



The West Must Help Ukraine Free its People to Stop Russian Atrocities

By Nataliya Bugayova
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Helping Ukraine liberate its people and territories is the only way to stop Russian atrocities and prevent future ones. The West must rush the military support that Ukraine needs to do so.

Bucha is an observable microcosm of a deliberate Russian terror campaign against Ukrainians. Similar intentional atrocities are happening throughout Russian-occupied areas in Ukraine. Russia's playbook includes several consistently reported efforts.

Russia revived its "**filtration**" concept in Ukraine. Russian soldiers are executing Putin's bogus order to "denazify" Ukraine. They are forcing civilians in the occupied areas to undergo "filtration" to identify so-called "nazis," which in practice means anyone opposing Russia's unprovoked invasion.

Specifically, Russians have been searching for, kidnapping, torturing, and executing local leaders, activists, and journalists in the occupied areas.¹ The US government warned about Russian lists of Ukrainians to be killed or sent to camps even before Feb 24 invasion.² Russians are continuing to create these lists and target activists.³

Russian forces are also looking for people affiliated with or sympathetic to the Ukrainian defenders. Russian soldiers are checking Ukrainians' phones and documents and even looking for tattoos with Ukrainian symbols, such as the country's coat of arms.⁴ Kremlin media and telegram accounts openly confirm these facts.⁵ Russia is making Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) undergo this filtration process as well.⁶

Russia is forcing refugees, including those deported from Ukraine to Russia against their will, to undergo filtration as Russians are looking for "extremists."⁷ US and Ukrainian officials called out reports about Russian forces taking Ukrainians into "filtration camps" before moving them to Russia.⁸

Russia used similar camps during its brutal wars in Chechnya to establish a state system of terror and intimidate the local population.⁹

Russian forces are also engaged in a broader effort to **target civilians and use terror to force the local population into submission.** Russians are executing unarmed civilians; reports of rape are widespread.¹⁰ Russian forces are targeting civilian infrastructure, including hospitals.¹¹

Russian forces are trapping civilians in Ukrainian cities by blocking and attacking evacuation efforts.¹² Mariupol is one of the most horrific examples but far from the only one.¹³ Russia is also forcibly deporting Ukrainian civilians, including children, from occupied areas to Russia.

Putin's decision to deploy Rosgvardia (Russian National Guard) to Ukraine indicates that population suppression is a clear Russian goal. Rosgvardia is not part of the Russian Armed Forces; it directly reports to Putin and is one of his suppression tools in Russia. Rosgvardia is deployed to the occupied areas, like Kherson, and has been detaining activists, quashing protests, and engaging in other forms of suppression alongside the Russian Armed Forces.¹⁴

Russian atrocities in Ukraine are not a new phenomenon. Russia and the forces it controls have been committing atrocities in Ukraine for the past eight years. A prison, known as “Izolyatsia,” in Donetsk has been a de facto torture camp.¹⁵ Russia has been prosecuting Crimean Tatars on the peninsula for years.¹⁶

Atrocities are a part of the Russian way of war in Ukraine and beyond. Terror is part of the Kremlin's offset efforts to compensate for the limitations of Russia's military power and the lack of value that the Kremlin can offer those it is trying to control—both inside and outside Russia.

Russia cannot control areas in Ukraine without terror. Russia is militarily controlling some places, like Kherson, but it cannot govern them. The locals are resisting Russia's rule. People in Kherson, for example, have been protesting Russian forces and Rosgvardia.¹⁷

Russia has used terror and the indiscriminate killing of civilians in its previous military campaigns in Chechnya and Syria to pacify resistant populations in those areas.¹⁸

Russia will continue terrorizing the population until Ukraine drives Russia out of its land. Russian forces will terrorize Ukrainians in every area Russia seizes. “Denazification” is yet another cover for the Kremlin's decades-long quest to strip Ukraine of its sovereignty. Atrocities will continue as long as Russian forces remain in occupied areas. Whether these areas are Russian-speaking is irrelevant: Mariupol and Kherson have many Russian speakers.

A ceasefire risks expanding Russia's bandwidth to terrorize local populations. Putin's intentions toward Ukraine remain unchanged. He made it clear over the past 20 years that he will accept nothing less than Russian control over Ukraine. The Kremlin will use any ceasefire it offers to adapt, not scale down, its ambitions to erode and ultimately destroy Ukraine's sovereignty.¹⁹

Stopping the fighting will not necessarily stop the killing—it will leave those Ukrainians trapped behind enemy lines unable to defend themselves and will allow Russian forces in Ukraine to focus more on filtration efforts in the areas they occupy.

The West should not try to push Ukraine into a ceasefire or a peace deal for the sake of short-term peace and should instead focus on helping Ukraine win this next phase of the war.

Ukraine can win the next phase of this war with timely and proper Western support. Ukraine has won the first phase of this war and has a chance to win the second one. Russia is regrouping for a major assault in Ukraine's southeast. The outcome of this phase is far from determined, as Russia struggles to amass the combat power necessary to achieve its military objectives in Donbas.²⁰

With proper and timely military aid, Ukraine has a chance to win the second phase by pushing back Russia's offensive and continuing its efforts to liberate Russia-held areas. The Ukrainian government has made clear what military aid it needs from Western leaders. Those needs include tanks, armored vehicles, artillery systems, multi-launch rocket systems, air defense systems, and combat aircraft.²¹

Time is critical: the West must deliver the aid Ukraine needs to defeat the next wave of the Russian offensive before that offensive begins.

Half measures or delays in military aid will prolong the war, increase Putin's chances of winning, and lead to more death and destruction.



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¹ <https://abcnews.go.com/International/kidnapped-ukrainian-mayor-freed-special-operation-ukrainian-government/story?id=83486933>; <https://www.newsweek.com/ukrainian-mayor-killed-execution-style-thrown-pit-troops-report-1694575>;

At least 11 local leaders have been held captive by Russians as of April 3, according to Ukraine officials: https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1875194282667086&id=100005295963148; Ukrainian human rights groups regularly publish lists of activists kidnapped by Russians: <https://www.facebook.com/531592303/posts/10158563572067304/?d=n>; <https://www.businessinsider.com/ukraine-russian-forces-kidnapping-torturing-journalists-reporters-rsf-2022-3#:~:text=In%20the%20occupied%20city%20of,to%20intimidate%20her%20into%20submission> ; <https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/general/816409.html>

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/02/20/ukraine-russia-human-rights/>

³ Russian are trying to coopt locals, such as the mayor of Rubizhne, to get the names of activists in the occupied areas: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/04/6/7337522/> ; <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=981027226112286>; The mayor of Russian-occupied Kherson said that the Russians have kidnapped at least 100 Kherson activists, veterans, and journalists. <https://news.liga.net/politics/news/v-hersone-okkupantam-slili-dannye-veteranov-ato-boytsov-teroborony-i-aktivistov-mer>

⁴ <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-andriivka-killings/31797730.html>; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/03/ukraine-apparent-war-crimes-russia-controlled-areas>

⁵ <https://t.me/milinfo/79098>; <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27374/4567762/>; <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/how-pro-russian-media-corroborates-key-details-of-atrocities-in-ukraine-1.4846451>

⁶ https://t.me/anna_news/25562

⁷ <https://rg.ru/2022/03/31/rossijskaia-policiia-vyivliaet-sredi-bezhencev-s-ukrainy-ekstremistov.html>;

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/07/europe/ukraine-mariupol-russia-deportation-cmd-intl/index.html>

⁸ <https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-by-ambassador-linda-thomas-greenfield-at-a-un-security-council-briefing-on-the-humanitarian-impact-of-russias-war-against-ukraine/>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iooYo8APE9M>

⁹ Human Right Watch documented horrific accounts of Russian ‘filtration camps’ in Chechnya in 2000:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2000/02/17/hundreds-chechens-detained-filtration-camps>

¹⁰ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/ukraine-russian-forces-extrajudicially-executing-civilians-in-apparent-war-crimes-new-testimony/>; https://uk.news.yahoo.com/russia-ukraine-war-rape-bucha-war-crimes-172831878.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly9sLmZhY2Vib29rLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAGKILcFmrjSljYc9Ylq2Eo5XwDSwnjjuK9BgJt3iXiVyArX9gUHa75Uo3w75pCzliuZq8AjvQjFqJoAvB_HaVCW72Fl9FUT2XPVLbLWR3DdsT_Iw6Nr8i62Ok7TLMWyJ4jbL7WYg5riyTu6BkZ_GpKMWCyLsV_5y55YAj-KqeXpr;

<https://www.newsweek.com/russian-soldiers-ukrainian-women-ukraine-kherson-sexual-assault-accusation-1684920>;

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/04/11/world/europe/bucha-terror.html?fbclid=IwAR2Ry6EeueALQtHEcC3dCIxGiab-P-oXpKhCDATmsudnWvc7mEquIjC4xk8>

¹¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-60866669>.amp; https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-25204be08db8868e858f624f851d2ae3?utm_source=Twitter&utm_campaign=SocialFlow&utm_medium=AP

¹² <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/05/europe/ukraine-kherson-russian-occupation-cmd-intl/index.html>;

<https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2022/04/06/ukraine-drone-footage-pleitgen-pkg-lead-vpx.cnn/video/playlists/russia-ukraine-military-conflict/>; <https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/11/europe/ukraine-russia-hostage-bus-drivers-help-people-intl-hnk/index.html>

¹³ Ibid;

Russia’s April 8 missile attack on a crowd of civilians fleeing the war at Kramatorsk train station left at least 50 dead:

<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/08/1091578830/kramatorsk-train-station-russia-rocket-attack-ukraine>

¹⁴ Ukrainian officials reported Rosgvardia detaining 400 Kherson activists and suppressing the protests in the city:
<https://www.pravda dot com.ua/rus/news/2022/03/9/7329762/>;
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/277107997935619>;
<https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-21>;
<https://twitter.com/yarotrof/status/1505879929749217286>; https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1505892871140003842; <https://twitter.com/Liveuamap/status/1505869404726341644>; <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/rossiiskie-voennye-v-kherson/31749937.html>

¹⁵ <https://hir.harvard.edu/donetsks-isolation-torture-prison/>;
There are numerous confessions of Ukrainians who experienced torture in Izolyatsia:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gudFzDrx-c>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5SJUBZsA68>;
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRv_Ui_A4VQ

¹⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/11/14/crimea-persecution-crimean-tatars-intensifies>;
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/ukraine/crimea/>

¹⁷ <https://news dot liga.net/politics/news/v-hersone-okkupantam-slili-dannye-veteranov-ato-boytsov-teroborony-i-aktivistov-mer>; <https://hromadske dot ua/ru/posts/v-hersone-okkupanty-pytalis-razognat-mirnyj-protest-strelboj-smi-soobshayut-o-ranenyh>; <https://www.economist.com/europe/ordinary-ukrainians-are-resisting-vladimir-putins-occupying-force-in-kherson-and-elsewhere/21808101>

¹⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2000/06/01/russian-atrocities-chechnya-detailed>;
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/01/russia/syria-war-crimes-month-bombing-aleppo>

¹⁹ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/risks-russian-ceasefire-offer>

²⁰ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-april-9>

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/zelenskiy.official/posts/3053126458271043>;
https://kim.house.gov/sites/kim.house.gov/files/wysiwyg_uploaded/4.4.2022%20House%20Letter%20to%20POTUS%20ore%20Additional%20Support%20to%20Ukraine.pdf