

# Strange Liberators: Militarism, Mayhem, and the Pursuit of Profit

Review of Gregory Elich's Book

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In reading Elich's book. My view of America's foreign policy has changed. I no longer view the U.S. as inept bunglers, or arrogant shoot-from-the-hip players. On the contrary, the agendas of the Oval Office, CIA, National Security and Pentagon are clear. The problems come from miscalculations of the opposition poor execution, and misguided sensibilities. Governments seem to have two foreign policies: one that it sells the public and one that the government actually executes, however prolonged, bloody, or costly it becomes in terms of human toll and depletion of resources. The best examples are the war in Vietnam and the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Elich focuses on the U.S. heavy-handed foreign policies and open aggressions deployed in Zimbabwe, Yugoslavia, and North Korea. One western economic principle is practiced – the free market system. It is a market that is hardly free and openly competitive. The cost is high to second and third world countries, chiefly to their rich resources and cheap human labor. In this system the workers are not the product consumers or participants in the profits. For westerners the market is global. There is oil in the Middle East, and there are gold and diamonds in Africa, cheap labor in China, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and various strategic ports and locations for trade and military interests. In the free market system, U.S. policy is “directed at creating conditions that favor the maximization of corporate profit.”

Elich focuses on the big issues – oil, nuclear threat, dictators, rising opposition from the emerging, most vocal nations, and control of the established foreign investments. In the free-market system, the U.S. is the big consumer of goods – textiles, coffee, oil, diamonds and gold. Corporate investments have fattened the profit margins by employing labor in Mexico, Cambodia, India, Pakistan, and Malaysia. As these countries' living standards rise, creating unions and precipitating demands, the U.S. companies find cheaper labor pools to keep the profit margins high. Slave-like labor relationships, exploitation of children, and unhealthy working conditions are not the concerns of the profit-conscious companies. U.S. foreign policy is about the protection of U.S. interests around the world.

Since 9/11 the war on terrorism has become a priority in U.S. foreign policy. The clear objectives in this global fight have shifted from the “right” to the “left” and ebbed and flowed like political tides. Alliances change with each new administration. Iran was a U.S. ally under President Reagan, but under Bush Iran is a major threat. Bush policies of preemptive actions and military interventions, while not failed policies, have not had the desired effects. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the seeds of democracy and freedom (western style) have not produced any yield. War wages on, people are caught in the crossfire, the land is devastated, and the U.S.'s presence is unwelcome. The huge reserves of oil have not

reduced cost at the pumps or helped the citizens, but oil companies report record profits. The Vice President's former company, Halliburton, has raked in millions on contracts with the U.S. military in Iraq, while negotiating deals with Kuwait to buy and sell oil. In this context, war is good for business.

As writer/analyst Dan Brody puts it, "Profiteering is not an aberration. It is the very purpose of war." In terms of ideology, the U.S. military and diplomatic efforts have not resulted in regional stability. President Bush, in his crusader persona, continues to press on with military intervention. Our presence in Iraq is now in its fifth year, Geopolitically, for all its costs, the U.S. is well positioned in Central Asia, within range of Russian and Chinese borders. In real estate terms, it's location, location, location.

Elich analyzes three main regions where the U.S. deploys its foreign policies: North Korea, Yugoslavia, and Zimbabwe. North Korea is prominent in the minds of average Americans. In nearly 60 years, Americans have come to know the geography of the Korean peninsula, the two countries divided by the DMZ, the "mad, pint-sized" dictator in the North, and South Korea's miracle economy of brand names – Hyundai and Samsung among them.

North Korea's nuclear program is the latest concern to U.S. foreign policy. That country "poses a risk to global security, and must be stopped." During the first Clinton administration, the U.S. was posed to declare war on North Korea. War was almost certain, if not for former President Carter's successful diplomatic meeting with Korean leader Il Sung Kim. Still, the hawks in DC were angry over Carter's intervention, among them Clinton and Gore.

One tactic of U.S. foreign policy against its enemies is a barrage of propaganda. Clinton's war plan against North Korea was not new. President Truman had nuke options for the Korean War. The U.S. recently had nuclear deployment programs against seven nations – Russia, China, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Libya and Syria. When Bush came to office, one of his first acts was to break off official contacts with North Korea. It took 18 months before the administration sent an envoy to Pyongyang, led first by Undersecretary of State James Kelly. Kelly was hardly the type of negotiator the North Koreans expected – ignoring the usual protocol, accusing the North Koreans from the start, and using an abrasive manner. His successor Christopher Hill proved to be more reserved but firmly held the Bush line of foreign policies. Hill's early diplomatic fallout came not with North Koreans but with South Koreans. The U.S. foreign policy toward North Korea often ignored the significance of South Korea's role on the peninsula. It is no wonder that both Koreas share similar levels of distaste for the U.S. There is also the shared view of not counting on Bush but waiting for the next U.S. president before attempting any real progress.

Bush's open rhetoric toward the leader of North Korea, I believe, is planned. Frankly, I don't think Bush even knew or cared who Jong Il Kim was prior to his crusade against the so-called "axis of evil." The DC rhetoric sounds like a well-executed spin. The policy was to push and prod North Korea, to break them by sanctions, and pressure by neighboring nations and UN support. The U.S. found quickly that they were alone, with little support from the UN. North Korea proved a tough adversary. As with Cuba, no sanctions, reduction of food and fuel, cutting money flows, or even natural disasters of prolonged drought and floods could force the Koreans to their knees. North Korea stood firm and continued with its nuclear program.

The U.S. Administration was not idle. New propaganda campaigns were created, based on

fear. This escalated the threat potential of North Korea to America, China, South Korea and Japan and kept the idea of the six-party conference at play instead of North Korea's wish for direct two-party dialogs with the U.S. The U.S. could justify the high security alert, with the possibilities of preemptive strikes, covert actions, and military action against the rogue nation. So far, both sides continue with rhetoric and saber rattling.

In the summer of 1999, the war in Yugoslavia against the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries officially ended. Some historians are still sifting through the information rubble to try to find why the war was declared in the first place. In 1998, President Clinton executed the order to have the Yugoslavian socialist government overthrown. At one point the city of Belgrade was bombarded for 78 days and nights. The NATO commander in chief of operations, a presidential wannabe, was General Wesley Clark. The Balkans and other central European countries had no huge cache of oil or minerals, no perceived threat to the world, nor a cause for democratic liberation. In other cities, NATO forces deployed the systematic destruction of chemical and fertilizer factories, and oil refineries, killing off the local economy. Aside from leaving the citizens without resources, there were the secondary consequences of soil, water, and air contamination. Unable to sustain themselves, mass migrations to other areas and neighboring countries began.

The NATO war succeeded in creating a central European economic and social disaster. Long-simmering national feuds among the ethnic groups flared up with devastating consequences. Serbians, Croatians, Slavs, Bosnians, Albanians, and Macedonians faced everything from starvation to ethnic cleansing. The chaos born out of the NATO War gave rise to new rulers and power groups. Self-appointed militias roamed the towns, free to eliminate ethnic groups, kill or jail political opposition, and redraw boundaries across the country.

The U.S.'s and NATO's arrogance to carve up central Europe into controllable mono-ethnic puppet states failed miserably, from the view of the long-suffering civilians. The targeted countries remained socialist. The U.S. and NATO did succeed in gaining a foothold in the region. Other than that, little else was gained in terms of freedom and democracy. Centuries ago, it was the same countries in their resistance against the powerful Ottoman Empire.

Western policies toward Africa are rooted in centuries old imperialism, the slave trade, missionaries, explorers, and entrepreneurs. In the 1980s, independent Zimbabwe was caught in the British and U.S. foreign policy crosshairs. Originally a British domain, modern Zimbabwe became embroiled with England and the U.S. As seen by western powers, this country was descending into anarchy as land wars raged. Poverty and starvation increased, wages decreased, corruption was at every level of government. The U.S. and England called for a democratic and human rights intercession.

From the view of the Africans, the land war was perverted by the wealthy few and powerful, when land was meant to be distributed to the masses. Land ownership gave the people everything – home, growing crops and animals, self-sufficiency. That smacked of socialism to U.S. Private interests would lose out if land were redistributed to the natives. Elich sees the plight of Zimbabwe as nothing more than a programmatic disciplinary action for a country choosing to go its own path, and putting the needs of its people over U.S. and British interests.

Zimbabwe and other African countries shared the similar fates of Native Americans in America. Lands stolen, contracts not honored, governments siding with the white settlers.

Natives in Africa and America suffered exploitation, disease, poverty, starvation, and endless wars.

Soon after independence, Zimbabwe adopted the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP), designed primarily by the World Bank. Privatization, deregulation, deficit cutting, and reduction of government social programs were heavily influenced by western investors. The country was falling into chaos. IN 1995, the International Monetary Fund cut funds when measures to curb inflation, control the deficit, and repay loans was too slow or not enough. In 2001, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe himself said enough is enough. The ESAP was declared a failed program and would be abandoned. IMF and World Bank were out. There was increasing pressure on the part of western countries, particularly the U.S. and Great Britain, to bring Zimbabwe into line or weaken it as an alternative. It seems so petty for the U.S. or Britain to punish a small nation for attempting to go independently, when this is the very ideal that the western powers preach. It seems that what they really want are docile democracies they can approve of.

As the U.S. loses its luster as the great democratic liberator, like Russia was once the great communist savior, the new country with the influence and clout is mainland China. Flush with cash, minimizing its former communist rhetoric, growing a red-hot economy, and maintaining a population of 1.5 billion that supplies both cheap labor and high consumerism, China is courting the Middle East, South America, and Africa. It is approaching regions often ignored by the west. China has built new alliances in the Pacific rim with South Korea and Japan. The combined alliance of China and Russia still holds sway, enough to keep the U.S. at bay.

Gregory Elich's book is provocative, accusatory, inflammatory, thoughtful and dead serious. This is sober reading. It shows the reader a very big picture of global cause-and-effect. What happens ten thousand miles away does impact us.

'Strange Liberators' is a disturbing read. It can be interpreted as a lengthy indictment of what U.S. policies on national interest have done to developing countries. He has solid evidence to back his claims, by research, public information, and from personal experiences in Africa, Yugoslavia, and Korea.

Gregory Elich, *Strange Liberators: Militarism, Mayhem, and the Pursuit of Profit*, Llumina Press, Coral Springs (FL), 2006 ISBN # 1-59526-5708

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