

The Fuller Picture:

“LEGIT GANGSTERS” — GANGSTERS WITH NUCLEAR WEAPONS

by Bob Avakian

The events of today, and in particular the events relating to the war in Ukraine, bring back again memories of a friend of mine from back in the day, Billy Carr. Billy got caught up in “the life” and ended up being killed as a result, while he was still in his 20s. But he had a sharp mind, and one time, when I described what the imperialists who rule this country were doing, not just to people here but all around the world, he captured something essential about this right away: “Legit gangsters,” he said.

Today we hear Biden and other “legit gangsters” who rule this country, and their media mouthpieces, chanting a constant chorus about Putin as a “war criminal” because of the destruction and carnage Russia is responsible for in Ukraine. This is like the biggest mob boss (or head of a criminal cartel) self-righteously condemning the crimes of a rival, but less powerful, gangster.

Let us not forget: *The U.S., a country founded on slavery and genocide, by far holds the record for invasions, coups, and in other ways violently interfering in countries whose governments it does not like—slaughtering huge numbers of people in the process, far beyond what Russia has done in Ukraine.* (At revcom.us there is extensive exposure and analysis of the towering crimes of U.S. imperialism.)

The Role of U.S. Imperialism Leading into This War in Ukraine

Let’s look at the role of the U.S. in the events that have led up to this war in Ukraine. What did the government of the U.S., under both Democrats and Republicans, do after the Soviet Union, and its military bloc, the Warsaw Pact, ceased to exist, at the beginning of the 1990s? Some people naively hoped that, with the Soviet Union going out of existence, the “end of the Cold War” would lead to a “peace dividend”—a shift of government spending away from the massive military budget of this country to funding to meet the needs of the people, particularly those with the greatest needs. But, owing to the very nature of this capitalist-imperialist system, such a “peace dividend” was never going to happen: the military

spending of this country—to enforce the preservation, and expansion, of its empire—has continued to increase and today is *far greater than the military budgets of Russia and China combined.*

Beginning in the 1990s, recognizing that what was left in place of the Soviet Union was a weakened Russia, the U.S. imperialists, as the gangsters they truly are, seized the opportunity to further expand their empire—going back on their “word” that they would not extend their aggressive military alliance (NATO) into countries of the previous Warsaw Pact. Ignoring this promise, the U.S. imperialists moved to include countries in NATO that are close to, and in some cases actually border on, Russia. As part of all this, the U.S. has repeatedly interfered in Ukraine in recent decades, conspiring to overturn governments there that were more friendly to Russia and replace them with governments leaning toward “western” imperialism, as happened as recently as 2014.

A key element in all this, which played a significant part in the decision by Russia to invade Ukraine, was the declaration by the pro-U.S. government in Ukraine that it wanted to join NATO. Ukraine is a large country right on the border of Russia. As articles at revcom.us have pointed out: Think what it would mean, and what the rulers of the U.S. would do, if the government of Mexico declared its intention to join a military alliance headed by Russia!

All this, on the part of the U.S. ruling class, has been driven by its grandiose ambition to become, and remain, an “unchallengeable” imperialist superpower.

With Russian, and Chinese, challenges of various kinds to U.S. dominance in the world, the argument of the U.S. ruling class, and those who parrot its American chauvinist rationalizations, amounts to essentially nothing more than this: “We have established, through massive force and violence, an ‘order’ in the world that is favorable to our ‘national’ (that is, imperialist) interests, and no one has the right to use force to change this in a way that threatens those interests.”¹¹

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The Real Aims of the U.S. in This War

None of this “justifies” the Russian invasion of Ukraine. But it does put this in its larger context, and in its true light. It shines a light on what the real intentions of the U.S. imperialists are in this war. The essential purpose and aim of the U.S. in this is *not* to help a weaker country defend itself against a more powerful aggressor; it is to weaken an imperialist rival, Russia (and also possibly weaken China, which is in a kind of cooperative relation with Russia at this point) in order to strengthen the domination of U.S. imperialism, and fortify NATO (especially after NATO had been weakened through the actions of Trump, which heightened divisions between the U.S. and other NATO countries).

The U.S. is now fighting a “war by proxy” with Russia—waging economic war (through “sanctions”) against Russia, while at the same time massively arming Ukraine. And this involves a serious risk of things leading to direct warfare between the U.S./NATO and Russia—warfare that could set in motion a dynamic that neither side could really control, leading very possibly to a devastating nuclear war that could put an end to human civilization entirely.

In short, what is going on around Ukraine is not some kind of holy war of “democracy vs. autocracy” that Biden and the rest are constantly proclaiming. The goal of the U.S. imperialists, in relation to this war and overall, is strengthening and expanding their empire of exploitation, and beating back challenges to their domination.

Putting an End to Imperialism and Its “Gangsterism”

The motivation, on the part of the U.S./NATO as well as Russia, is very much that of gangsters—gangsters who claim “legitimacy” because they are heads of governments, rulers of countries. But these gangsters are not just fighting over turf in a city—the “turf” they are fighting over is **the whole world**. And these are **gangsters who control powerful arsenals of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons with the capacity to kill off all of humanity**.

These “legit gangster” imperialists commit monstrous crimes on a massive scale, way beyond what someone like Don Corleone, the mob boss in *The Godfather* movie, could even think about committing. As I said in *BASics*, “These imperialists make the Godfather look like Mary Poppins.”²

To sum it all up:

Imperialism means huge monopolies and financial institutions controlling the economies and the political systems—and the lives of people—not just in one country but all over the world. Imperialism means parasitic exploiters who oppress hundreds of millions of people and condemn them to untold misery; parasitic financiers who can cause millions to starve just by pressing a computer key and thereby shifting vast amounts of wealth from one place to another. Imperialism means war—war to put down the resistance and rebellion of the oppressed, and war between rival imperialist states—it means the leaders of these states can condemn humanity to unbelievable devastation, perhaps even total annihilation, with the push of a button.

Imperialism is capitalism at the stage where its basic contradictions have been raised to tremendously explosive levels. But imperialism also means that there will be revolution—the oppressed rising up to overthrow their exploiters and tormentors—and that this revolution will be a worldwide struggle to sweep away the global monster, imperialism.³

As I have analyzed extensively in “Something Terrible, Or Something Truly Emancipating,” with what is going on in the world today, and with all the dangers and difficulties it will involve, this is one of those rare times when revolution, in this imperialist country itself, becomes more possible—and is all the more urgently needed.⁴

What we need is a radical transformation to where revolution, not gangsterism, is setting the tone and the terms—not just on a block or in a neighborhood, but in this country overall and ultimately in the world as a whole.

FOOTNOTES:

1. This point was also made in the article by Bob Avakian “Shameless American Chauvinism: ‘Anti-Authoritarianism’ as a ‘Cover’ for Supporting U.S. Imperialism.” This article is also available at revcom.us.
2. See *BASics, from the talks and writings of Bob Avakian*, Chapter 1, #7. Information for ordering the print edition of *BASics*, and instructions for downloading the free e-book version, can be found at revcom.us.
3. *BASics* 1:6.
4. *Something Terrible, Or Something Truly Emancipating: Profound Crisis, Deepening Divisions, The Looming Possibility of Civil War—And The Revolution That Is Urgently Needed, A Necessary Foundation, A Basic Roadmap For This Revolution*. This major work by Bob Avakian is available at revcom.us.

