

German press seizes upon claims of Russian atrocities to demand military escalation

Peter Schwarz
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Atrocity propaganda is one of the most important weapons of modern warfare. The enemy is alleged to have committed bestial crimes, which are either totally invented or greatly exaggerated, to then seek their total destruction. This is the pattern now being followed by the broad campaign about Russian war crimes in Bucha.

As yet, although there is neither reliable information nor any independent investigation, the Ukrainian government and NATO are using the alleged massacre of civilians to burn all bridges leading to a ceasefire and to promulgate the continuation of the war until the complete subjugation of Russia.

What exactly took place in Bucha is not yet clear. The Ukrainian and Russian accounts of events differ diametrically. The Ukrainian government accuses the Russian army of brutally murdering over 400 civilians in the small town near Kiev. The Russian government speaks of a “provocation by the Kiev regime” and claims that no one was harmed in the town until the withdrawal of Russian troops on 30 March.

Photos and video footage show numerous bodies in civilian clothes lying on the roadside. Journalists also confirm they have seen bodies. Who these are and who killed them and when, however, has not yet been clarified. In view of the role similar incidents have played in imperialist war propaganda, the greatest caution is therefore called for.

Let us recall the “Ra?ak massacre,” which was instrumentalised by NATO to justify its war against Yugoslavia in violation of international law. On 15 and 16 January 1999, 40 bodies were found near the village of Ra?ak, and presented by the Western media as evidence of an alleged Serb genocide of Kosovo Albanians. Later, it turned out that the evidence had been manipulated. The actual events have not been clarified to this day, as important documents remain under lock and key.

Even now, the NATO powers immediately instrumentalised the alleged Bucha massacre to intensify the conflict with Russia. President Joe Biden has announced further sanctions and called for a “war crimes trial” against President Vladimir Putin, effectively blocking the path to a negotiated settlement. The European Union also wants to tighten its sanctions against Russia.

The reactions in Germany are particularly ferocious.

Formerly liberal representatives of the affluent middle class, including numerous journalists, are gripped by a veritable war hysteria. For them, sanctions against Russia and military support for Ukraine cannot go far enough.

News and talk shows have degenerated into pure propaganda programmes where dissenting opinions are no longer tolerated. Even ex-Chancellor Angela Merkel and German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who used to be foreign minister, are caught in the crossfire of criticism because they once cultivated diplomatic relations with Putin. Steinmeier has since admitted his “mistake”; Merkel has not, so far.

Green Party Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, a leading voice in German war propaganda, has expelled 40 Russian diplomats from Germany in response to Bucha. The German government, like its US counterpart, is supplying additional weaponry to Ukraine.

The double standards of this campaign break all bounds. Journalists, who for decades have defended every war crime committed by the USA and NATO and downplayed the historical crimes of the Nazis, are discovering a new dimension of war crimes in Bucha.

Typical is a comment by the head of the politics department of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Stefan Kornelius. What was visible in Bucha, he writes, “cannot even begin to be described with the term crime and makes clear the brutal, bestial nature of this slaughter.” The Russian invasion was “aimed solely at destruction and death,” it defied “all notions of atrocity.” Ukraine was suffering “not a war of aggression” but “a campaign of extermination.”

The Nazis described their war against the Soviet Union, in which almost 30 million people fell victim, as a “campaign of extermination.” In the territory of today’s Ukraine alone, they murdered 5 million people, including 1.5 million Jews. In Babi Yar, which is only a few kilometres away from Bucha, Hitler’s Wehrmacht (army) shot 34,000 Jewish men, women, and children within 36 hours.

Equating the events in Bucha with these historical crimes deliberately trivialises the Nazi regime, in order to follow in its footsteps. Kornelius advocates intensifying the war against Russia until its complete surrender. “Those who believe that Ukraine can make peace with Russia and the war would then

end should be honest: No one in Ukraine will make peace, these images will catapult the war into a new dimension,” he writes.

Kornelius, who is very well connected internationally, has long been active as a propagandist of German militarism. As early as 2014, he had welcomed the overthrow of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich by fascist militias and called for NATO military intervention when Russia incorporated Crimea into its territory in response.

A year earlier, he had advocated US military intervention in Syria following an alleged poison gas attack on Syrian civilians. Cynically, he noted that it did not really matter whether the Assad regime or the Western-backed rebels had used the poison gas: “Realistically, it also makes little difference who fired the shells.”

Kornelius is just one of many German journalists calling for all-out war against Russia.

Mathieu von Rohr, head of the “Foreign Desk,” writes in *Der Spiegel*: “There will not be a return to the status quo ante, there cannot be. Not with Russia, not for Europe. This war has irrevocably changed some things on the continent: It is now definitively clear that peace in Europe can only be defended against Russia.”

He also accuses Putin of waging “a war of extermination against Ukraine” and concludes: “We must supply Ukraine with all the weapons it can use, especially heavy weapons—and quickly.”

In the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Reinhard Vesper comments that the Ukrainians were “in a struggle for existence in which they have no other option but to fight back with all their might. The West must provide them with the means to do so.” Compromises with Putin could not lead to lasting peace, he writes.

The rehabilitation of Nazism is an inseparable part of this war campaign. In 2014, the return of German militarism and support for the right-wing coup in Ukraine went hand in hand with the trivialisation of Nazi crimes. At the time, Berlin historian Jörg Baberowski called in *Der Spiegel* for the rehabilitation of Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte and attested that Hitler had “not been cruel.”

When the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and its youth organisation IYSSE protested against this, the bourgeois media almost uniformly rallied behind Baberowski. When the SGP gained support among students and workers, the Verfassungsschutz (secret service) denounced it as a “left-wing extremist” organisation, placed it under surveillance and included it in its annual report. At that time, the political rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) also began.

In the meantime, the trivialisation of Nazi crimes has become commonplace in Germany. Ukrainian Ambassador Andriy Melnyk, an open admirer of Nazi collaborator and war criminal Stepan Bandera, is a celebrated guest in editorial offices and at

political events.

When Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced the biggest rearmament offensive since Hitler in the Bundestag (federal parliament) on 27 February, Melnyk, who sat in the public gallery with former Federal President Joachim Gauck, was greeted with a standing ovation by deputies from all parliamentary groups. Since then, Melnyk has unabashedly defended his extreme right-wing views.

The target of his latest attack is *Süddeutsche Zeitung* columnist Heribert Prantl. The latter had called Melnyk’s cult of Bandera “alienating” and noted: “Bandera is a convicted murderer of the Polish Interior Minister Pieracki in 1934; he became the leader of the radical anti-Semitic wing of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists in 1940; he took over police powers there after the German Wehrmacht invaded Lemberg/Lviv and was involved in pogroms against the Jewish civilian population as well as in the murder of Soviet prisoners of war.”

Melnyk retorted on Twitter, “Neither the Russians, nor the Germans have the right to determine who Ukrainians revere as heroes. Stepan Bandera & hundreds of thousands of my compatriots fought both Hitler and Stalin for the [UKR] state. Leave us alone with your lectures.”

The war offensive against Russia and the rehabilitation of Nazi crimes are two sides of the same coin. Germany, the USA, and NATO are not concerned with the “freedom” of Ukraine and the welfare of its people. They are waging a proxy war against Russia in order to conquer it—as Hitler once did—and divide it up among themselves. In doing so, they consciously accept the risk of a third, nuclear world war. The population and the army of Ukraine, which they are arming to the teeth, serve as their cannon fodder.

The reactionary, nationalist regime of Vladimir Putin, which represents the interests of the Russian oligarchs, has nothing to oppose this. It vacillates between offers of negotiations with the imperialist powers, nuclear sabre-rattling and brutal military actions that play into the hands of imperialist propaganda.

The danger of a third world war can only be stopped by the independent mobilisation of the international working class—Russian, Ukrainian, European, and American. This requires a socialist programme that places the social interests of the masses above the profit interests of the few.



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