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There is an old saying that one of the first casualties of war is truth. This is being sharply demonstrated with the war in Ukraine. *Both sides*—not just the Russians but also the U.S. and its “allies,” including the government of Ukraine—are engaging in wild distortions of what this war is all about. For people in *this* imperialist country, it is particularly important to be aware of, and to critically examine, what is being put out by “our own” rulers (and those allied with them) and to weigh what they are saying against the actual reality.

The truth is that what passes for “news” about the war in Ukraine, in the “mainstream” media of the U.S., is in fact a massive propaganda offensive by “our” imperialist rulers, which is full of crude distortions. In other articles, I have examined many of the distortions and lies that are part of this propaganda offensive. ¹ Here, I am going to speak to a particular—and particularly dangerous—dimension of this: the notion that the Russian ruler Putin is like Hitler, and “if we don’t stop him now, in Ukraine, he will soon be invading other countries, including NATO countries” (in the same way that Hitler invaded one country after another leading into World War 2). This is often accompanied by the claim that Putin is irrational, and he’s likely to do any crazy thing in pursuit of his mad ambitions.

A related, and very dangerous, argument is that, “We cannot let fear of World War 3 keep us from doing what is necessary to defeat Putin in Ukraine, and put a stop to his aggression—or we will just give in to him every time he makes another aggressive move or issues an aggressive threat.”

In response to these arguments, if this situation weren’t so deadly serious, it would be tempting to simply echo the punch line of a joke that became popular in the 1960s: “What do you mean we

, imperialists?” (The original joke was that the Lone Ranger and his “Indian sidekick” Tonto were fighting hostile Indians, and the Lone Ranger said, “It looks like we’re surrounded, Tonto”—to which Tonto replied: “What do you mean we
, white man?!”)

Obviously, the situation today, with the war in Ukraine, is no joke; but the point is that the interests of the imperialists, on both sides, who are involved in this war are *not* the same as—and in fact are in fundamental opposition to—the interests of the masses of people. And because the stakes and potential consequences are so profound, and the risks so dangerous—involving the very future of humanity, and whether humanity has a future at all—it is necessary to go into things in depth and at some length in order to bring to light the actual reality of what is happening, what are the aims of different contending forces in this conflict, and where the interests of the masses of humanity lie in opposition to all this.

The Distortions and Very Real Dangers

Later in this article, I will speak to the actual aims of Putin/the Russian imperialists. But, before that, it is important to examine what is being done by “our own” imperialists (and their NATO “allies”). As a basic point of orientation, which is very important in evaluating the claims and the actions of these (U.S.) imperialists, it is necessary to be aware of and keep clearly in mind this essential fact:

The U.S. by far holds the record for invasions, coups and other violent interference in other countries. It has continued, right down to today, to be responsible for atrocities—for example, in Yemen—which are far worse than what Russia has done in Ukraine. (At revcom.us there is extensive exposure and analysis of the towering crimes of U.S. imperialism.)

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With that as an important part of the picture, let’s return to the arguments (noted above) about how Putin is like Hitler, and “We can’t let the fear of World War 3 keep us from doing what has to be done to stop him now.” Let’s weigh these arguments against the actual reality. A key aspect of the situation is that there is, in the world today, the powerful aggressive military alliance, NATO, headed by the U.S. And of decisive importance: both the U.S. and Russia possess *thousands of nuclear weapons*. These factors alone mean that the situation today is

vastly different than the one leading into World War 2.

The fact is that there is no evidence to back up the claim that Putin intends to attack countries that are part of NATO—which would immediately “trigger” the involvement of the U.S., with its powerful and *nuclear-armed* military. (This important point is something I will speak to further, later in this article.)

Both Russia and the U.S./NATO are trying to achieve their objectives without coming into *direct* military confrontation with their nuclear-armed rival. (Given that Russia cannot be defeated easily or quickly, the U.S. imperialists actually see it in their interests for the war in Ukraine to “drag on” for some time in a way that weakens Russia and strengthens NATO and “western” imperialism in general. The massive provision of arms by the U.S./NATO to Ukraine has so far served this objective of dragging out the war, contributing in a significant way to the frustration of Russia’s initial objectives. Of course, dragging out the war results in perpetuating and increasing the suffering of the people of Ukraine—but, despite making use of this suffering in their propaganda offensive, consideration of civilian casualties is not a primary factor in the cynical calculations of imperialists. This can be seen in the massive carnage that the U.S. has been responsible for in wars all over the world, right up to the present—and it was openly expressed by Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State in the administration of Bill Clinton during the 1990s, who bluntly stated that the killing of more than a million people, including 500,000 children, through U.S. sanctions against Iraq, was “worth it” in the pursuit of U.S. imperialist interests.)

Regardless of intentions, however, as has been shown over and over again, events—especially the dynamics of war itself, once entered into—can “overtake intentions” and lead to circumstances and consequences that neither side wanted or anticipated at the start. In the current situation, with the war in Ukraine, there is a very real danger that such a dynamic could “take over” and lead to truly terrible consequences—the very real possibility of war between the U.S./NATO and Russia, with the use of nuclear weapons which could pose a very real threat to human civilization as a whole.

In this regard, it is important to be acutely aware of the way that the media in this country relentlessly repeat accusations of terrible war crimes by Russia in Ukraine, accompanied by graphic illustrations and features of individual suffering meant to back up and “bring alive” these accusations. These media are clearly not interested in any real investigation with regard to these accusations—whether or to what degree they are true, or on the other hand involve some distortion. These accusations are simply presented as fact, and as the basis for denouncing Russia for war crimes. Now, it would not be surprising if at least many of these

accusations turn out to be true. But given the record of the media in this country, in *repeatedly broadcasting lies to justify U.S. military aggression*—for example, in Iraq, and in Vietnam before that—it is extremely important to refuse to “accept at face value” anything these media say about the war in Ukraine.

This is especially so when these same media, while portraying Putin and Russia as guilty of some kind of “unprecedented” war crimes in Ukraine, refuse to broadcast and bring alive the far worse devastation and suffering in Yemen now, for which the U.S. bears heavy responsibility, along with the massive devastation caused by U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, in recent years, on top of its whole history of invasions, coups, and other violent interference in other countries. (And, while it is understandable that people learning about the very real suffering of people in Ukraine would feel sympathy for them, and want to do something that might help to alleviate that suffering, people should be aware that these sympathies on their part are being cynically manipulated and integrated into the massive propaganda offensive aimed at getting the people in the U.S. to support their government’s imperialist aims in the war in Ukraine. At the same time, it is revealing that no campaign of this kind is being carried out to make the people in this country broadly aware of the eve
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suffering of people, including huge numbers of children, in Yemen—and there is no comparable effort by the dominant institutions in this country to promote a campaign of humanitarian assistance to those suffering so terribly in Yemen—something that would no doubt shine a light on the horrendous crimes that U.S. imperialism is deeply involved in, in Yemen.)

What is particularly dangerous is the effect that this U.S. propaganda offensive can have in creating a situation where so much “public sentiment” is built up for direct U.S. involvement in the war in Ukraine (in order to “stop the atrocities” being committed by Russia and prevent it from being “rewarded” for carrying out such allegedly “unprecedented” war crimes) that the U.S. government and its “commander-in-chief,” Biden, become “victims of their own propaganda offensive” and are compelled to directly intervene militarily in Ukraine, despite their stated initial intentions and repeated declarations that they would not do so.

Already this kind of perverse “logic” is leading some influential representatives of U.S. imperialism, such as Democratic Senator Chris Coons, to argue that the time could come when the U.S. would need to move from just arming Ukraine against Russia to actually joining directly in the war.

Along with this, there are the kinds of arguments I have cited at the beginning here—arguments comparing Putin to Hitler, and insisting that “we” cannot let the threat of World War 3 keep “us”

from doing what needs to be done to defeat Putin. Such arguments also *increase the possibility that the U.S./NATO could end up directly intervening in the war in Ukraine, leading to a confrontation with Russia that could escalate to nuclear exchanges that would have horrific consequences, and could even wipe out human civilization*

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This further emphasizes why it is vitally important for people *not* to be taken in by the relentless propaganda offensive of “our” imperialists and their media, with its highly distorted, one-sided presentation of Russian aggression as some kind of extreme war crime that only an “autocratic madman like Putin” would carry out, when the fact is that the U.S. is guilty of far worse war crimes, throughout its history, and right down to today

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(And it is worth remembering that the *U.S.* is the only country that has actually used nuclear weapons—the atomic bombs it dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War 2, instantly incinerating hundreds of thousands of civilians, and causing terrible suffering for many survivors of these atomic bomb attacks.)

This makes all the more clear and urgent that arguments that call for—or serve to “prepare the ground for”—direct U.S. military involvement in Ukraine need to be firmly rejected, and people (like Senator Coons) making such arguments need to be sharply exposed and roundly denounced for such war-mongering, with its extremely dangerous “contribution” to the possible destruction of humanity.

Truthful, Scientific Analysis of the War in Ukraine

All this should also drive home why it is so important to have a truthful, scientific understanding of what is really going on with the war in Ukraine.

In a previous article, I spoke to important elements, and in particular actions of the imperialist rulers of this country, that have contributed to the current 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?....

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! [3](#)

As I also emphasized in that article:

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. [4](#)

To speak to the essence of what is involved, on the part of the imperialists, on both sides of this conflict:

Something which cannot be stressed too many times—especially given the lies and distortions in the relentless propaganda offensive by U.S. imperialism and its media—is the reality that the confrontation between the U.S./NATO on the one side, and Russia on the other, is *not* a conflict “between democracy and autocracy” but between rival imperialists

. (As I have pointed out before, Turkey, which is a member of NATO, is itself ruled by an “autocratic” government—and the same is true of Poland, also a member of NATO.)

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Actual Aims of Putin/Russian Imperialism

By way of introduction to this question of Putin’s aims, and as a basic point of orientation and method, it is important to make clear that I do not claim to have some informed understanding of what Putin’s “state of mind” may be—and this also applies to those “analysts” in the U.S. media who do claim to have such knowledge. But it *is* possible to identify what are actually some of the main aims of Putin/the Russian imperialists in this war in Ukraine.

In light of what has been spoken to here, it can be seen that a part—and an immediate objective—of what Putin/the Russian imperialists are pursuing in this war in Ukraine is putting a stop to NATO expansion around Russia (in particular through the inclusion of Ukraine in NATO), and to counter what is effectively NATO’s “encirclement” of Russia (in particular the western part of Russia, which contains major population and government centers).

Russia has also claimed that its goal in this war is to put an end to militarization and “Nazification” in Ukraine, which Putin insists is a threat to Russia. The claims of NAZI elements in Ukraine and its government have been repeatedly ridiculed by politicians and media in the U.S. and other countries, including Ukrainian officials. As supposed “refutation” of this claim, they have cited the fact that the head of the Ukrainian government, Volodymyr Zelensky, is

himself Jewish—as if this somehow “automatically disproves” the accusation about NAZI influence in Ukraine. ⁶ But facts are facts—and the fact is that NAZI forces have played a significant part in shaping recent events in Ukraine, and some of them have been integrated into its government institutions, in particular the military. Nevertheless, the essential aim of the Russians is not to “de-nazify” Ukraine, nor simply to protect pro-Russian people, particularly in eastern Ukraine, but again is to counter NATO’s “encirclement” of Russia—and, beyond that, to pursue Russian imperialist interests in the broader world, in opposition to the dominant position of U.S. imperialism. As Raymond Lotta pointed out in a recent talk:

The Russians, for their part, have, and especially since 2014, backed sections of Russian-speaking Ukraine to break away and ally or merge with Russia. In 2016-17, the U.S.-led NATO deployed battle groups with advanced weapons to Poland and other Baltic states like Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia that border Russia (and very close to Russia’s second-largest city, St. Petersburg). Meanwhile Ukraine has been moving closer to the U.S. and trumpeting its determination to join the U.S.-dominated NATO military alliance. This is the immediate backdrop to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in late February.

The Russian invasion is not about de-nazifying Ukraine, as Putin proclaims. This invasion is designed to bolster Russia’s rivalry with the U.S.: *to command more influence and create a rival Russian pole of power focused in Europe, central Asia, and the Middle East*. For its part, the U.S. is arming Ukraine in order to *weaken Russia and prevent Russia from consolidating further imperialist strength and posing greater imperialist challenges to the current world order that the U.S. dominates and of which it is the main beneficiary*

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It is motivations and objectives of this kind—which are grounded in the basic nature of the capitalist-imperialist system and the necessities perceived by the leaders of imperialist states, on the opposing sides —and not irrational and simply “power mad ambitions” of Putin (or, on the other hand, Biden and the U.S. imperialists he represents) that are driving the war in Ukraine, and that pose such grave dangers.

In this regard, it is worth noting what Putin has—and has not—done over the past couple of decades. With a military incursion into the country of Georgia (which borders Russia), then in Crimea (which was part of Ukraine but was occupied by Russian forces in 2014 and effectively “annexed” to Russia), as well as in conflicts like that in Syria (where the U.S. and Russia were

backing opposing sides), and now with the invasion of Ukraine as a whole, *Putin has acted in ways that are intended to achieve his objectives while avoiding direct confrontation with NATO*

. And it can be said that Putin moved against Ukraine, among other reasons, because Ukraine is *not* part of NATO—he did so before it became part of NATO, and to *prevent* it from becoming part of NATO.

If Putin waited until Ukraine became part of NATO (which, again, Ukraine has declared its desire and intention to do) then an attack on Ukraine would constitute *a whole other order of conflict* —a situation that would “legally” require the U.S./NATO to militarily “come to the defense” of a NATO country so attacked. *In that*

situation

, failure by the U.S./NATO to *directly*

oppose and engage Russia militarily would, according to the calculations of imperialist gangster logic, be “giving in to the nuclear blackmail” of Putin/Russia—which could then set in motion a “logic,” dynamic and momentum toward repeatedly “giving in”—all of which is something these imperialists of the U.S. and NATO could not allow.

Again, the operative and important point here is that Ukraine is not

part of NATO, so an attack on Ukraine by Russia does not

(automatically or necessarily) “trigger” a direct military conflict with the U.S./NATO

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This bears significantly on the claim, or complaint, from some U.S. imperialist quarters, that not directly intervening militarily in Ukraine is allowing Putin to “set the terms” of the conflict. This was explicitly raised by CNN “national security reporter” Jim Sciutto, at a press conference where he first asked why the U.S. did not shoot down the plane that had apparently destroyed a maternity hospital in Ukraine. Then, upon being told that this could start World War 3, Sciutto insisted: but doesn’t that allow Putin to set the terms? The answer to this is that it is in fact likely that Russia, more than the U.S./NATO, would “set the terms” in this war because Russia is at war, directly, with Ukraine, while the U.S. has (so far at least) insisted that it is not, and will not become, directly involved, militarily, in this conflict, but instead will take part by providing large amounts of arms (and in other ways providing support) to Ukraine, while waging economic war, through sanctions, against Russia.

But what is actually involved in this argument (by Sciutto and others) is something much more insidious and dangerous. It is an argument that *the U.S. (and NATO) **should** be directly involved militarily*

. Especially for such types—seemingly drunk with a bloodthirsty sense of the invincible military might of the U.S. and apparently anxious, after the “disappointments” in Afghanistan and Iraq, to once again demonstrate this supposedly invincible might—this line of argument (for direct U.S./NATO military involvement) is encouraged and “buttressed” by what appears to be the poor showing of the Russian military in its invasion of Ukraine (at least so far, prior to its major offensive in eastern Ukraine, whose outcome is, at the time I am writing this, unclear).

What We Need to Do—What Is in the Interests of Humanity

From all this, it should be obvious that the interests of the masses of people in all the different countries involved, and of humanity as a whole, are in fundamental opposition to those of the imperialists on both sides of this conflict. With this understanding, what are we called on to do?

It would, of course, be in the interests of the masses of people everywhere for the actions of the imperialists, on both sides of this war, to be halted, right away. But the reality is that we—the masses of people, in the countries involved and in the world as a whole—do not, and cannot, determine, in direct and immediate terms, what the different governments will do. In order to determine the direction of society, we need revolution, to overthrow these imperialist (and other) oppressors and bring a radically different and emancipating system into being. What we can do, and need to do, now—while these imperialists are still in power—is speak, and act, in opposition to their military aggression, on all sides, with the aim of contributing in that way to a situation where they feel compelled to pull back from such aggression (including indirect as well as direct involvement in war), as has happened in the past, notably with the war in Vietnam in the 1970s, where mass opposition among broad ranks of people in the U.S. (and other countries) was a significant factor in forcing the U.S. to withdraw from the imperialist war it had been waging in Vietnam.

People in Russia who have courageously spoken out and acted in opposition to their country's war in Ukraine should be supported, and further opposition of this kind should be encouraged. *But, at the same time, the hypocritical moves by the imperialists of the U.S. (and others allied with them) to use this opposition to Russian aggression to reinforce, and build support for, “western” imperialist aims and actions—this, too, should be firmly opposed*

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Here it is important to stress these basic points of orientation:

Of course, this act of imperialist aggression by Russia deserves to be condemned. But especially for people residing in *this* country—which, again, by far holds the record for such acts of aggression—it is a matter of basic principle and profound importance

not

to be echoing the positions and serving the aims of “our” imperialists, and instead to be making very clear our opposition to the aims and actions of these (U.S.) imperialists,

who are using opposition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, not as a way of promoting “peace,” or “the right of nations to self-determination,” but as means of furthering

U.S

. imperialist interests, in opposition to the rival Russian imperialists

. So, in keeping with this crucial principle, any opposition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, particularly by people in

this

imperialist country,

should be accompanied by a clear and definite stand of also opposing the role of the U.S. in the world, including the wars it continually wages, and other ways it violently interferes in other countries

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And overall, in the countries that are part of NATO (or in other ways aligned with the U.S.) people there, including those who are speaking out against and mobilizing in opposition to Russian aggression in Ukraine, *need to raise their sights, recognize and also actively oppose the ways in which the ruling classes of their own countries are seeking to misuse opposition to Russia’s aggression to further their own reactionary objectives*

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Once again, in fundamental terms, in order to put an end to the wars waged by these imperialists, along with all their other massive crimes, it is necessary to put an end to their whole system, which continually gives rise to such wars and the horrific destruction and massive suffering they repeatedly involve—wars which can pose a threat to the very existence of humanity (along with the continuing, and accelerating, destruction of the environment, for which these imperialists are also primarily responsible).

Certainly, a crucial lesson that people should learn from the war in Ukraine is that humanity cannot afford any longer to allow these imperialists, on any side, to continue to rule the world, and battle over who will dominate in this situation, with the very real and dire threat this poses to the future, and the very existence, of humanity.

In this light, the following is of great relevance and importance:

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.

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All this underlines once again the great importance of the slogans raised at revcom.us, and the demonstrations being called for, in New York and Los Angeles, on May First around these slogans:

NO US/NATO WAR WITH RUSSIA! NO WORLD WAR 3!

IT'S *THIS SYSTEM*, NOT HUMANITY, THAT NEEDS TO BECOME EXTINCT!

WE DON'T ACCEPT *THEIR* FUTURE

