

In Syria, where even the dead are 1

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The vandalising of graveyards and digging up of bodies by the Assad regime demonstrate once again that man's inhumanity to man is the new normal

The horror of the footage and the sheer depths of the sacrilege are difficult to fathom. The scenes are so repugnant that words that could possibly describe them are dispersed. It is as though the mind is hoping that if they are lost, it will eventually forget whatever it was that it saw.

These videos appear to have been shot by soldiers loyal to Syria's President Bashar Al Assad, who appear to have filmed themselves raiding local graveyards in towns and villages in Idlib province that they reclaimed in recent days. The soldiers, out of spite and a twisted desire for vengeance, are digging up corpses of the dead, and in at least one case have filmed themselves posing with skeletal remains.

The images are revolting, but hardly surprising. This kind of inhumanity is the new normal in war, thanks to nine years of impunity in Syria.

Idlib is one of the last remaining areas in the country outside of Mr Al Assad's control. Syria's ruler, has reclaimed most of the country in scorched earth campaigns of great cruelty. But Idlib's reckoning is catastrophic beyond measure. Three quarters of a million civilians fleeing the great bombardment to



A view of a sprawling cemetery in Maarat Al Numan, some 31km south of Idlib in Syria's north.

the Turkish border. Hundreds dead, hundreds of thousands freezing in sub-zero temperatures under flimsy tents. More than a million children in the crossfire. Dozens of hospitals bombed. Desecrated graves. Ghost towns left in the wake. Not even the pretense of international action, no justice on the horizon.

The apocalyptic humanitarian

situation in Idlib has finally managed to garner the attention of international media in recent days. But the latest crisis belies a deeper truth – that atrocities have been normalised over nine years of warfare. Man's inhumanity to man is the new normal.

Let us consider what has become normal because of the Syrian war.

Mr Al Assad repeatedly used chemical weapons throughout the course of the war. More than a thousand civilians have been killed or injured due to the repeated use of sarin and chlorine. The regime did not face any serious consequences despite violating a clear, red line. Even a programme to dismantle Syria's chemical weapons

arsenal failed to complete them.

Since 2011, at least 585 attacks against healthcare were documented by Physicians for Human Rights, the vast majority by Mr Al Assad and his forces. Attacks against medical personnel are illegal under international law. But the regime has

Why a small American state can have a big i

RASHMEE ROSHAN LALL

The battle for the US presidency gets properly under way with Tuesday's election in New Hampshire, a small north-eastern state, where the Democratic Party picks its preferred choice for presidential nominee. Meanwhile, two seemingly contradictory narratives are emerging. The first is that the Democratic Party is simply incapable of winning against incumbent president Donald Trump and his Republican Party. The second is that there is just no way the Democrats can lose.

Both narratives are based on the same belief: that the success of the eventual Democratic nominee on November 3 – the day of the presidential election – will have nothing to do with his or her domestic and foreign policy agendas.

The doom-and-gloom forecast for the Democrats is based on the chaos after the Iowa caucus, when the party was unable to adequately explain technological failures that held up the tabulation of final results. The ensuing confusion left the Democratic Party looking shell-shocked and promoted the impression of incompetence and unpreparedness.

A more upbeat line comes from political scientist Rachel Bitecofer, a professor at Christopher Newport University and a senior fellow at the Washington think tank Niskanen Centre. In 2018, Ms Bitecofer became famous for accurately predicting the nature and size of the Democrats' win in the November mid-term elections. What's more, she made her prediction months ahead of the polls and stuck to it. So the findings of her 2020 election model, released ahead



Voters cast their ballots in a voting booth setup in a community centre in Manchester, New Hampshire.

At New Hampshire's primaries, future US policies take shape

of the New Hampshire primary, have attracted considerable attention. They are startling.

Ms Bitecofer reckons that the Democrats will almost certainly win back the White House, gain congressional seats and may even have a chance at retaking the Senate. She has said her analysis is about "flipping giant paradigms of electoral theory upside down" because the election depends on turnout rather than the candidate or their policy

positions. This would be a controversial, deeply contested view for any election almost anywhere in the world, but especially for that of the US presidency, with its long, hard-fought campaign.

In a funny sort of way, Dr Bitecofer's theory that the Democrats will win 2020 irrespective of their choice of candidate, chimes with the more despairing narrative mentioned earlier: that Democrats cannot win against Mr Trump no matter

who the party picks as its nominee.

Both assumptions are just that – assumptions. The domestic and foreign policy positions taken by the Democratic presidential hopefuls are certainly not inconsequential in the primaries. If anything, Mr Trump's shock 2016 election win showed that even an unlikely presidential candidate can upend a tough and crowded primary contest on account of their personal style and world-view.

Now, those who seek to offer contrasting views on America's role in the world and in the Middle East.

This was apparent in the televised debate. Most of the Democratic candidates on the debate called time on Mr Trump's policies by advocating instead diplomatic initiatives, the