



Addressing the War Crimes against Azerbaijan

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Speech by Taras Kuzio, a Research Fellow at Henry Jackson Society and Professor of National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy at the hybrid seminar on “Addressing the war crimes against Azerbaijan” organized by the AIR Center.

I think there is a fascinating comparison between why the Western world is so angry and critical of what Russia is undertaking in Ukraine today and yet, the same Western world de-facto ignored the exact war crimes taken place in Azerbaijan and also in Syria, earlier in 2015. These areas of war crimes are execution of civilians, mistreatment of the prisoners of war, including torture and human rights abuse, laying of landmines, ethnic cleansing, stealing of children and the launching of missiles against civilian targets. Recently Russia has implemented the same things in Ukraine, most notably with its own missiles and later with Iranian drones. All those four areas of war crimes, which today the Western world is very critical of Russia undertaking in Ukraine and is threatening the crawling Russian leadership with an actual indictment under the International Criminal law, also took place by Armenia against Azerbaijan during the First and Second Karabakh Wars and unfortunately, the West still remains silent about them.

The general impression present in Western public opinion amongst journalists and policymakers is that it is the Azerbaijani side, which is the cruel one, committing crimes and Armenians are victims with a clean face and heart. Obviously, that is undertaken with the help of a huge Armenian diaspora, particularly in France and the United States. But there is also a deeper discussion on how the Western world is so biased while analyzing the crimes committed against Christians and crimes committed against the people of Muslim pray.

My article, published in the August-September issue of the very well-known magazine published in California, the Rolling Stone has extensive details about up to 4000 missing Azerbaijani civilians

and particularly prisoners of war, in the early 1990s during the First Karabakh War. So, 4000 is a large number of people that went missing and nothing could be really found out about them because the area where these crimes took place were occupied by Armenia for nearly three decades and only now, the evidence is appearing around what happened to those peaceful civilians.

The article was published with the extensive research, photographs and the videos on social media portraying that period and showing the human rights abuse, torture, and killings. But if you were to ask any journalist or policymakers about this issue, very few people, if anybody, had ever heard of the massacres executed against 4000 Azerbaijani civilians and prisoners of war during that period.

In my opinion, the general impression of the West is that the country that commits most of the crimes is Azerbaijan not Armenia. While in fact, war crimes in three areas: the ethnic cleansing of nearly 1 million (maybe between three quarters of million and one million people) was undertaken, the massacre and missing of up to 4000 civilians and prisoners of war, and the laying of subsequent landmines was undertaken by the Armenian side – the victorious side of the First Karabakh War. My article in the Rolling Stone magazine is an example of how the Armenian side does not want any information to be made public. Although, the Armenian diaspora lives in democracy in United States and France, it was able to successfully block my article from appearing online. The heavy pressure influenced by huge numbers of telephone calls, emails, threats, and other means to the editors of the Rolling Stones magazine was that, for the first time in their history of being published for four decades, they did not publish their magazine online because of the issue about my article about the 4000 missing Azerbaijani civilians and prisoners of war. And this went as far as I have accessed the University of Toronto library website. Even there, this particular issue of Rolling Stone magazine was not available online. Readers can buy its hard copy but cannot find the article online. People are unable to spread the web-links to that particular article which was the sole purpose of the pressure from Armenian diaspora, because that would spread the information which would change the discourse and the rhetoric surrounding the Karabakh wars; it would destroy the myth of Armenians as victims and would show that actually they were the ones who committed war crimes.

Going back to the issue of comparison, I think we need to change the way we look at how these conflicts are taking place. We should not be hypocrites and have double standards. We criticize war crimes when they are committed against Christians as in Ukraine by Russia but ignore when they are committed against non-Christian people in Azerbaijan or Syria. That shows a complete bias in human rights, and it feeds into cynicism that you get in the developing world countries like Africa, India and China making them think that West only raises the issue of human rights only when it suits them. The most evident example is when they ignored the war crimes committed by Armenia in Azerbaijan but now, they raise the issue of war crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine. What Russia is doing now in Ukraine, Russia did before in Chechnya 20 years ago, in Syria and Russia's puppet state – Armenia, did it in Karabakh, Western Azerbaijan, both during the First Karabakh War in 1990s and Second Karabakh War in 2020 in the same areas as human rights abuse, extrajudicial killings of civilians and prisoners of war, missiles, landmines, ethnic cleansing – all was taken place before. It is not surprising, because Armenia is a close ally

of Russia. All of its intelligence forces and army continuously gets trained by Russian military academies and with Russia's influence in Eurasia being in decline, there are only two countries left which remain Russian puppet states - Belarus and Armenia. It is no wonder that there is a similarity in how human rights have been abused by Armenia against Azerbaijanis and by Russia against Ukrainians. All the same, we should not ignore the parallels and the comparisons. What is happening now in Ukraine, was taken place in Azerbaijan 30 years ago during the Karabakh Wars.

In the end, I would recommend everyone to purchase a hard copy of the August-September issue of the Rolling Stone magazine, to scan the pages of my article and to spread it on social media, because it is important that we all come to learn about the terrible war crimes committed against 4000 innocent people of Azerbaijan.

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