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A Liberal Hand in Hand with Nazis: Chrystia Freeland in Ukraine



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Become a

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For progressives, foreign policy is one of the most difficult tasks of government to put ideals into action. Some decisions are relatively easy, like expanding intake of refugees from climate disasters, wars, or oppressive governments, or pressuring our allies to adopt better labour practices and workers' rights.

But no one can leave the Great Games of geopolitics unsoiled from the filth of compromise with some form of brutality. Worse, geopolitics is not a field from which a country and its leadership can opt out. As long as some play aggressive geopolitics, everyone else must stay on the

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One such brutal battlefield of today's Great Games is Ukraine. There, Canada, and particularly one of Canada's central leaders Chrystia Freeland, has embraced the mud and blood of geopolitical empire-building and war. As Foreign Minister, our current Deputy Prime Minister has sullied herself and Canada with her support for violent, radical, racist nationalist movements in Ukraine.

When the Geopolitical Can Be Personal

These are the foreign policy shenanigans into which Canada and our state's foreign policy had to step. The Canadian government's alliance with the European Union and other democratic states and parties in Europe, as well as previous support for ending autocracy in the former USSR, meant that we were obligated to take some stand on the war in Ukraine.

The Liberal government extended the same military training, funding, and weapons sales program that Harper began, and as Foreign Minister, Freeland was in charge of maintaining that relationship. But there is also a personal element in Freeland's own upbringing that makes Ukraine important to her: She is the child of a Ukrainian immigrant.

This writer is very familiar with the sentiments that attach the child of an immigrant to the country of their heritage. Both of us have a set of grandparents who migrated with their young children from homelands left destitute after the Second World War. Toddler Halyna Chomiak left war-ravaged Eastern Europe with her parents for Edmonton, and a few years later, a boy named Michael Riggio left the poverty of southern Italy with his parents for similar opportunities in Montréal. Just as I grew up knowing the geography and culture of Calabria, Chrystia Freeland would have known the same of Lviv. Freeland's mother Chomiak spent her life as an activist for Ukrainian democracy, working with western Canada's Ukrainian community, and would have influenced her daughter similarly.

Before her political career began, Freeland may very well have looked upon the rise of Ukraine's billionaire kleptocrat Viktor Yanukovich with the same disdain that I have for Italy's billionaire sex criminal and recurring Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, or for the leader of the racist and neo-fascist League Party Matteo Salvini. Our personal connection to, respectively, Ukraine and Italy, expresses itself in the contempt for those who would rule the lands of our heritage with violence and oppression.

But the tools of state geopolitics – military support, weapons sales, cyberwarfare, espionage, disinformation, trade and financial sanctions, and so on – are themselves methods of oppression. When those tools are at your disposal, it requires the most self-discipline to control how these are used.

What betrays Freeland's apparent lack of self-discipline is how her use of geopolitical tools to fight the Russian military and Russian-allied militias in Ukraine, boosted ultra-nationalist militias whose goals include the cleansing and erasure of ethnic minorities from Ukraine.

The Inevitable Awkwardness of Ukrainian Alliances

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which grew as Soviet policy emptied Ukraine of food, an intentional famine that killed more than 10-million people now known as the Holodomor. This was Stalin's most brutal attempt to subjugate Ukraine to rule from Moscow, using the tools of genocide.

The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists formed in response to Stalin's state terror, but shared with the Soviets many of the same totalitarian political principles. The OUN's extreme ethnic nationalist ideology held that Russian-speaking people and Jews had no place in Ukrainian society. The OUN was also openly fascist: their leader's official position was Vozhd, warlord, or absolute military ruler.

With their goal of liberation from Russia and an ideology of ethnic purity and violent anti-Semitism, the OUN under Stepan Bandera in the 1940s were enthusiastic partners of the Nazi invasion. Bandera declared independence after helping the Nazi army push the Soviet army out of Ukraine, establishing the new state's capitol in the OUN heartland, Lviv. Bandera's stand for an independent Ukraine, rather than integration into Germany's European empire, landed him in a Nazi prison cell for years.

As the USSR took full control over Ukraine from the end of the Second World War, the OUN was forced into exile, and because of their anti-communism found a home in the Ukrainian diaspora of Western Europe and North America. The Canadian government throughout the 1950s and 1960s encouraged OUN members and affiliates to immigrate. The policy's purpose was to dilute the tendency to left-wing political organizing in the Ukrainian-Canadian community.

Chrystia Freeland's mother, Halyna Chomiak, was one of those socialist activists, a union organizer and NDP candidate for a federal seat in Edmonton in 1988 (Chomiak came in second). Many other Ukrainians who arrived in the same era as Chomiak were far from progressive, including young men who were employed as violent enforcers against labour unions in the natural resources sectors.

Those same nationalist Ukrainians who fled the post-Stalin USSR include those who erected a monument to the Ukrainian branch of the Waffen SS who fought Stalin. These soldiers carried out multiple massacres of Jews, Russian-speakers, Roma, and other ethnic minorities throughout the German invasion. The memorial stands proudly, if controversially, in Oakville, Ontario, at the city's St. Volodymyr Ukrainian Cemetery.

The Enemy of My Enemy Is Therefore My Friend

That the geopolitics of the West is always and entirely oriented against fascism is, as we progressives generally know, a lie. Progressive luminaries like Hannah Arendt, for example, championed the United States as a beacon of democracy after its defeat of Nazi Germany, but it was still a society built on racist segregation and remains so today. Throughout the Cold War and War on Terror, successive US governments have given substantial material aid to fascist and authoritarian militants and leaders around the world, as long as they stood up to Russian influence, and in this century, as long as they suppressed Islamist militancy (or were good at pretending so).

Likewise, Canada is a country that today can pride itself on having avoided (for now) the authoritarian backslide of so many of our ostensible geopolitical allies like the United States.

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populations.

As such, for a Canadian politician to take the lead in defence of democratic allies under assault requires a healthy dose of cognitive dissonance, if not wilful blindness. Chrystia Freeland's enthusiastic support of any Ukrainian militant group opposed to the Russian invasion required blindness along many such vectors.

It was Freeland who coordinated millions of dollars in arms sales from Canadian weapons plants not only to Ukraine's government, but also Ukrainian nationalist militias. Those militias include the Azov Battalion, Dniepro Battalion, Donbas Battalion, and Aidar Battalion, each of whom has been credibly documented as carrying out massacres of Russian-speaking and Jewish Ukrainian civilians. Under Freeland's watch, Canadian military officers also trained the Azov Battalion in guerrilla combat. One officer in charge of training the ethnic nationalist militia was Major Oksana Kuzyshyn, who is also an influential member of the lobby group the Ukrainian-Canadian Congress.

The rise of anti-semitism in Ukraine

Since the 2019 election of President Volodymyr Zelensky, the militants who Freeland was happy to arm heavily as Foreign Minister, have begun turning against the Ukrainian government. Azov Battalion members carried out a genuine pogrom against Roma Ukrainians in the capitol Kyiv, burning their homes to the ground, murdering men and boys, and sexually assaulting women and girls. Their reasoning for doing so, was that the city police refused to massacre the Roma themselves.

Not only that, but the militiamen that Freeland happily armed with Canadian guns and combat knowledge to fight Russian invaders have been threatening Zelensky himself. Not only is Zelensky the first Jewish-Ukrainian President of the country, the centre of his election platform last year was brokering peace with Russia and ending the war in Donetsk and Luhansk. Petro Poroshenko, the former President who Zelensky defeated, aggressively prosecuted the war against Russian invaders and insurgents, has bent his messaging to appeal to nationalist militants. Poroshenko has also leaned into anti-Semitic racism, branding Zelensky as the puppet of Jewish billionaires.

The racist militant groups of Ukrainian nationalism are allies of convenience as long as Russian troops occupy Donetsk and Luhansk, and as long as militant guerrillas fight the Ukrainian government to bring the country into Russia's sphere of influence. Canadian leaders are right to support a democratic Ukraine, but the militants that our government arms to bolster Ukraine's alliance with Europe's democracies are not themselves democrats, but the violent vanguard of an ideology of fascism, total war, and ethnic cleansing.

Turning From the Dark Side of Heritage

Stepan Bandera's ethnic nationalist party, the OUN, still exists today under another name: Svoboda, formerly the Social-National Party of Ukraine, whose ideology openly is and always was that kind of national socialism. A fairly minor party, their activists played a noticeable role in the Maidan uprising of 2014, as the only protestors openly committing violence against

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throughout the Russian invasion.

That Chrystia Freeland, as the Foreign Minister of one of the world's more resilient liberal democracies, sold arms and sent Canadian soldiers to train neo-Nazi groups in the name of holding back Russian military aggression, is a serious fault. Her own identity as the child of a Catholic Ukrainian immigrant includes a weakness that made her enthusiastic support for the nationalist battalions more likely than not. Freeland's heritage is the same as Bandera's and his successors in Ukrainian fascism: the city of Lviv, cultural centre of the most European, least Russian-influenced, region of Ukraine.

The cosmopolitan Lviv produced both the fascist guerrilla leader Bandera and the social democratic union organizer Halyna Chomiak. Raised in the relative haven of Peace River and Edmonton in Alberta, Freeland would likely have had a romanticized, idealized picture of Ukrainian liberation. As a member of the comfortable classes, she would not have understood that you can oppose an imperialist invasion of your country while also being a fascist. As a result, Canadian weapons likely helped slaughter and rape hundreds of Roma in the name of an ethnically pure Ukraine, among who yet knows how many other crimes against humanity.

Geopolitics is the field of the greatest, and highest-stakes, political power, where the creation and destruction of whole peoples are at issue. To use this power for democratic ideals is the greatest temptation of state leadership. Yet it is also the field of politics' most grotesque compromises, as when the soldiers of democratic countries arm and train fascist militants to secure a fragile allied democratic state against a different enemy. The romantic view of Ukraine she has clouds the judgement of the former Canadian Foreign Minister.

In the dangerous field of geopolitics, one must often treat the enemy of my enemy as my friend. But all the more frequently, the enemy of my enemy is also my enemy.

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