

Canadian Officials Who Met with Ukrainian Unit Linked to Neo-Nazis Feared Exposure by News Media: Documents

A year before the meeting, Canada's Joint Task Force Ukraine produced a briefing on the Azov Battalion, acknowledging its links to Nazi ideology.

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Canadian officials who met with members of a Ukrainian battalion linked to neo-Nazis didn't denounce the unit, but were instead concerned the media would expose details of the get-together, according to newly released documents.

The Canadians met with and were briefed by leaders from the Azov Battalion in June 2018. The officers and diplomats did not object to the meeting and instead allowed themselves to be photographed with battalion officials despite previous warnings that the unit saw itself as pro-Nazi. The Azov Battalion then used those photos for its online propaganda, pointing out the Canadian delegation expressed "hopes for further fruitful co-operation."

After a journalist asked the Canadian Forces about the Azov social media postings, officers scrambled to come up with a response, according to documents obtained by this newspaper through Access to Information law.

Lt. Col. Fraser Auld, commander of Canada's Joint Task Force Ukraine, warned that a news article might be soon published and could result in questions being asked inside the Canadian government about why such a meeting took place.

A year before the meeting, Canada's Joint Task Force Ukraine produced a briefing on the Azov Battalion, acknowledging its links to Nazi ideology. "Multiple members of Azov have described themselves as Nazis," the Canadian officers warned in their 2017 briefing.

Bernie Farber, head of the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, said the Canadians should have

immediately walked out of the Azov Battalion briefing. "Canadian armed forces personnel do not meet with Nazis; period, full stop," Farber said. "This a horrendous mistake that shouldn't have been made."

Farber said it was also disturbing the Azov unit was able to use the Canadians in propaganda attempts to legitimize its far-right ideology. Besides its support of Nazi ideology, Azov members have been accused of war crimes and torture.

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Featured image: A news broadcast by German ZDF station showed soldiers of the Ukraine Azov Battalion with nazi symbols on their helmets. PHOTO BY FILES /ZDF station

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