
Interview of the Chairman of the IC of Russia to Russia Today



«Every criminal leaves some trace»: Russia’s top investigator shares his views on Ukraine conflict

Eight years after the outbreak of the conflict in the Donbass, innocent people continue to die. Russian investigators have been scrutinizing incidents that involve the killing of civilians. Alexander Bastrykin, Chairman of the country’s Investigative Committee, spoke to RT about these efforts and the results so far.

— Mr. Bastrykin, for a long time now, the Russian Investigative Committee and RT have been involved in a joint project aimed at uncovering and detailing the war crimes committed

by Ukraine against the people of the Donbass. Could you share some of the latest information with us? How much have the Russian investigators done over the years?

Over the past eight years, the Investigative Committee has initiated about 800 criminal cases in connection with the events in the Donbas and in Ukraine. The persons involved in these cases are members of Ukraine's military and political leadership, security forces and radical nationalist organizations. In total, 287 persons are subjects of our investigative work. Nearly half of them have been indicted.

These individuals include Ukraine's former Minister of Internal Affairs Arsen Avakov, Governor of Dnepropetrovsk Region Igor Kolomoysky, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Anton Gerashchenko, former Ministers of Defense Valery Gelety and Stepan Poltorak, First Deputy and Deputy Ministers of Defense Ivan Rusnak, Igor Pavlovsky, Oleg Shevchuk and Alexander Dublyan, as well as commanders of a number of units of the Ukrainian armed forces and members of Ukraine's nationalist battalions.

Most of the crimes committed by the Ukrainian security forces involve attacks on civilians using artillery, tactical missile systems, mortars, and small arms. Such actions are classified as mistreatment of civilians, use of prohibited means and methods of warfare, and even as genocide.

115 persons are implicated in crimes against the peace and security of mankind, of which 63 have been indicted. Naturally, these figures are far from final. Every day, our investigators identify new suspects and bring new charges against the military commanders of the Ukrainian army and members of nationalist units.

Thanks to their work, we've convicted seven persons involved in attacks on Russian foreign missions, as well as in mercenary recruitment, extremism, and the facilitation of terrorist activities. These persons are Nikolai Rudkovsky, Sergei Litvinov, Roman Ternovsky, Artem Shirobokov, Roman Zheleznov, Anatoly Gritsenko, and Alexander Razumov.

Ukrainian nationalists continue to shell residential buildings and infrastructure using heavy weaponry, which produces a huge number of casualties. We keep track of and record every such case. Our investigators work on the ground, at the scene, and we are receiving mounting evidence of particularly heinous crimes against the Russian-speaking population of the Donbass; against the people who opposed Kiev's nationalist policies and the ban on the Russian language; and against those who rallied together to fight for the autonomy of the southeastern regions of Ukraine. People have been talking about what is happening for years.

During the entire period of the investigation, we interrogated more than 181,000 people and over 59,000 people were recognized as victims, including more than 10,000 minors.

As part of the criminal investigations, we are helping the victims to prepare civil claims for

compensation of material and non-material damage. These claims already stand at tens of billions of rubles.

— Ukrainian law enforcement agencies, as well as the International Criminal Court, are conducting criminal investigations against Russians. How would you characterize these actions?

What we are seeing are patently absurd and unlawful decisions by the Ukrainian authorities to prosecute our lawmakers and other officials on trumped-up charges, not to mention former Russian servicemen who retired from service many years ago, yet Ukraine is now trying to accuse them of something.

These examples reveal what their system of justice is really worth. As for the Russian Investigative Committee, we are making a legal assessment of their actions. The legal professionals of our Investigative Committee initiate criminal proceedings against Ukrainian officials for the illegal prosecution of Russian citizens. Our job is to hold them accountable in accordance with the law. The Investigative Committee has already initiated 14 such criminal cases.

At the same time, we are surprised by the Ukrainian side's capacity to ignore actual crimes committed against its own civilians. For eight years, Ukraine and the West have turned a blind eye to the atrocities of Ukrainian security forces in the Donbass. To this day, no one has been made to answer for the mass murder of people in the Trade Union building in Odessa.

This is why our country has taken responsibility for investigating the crimes committed by the Ukrainian regime.

— How would you describe the actions of Ukrainian nationalists and the Ukrainian armed forces?

We have known them to be particularly brutal, indiscriminate, cynical and ruthless – against both their enemies and fellow Ukrainians who happen to not share their nationalist views. They use banned munitions. These people are fully aware that their use is prohibited; they know about the relevant convention. But it's become standard practice for Ukrainian servicemen to target civilians with these banned weapons. These munitions are used in the infamous Tochka-U tactical missiles. This type of weapon causes mass casualties and destruction on a large scale.

In March, more than 20 people were killed and over 30 injured after a Tochka-U missile hit the city of Donetsk. This is a missile used exclusively by the Ukrainian Army. After conducting its investigation, the Russian Investigative Committee concluded that the 19th Separate Missile Brigade of the Ukrainian armed forces under the command of Fyodor Yaroshevich, which consisted of three battalions of eight missile launchers each, was responsible for the launches. We have documented and evaluated these facts. A Russian court has issued an in-absentia arrest warrant for Yaroshevich.

The criminal investigation is also identifying other Ukrainian military units that may have engaged in the use of these prohibited methods of warfare.

It has been reported on several occasions that nationalists have resorted to using civilians as human shields. Recently, we have been receiving more and more data confirming this. People coming to Russia from Ukraine and the Donbass told us about the nationalists and the Ukrainian forces stationing their equipment near five schools. They also recounted how Ukrainian soldiers used hospitals, including a maternity hospital, as shelter, spoke about Azov Battalion fighters firing mortars from the Primorye shopping mall, and of the Ukrainians setting up firing positions on the roofs of residential buildings. These and other numerous facts are also documented in the criminal case files.

Every day, we document cases of shells fired by Ukrainian nationalists hitting residential buildings and infrastructure. Dozens of houses and social infrastructure facilities – hospitals, kindergartens and schools – come under fire. Clearly, these are all premeditated criminal acts. As a result, we see elderly people, women and children get injured and killed. It's dreadful.

Investigators from the Central Office of the Investigative Committee have recently identified a number of Ukrainian commanders who gave illegal orders to shell towns and settlements in the Donbas. Among them, the commander of the 1st Air Assault Battalion of the 95th Air Assault Brigade, Aleksandr Tabachny, commander of the 2nd Air Assault Battalion of the same brigade, Aleksey Makhov, commander of the 1st Paratrooper Battalion of the 25th Separate Airborne Brigade, Sergey Smolik, and his second-in-command, Major Igor Sitnitsky, artillery commander of the 56th Separate Motorized Infantry Brigade Artem Puchkov, and the commander of the 2nd Paratrooper Battalion of the 25th Separate Airborne Brigade, Vitaly Sushchenko. All of them were involved in crimes against peace and security of mankind, such as shelling of civilians, including the use of artillery.

— There is a lot of talk now about secret Ukrainian bio-laboratories. It's getting difficult to tell truth and fiction. What do you know about these bio-labs?

Let me remind you that the Investigative Committee is currently investigating a criminal case in connection with the development of biological weapons in Ukraine, which are weapons of mass destruction. It was the US Department of Defense, along with other associated organizations, that financed and supervised the entire operation.

An analysis of the documents obtained allowed us to precisely identify the circle of individuals involved in biological research for military purposes in Ukraine. The list includes US officials from the Department of Defense and a number of American contractors.

It has been established that, since 2005, the amount of US funding of biological research programs in Ukraine exceeded \$224 million. The US has systematically modernized and updated about thirty

scientific research facilities associated with Ukraine's ministries of health and agriculture, as well as a number of sanitary and epidemiological facilities of the Medical Forces Command of Ukraine's Ministry of Defense. The results of their research were moved to Kiev-controlled areas before the start of the special military operation.

The Investigative Committee will continue to investigate whatever new information emerges related to these activities and will analyze the documents discovered by the Russian Ministry of Defense.

— Another shocking issue related to Ukraine is the torture of prisoners of war. Is there any chance that the perpetrators will be found and punished?

Our investigators are looking into a number of these crimes. For example, there is a case of Russian servicemen involved in the special operation to protect the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, who were shot at by Ukrainian security forces and captured in the Zaporozhye region of Ukraine. They were taken to SBU {Security Service of Ukraine} officers, who detained them illegally for ten days. Physical violence was used against the Russians soldiers on a regular basis. The Ukrainians tried to torture them into giving up information about the progress of the special military operation.

On March 2 and 5, two more groups of Russian servicemen were captured in the Nikolaev region of Ukraine. For several days, they were held by the SBU and subjected to physical and psychological violence. There is always a chance that the people responsible will be found – after all, every criminal leaves some trace. To make that happen, we are cooperating with our colleagues from the DPR and LPR, as well as the emergency services in the area.

— How does Russia process prisoners of war? How many of them are there?

No matter what the Western media and propaganda outlets are saying, everyone can see that Ukrainian troops prefer to surrender whenever they get the chance. They understand that resistance is pointless. There are over 2,000 Ukrainian servicemen in Russia now who surrendered voluntarily, including five commanders who were in charge of the units fighting against the population of Donbass. Our investigators are questioning them and collecting a lot of data about the crimes committed by the Ukrainian regime.

There are witness accounts about instructors from abroad, as well as citizens of other countries volunteering to fight as mercenaries. Based on all the evidence, we have launched criminal investigations into a total of 75 mercenaries fighting in this conflict for Ukraine. We know that among them are citizens of the UK, USA, Norway, Canada, Georgia and other countries.

For example, a citizen of Georgia by the name of Mamulashvili created a so-called Georgian National Legion in Ukraine, an armed group that he proclaimed himself the leader of. He recruited at least 24 citizens of Georgia to join it as mercenaries. Some of them surrendered and were questioned by our investigators.

— There are people who believe that the problem of nationalism in Ukraine is at the very least seriously exaggerated, if it exists at all. You surely are aware of how things really are there. What can you say about nationalism in Donbass? How serious is it?

I'll give you just a few examples that speak for themselves. One: they have been glorifying the Nazi SS-Volunteer Division 'Galicia' and awarded the title of Hero of Ukraine posthumously to Nazi commander Shukhevich, who participated in the genocide of Jews and was one of the organizers of the massacre of Poles in Ukraine. They also made Stepan Bandera a Hero of Ukraine and made his 100th birthday a state holiday, no less.

Secondly, they adopted the Law on Facilitating the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language that obliged the country's citizens to use Ukrainian in all activities, except for everyday communication and religious rituals. That's against both international law and Ukraine's own constitution. This year, they expanded this law so that now all mass media in Ukraine can only be published in Ukrainian.

Additionally, they falsified historical facts in the school books in such a fashion that they essentially teach the young generations to hate Russia. We have also seen public figures in Ukraine call on fellow citizens to kill ethnic Russians via mass media so often that such statements have become a new normal there.

All this fuels racial hatred and xenophobia, stripping ethnic minorities of their rights and resulting in violations of human rights at large. Sadistic torture of Russian POWs by Ukrainian neo-Nazis has no justification.

Also, there were a number of provocations, including the one of April 3, 2022 in Bucha, which sought to misrepresent the events as a massacre of local residents allegedly by Russian troops. These are also glaring examples of neo-Nazi ideology at work. The Investigative Committee of Russia is also investigating the Bucha incident, and we have been collecting more and more evidence supporting the hypothesis that it was part of a smear campaign by Ukraine against the Russian troops

— What did the official recognition of independence of the DPR and LPR signify for you? How well is the cooperation going between Russia's investigators and the Donbass Republics?

Once both the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics were officially recognized, we got the green light to set up a full-scale cooperation program. To that effect, we prepared relevant inter-agency cooperation agreements that were signed by the Russian Investigative Committee and prosecutors general of both republics.

We exchange daily and urgent reports, and based on these reports we have been launching

investigations into war crimes such as attacks on civilian targets every day. There are Russian investigators working on the ground in cooperation with their counterparts in the DPR and LPR to secure evidence of the crimes committed by the Ukrainian troops. They examine the crime scenes, question the witnesses, and so on, and ultimately report to the Investigative Committee in Moscow.

I'd like to say that the Investigative Committee's staff is very well equipped to perform all necessary procedures, which means a great deal in our line of work. They can process the crime scenes and secure evidence according to the best practices.

— How will justice be administered for the war crimes committed by Ukrainian citizens apprehended by Russian, DPR or LPR troops? Is it clear when and where they can appear in court?

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) requires states to find and prosecute those responsible for serious violations of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols I and II of 1977 or otherwise responsible for war crimes, or extradite them for prosecution by another state.

However, Ukraine runs no investigations into the crimes committed against the civilian population of Donbass by Ukrainian servicemen whatsoever, effectively violating its obligations under the IHL.

What court will try Ukrainian nationalists is still an open question. We are considering several options. The principles of universal jurisdiction allow national courts to try such cases. At the same time, we also support the idea of setting up a specialized tribunal for this purpose. The key thing is to ensure that the court or tribunal in question is fair and unbiased.

— Never before has an armed conflict been covered so widely by non-professionals such as bloggers, online streamers, citizen journalists equipped with smartphones as it is now in Ukraine. Does your agency trust such sources?

I do appreciate the technology that allows witness reports of actions that call for legal investigation to be uploaded online fairly quickly, thus giving agencies such as ours the opportunity to take them into account. It is also true that all such reports have to be verified by professional investigators, which is what we do as part of our job.

We also perfectly understand that some Western media publish materials of this kind solely as part of a smear campaign against our country, and these publications contain lies and misinformation. An information war is being waged against Russia. It is our mission to keep providing a truthful account of the events and evidence pointing to the crimes, and to explain our position. This is what we do and intend to keep on doing.

There are also citizens of Russia spreading misinformation about the Russian troops in Ukraine. We keep track of these too. Since late February, the Investigative Committee has launched investigations

into 35 criminal cases under the Article 207.3 that was added to the Russian Criminal Code by the Parliament in order to enable us to prosecute such cases.

It is also true some Western journalists beg to differ from the bulk of their colleagues. They have visited Ukraine and saw the situation on the ground with their own eyes, and they report on the nationalism in Ukraine and crimes committed by Ukrainian troops, citing witness accounts provided by local civilians without any bias.

We should make special mention of the Russian journalists who risk their lives obtaining important information on the ground and whose work allows people to follow the developments in the conflict zone. Here I would like to thank the people at RT for participating in our joint project and for their unbiased coverage of the situation in Ukraine and the Donbass. The data published as part of our joint effort allows a broader online audience to gain a better understanding of the issue and to understand the scale of the crimes committed by the Ukrainian regime.

03 May 2022

Page address: <https://en.sledcom.ru/press/interview/item/1680369>