

New York Times reveals Ukrainian war crimes, remains silent on paramilitaries' ties to US state

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An American-led combat unit in Ukraine has committed war crimes, according to revelations published July 5 in the *New York Times*. Composed of volunteers from 30 countries, the “Chosen Company” executed surrendering and captured Russian soldiers during a number of operations last year. The newspaper’s report is based on the eyewitness account of a medic serving in the unit, a review of text messages and video footage, and interviews with company members.

The forces involved, part of a network of foreign far-right paramilitaries active in Ukraine, have close ties to the American state and were feted in Washington earlier this year. Its exploits have been praised in the Western media. The *New York Times* notably omits these facts from its exposé, which documents the gross violations of the Geneva Conventions.

Last August, an unarmed Russian soldier pleading for medical help was shot in the chest and head by two Chosen Company combatants. In October, a grenade was thrown at a Russian fighter who, having tossed away his weapon, approached with his hands raised. The perpetrator, a Greek member of the unit under the command of American Ryan O’Leary, laughed and boasted. Video footage shows that, contrary to O’Leary’s efforts to claim that his forces were under threat, the Russian soldier was unarmed, while one of his compatriots was dead and another wounded and unresponsive.

Coming out of a battle that same month, a member of the fascist militia, speaking about Russian POWs his unit had captured, demanded to know “why the fuck aren’t they sleeping.” He insisted that the unit “sort em out.” Afterwards, fighters bragged about executing captured soldiers in text messages. Another asked whether there was any video of an execution and declared that since there was none, it would only come out if “someone grasses.”

A journal entry about the incident by German Chosen Company volunteer Caspar Grosse, who spoke to the *Times*, states:

Today a good friend willingly executed a bound prisoner. As the prisoner was sitting in a trench

blendage (sic) with his jacket draped over his shoulders, Zeus came up behind him and shot him into the back of the head multiple times. Going to bed.

Group chat messages by a fighter with the call sign Andok declared, “If anything comes out about alleged POW blamming, I ordered it.” After posting the image of a Croatian war criminal, he then wrote, “At the Hague ‘I regret nothing!’”

Threats against anyone who speaks out circulate widely in the unit.

Benjamin Reed, an American from Massachusetts who left the paramilitary unit in November 2023, told the newspaper that he had “heard, to such a large degree, innumerable conversations, about the executions of P.O.W.s on various operations,” and that “even the unit’s recruiter told him that it ‘was OK to kill P.O.W.s if they didn’t surrender in the strictest Geneva Convention standards.’” In January of this year, he described the Chosen Company as “kill-crazy cowboys, nothing more.”

The paramilitary unit—the name of which indicates that its members believe they are on a mission from God—was, according to its website, “raised and organised in collaboration with the Armed Forces of Ukraine and is a multinational force of veterans.” Attached to the Ukrainian military’s 59th motorized brigade, its “purpose is to organise and operate a NATO-standardised unit.”

The group’s films, posted on YouTube, glorify and appeal to extreme violence. “No one will save you,” states a gruesome voice accompanying war scenes on its online recruiting video.

“Once you go past that line, it’s a whole different world, where no rules of society come into play. It’s just pure violence, death and destruction,” said a Chosen Company fighter in a YouTube interview with right-wing Australian social media personality Willy OAM, who enthusiastically promotes the paramilitaries.

The Chosen Company has arisen from the International Legion for the Defense of Ukraine (ILDU), a collection of far-right foreign mercenaries mobilized by the government in Kiev

and armed by Washington. It is known for its brutality and lawlessness. Its members thief, steal, lie and engage in vicious infighting as they seek to lay hold of the spoils of war, notes a March 2023 *New York Times* article about these forces.

In addition to serving on the front lines in Ukraine, they are the backbone of a far-right gun-running operation, channeling American and European arms to an international network of murderous, pro-imperialist psychopaths that spans all six inhabited continents.

The Ukrainian government, which has applied for and been granted exemptions by the European Union from the European Human Rights Convention, told the *Times* that the war crimes revealed last week will be “thoroughly examined.” The Biden administration has ignored the revelations and issued no comment.

Neither Ukraine nor the US has ever conducted any war crimes investigations into acts committed by Ukrainian forces, despite the fact that, as the Washington-based Wilson Center recently stated, “human rights violations” are a well-known and “toxic issue” in the Ukrainian military. The murder of civilians, the humiliation of Russian soldiers’ dead bodies and the torment of their families, the killing of surrendering soldiers, the persecution of alleged “collaborators” and “traitors,” and the intentional targeting of residential areas are all established practices of the Ukrainian military, although they receive no coverage in the Western media.

Kiev, which has suspended freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and elections, is violently rounding up men for the draft and suppressing all opposition to the war. Since April 25, Trotskyist opponent of the war Bogdan Syrotiuk has been under arrest on trumped-up charges of colluding with the Russian government. The *World Socialist Web Site* is now banned in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, every war crime—alleged or real—of the Russian government is broadcast to the world as a sign of Putin’s savagery and evidence of the supposed democratic aims of Ukraine’s war.

The *Times* article on the war crimes of the Chosen Company covers up as much as it reveals. Overall, the piece gives the impression of an exercise in damage control. The article indicates that the German medic who provided the eyewitness account of the war crimes reached out to the newspaper in October 2023. In other words, the editors sat on the story for 10 months.

The *Times* made sure that its report did not appear before a massive funding bill for the Ukrainian military made its way through Congress this past spring. The author leaves out of the article the fact that Ryan O’Leary, the head of the Chosen Company and an interviewee featured in the story, met with Democratic and Republican lawmakers on Capitol Hill last March.

As part of the campaign to get billions more for NATO’s war, he told legislators, “We still need artillery, we need

mortars. We need short- and mid-range [systems], like [High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems] missiles, to effectively do offensive maneuvers and also provide defense,” reported *Stars and Stripes* on March 13. He got what he asked for.

Knowing that the revelations of Chosen Company’s war crimes would come out eventually because the German medic who reported them to the newspaper made clear he intended to reveal what he had witnessed, the *Times* likely decided to publish in order to control what was said about the paramilitary group and its ties to the American state. It was confident that the story would be buried by other press outlets, which are implicated in the glorification of the unit.

In this vein, the *Times* article fails to point out that the Chosen Company has been hailed and its “fallen heroes” venerated in the Western media. Last year, press agencies around the world produced sympathetic reports of videos of Chosen Company battles posted on social media. They also published material about members killed in these conflicts, including in one case a rapturous interview with one fighter’s widow, which features a photo of the US military veteran brandishing a machine gun.

The battles highlighted in this press coverage line up with the dates of those during which, according to the *Times*’ reporting, war crimes occurred. The newspaper was aware of these allegations when other publications were celebrating the Chosen Company, and it remained silent.

The press outlets involved in touting the allegedly glorious efforts of the Chosen Company span much of the political spectrum and include everything from *Stars and Stripes*, *Task and Purpose*, *military.com*, and the *Hill*—publications associated with the US government and Washington’s political insiders—to Oregon Public Broadcasting, a branch of American “public radio” adored by liberals. Australian Public Broadcasting and numerous Irish publications also jumped on the bandwagon, honoring the deaths of countrymen killed fighting for Ukraine’s “liberation.”



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