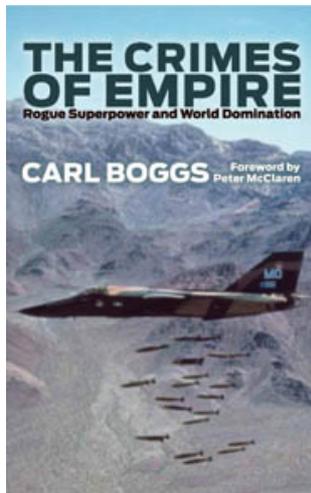


Carl Boggs, *The Crimes of Empire. Rogue Superpower and World Domination*, Pluto, London-New York 2010, p. 291, L 14,99.



Successive governments of the United States of America like to designate other countries, whose leaders they do not like, „rogue states“. Noam Chomsky showed in „Rogue States“ that this designation does not apply to countries such as Iraq but to the United States itself. According to him, the American superpower fulfills all the characteristics of such an entity. The U. S. and its „junior partner“, the United Kingdom, made Iraq a cartoon of an „outlaw nation“ that threatens the entire world, and Saddam Hussein the reincarnation of Adolf Hitler. If that would have been true, they should have turned to the U. N. Security Council. Instead they started an act of aggression against Iraq, thereby showing contempt for international law and the U. N. Charter, which would have provided a legal base to handle this crisis peacefully. Chomsky mentions that Libya, Cuba, and North Korea were also designated as „rogue states“, and the ‘boy emperor from Crawford, Texas’ named Iran, Iraq and North Korea the „axis of evil“. U. S.

President Ronald Reagan had already termed the Soviet Union an „evil empire“. Having read Carl Boggs' book, one can doubt whether the right countries were stigmatized „rogue states“ because „The Crime of Empire“ is the criminal history of U. S. behavior in international relations.

The central thesis of Carl Boggs' book may be summarized in the following statement: „The U. S. stands today as the most fearsome outlaw nation in the world, its leaders having contributed to a steady descent into global lawlessness“. The author explores the rise of the U. S. from its foundation in 1776 as it rose against old European colonialism to the status of an empire, which dominates the world. Boggs follows an interesting approach. Over a period of more than 200 years the development of U. S. policy is described as a history of „military criminality and outlawry“. Boggs links global and domestic (political, economic and cultural) elements of a power structure that is addicted to militarism and war. The present U. S. neo-colonialist policies of aggression cannot be understood apart from this historical legacy. According to the author, the legacy of U. S. outlawry has its origins in the earliest days of the Republic beginning with the extermination of the Native American.

This book is the third part of a trilogy on U. S. imperial power which started with „Imperial Delusions“ in 2004 and was followed by „The Hollywood War Machine“ in 2006, the last one written with Tom Pollard. Without the support of the film industry, the corporate media and the military-industrial complex the American public could not have been so easily manipulated into supporting the illegal wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Carl Boggs teaches Social Science at the National University in Los Angeles. In 2007 he has received the Charles McCoy Career Achievement Award from the American Political Science Association. In seven chapters of his book, the author succeeds to convince readers about the criminal nature of the U.S. superpower.

The consequences of U. S. outlawry for the future of international relations are regarded by the author as „nightmarish“: in the wake of 9/11 the U. S. lost all legal restraints on its military conduct and stepped up its quest for world hegemony aggressively. The Bush administration demonstrated open contempt for international law, the United Nations, and the International Criminal Court (ICC). This contempt of the rule of law „is deeply rooted in U. S. practice and intellectual culture“. If that would not have been enough, it even arrogated itself a „right“ to attack any country it deems as a potential threat to U. S. domination.

Boggs points at a dichotomy in U. S. governments behavior. „No ruling elite proclaim the ‘rule of law’ more loudly, and no society produces more lawyers, prosecutors, judges, legal theorists – and

prisons" than American society. But this goes no further than domestic society. At the international level, the U. S. „routinely favors power over legality, often dismissing legality as nuisance in the face of pressing global realities". The U. S. power elites „believe" in „national exceptionalism", they view the country as a „benevolent" or „benign" hegemon working for „democracy, human rights, and peace". The elite – politicians, media, academia, and think tanks - presents U. S. policy as „pragmatic", non-ideological, furthering liberal democracy, freedom, equality, and citizen participation. Policies are driven by a consensus of economic and geopolitical desiderata that actually „revolves around a struggle for domination over the Middle East", writes Boggs. According to the author, the unholy legacy started with the white European settlers. They perceived their mission als „God-given", driven by enlightenment and social progress. This „white-man's burden" was later called „Manifest Destiny". A concept rooted in the religious zealotry of the Puritans. In the nineteenth century the U. S. carried out military interventions in several nations in Central America and the Caribbean. The author writes that in 1844, under the presidency of James K. Polk, the U. S. annexed, after a self-provoked war against Mexico, large parts of Texas, California, New Mexico, Arizona, and Nevada which belonged to Mexico. Already at that time this „preemptive war" was justified by national security arguments. The Mexicans were slaughtered by the thousands as being „backward, ignorant, and undemocratic, hardly worthy proprietors of the land they had controlled". Don't the neocons and the religious fundamentalist of today cartoon the Muslims in a similar fashion, in order to dehumanize them and make attacks against them appear more „rational"? With the massacre at Wounded Knee „a system firmly rooted in authoritarian controls and propelled by a mixture of colonialism, racism, capitalism, and militarism" was firmly established. „An ideology of ruthless expansion was incorporated into the political culture, shared especially by the upper circles of politicians, business elites, the military, and Christian institutions." And Boggs adds: „It is precisely the legacy of imperialism, warfare, and outlawry that was carried into, and helped shape, later U. S. behavior in such targeted areas as the Philippines, Central America, Korea, Vietnam, and the Middle East."

In the chapter „Crimes against Peace", „Warfare against Civilians", „War Crimes by Proxy", „Weapons of Mass Destruction", „A Tale of Broken Treaties", „War-Crimes Tribunals: Imperial Justice", and „Torture and Other Atrocities" the author spreads out to readers a picture of this country, unknown to most of the world. To outsiders, the American political system presents a highly idealistic model that actually hides its hegemonic aims. This perception is widely shared around the world. In the chapter „Crimes against Peace". Boggs shows how the U. S. violates not only the „Nuremberg principles" but also international law in general. He mentions that after World War II the Germans and Japanese were tried for „crimes against peace". The Charter of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg defined such crimes as „planning, preparation, initiation, or waging a war of aggression, or a war in violation of international treaties, agreements, or assurances, or participation in a common plan or conspiracy (for war)". At different periods in its history „the U. S. has violated every one of the above principles, generally holding itself above the most hallowed norm of international law", so Boggs.

The Nuremberg Charter had jurisdiction over four separate crimes: conspiracy to carry out aggressive war, the actual launching of aggression, killing, destroying, and plundering during a war not justified by military necessity, and crimes against humanity related to atrocities against civilians. The Nazis were convicted on all four counts. Did not the rulers of the United States commit all these crimes in the Korean and Vietnam War? Or in the more recent, and illegal, wars against Afghanistan and Iraq?

In „War Crimes by Proxy" the author writes: „The Israeli occupation of Palestine, with its continuous acts of military aggression and human rights abuses over several decades, is surely the most visible (and no doubt most egregious case of U. S. war crimes by proxy. The state of Israel has in many ways served as an American imperial outpost in the Middle East, subsidized by every conceivable form of economic, political, diplomatic, and military backing – a relationship that is, indeed, sui generis." Boggs mentions persistent Israeli disregard for international law and human rights. „Beneath its celebrated 'democracy',

the Israeli state was historically founded on brute force and terrorism leading to an occupation regime in clear violation of international legality. The territory expropriated by Israel is stolen land, justified by Zionist ideology with its phony biblical claims and sustained by a fanaticism that views the local population as subhuman primitives. (...) To legitimate such criminality, Israel lays claim to ethnic and religious supremacy rooted in Zionism, an ideology that glorifies colonial theft of land, appropriation of resources, and military occupation denying even the most basic rights of Palestinians." According to the author, the U. S.-Israel „client-state relationship is solidified and legitimated by the indefatigable and well-financed work of the Israel lobby". In this respect, Boggs mentions AIPAC, JINSA, WINEP, ZOA, IPP which are blindly supported by the various Christian Zionist organizations, by think-tanks like AEI, PNAC and the Hudson Institute. Boggs quotes from the book „The Israel Lobby" by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt in which the authors wrote „if the United States were to choose sides on the basis of moral considerations alone, it would back the Palestinians not Israel". The U. S. departure from moral principles started at the Lausanne conference in 1949 and has continued ever since. The book „The Passionate Attachment" by George W. Ball and Douglas B. Ball shows not only the one-sidedness of U. S. Middle Eastern policy but also the caving in to permanent Israeli pressure.

As a postscript, the author describes „the routinization of mass murder" referring to explanations from political psychology. For Boggs, the U. S. armed forces have occupied a special place when it comes to war crimes. Two of many reasons are noteworthy: the constant pressures to maintain imperial hegemony and a long history of evading legal accountability, writes Boggs. Winding up this extraordinary book, the author concludes: „A major problem with U. S. war crimes in general is that virtually everyone has managed to escape criminal liability, except in a few cases like My Lai and Abu Ghraib where lower personnel was tried, convicted, and generally given light sentences." Last but not least, all the war crimes the U. S. has committed against other peoples were not planned and carried out by sadistic thugs or xenophobic right-wingers but by ordinary folks who come from solid family backgrounds, are well mannered, display elevated cultural taste, and may even be informed by good intentions, writes Boggs. And the planners of these horrendous crimes are mostly so-called whiz kids liberal, cultured, urbane, visionary government officials and many celebrated academics from the Ivy League Schools.

The following distinction could be important which Boggs did not contemplate on: The specific nature of U. S. „criminal conduct" is not so much the number of direct victims – which are much smaller than the victims of Hitler´s and Stalin´s brutal tyranny - but the fact that U. S. „criminal conduct" are being overly supported or at least tolerated by all governments which claim to represent democracy and human rights. Another specific feature of U. S. „criminal conduct" is that the U. S. crimes have been mostly committed in broad daylight, whereas both the Nazi and Soviet regimes attempted to hide their crimes. The „crimes" by „democratic governments" require much greater reliance on the manipulative practice of mass media than were the crimes by the Nazi and Soviet regimes, because „crimes" by „democratic governments" must be legitimized by public acceptance.

Having read the book I was flabbergasted by the fact that the country in which I studied International relations has such a long history of war crimes. If „The Shining City upon a Hill" and „the light of the world" does not end its hegemonic policy and become primus inter pares in the international system, it will be doomed to the fate of the Roman Empire.

Ludwig Watzal