

Reviews and Comments

David N. Gibbs

First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia

Vanderbilt University Press, 2009.

David N. Gibbs, in his excellent book about the destruction of Yugoslavia, *First Do No Harm* offers a credible explanation [for US policy].

■ Charles Simic, *New York Review of Books*

A serious, well written, and convincingly supported study on the reasons for Western and above all the US intervention in the wars of the post-Yugoslav countries... The book is based on a thorough analysis of documents, the most convincing of which are the eyewitness testimonies at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia... When it comes to the behavior of local actors (in Bosnia and Herzegovina and nearby countries), Gibbs offers a far more sophisticated portrait than is customary in Croatia. He does not excuse anybody... [Gibbs' book] is excellent, original, and compelling... [It] is recommended for all those who want a more balanced and reasoned discussion.

■ Dejan Jović, chief policy analyst to Croatian President Ivo Josipović
Published in *Politička Misao: Croatian Political Science Review* (translated)

[Gibbs] openly denies the genocide at Srebrenica [and] justifies the genocide... [Gibbs] is a neo-communist supporter of conspiracy theories who [sees] Slobodan Milošević as a fighter against NATO expansion and not the Balkan butcher, responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands and persecution of millions.

■ Petition by 15 organizations to President Josipović, protesting the above review

Gibbs marshals an impressive array of sources to counter the explanations used to justify Western involvement in Yugoslavia ... His contention that a relentless American drive for hegemony was at the root of this disaster is open to debate... Yet Gibbs raises compelling questions about the role of the West in Yugoslavia's demise and future studies will have to acknowledge the challenges he has posed.

■ *Diplomatic History*

Gibbs shows that the NATO intervention against Yugoslavia was deliberately planned and was not the answer to the “humanitarian catastrophe”... The book certainly shows a very different picture than the simplified black and white, which has in the world and in Slovenia so far prevailed.

■ *Mladina* (Slovenia – translated)

[In its sections on Yugoslavia, Gibbs’] book collapses and reads as little more than a collection of the conspiracy theories so popular in Milošević’s Serbia... Gibbs repeatedly claims to be setting the historical record straight, but does so only to create a smokescreen for his distortions.

■ Josip Glaurdic, *International Affairs*

[Gibbs] presents powerful arguments that the [Western] intervention not only contributed to the initial breakup of Yugoslavia, but that it also helped spread violence and destruction... a rational and logical assessment.

■ *American Srbobran*

Gibbs has written what is in many ways an admirable work... *First Do No Harm* teems with fascinating and important information. The author has clearly spent an enormous amount of time in research, unearthing a considerable array of data heretofore not widely known. His analysis is well thought out and revealing, painting a devastating picture of Western duplicity. This is an important work which anyone with an interest in how diplomacy is actually conducted should read.

■ *Science and Society*

[*First Do No Harm*] stands out as one of the most intriguing accounts of the Western intervention in the Balkans in the 1990s... an indispensable source on the Yugoslav crisis.

■ *Perspectives: Central European Review of International Affairs*

[Gibbs] professes to be a leftist, and he sticks doggedly to his convictions throughout the study... He uncritically embraces a series of long-discredited Serb propaganda canards.

■ Robert Donia, *Slavic Review*

Amid the burgeoning literature on humanitarian intervention, David Gibbs' book stands out for its apt critique and the cogent questions he raises about the rationale for using military force to try and remedy the world's many human crises. Professor Gibbs makes strong arguments and contentious and provocative claims, some of which I disagree with. Yet this is a carefully reasoned and well sourced account of how the liberal or Wilsonian doctrine of self-determination and non-intervention morphed into a license to intervene almost anywhere. Gibbs has read very widely and uses the best sources available. Given the hypocrisy of many arguments for humanitarian intervention, Gibbs' central argument should be taken to heart. First do no harm.

■ Bruce Cumings
Swift Distinguished Service Professor of History
University of Chicago

Overthrows the fading shibboleths of the Yugoslavian conflict.

■ *Z Magazine*

An antidote to the humanitarian legend of the Kosovo war.

■ David Bromwich, *Huffington Post*

Though other critical writers have dealt with the problems of Western intervention in Yugoslav civil wars, none has conducted so thorough and well documented an analysis as Gibbs... excellent and readable.

■ *Peace Research: The Canadian Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies*

[A] pioneering study... a powerful new interpretation of the Balkan wars of the 1990s.

■ Chalmers Johnson, author of the *Blowback* trilogy

[A] sorry little propaganda pamphlet... No doubt the sort of bone-headed ultra-left activist who would turn to Gibbs' book for information on the Bosnian war, instead of a serious work, is easily and happily deceived.

■ Marko Atilla Hoare, Greater Surbiton blog site

Gibbs offers an important antidote to the self-serving propaganda emanating from Washington and allied capitals... *First Do No Harm* is a tour de force... [An] invaluable book.

■ *Washington Times*

The book offers a spectacular insight into the puzzling games of grey diplomatic elites acting behind the official scenes of diplomatic negotiations on the Balkans... The structure of the book is remarkable.

■ *Obrana a Strategie – Defence and Strategy* (Czech military publication)

[A] provocative book.

■ Jim Hoagland, *Washington Post*

Also featured on C-SPAN's Book TV series.

David N. Gibbs is Professor of History at the University of Arizona, in Tucson and the author of *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention* (University of Chicago Press, 1991). His articles have appeared in the London *Guardian*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Extra*, and *Tikkun*, as well as many academic journals.