

(This article by **Peter Hitchens** appeared on his blog <http://hitchensblog.mailonsunday.co.uk/ukraine/> It has been reproduced on the *Apropos* website www.apropos.org.uk in reference to a previous article on our website on the subject of Ukraine.)

05 April 2014 11:21 AM

Who did What to Whom in Kiev? Reflections on the Elusiveness of Truth

Burned deep in my memory are a few days I spent in Romania before and during Christmas 1989. I learned so many things in those few days that I have still not completely absorbed them. But one of the most important things I learned was how, in times of chaos, the whole truth is almost impossible to discern.

How could one check?

Asked by my office to forego Christmas and head off into the newly-opened borders of Ceausescu's prison state, I very reluctantly girded my loins and climbed aboard the Bucharest express at Arad station. I'd spent the night before in a mad hotel just inside the Romanian frontier, its pillowcases folded like napkins in a nouvelle-cuisine restaurant, the whole building canted over at a worrying angle. I had no money except a wad of the softest currency I had ever encountered – Romanian lei, circulated so much that they were, literally, soft and absorbent and almost totally illegible. I had been forced to change my few remaining Hungarian and German notes into this joke money, when I crossed the border. Luckily, the soft lei were enough for a single ticket to Bucharest. I just hoped that some way would be found to survive once I got there (which turned out, as it so often does, to be true, though I'm not quite sure how or why. I eventually left Bucharest by hopping on the first train I could find that looked likely to leave, which took me, ticketless, to Sofia. My only destination was 'Anywhere but Bucharest' and I wouldn't have minded where it went, as long as it went).

I spoke a few syllables of German and no Romanian. I knew nobody. I had originally set out, two weeks before, to cover an event in East Germany and was wholly unresearched and unequipped for my task. In this, I was much like most reporters who are suddenly dropped into such places.

I resolved that all I could honestly do would be to describe what I saw and heard and felt. As I and some colleagues (who decided, quite reasonably, not to join me on the train) drove through Arad to the station, we heard shooting, though who was shooting what I do not know to this day. At the hotel, a wailing woman had warned us in the lobby of massacres everywhere, of Securitate secret police in helicopters strafing the roads, of vast piles of dead. And so it went on, rumour, panic, wild report, uncheckable, unchecked. Mind you, in Romania everything had been wholly closed before, and after Ceausescu had gone, it suited whoever was pulling the strings to make it look as if nobody was in charge.

I heard a lot of gunfire in Bucharest, and saw quite a lot of wounded people in a disgusting hospital - which is why, ever afterwards, I have been the first round the corner, under the car, under the bed, flat on his face, at the slightest sound of a bullet. You don't want to be shot at the best of times, but being shot in a crumbling east European city is even worse, because of what will happen to you if you live on and the boozy stretcher-bearers get you to the filthy ambulance for the long jolting ride to the People's Infirmary.

There was no doubt they were wounded, but I had no reliable way of knowing who had wounded them or why.

Reporters in Kiev during the recent trouble had great advantages, by comparison. Many modern Ukrainians speak English. Ukraine has been a semi-open society for some time and has independent newspapers which can expose official lies. Politicians make statements which they know will be checked by their opponents. Hospitals, even police officials, are independent of government. A western reporter can engage translators and local journalists to check facts. But during the chaos of a putsch, and the immediate aftermath when everyone is busy changing sides to keep his job, some facts may be given more prominence than others.

Even so, I think a fair-minded person must accept that both sides used lethal force, the demonstrators initially using rocks, petrol bombs, clubs and boots, and later using guns. The exact moment at which the authorities began to use guns, and the true identity of the 'snipers' may take a long time to establish. It is by no means impossible that the snipers were deployed by the Ukrainian state, and I certainly don't rule out that possibility, not being in any way a defender of that state or its methods, as such. I just can't help pointing out that it was a legitimate government, and was overthrown by non-constitutional methods. If such things aren't important to you, you can't really claim to be enlightened.

My position, simply summed up, is that the 'West', by openly and actively supporting a mob whose aim was to remove a legitimate president, chose the path of lawlessness and so made it easy for Russia to do the same. That's why I don't join in the attacks on Russia, but instead attack those who provoked Russia. Russia's actions were a ***response*** to aggression and should be understood as such. Russia's actions were no more lawless than was the open support of internal chaos by meddling Western politicians. (Just as Turkey's seizure of North Cyprus in 1974 was no more lawless than Greece's stupid promotion of the Sampson putsch in Nicosia).

The 'West' chose to take the lawless path, and so cannot complain when Russia follows its example, using more traditional and blatant methods, perhaps, but that is all. He who first

uses lawless methods licences his opponent to do the same, and must not whine and grizzle if he gets hit in the face after starting a fight. The paradox is that Russia's action, openly using armed forces to seize territory, cost many fewer lives than the EU's postmodern, electronic cyber-aggression, which covertly used mobs to try to wrest Ukraine into its sphere of influence.

It really is time that people began to see 'People Power' revolutions for what they are. They are aggressive interventions in sovereign countries by outside forces, at least as offensive as parking an aircraft carrier off someone else's coast and overflying his airspace, and in my view rather more so, because they have the potential to start violence inside the threatened country. They are in many cases designed to provoke responses by the existing government which can be characterised as 'killing their own people', an act which has recently become an accepted argument for de-legitimising any government. As it happens, most governments have done this at one time or another, and until recently most people would have said they were entitled to do so when faced with a violent challenge to their authority.

I'd add that this sort of covert destabilisation, whose origins are hard to trace, can lead to terrible tragedy. I continue to believe that Syria's current nightmare was caused by outside intervention of this sort, and ask those who rail about how repressive the Assad state is (which is beyond doubt) whether they honestly believe this justified the horrors which have now been visited on this country. Or whether those horrors would be greater or less if we had succeeded in removing Bashar Assad, as we succeeded in removing Muammar Gaddafi. Libya's present plight suggests that this is at least an open question – as does the awful and worsening condition of Iraq.

'Killing your own people' obviously isn't a universal disqualifier. Like all the rest of this fake moralising, this charge is not based on principle but on expediency, and is not made against governments that the new World Order favours. Once again we must look at Turkey. Turkey's premier, Recep Tayyip Erdogan 'killed his own people' during the Taksim Square/Gezi Park disturbances last year, and Egypt's military Junta has killed so many of its own people that the mind recoils in horror. But both remain un-assailed by the stage army of the good, and nobody says they have cancelled their right to rule. As for the Chinese People's Republic, our friend and trading partner....

Likewise, there seems to me to be little doubt that the violence in Kiev came from both sides. The demonstrators shot and killed several policemen, and wounded many others. The peaceful people among them were unable (or unwilling) to prevent their allies from behaving in this way, which raises the interesting question of how responsible you are for the actions of your allies.

The mob also captured quite a few police officers, and I am not sure if we know the ultimate fate of all of those captured.

One of the things about stories covered by visiting corps of foreign journalists is that events are very closely covered for a few days, and then hardly at all. The fate of the Ukrainian officer , Yuliy Mamchur, who stood up against Russian troops in Crimea, is a case in point. Many western outlets covered his admirably brave actions, and his being taken away by the Russians. Few bothered to mention his release unharmed, shortly afterwards.

Very few British outlets even mentioned the violent assault by Ukrainian putschists (some of whom were parliamentary deputies of the 'Svoboda' (Freedom) party whose leader is an open anti-Semite, and one of whom was head of a parliamentary commission on freedom of speech) on Oleksandr Panteleymonov, head of Ukraine's main TV station. I have been unable to find any reports on the supposed investigation of this behaviour which the post-putsch Ukrainian regime is supposed to be conducting, though senior figures in the Ukraine regime accepted that they would be judged by their response to this behaviour by senior members of 'Svoboda'.

So I was always careful to be sceptical of reports from Kiev when the Ukraine crisis came to the boil around the 19th, 20th and 21stFebruary, whether it suited me to believe them or not. .

One of the things which struck me was that I had heard on several broadcasting sources (and read, as I had remembered, in many print media) reports of several deaths among the Kiev police. I had also seen film, and heard and read reports, of demonstrators being armed with guns (such clips are still easily found on the Internet) . there were also mysterious reports of unidentified snipers (oddly reminiscent of similar reports during various episodes in the 'Arab Spasm' , notably in Yemen and Egypt.

I've here tried to assemble all the contemporary mentions I can find of police being killed or wounded. I'd be glad of any others:

Daily Telegraph, P.3 21/02/2014 in a story in which police were reported to have been taken hostage by demonstrators.

'The interior ministry issued a decree granting police officers the right to use live ammunition and warned Kiev residents to limit their movements because of the "armed and aggressive mood of the people." The ministry admitted deploying snipers, saying they were providing covering fire for officers who came under fire from armed protesters. It said 410 officers had been admitted to hospital and 13 killed since fighting started on Tuesday(18th Feb).'

The Times 21/02/2014, page 10

'...masked protesters marched 23 frightened-looking captured riot policemen in black fur-lined bomber jackets through into a secure pen.

'Street commanders in military fatigues confiscated their personal documents but said that they would send them home later. Priests with crosses blessed the men, who were all from the Internal Troops, a paramilitary police force that has done the bulk of the policing during the protests.

'One of the prisoners, Yaroslav, 23, said that they were military reserves from Lugansk, in the Russian speaking far east of the country. He said that they had been taken prisoner after finding themselves marooned behind protester lines in the International Centre of Culture and Arts, a large neo-baroque building known by its earlier name the October Palace.

"It's awful what's happening, first of all to me now but also to the country," he said. "I don't like Yanukovich and I don't want to kill people, but they say Maidan [the protest movement] is a peaceful action and it's not. They brought stones and petrol bombs.

"Please", he begged, "ask them not to cripple me and not to kill us." '

Reuters Archive 21st February 4.21 a.m. EST

' Ukrainian police shot back when protesters opened fire on officers between the main protest square in Kiev and the parliament building, a police statement said.

'The statement did not say whether there had been any casualties. It said the police had sent in armed reinforcements to enable the officers to retreat when they came under fire.

'The protesters did not immediately comment on the police statement.

(Reporting by Natalia Zinets, Editing by Timothy Heritage)

BBC website, Thursday 20th February :<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-26269221>

12:38:

In a televised statement Interior Ministry spokesman Valeri Mazan denounces the protesters: "Today, despite it being the day of mourning, despite the truce, they fire at riot police and internal military forces, targeting them with weapons since the early morning on Instytutska street. At this moment there are more than 20 injured police officers who have been taken to hospital for medical treatment."

14:37:

Police say that the decision to use live fire was taken in self-defence. "For the purpose of preserving the lives and wellbeing of law enforcement officials, a decision was taken... To use weapons in self defence," the interior ministry is quoted by AFP as saying.

14:54:

The interior ministry says that 67 police have been captured by protesters in Kiev and to free them police "have the right to use all means allowed by law including weapons" - via BBC Monitoring.

17:09:

The interior ministry says that 13 police have been killed since 18 February, with 565 needing medical attention including 410 admitted to hospital - Interfax news agency via BBC Monitoring.

Euronews reports : The death toll of today's clashes rises to at least 67 dead, more than 550 injured, 332 at hospital, according medical sources. The Interior Ministry said earlier that at least 410 police officers were injured and at least 13 died in the last two days.

Christopher Miller (Editor Kyiv Post) Tweets (4.52 pm, 20thFebruary) 'Interior Ministry: Since Feb. 18, 565 Interior officers sought medical, of whom 410 hospitalized, 130 w/ gunshots. 13 officers dead, 3 today'

Emily Magdij, Ukraine Live Blog Friday February 21st

'10:08 – INTERIOR MINISTER RELEASES KILLED FIGURES

Total number of police killed has gone up to 16, with 410 injured, says the Interior Minister in a statement on their website.'

And then this, which I think must have originated with the state Russian agency RIA, so must be treated with the caution reserved for all official media, but does not differ significantly from the others:

Friday 21st February, CIHAN Newsagency (Turkish) reported ; 'Opposition figures accuse security forces of firing on protesters, while the authorities maintain the increasingly well-armed and aggressive anti-government movement attempted to mount a violent seizure of power.

At least 13 police officers have been killed in the fighting. By the latest Health Ministry estimates, 577 people have sought medical aid, although the actual number of people injured is believed to be much greater.(Cihan/Ria)'

Can anyone, having followed these events, seriously doubt that there was severe homicidal violence on both sides? I don't. As to who is ultimately to blame, and if any of this was justified, I would want to know a good deal more about what actually happened, beginning with the origins of the demonstrations and the influence, or lack of it, which outside forces and bodies had upon them. For that we will need the sort of impartial inquiry which is hard to imagine in today's Ukraine.

And yet supporters of the Kiev putsch, who pester me on Twitter, seem to be persuading themselves that armed violence was only on one side. I am at a loss as to know what to say to such people.