

Questions About About Bucha Massacre

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Save

The West has made a snap judgment about who is responsible for the massacre at the Ukrainian town of Bucha with calls for more stringent sanctions on Russia, but the question of guilt is far from decided, writes Joe Lauria.



Victims in Bucha. (Ukrainian Ministry of Digital Development Mikhail Fedorov/Wikimedia Commons)

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Within hours of news Sunday that there had been a massacre at Bucha, a town 63 kms north of the Ukrainian capital, the verdict was in: Russian troops had senselessly slaughtered hundreds of innocent civilians as they withdrew from the town, leaving their bodies littering the streets.

Unlike their judicial systems, when it comes to war, Western nations dispense with the need for investigations and evidence and pronounce guilt based on political motives: Russia is guilty. Case closed.

Except the case hasn't even been opened yet and the sentence is already being proposed. French President Emmanuel Macron, for instance, has called for Russian coal and oil to be banned from Europe. "There are very clear indications of war crimes," he said on France Inter radio Monday. "What happened in Bucha demands a new round of sanctions and very clear measures, so we will co-ordinate with our European partners, especially with Germany."

Other voices are now perilously calling for the U.S. to go to war with Russia over the incident.

"This is genocide," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told *Face the Nation* on CBS. "Mothers of Russians should see this. See what bastards you've raised. Murderers, looters, butchers," he added on Telegram.

Russia has categorically denied it had anything to do with the massacre.

Where to Start

If there were to be a serious probe, one of the first places an investigator would begin is to map out a timeline of events.

Last Wednesday, all Russian forces left Bucha, according to the Russian Defense Ministry.

This was confirmed on Thursday by a smiling Anatolii Fedoruk, the mayor of Bucha, in a video on the Bucha City Council official Facebook page. The translated post accompanying the video says:

"March 31 – the day of the liberation of Bucha. This was announced by Bucha Mayor Anatolii Fedoruk. This day will go down in the glorious history of Bucha and the entire Bucha community as a day of liberation by the Armed Forces of Ukraine from the Russian occupiers."



Screenshot from Fedoruk Facebook video.

All of the Russian troops are gone and yet there is no mention of a massacre. The beaming Fedoruk says it is a “glorious day” in the history of Bucha, which would hardly be the case if hundreds of dead civilians littered the streets around Fedoruk.

“Russian Defence Ministry denied accusations by the Kiev regime of the alleged killing of civilians in Bucha, Kiev Region. Evidence of crimes in Bucha appeared only on the fourth day after the Security Service of Ukraine and representatives of Ukrainian media arrived in the town. All Russian units completely withdrew from Bucha on March 30, and ‘not a single local resident was injured’ during the time when Bucha was under the control of Russian troops,” the Russian MOD said in a post on Telegram.

What Happened Next?

What happened then on Friday and Saturday? As pointed out in a piece by Jason Michael McCann on *Standpoint Zero*, *The New York Times* was in Bucha on Saturday and did not report a massacre. Instead, the *Times* said the withdrawal was completed on Saturday, two days after the mayor said it was, and that the Russians left “behind them dead soldiers and burned vehicles, according to witnesses, Ukrainian officials, satellite images and military analysts.”

The *Times* said reporters found the bodies of six civilians. “It was unclear under what circumstances they had died, but the discarded packaging of a Russian military ration was lying beside one man who had been shot in the head,” the paper said. It then quoted a Zelensky adviser, who said:

“The bodies of people with tied hands, who were shot dead by soldiers lie in the streets,’ the adviser, Mykhailo Podolyak, said on Twitter. ‘These people were not in the military. They had no weapons. They posed no threat.’ He included an image of a scene, photographed by Agence France-Presse, showing three bodies on the side of a road, one

with hands apparently tied behind the back. The New York Times was unable to independently verify Mr. Podolyak's claim the people had been executed."

It is possible that on Saturday the full extent of the horror had yet to emerge, and that even the mayor was unaware of it two days before, though photos now show many of the bodies out in the open on the streets of the town, something that presumably would be difficult to miss.

In Bucha, the *Times* was close to the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion, whose soldiers appear in the newspaper's photographs. In his piece, McCann suggests that Azov may be responsible for the killings:

"Something very interesting then happens on [Saturday] 2 April, hours before a massacre is brought to the attention of the national and international media. The US and EU-funded Gorshenin Institute online [Ukrainian language] site *Left Bank* announced that:

'Special forces have begun a clearing operation in the city of Bucha in the Kyiv region, which has been liberated by the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The city is being cleared from saboteurs and accomplices of Russian forces.'

The Russian military has by now completely left the city, so this sounds for all the world like reprisals. The state authorities would be going through the city searching for 'saboteurs' and 'accomplices of Russian forces.' Only the day before [Friday], Ekaterina Ukrainsiva, representing the town council authority, appeared on an information video on the *Bucha Live* Telegram page wearing military fatigues and seated in front of a Ukrainian flag to announce 'the cleansing of the city.' She informed residents that the arrival of the Azov battalion did not mean that liberation was complete (but it was, the Russians had fully withdrawn), and that a 'complete sweep' had to be performed."

Ukrainsiva was speaking a day after the mayor had said the town was liberated.

By Sunday morning, the world learned of the massacre of hundreds of people. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said: "We strongly condemn apparent atrocities by Kremlin forces in Bucha and across Ukraine. We are pursuing accountability using every tool available, documenting and sharing information to hold accountable those responsible." President Joe Biden on Monday called for a "war crimes" trial. "This guy is brutal, and what's happening in Bucha is outrageous, and everyone's seen it. I think it's a war crime."

The Bucha incident is a critical moment in the war. An impartial investigation is warranted, which probably only the U.N. could conduct. The Azov Battalion may have perpetrated revenge killings against Russian collaborators, or the Russians carried out this massacre. (Once again the Pentagon is dampening the war hysteria, saying it can't confirm or deny Russia was responsible.)

A rush to judgment is dangerous, with irresponsible talk of the U.S. directly fighting Russia. But it is a rush to judgment that we are getting.

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