CHAPTER ONE

A WORLD OF TROUBLES

On Sunday, August 7, 1983, Mrs. Justine Eiseman of Belleville, Illinois, picked up her St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* and read about her country's latest foreign entanglement.* A threat from socialist Libya had been discovered at a lonely Sahara Desert oasis called Faya-Largeau, in the African country of Chad.

The more Mrs. Eiseman read, the less sense it made. Chad, a barren stretch of nothing if there ever was one, had been suffering a seesaw civil war for 15 years, between two culturally different groups of tribes. One group, supported by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, had won control of the capital and largest city (N'Djamena, population 240,000) a few years ago. But a rival group was supported by Libya—its members lived along the Libyan border and shared a cultural heritage with Libyans. And this Libyan-backed group had just retaken the northerly oasis of Faya-Largeau, which had changed hands several times in the previous few months. Suddenly, the State Department and the newspapers were saying that all of Africa would be imperiled if the Libyan-backed tribes weren't met with force and stopped now.

Mrs. Eiseman wasn't much up on her African geography. If she had been, the State Department story would have made even less sense, because on the other side of Chad lay Nigeria, Africa's biggest and second-richest country, a natural barrier to Libyan expansion. Nigeria had a superior, war-

*Facts are according to a telephone interview with Mrs. Eiseman, August 26, 1983.

toughened army, and was suspicious of the Libyans—who seemed to have all they could handle just taking Faya-Largeau anyway.

Nevertheless, on August 7, 1983, the State Department lurched into its arms deployment mode. Out to the desert oasis went some of our most sophisticated and expensive electronic aircraft, which everyone knew were not going to be flown and maintained by Chadian nomads.

That evening, Mrs. Eiseman drove her four-year-old Ford back to her first-floor garden apartment, and for the first time in all her fifty-seven years, she wrote a letter to the editor of an eastern newspaper—the *New York Times*. She had written to the *Post-Dispatch* before, but this was different.

Mrs. Eiseman lived alone, divorced, her children grown. She worked selling imprinted calendars, ballpoint pens and similar novelty promotional items around Belleville, representing a Chicago imprint firm. Her clients were banks, restaurants, and automobile dealerships that liked to give away mementos to customers. She was, by her count, picking up over $25,000 a year. She didn't have to stick with the old Ford much longer; she was ordering a new car. On the other hand, she was frequently confronted these days by people who weren't doing so well. Mrs. Eiseman liked to play bingo, and some friends she played with regularly—hard-working folk like her—were eating cheese distributed free by the government to the poor. Mrs. Eiseman was a bit shocked by that.

In 1980, Mrs. Eiseman had voted for Ronald Reagan. But she now considered that vote "a mistake." She explains, "I thought Carter was a phony, and that wife of his is absolutely awful. People back east, including our own congressmen, they live in another world. That is not America. This is America. They come back [to visit] and they stay in a $185 room."

When the handwritten draft of her letter satisfied her, she went to the typewriter and copied it. It appeared, as follows, in the *Times* of August 19, 1983:

> To the Editor:
>
> Extraordinary. Now military hardware is being sent to some country in Africa called Chad. I had never heard of Chad, and I couldn't care who governs it. What is the matter with this administration? They seem to want to rule the world. They want to monitor who governs every nation. If they spent more time and money helping the citizens of the United States, we wouldn't have this dreadful deficit or so many hungry people.

There was reason to believe that many of Mrs. Eiseman's countrymen shared her frustration. At about the time her letter appeared, leading opinion polls showed that the overwhelming majority of Americans couldn't even keep straight which side their blood and treasure was being spent on in Central America. In El Salvador, we were *for* the dictatorial government and *against* the rebel guerrillas; in Nicaragua, we were *against* the dictatorial

government and *for* the rebel guerrillas. To make it even more confusing, the State Department, and often the newspapers, acted as if these conflicts had started in the past few years. It was somehow written out of history that the United States had been toppling and establishing the governments of Central America for decades, always to set things right, never with success.

In faraway Lebanon, U.S. marines were patrolling the streets, and occasionally dying. The newspapers said the marines were there to put an end to twenty-five years of bloody civil war, so Lebanon could "get back on its feet" and start a democracy. Nobody seemed to remember that Lebanon's twenty-five years of civil war began when the CIA sabotaged a democracy that was already in place. In 1957, the CIA had helped rig an election to load the Lebanese government with Christians, who it believed would better serve American interests. But the Christians we installed proved not terribly credible with their fellow Lebanese. The operation succeeded temporarily,* but the next year, 1958, the Moslem majority began fighting for control.

So U.S. marines were summoned in 1958—to help the young country get back on its feet and restart its democracy. But the marines couldn't stay forever, and the civil war the U.S. government had inadvertently touched off—maybe it would have started anyway, maybe not—wouldn't stop. As happens sometimes in foreign interventions, official Washington was eventually embarrassed to discover that partisans from "our side" in Lebanon were supporting themselves and their cause by smuggling dope into the United States. The cases weren't prosecuted. Many crimes against the American public have been incited, then covered up, by U.S. foreign policy designs around the globe.†

Like earlier missions, the 1983 U.S. mission to Lebanon was described as a one-time-only intervention, just temporary, until things were set right. It was also described as nonpartisan, although the government the marines were protecting was Christian, and the people shooting at the marines were Moslem. Planeloads of U.S. diplomats, led by the secretary of state himself, were hopping from Beirut to Jerusalem to Cairo, trying to negotiate settlements. But crisscrossing them in the sky, and undermining their work, were planeloads of arms salesmen, led by the secretary of defense. The one thing the Middle East never seemed to run out of was ammunition.‡

*For an account, see *Ropes of Sand* by former U.S. intelligence officer Wilbur Crane Eveland (W. W. Norton, 1980).

†Both the Treasury Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms and the Drug Enforcement Administration launched extensive investigations into narcotics dealing by Lebanese Christians during the 1970s. These investigations produced many accusatory field reports, but few prosecutions, before the investigations were ordered closed down by Washington. Some agents blame foreign policy considerations for the shutdown; proof isn't available. There is plenty of proof, though, for other instances to be cited in the pages ahead.

‡Thanks for this image to Michael Cooney.

* * *

THE American people have built a great country. Its prosperity is based in large part on the extraordinary ability of individual Americans to determine their own economic course, and this in turn is rooted in an extraordinary concept of liberty. However imperfectly at times, the United States still clings to the ideal that liberty requires the diffusion of power. Maybe nowhere, certainly not on such a scale, is there so much freedom to inquire, to speak, and to publish, coupled with so much genuine popular control of institutions. In Britain, newspapers are shackled in reporting many activities of government. In Belgium, giant trusts strangle the ambitions of small business in ways that U.S. law does not tolerate. In Japan, giant trusts are at times almost indistinguishable from government. Americans have been careful not to give anyone such power over their country. We have built a society hardly devoid of wrongs, but in which, perhaps uniquely, wrongs can be, and regularly are, righted by the independent actions of ordinary people.

Americans have a distinguished military history, too. It includes a much earlier war with the country that is now Libya. That earlier war wasn't fought in the Chadian desert to determine which tribe would manage a water hole. It was fought on the shores of the Libyan capital of Tripoli, to stop Libyan pirates from attacking U.S. commercial vessels on the high seas. We were clearly right, and we won, for all to see.

America's military history includes a successful war that stopped mighty totalitarian empires from Germany and Japan that were trampling over country after country, bombing our territory, sinking our ships, invading the traditional bastions of democracy, and stealing the productive output of our most important trading partners. We stood up against another mighty totalitarian empire, the Soviet Union, when it tried to cheat on our World War II truce lines in Berlin and Korea.

More recently, though, things haven't gone so well. Our efforts overseas have become more and more remote from the true interests of the American people, and the principles we stand for.

Americans have an interest in foreign affairs. They want and deserve security, peace, and prosperous trade. But these goals elude them. Their government's foreign policy has left them in constant peril of war with a seemingly unending list of enemies. Peril is found in places that neither Mrs. Eiseman nor most other Americans have ever heard of. Taxpapers are sacrificing nearly $1,000 a year for each member of each family, to support a military machine that does not allay the peril. And that doesn't include the hidden billions that the CIA is spending, or the cost of diplomatic missions. This expenditure is an enormous drain on the economy's ability to supply the goods and services that people want and that could make their lives more pleasurable.

Nearly a quarter century has passed since the Eisenhower administration

stained the U.S. Constitution by overthrowing the legitimate government of the former Belgian Congo, now Zaire. We implanted a new government in the Congo that was thoroughly corrupted by Western business interests. Americans weren't told about the constitutional violations, or the corruption. They were just told that the good guys had won. Freedom would be preserved for Africans, and access to valuable minerals would be guaranteed for the American economy. But in 1983, the government we had established in the Congo continued to impose a murderous tyranny on its people. And instead of guaranteeing our mineral supplies, it daily held them hostage to a great economic and moral ransom. At considerable cost, we had achieved nothing and done great harm.

In August 1983, the month of Mrs. Eiseman's letter, Americans were shocked by the latest demonstration of what their government had wrought upon the Philippines. So very recently our relations in the Philippines had been wonderful. Americans had fought and died rescuing the islands from the Spanish and Japanese. After a shaky start early in the century, the U.S. appeared to have helped Filipinos obtain not only a genuine democracy, but also the liberal economic and educational institutions to make the democracy work. The U.S. had earned, and for a while actually *had*, the admiration and affection of millions of Filipinos.

But the State Department's global designs interfered, slowly at first, then radically during the Vietnam War. By August 1983, freedom and democracy in the Philippines had long been crushed, in the name of fighting communism. The Filipino people's friendship for the United States was squandered. Benigno Aquino, the most popular Filipino politician, lay dead under the wing of his commercial airliner at the Manila airport, only seconds after returning from refuge in the U.S. The long history of U.S. government cooperation with Philippine tyranny continued to unravel.

Ironically, just as in Zaire, one of the main freedoms the U.S. side had destroyed in the Philippines was freedom of the marketplace—free enterprise. We supported the nationalization of the Philippines' main industries. Where we can help it, we will not trust our allies with the economic liberty we say we are fighting for. And then we wonder at their ingratitude!

In Iran, the U.S. State Department had successfully overthrown a popular government that was not only anti-Communist, but led by a man who had successfully fought off the Soviet Union's attempt to occupy his country. This was done back in 1953, to protect an oil cartel whose interests were not at all synonymous with those of the American people. The result was a brutal tyranny for Iranians and high gasoline prices for Americans—then the almost inevitable revolution, the advent of a lunatic and rabidly anti-American government, the loss of Iranian oil altogether, and the seizure of American citizens as hostages. As if all this wasn't bad enough, it also allowed the Soviet Union to march into Afghanistan.

When U.S. foreign policy won, the American people lost. When the policy

lost, we also lost, though often not quite as badly. When we were defeated in Southeast Asia, Indochina, wretchedly governed anyway, continued in agony. But the nearby nations, from Burma through Thailand, Malaysia, and on down to Australia—supposedly doomed to fall like dominoes—grew economically stronger and improved as trade partners. Politically, to the extent they changed at all, the domino countries became freer. Even the communist government of China, the supposed principal threat inspiring our enormous sacrifice in Vietnam, began behaving much more in accord with American desires, not only internationally, but even in its treatment of its own people. Then what was the sacrifice for?

As our policies betray us abroad, so they also do at home. The loss is not just in workers' hours, consumers' dollars, and soldiers' lives. The excuse of "national security" has been used to cloak a myriad of unconstitutional U.S. government invasions of our free society, from the break-in at Democratic party headquarters at the Watergate by Cuban CIA operatives to the clandestine manipulation of the AFL-CIO and many well-known businesses. Thugs have been secretly hired to perform unconstitutional acts for the U.S. government, then have carried on illegal activities that their government employers never contemplated, but dared not prosecute.

Corruption in American business has been not only tolerated, but, by much evidence, actively encouraged as an instrument of foreign policy. The result has been not just a moral stain, and the passing on to consumers of the cost of political bribery, but also the creation of monopolies and cartels that substantially elevate U.S. prices. Banks have been encouraged to alter their lending practices to the detriment of American borrowers. In the name of free markets, the U.S. has gone about the world rigging marketplaces.

As bad as anything, "national security" has provided a cloak under which the men who run a large part of the U.S. government have excused themselves from their responsibility to tell the truth to the people who elect them. U.S. citizens can't believe their leaders anymore, although some citizens in the press corps seem not to have learned that. We have been lied to through one war after another, the press often in naive complicity with the liars.

Forgotten are the words of Walter Lippmann, written after the disastrous U.S. invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs: "A policy is bound to fail which deliberately violates our pledges and our principles, our treaties and our laws. . . . The American conscience is a reality. It will make hesitant and ineffectual, even if it does not prevent, an un-American policy. . . . In the great struggle with communism, we must find our strength by developing and applying our own principles, not in abandoning them."

All this did not need to be. It certainly does not need to continue.

WHAT follows is a reporter's view of the world as it relates to America. The view was formed during twenty years of traveling—some of it as a student tour leader, some of it as a Peace Corps volunteer, some of it as an

unemployed, backpacking vagabond, and some of it, over the past thirteen years, as a reporter for the *Wall Street Journal.*

Much of that same twenty-year period has also been spent reporting on the domestic concerns of the American people. Those concerns—and the concerns of peoples overseas—are habitually ignored by the geopolitical strategists who for thirty-five years have committed us to endless and counterproductive entanglements abroad. And that is the reason for this book.

The book will dwell first on Zaire, for the American experience in Zaire seems to embody most of our characteristic foreign policy errors. What we could do wrong, we did in Zaire. It is an ultimate example, one that will make it easier to understand the errors we have committed at other crisis points around the world, and the ways in which they might be corrected.