

Militarism, Mayhem, and the Pursuit of Profit

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by Michael Parenti

The following essay is an introduction to the new book, *Strange Liberators*, published with permission of the author, Gregory Elich.

The difference between what U.S. citizens think their rulers are doing in the world and what these rulers actually are doing is one of the great propaganda achievements of history. If we believe the White House and its various spokespersons, the United States has been reluctantly propelled onto the world stage by the force of events. This idea of reluctance is heavily peddled by policymakers and their media shills. None of our leaders ever really wanted to get involved in this or that region, we are told, but there are demonic forces afoot that necessitate U.S. intervention throughout the world.

Again and again we hear that the United States is a superpower, the only superpower in the world, and therefore it has to discard its timidity and start acting like one, assuming all the responsibilities and enjoying all the prerogatives of a global colossus. With the growing sense of unanswerable global military power comes an increasing intolerance toward those who might question the course of U.S. policy. With the growing sense of power comes a still greater sense of entitlement. One hears that since we have so much power, we are obliged to use it and have every right to use it as we wish; so we had best get over our reluctance to do so.

Reluctance? Timidity? The record shows otherwise. Since World War II, U.S. rulers have played a crucial role in overthrowing reformist democratic governments or insurgent popular movements in Guatemala, Guyana, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Syria, Iran, Indonesia, Greece, Argentina, Haiti, Egypt, Peru, Congo, Portugal, Nicaragua, Jamaica, Venezuela, Bolivia, Mozambique, East Timor, the Fiji Islands, Grenada, Panama, and various other countries, at a cumulative cost of millions of lives. All this is a matter of public record yet seldom mentioned in mainstream discourse.

Also since World War II, U.S. forces have launched direct military invasion or aerial attacks (or both) on Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Lebanon, the Dominican Republic, North Korea, Grenada, Panama, Yugoslavia, Libya, Somalia, and Iraq. U.S. forces carpet-bombed Cambodia and Laos, and poisoned the ecological system of Vietnam with Agent Orange – while waging a war that killed two million people in that country. U.S. rulers bombed Yugoslavia for 78 days nonstop, transforming it from a prosperous nation into a devastated and impoverished one. They gave full support to the murderous Khmer Rouge in its campaign of attrition against a reformist socialist government in Cambodia. And U.S. rulers fully supported Iraq's invasion of Iran, resulting in almost 2 million dead. Later, they waged a war and then a dozen years of sanctions that killed over a quarter million Iraqis. U.S. forces contaminated much of Yugoslavia and Iraq with depleted uranium, made whole regions of the Colombian countryside uninhabitable with toxic aerial spraying, and supported death squads and counterinsurgency campaigns that have brought death to hundreds of thousands of peasants, workers, students, clergy, and journalists in numerous Third World countries.

Consider the interventionism perpetrated against Africa. Through the World Bank and the IMF, U.S. rulers have demolished African national economies, including their public health and education sectors. Most African nations have sunk into a debt structure that leaves them in peonage to western investors. U.S. leaders have fueled eleven wars on the African continent, resulting in the death of more than seven million people, with millions more facing starvation and an ever deepening poverty. Washington has given arms and military training to fifty African countries, helping Africa to become the most war-torn region in the world. The more ravaged are the African nations, the more compelled they are to sell their labor and abundant reserves of oil and strategic minerals at rockbottom prices to western investors.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration plans to spend a staggering \$2 trillion on the military over the next few years. The White House has instructed the Pentagon to develop contingency plans for using tactical nuclear weapons against Russia, China, and a list of other countries – should necessity ever dictate. And we are fed nightmare scenarios about how China is emerging as a threat to our

safety and survival, or on other days, North Korea, Iran, and even Syria.

Is all this militaristic aggression a sign of policy failure or success? According to some critics, including many who identify themselves as being on the left, U.S. foreign policy is repeatedly bungled, timid, overextended, heavy handed, confused, overcome by unintended consequences, overly dependent on military solutions, and so forth. If we are to believe these critics, the individuals in power are just not very smart, certainly not as smart as the critics themselves. Indeed, in regard to presidents like Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, the power wielders are depicted as downright stupid.

I beg to differ. We are the ones who are being stupid when we think our enemies, the reactionary purveyors of international finance capital are stupid – those who enjoy triumph after triumph while wielding power on a global scale. If they are so dimwitted and inept, how do they manage to enjoy such success in recreating and advancing the conditions of politico-economic hegemony while selling the American people a bill of goods?

I have long argued – and this fine book by Gregory Elich demonstrates so compellingly – that U.S. foreign policy is neither confused, nor poorly executed, nor stupid, reluctant, timid, misinformed, lackadaisical, or wrongly conceived (given the international corporate finance interests that U.S. rulers actually serve). What Elich and others of us maintain is that U.S. foreign policy is extraordinarily rational, consistent, and impressively effective. It supports those comprador leaders who open their countries to transnational corporate penetration, who hand over their choice lands, natural resources, labor, and markets to giant foreign investors on terms that are entirely favorable to the major corporate investors. The countries that become obliging fixtures of the global free-market system are hailed as "pro-West" and "friendly to America."

Meanwhile, those countries that try to chart an alternative path to self-development, that try to use some portion of their land, labor, capital, markets, and natural resources for the benefit of their own populace are demonized as "anti-American" and "anti-West." And those that attempt to build any kind of egalitarian social order are

branded as positively lethal to American freedom and the very survival of humanity.

The overriding goal of U.S. policy is to make the world ever safer and more profitable for the Fortune 500 and international finance capital. This is not what the U.S. public hears. What we hear is that our leaders over the years have been compelled to intervene in other countries and regions in order to contain communism, fight terrorism, defend freedom and human rights, overthrow tyranny, launch humanitarian rescue operations, prevent genocide, save weaker nations from aggression, uphold international law, and more generally defend America's global interests ("interests" that usually go undefined). In this way do U.S. rulers manipulate the public's fears. While professing the highest principles, they serve the lowest forms of greed and power.

In the pages ahead, using a wealth of historic evidence and revelatory analysis, deep research and eye-witness investigation, Gregory Elich treats what lawyers call the "hard cases": Yugoslavia, Croatia, Zimbabwe, North Korea, and certain untouched questions about Iraq, issues that have been most thoroughly misrepresented in the corporate media and even by political commentators and activists who claim to be on the left. Our most prominent progressive critics usually play it safe by making sure to couple their criticisms of U.S. foreign policy with negative and oddly inapposite asides about the evils of the Soviet Union (which went out of existence fifteen years ago). With compulsive genuflections to anti-communism, they denounce U.S. policies as poorly conceived, wrongheaded, and "as bad as anything Stalin might have done," etc. In this way they hope to shore up their credibility.

In far superior fashion, Elich wastes no time with genuflections to the dominant ideology. Instead he sticks to the awful facts and glaring truths that compose the underlying reality of the U.S. global empire. He ties in his deeply informed case studies to the wider issues of U.S. imperial policy, the broader questions of war and peace, and the general crisis that faces the entire world and the planet's ecology itself. Thereby he performs a most valuable service to persons all across the political spectrum.

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