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Russia Shirks Responsibility for Bucha 'Massacre' as Outrage Mounts

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A communal worker cuts the rope of the corpse of a man with his hands tied behind his back as a colleague prepares a plastic body bag to carry him to a waiting car in town of Bucha, not far from the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv on April 3, 2022. **Sergei Supinsky / AFP**

Russia has rejected claims that its army was behind atrocities against civilians of a Kyiv suburb amid widespread international outrage, claiming the footage was staged following Russian forces' retreat from the area.

Ukraine calls the harrowing footage that emerged from the town of Bucha near Kyiv on Sunday evidence of a "massacre" by the Russian army. Ukrainian prosecutors said at least 400 bodies have been recovered so far.

The images of dozens of bodies in civilian clothing scattered in the streets and piled in mass graves have galvanized calls to investigate the deaths as war crimes as well as for a fresh round of sanctions on Moscow.

But Russia has doubled down, with both officials and state media throwing out a number of

theories aimed at discrediting the claims as more evidence of civilian killings emerged.

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The Kremlin said the footage is "not to be trusted" and "should be looked at with considerable doubt."

"Our specialists from the Defense Ministry have found signs of video forgery and different kinds of fakes," spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Russian officials including Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov repeated claims that the footage from Bucha was "staged," possibly with Western involvement — but did not provide any evidence for this.

The Russian Defense Ministry ministry said that all Russian units withdrew from Bucha on March 30, a day after Russia's military announced it would be significantly reducing activity in northern Ukraine.

It also claimed that no civilians were harmed while Russian forces controlled the town.

Moscow called for a UN Security Council meeting on the "heinous provocation" it blamed on "Ukrainian radicals," but its request was rejected.

Meanwhile, Russia's top investigative body ordered a probe into those who it said were spreading "fakes" about the alleged atrocities. Under a newly passed law, anyone found guilty of distributing "fake" information about the Russian military faces up to 15 years in prison.

On Russia's top search engine, Yandex, users are being warned that some results for "Bucha" have been omitted in compliance with Russian legislation, according to a screenshot shared by journalists.

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An anchor on Russian state broadcaster Channel One claimed Sunday that one "extra" can be seen raising his arm, "and the other gets up, thinking that he had already played his role."

The independent Mediazona news website debunked both these claims, saying the "raised arm" was a speck on the windshield and the "standing" victim was a distortion of the sideview mirror.

In a broadcast on Rossia 1, pro-Kremlin pundit Vladimir Solovyov accused Ukraine and the

West of “playing the Srebrenica card in Yugoslavia on us [...] The British are primarily working there because it appears this entire provocation was thought up by the Britons.”

He didn't provide evidence for this.

State media also reported unsubstantiated theories that Ukraine's military had shelled Bucha following Russia's withdrawal; that Kyiv staged a “witch hunt” for those who collaborated with the “occupation forces”; or that the dead bodies were actually Russian troops who had been killed in earlier fighting.

One state media anchor even alleged that the victims were “some kind of road traffic offenders.”

“The West is using Bucha to legalize future purges in areas previously occupied by the Russian army. The people were killed by Ukrainian forces because they didn’t resist the Russians. The West is thus giving Ukraine approval to extrajudicially kill those they deem traitors,” Rossia 1 host Olga Skabeyeva said.

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