study Ukraine's modernizing military has allowed Canadian troops to expand their training from low-level tactical drills to the education courses given to Ukrainian troops." On Wednesday the Trudeau government announced an expansion of UNIFIER and further loosening of restrictions on Canadian military trainers.

Canadian officials have openly stated that Operation UNIFIER is directed at Russia. During a 2017 parliamentary debate about UNIFIER defence minister Harjit Sajjan said, "[through](#) Operation UNIFIER, we sent a clear signal of deterrence to Russia." Another aim of Operation UNIFIER is to help "[modernize](#) the Ukrainian Armed Forces", noted Sajjan, so the country could join NATO. To support Ukraine's possible accession to the alliance, Canada has [supported](#) the NATO-Ukraine Joint Working Group on Defence Reform and Canada shared the role of NATO Contact Point Embassy in Kyiv.

The Liberals also equipped the Ukrainian military, donating tens of millions of dollars' worth of [helmets, vehicles](#), clothing and bulletproof vests. In December 2017 the Liberals [added Ukraine](#) to Canada's Automatic Firearms Country Control List, which allowed companies to export weapons to that country with little restriction. In 2019, Winnipeg based PGW Defence Technologies delivered [\\$1 million](#) worth of heavy caliber sniper rifles to the Ukrainian military. Through a memorandum of understanding Ottawa signed with Kyiv a Canadian company, supported by the crown-owned Canadian Commercial Corporation, is helping [build up](#) Ukrainian ammunition production.

To strength military ties the two countries signed a [Defence Cooperation](#) Agreement in April 2017. Three months earlier the Liberals appointed former Assistant Deputy Minister at National Defence, Jill Sinclair, to Ukraine's Defence Reform Advisory Board. "[This representative](#) provides strategic advice on defence reform to Ukraine's Minister of Defence and senior officials", noted Global Affairs.

In July 2018 International Development Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau was the first G7 minister to travel to the line of contact between the warring factions in the East of Ukraine. Two years earlier Trudeau traveled to Kyiv to sign a free-trade agreement. During the visit the Prime Minister said Canadian troops were preparing Ukrainian soldiers to "[liberate](#)" its "territory". At that time Ukrainian troops were actively fighting secessionist forces in the east of the country.

The Liberals effectively deny the legitimate grievances of the predominantly Russian-speaking population in eastern Ukraine who revolted against the ultra-nationalist government in Kyiv that took power after the Canadian backed overthrow of Yanukovich. In response to a March 2017 question about whether Canada saw the conflict in eastern Ukraine as a separatist movement or Russian aggression Sinclair told a Ukrainian press outlet, "[I think](#) Canada has been clear since the outset of Russian aggression against Ukraine that it's Russian aggression against Ukraine, in Crimea and in the East."

For her part, former foreign minister Freeland framed the conflict in eastern Ukraine as a global battle between good and evil. In November 2019 she declared that Ukraine was at the "[forefront](#) of the struggle between democracy and authoritarianism" and that "modern

Ukraine is the country where the struggle is ongoing and the future of the rules-based international order and genuine democracy in the world will be determined.”

Ottawa’s words and actions have emboldened far-right militarists responsible for hundreds of deaths in Eastern Ukraine. [Far right](#) militia members were part of the force fighting Russian-aligned groups in eastern Ukraine and Canadians troops have trained a force that includes the best-organized neo-Nazis in the world. In June 2018 Canada’s military attaché in Kiev, Colonel Brian Irwin, [met privately](#) with officers from the Azov battalion, who used the Nazi “Wolfsangel” symbol and praised officials who helped slaughter Jews and Poles during World War II. According to Azov, Canadian military officials concluded the briefing by expressing “their hopes for further fruitful cooperation.” A September report from an Institute at George Washington University [revealed](#) that the far-right Centuria boasted about being trained by Canadian troops in the Ukraine. The report detailed Centuria members making Nazi salutes, praising SS units and promoting white supremacy.

Canada has also funded, equipped and trained the neo-Nazi infiltrated National Police of Ukraine, which was founded after Yanukovych was overthrown. The post Maiden Ukrainian government included a number of neo-Nazis. During his 2016 trip to Ukraine Trudeau was photographed with Andriy Parubiy, Ukrainian Parliament speaker, who had a [background](#) with the far right and was accused of praising Hitler.

As part of its alignment with Ukraine against Russia the Liberals have refused to back a number of UN resolutions opposed to glorifying Nazism, neo-Nazism and racial discrimination. On November 19, 2015, they [voted](#) against a UN General assembly resolution critical of the aforementioned subject supported by 126 states. The US, Palau and Ukraine were the only other countries to vote against the resolution titled “[Combating](#) glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.” In subsequent years the Liberals have [abstained](#) on a similar resolution.

To a large extent Ottawa and Washington have used the Ukraine as a proxy to weaken Russia. Despite the fact the Cold War ended decades ago, the Russian bogeyman remains an effective tool that supporters of the US Empire are eager to employ.

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