**The massacre in Bucha**

BY R A F I A Z A K A R I A 2022-04-06

PAKISTAN is in a state of shock these days, but beyond this country`s borders, the world is also in great turmoil. While we were living out our old script of meddling and dissolving, the Russian troops that had been occupying the area around Ukraine`s capital, Kyiv, withdrew.

Vladimir Putin, the president of the Russian Federation, announced that Russia would be withdrawing from the northern portions of Ukraine and redeploying in the east and south. There, it appears, the Russians will focus on entrenching themselves in the Donbass and Crimea regions to sustain their takeover of the port city of Mariupol, which even a Red Cross team was stopped from entering.

So it was over the weekend that the Ukrainians were able to re-enter the northern and eastern suburbs of their capital city of Kyiv. The fighting there had been concentrated in the suburbs of Irpin and the town of Bucha. In the latter town, a scene of utter mayhem awaited the Ukranians. Hundreds of bodies of civilians were scattered on what had been the city`s streets.

From the images released, the bodies had not been there for very long. Some corpses had their hands tied behind their backs, suggesting that they had first been taken captive and then killed. Most had been shot in the back or the head or chest at close range, meaning that they had not died as collateral damage from some larger military operation.

When the Ukrainian soldiers went into homes whose doors had been smashed in, they found more dead people. Some of the dead were found in backyards, where allegedly Russian forces had taken them and shot them.

It was not just human devastation that the Russians had lef t behind. Irpin and Bucha had both been city suburbs, where the vast majority of people lived in high-rise apartments. These apartments had been the targets of Russian artillery and shelling and were bombed-out husks, their f acades rising up like ghosts from scorched land.

Some had more left than others, and the belongings of once normal lives tables and chairs and toys could still be seen. Many others looked likethey could never have been inhabited by humans at all, their dark and foreboding silhouettes part of some unearthly and evil presence.

In a TV interview on CNN, a soldier from a Ukrainian unit appeared aghast. There were too many bodies for them to collect in their initial patrol of the city, he said. It would take several units to clear out the city and properly dispose of the dead.

Over the weekend, a mass grave was also discovered. It is alleged that hundreds of bodies were hastily buried in the trench-like structure. The mouth ofthe grave was not covered and the bodies, some in body bags or trash bags, others just thrown in, could still be seen.

It was unknown who had dug the grave, but the people in it were definitely Ukrainians people who had decided to stay in the city and protect their property, instead of fleeing towards the border with most of the population. Relatives who had come with the troops sat crying at the edge of the grave, afraid that their missing loved ones were somewhere in it. Their despair matched the despair of the environs, the stunning unreality of evil underscored, the grimness of it all.

In the af termath of this massacre in Bucha, many countries, most of them allied with Ukraine, have expressed their shock and grief over what happened there. Several of the Baltic states have expelled Russian diplomats and severed diplomatic contacts with the Russian Federation. A few other countries have indicated that they may do the same.However, many have also demanded investigations into the massacre, suggesting that they may not believe entirely the claim that it was the Russians who perpetrated the crime. In an interview, the former CNN bureau chief in Moscow stressed that no one actually `saw` the Russians commit the crimes in Bucha. Before any questions of justice could be resolved, there needed to be a proper investigation in order to identify the culprits.

Her statement represents what happens in war.

Both sides fall to new depths in the depravity and inhumanity they are willing to inflict on the other.

Ukraine is being supplied with literally billions of dollars of arms and munitions by the West, notably the United States. At the same time, the US appears to be sceptical of what it sees as Ukrainian attempts to draw it deeper into the conflict in a way that may be seen as escalatory by Russia, and consequently provoke a global conflict.

Human suffering should be the ultimate instigator of action. It was imagined that the international human rights community would enable this when it was put together some 80 years ago. The war in Ukraine shows the idealism of that perspective. If the war in Ukraine has proven anything, it is that nations continue to act according to their own interests, even when those are immoral or amoral. This means that even if it does have incontrovertible evidence that the crimes in Bucha were carried out by Russians, the US will not publicly acknowledge this.

Instead, America will continue to calculate which of its current or former allies will line up on its side were a global conflict to break out eventually. It is not just the Russian troops that are realigning at this moment, turning to claim the south and east of Ukraine. The US, too, is pulling many strings behind the stage of conflict: meddling, intervening, questioning, tempting and seducing to see how many of the players it can attract to its own side.  The writer is an attorney teaching constitutional law and political philosophy.

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