

*Focus On:*

## Why Does the Cold War Continue in the Third World?

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### 1. *An Anomaly in Gorbachev's Foreign Policy*

The Cold War in Europe is coming to an end. Yet despite communist troop withdrawals not only from Eastern Europe but also from Afghanistan, Cambodia, and Angola, conflict in many parts of the Third World still rages on, and both superpowers remain involved in it. Indeed, present Soviet foreign policy toward the Marxist regimes of the Third World is something of an anomaly. It does not appear logical that the USSR should now be withdrawing its troops and allowing democratization in Eastern Europe - a region which the Soviets consider fundamentally important to their security interests - while at the same time Moscow continues to ship huge quantities of weapons to several Marxist regimes in the Third World periphery.

General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, commander for US rapid deployment forces in the Middle East, testified in February 1990 that the USSR still sends USD250 million worth of weapons to Kabul each month, an amount which is more than they supplied while they were in there,' (Tyler, 1990a). Soviet arms transfers to Cambodia were reported to have 'increased dramatically' as the Vietnamese withdrew in 1989, while Soviet military support to Angola has continued at the rate of about a billion dollars per year (Tyler, 1990a). The Soviets reportedly sent over USD800 million worth of arms to Ethiopia in 1989 and continue to provide weapons to Addis Ababa in 1990 (Ottaway, 1989). According to the US Defense Intelligence Agency, Soviet arms shipments to the Third World as a whole are declining, but this decline is largely accounted for by reduced purchases from Middle Eastern states (*The*

*Washington Post*, 1990). Shipments to Marxist Third World regimes, for which Moscow probably receives no hard currency, have not yet been seriously affected.'

### 2. *Competing Hypotheses*

Why should the Soviets be so concerned about the preservation of Marxism in the Third World periphery when they are willing to sacrifice it in Eastern Europe and perhaps even in the USSR? A number of hypotheses have already been advanced. According to one, these continued Soviet arms shipments are due to bureaucratic inertia; the system to transfer arms still exists and thus continues to function. Another hypothesis holds that Gorbachev's conservative opponents continue to control Soviet military policy toward the Third World, or that Gorbachev pursues an activist policy in the Third World in order to appease the conservatives in compensation for the loss of Eastern Europe. Yet another hypothesis contends that while Gorbachev realized the futility of attempting to maintain communist regimes in Eastern Europe, he has not given up the pursuit of Soviet military aims in the Third World. An hypothesis has also been advanced which states that Gorbachev will soon end Soviet arms transfers to Marxist Third World regimes; these current arms shipments are the final ones 'in the pipeline' before Moscow cuts its Marxist allies off altogether.

Although different from each other, all of these hypotheses have one element in common: each assumes that Soviet military aid to the Third World stems from an independently set Soviet policy. Gorbachev, or whoever controls Soviet Third World policy, has decided what goals Moscow should pur-

sue in the Third World, and simply pursues them with little or no relationship to the dramatic changes in Europe.

Another hypothesis, though, deserves to be explored: continued Soviet arms transfers to Marxist Third World regimes at present are a reaction to US foreign policy. What explains the difference in Soviet policy toward Europe on the one hand and the Third World on the other is the Soviet perception that the USA pursues differentiated policies toward these two areas. After exploring this hypothesis, this paper compares its policy implications with the other hypotheses which presume an independently set Soviet policy.

### 3. *Soviet Concerns*

In early 1989, former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger issued a proposal aimed at securing the reduction of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe as well as its acquiescence to the downfall of Marxist rule there. Basically, the Kissinger proposal amounted to the following:

**. . . further dramatic easing of Soviet political controls over the Eastern European nations of Moscow's post-World War II empire and Soviet acquiescence in national self-rule by those countries without the threat of renewed Soviet military intervention. In return, the West would provide some form of security guarantees that NATO would not advance into Eastern Europe or utilize those nations as a threat to the Soviet Union (Oberdorfer, 1989).**

It is not clear whether such an agreement was formally made between the US and the USSR. There had to have been, however, at least a tacit agreement to this effect. It is highly doubtful that Gorbachev would ever have consented to loosening Moscow's grip in Eastern Europe or withdrawing substantial numbers of Soviet troops from there if he believed that non-communist East European governments would seek to become part of NATO or invite NATO forces to replace the Soviets. While events in Eastern Europe may have helped Gorbachev realize that the costs of maintaining Soviet influence there in the previous manner could escalate dramatically, his willingness to reduce Soviet

influence had to have been predicated on the calculation that the risk of an increased security threat stemming from NATO was minimal. Indeed, the new East European governments have behaved very circumspectly toward the USSR. Even those countries calling for the withdrawal of Soviet forces have indicated a desire to accommodate Soviet interests and avoid actions or statements that would threaten them. Nor have the USA and Western Europe advised them to behave differently. It is interesting to note that the one sticking point so far with regard to the political transformation of Europe was the question of German reunification. Moscow had indicated that it would approve reunification, but has objected to Germany belonging exclusive to NATO (Friedman, 1990).

But while the USA has behaved accommodatingly toward the Soviets in Europe in order to persuade them that their interests will not be threatened by reducing their influence, Washington has pursued a very different policy in the Third World. Despite communist troop withdrawals from Afghanistan, Cambodia, and Angola, the USA and its allies continue to provide military support to opposition groups in these countries. In both Afghanistan and Cambodia, it is the rebel aim to completely oust the pro-Soviet regimes.

From the Soviet point of view it must appear that Washington is promoting democracy in the USSR and Eastern Europe but not in the Third World. Why shouldn't there be elections in Marxists Third World states which include all parties, including the Marxists, as in Eastern Europe? Why do the USA and its allies seem to insist that belligerently anti-Soviet regimes come to power there? A fundamentalist but non-aligned Afghanistan would probably have no interest in angering the USSR, but a belligerently anti-Soviet government allied to the West and receiving Western support might behave differently. Similarly, given the weakness of the non-communist opposition groups in Cambodia, insistence on the downfall of the Hun Sen regime appears to be aimed at allowing the Khmer Rouge to return to power, which (among other negative conse-

quences) would threaten Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> And Moscow must doubt whether the USA continues to support UNITA despite the Cuban withdrawal because it wants to promote an internal power-sharing agreement or because it now sees an opportunity to oust the MPLA and replace it with a pro-Western regime.

At this point it really does not seem reasonable to conclude that the Soviets are heavily arming Marxist Third World regimes because they hope these regimes will destroy their internal opponents completely. Gorbachev seems to have learned that counter-insurgency operations in the Third World are extremely difficult and are unlikely to succeed. The 'Reagan Doctrine' - in which the USA and several of its allies provided military assistance to anti-Soviet rebel groups fighting Third World Marxist regimes - appears to have contributed to this learning process. It is highly doubtful, then, that Gorbachev continues to ship large quantities of weapons to Marxist Third World regimes because he hopes they can vanquish their opponents. He may have a more modest goal instead. Just as the Reagan Doctrine helped convince Gorbachev that anti-Soviet rebels could not be defeated in various countries, continued Soviet weapons shipments may be designed to convince the USA, its allies, and the rebels themselves that they cannot easily overthrow Third World Marxist regimes or exclude the Marxists from any settlement process. The only way to settle these conflicts is through negotiations.

That this more modest aim may indeed be Gorbachev's goal is underlined by the fact that Moscow is supplying arms most heavily to regimes where external assistance to rebels is the greatest: Afghanistan, Angola, and Cambodia. Soviet military assistance has been ended or is being reduced where the external threat is least: Nicaragua, South Yemen, Mozambique, and even Ethiopia where the threat to the regime is great but the source of this threat is primarily internal. In addition, Moscow has expressed its support for the peaceful processes which have led to the displacement of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and the disappearance of the Marxist regime in South Yemen through

merger with the more populous non-Marxist North.

In Eastern Europe the Soviets are withdrawing voluntarily and the West is refraining from taking steps that would harm Soviet interests. In the Third World, however, Gorbachev sees the USA trying to drive the USSR out altogether. Any great power would naturally resist being forced to relinquish influence. The Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe is voluntary, and others are seeking to accommodate its interests. The USSR is still seen as a great power. But if it is driven from the Third World involuntarily, Gorbachev may fear that the USSR will not be respected as a great power with legitimate interests in the Third World, in Europe, or anywhere. From the Soviet point of view, it is only prudent, then, for them to continue supporting Marxist Third World regimes until the US and its allies realize that they cannot achieve victory but must work for peaceful internal settlements which do not exclude Moscow's allies.

#### 4. *Policy Implications*

Very different policy implications stem from the two different types of hypotheses about why Gorbachev continues to ship arms to Third World Marxist regimes. Most of the hypotheses presuming independently set Soviet policy imply that Gorbachev plans to continue Soviet military support to Marxist regimes indefinitely (policy inertia, appeasing the conservatives, Gorbachev continues to pursue active military aims in the Third World). The policy implications of these hypotheses are clear: the USA and its allies must continue the Reagan Doctrine until the Soviet Union realizes that arming its Marxist Third World allies is unproductive and therefore stops doing so.

One of these hypotheses presuming independently set Soviet policy implies that Gorbachev will soon end or reduce voluntarily Soviet military assistance to its Third World clients (final aid before the cut-off). This hypothesis also implies that the Reagan Doctrine should continue: it was the Reagan Doctrine that led Gorbachev to withdraw from the Third World as much as he has.

Ending it now would mean reducing the costs for the USSR of remaining militarily involved in the Third World and thus might result in Gorbachev continuing or accelerating arms shipments to his weak Marxist allies.

The hypothesis presuming continued Soviet support to Marxist Third World regimes is a reaction to American and other country support for anti-Soviet rebels has very different policy implications. This hypothesis implies that if the Reagan Doctrine continues, Soviet military support to Marxist Third World regimes will also continue. To end Soviet military support to these regimes, then, the USA and its allies must end their aid to the rebels fighting them.

The Bush Administration, however, does not accept the hypothesis that continued Soviet support for Marxist Third World regimes is a reaction to US aid to anti-Soviet rebels. Instead, the Bush Administration's policy is based on one or more of the hypotheses claiming Soviet behavior can be explained as the result of independently set Soviet foreign policy. According to the 1990 Defense Policy Guidance for the years 1992-97, which was prepared under the direction of US Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney and US Under-Secretary of Defense for Policy Paul Wolfowitz, 'While we now see some shift in Soviet methods, for example, from direct use of military force to more reliance on military assistance to client regimes, fundamental Soviet objectives in the Third World do not appear to have changed' (Tyler 1990b).

The implications of this statement are clear: since Soviet goals in the Third World remain the same, they must be combatted through the successful means applied in the past - the Reagan Doctrine. There are, however, certain risks associated with continuing the Reagan Doctrine. First, if the US continues supplying arms to anti-Soviet rebels, the USSR is likely to continue supplying weapons to Marxist Third World regimes and regional conflicts will drag on. The more the superpowers are involved in them, the greater the prospects are for these conflicts to affect overall Soviet-US relations as in the past.

Second, now that Soviet power has become considerably weakened in Eastern Europe, the Third World, and even the USSR itself, continued US pursuit of the Reagan Doctrine could prove counter-productive. With the Soviet Union clearly on the retreat, public and government opinion in the Third World and in Europe may come to question why the United States is seeking to expand its influence by military means. This may strengthen forces in other countries which advocate less cooperation with the US or which claim that US policy hurts their interests or offends their morals. More ominously, some may perceive (or misperceive) the USA to be posing a greater threat to their security than the retreating Soviet Union. It may appear inconceivable to some citizens of the USA that other nations might view US policies as threatening, but they should not forget the overwhelmingly negative reaction in Latin America and throughout the world to US intervention in Panama recently.

Third, the perception that Soviet power is declining markedly, combined with increasing publicity about the anti-democratic nature of some of the anti-Soviet rebel groups Washington supports, may eventually weaken US public and Congressional support for the Reagan Doctrine. If this happens, the Bush Administration may end up in the same position vis-a-vis Afghanistan, Angola, and Cambodia that the Reagan Administration found itself vis-a-vis Nicaragua following the Congressional cut-off of funding for the contras. Even a weakened Soviet Union might be able to retain its Marxist Third World allies under these circumstances.

##### 5. *Conclusion*

The 'prudent' policy of continuing the Reagan Doctrine, then, might not be so prudent after all. Clearly, there are risks associated both with continuing the Reagan Doctrine and with extending the Kissinger approach to the Third World. In the long run, however, the US position in the world would be enhanced if the USA agreed with the Soviets to end or limit arms transfers to regional conflicts, the Soviets reneged on their prom-

ises, world public opinion turned against Moscow, and the USA had to revive the Reagan Doctrine than if the USA doggedly continued the Reagan Doctrine without success and public opinion both at home and abroad effectively forced an end to the policy.

Whatever value the Reagan Doctrine previously had in convincing Gorbachev that he could no longer pursue the same expansionist policy that his predecessors did, it no longer serves a useful purpose if, as has been argued here, it only prolongs Soviet military aid to Marxist Third World regimes. The USA should try extending the Kissinger (1989) approach from Europe to the Third World not only for the sake of peace, but because this approach offers the best prospect for ending the anomaly of continued large-scale Soviet arms transfers to the Third World in an era of Soviet retreat everywhere else.

#### NOTES

1. Unlike Soviet arms sales to the Marxist Third World states, there is often a strong economic incentive for Moscow to sell arms to non-Marxist Third World states. To this latter group, Moscow either sells the arms for hard currency (primarily to Arab states) or

transfers them as part of a profitable bilateral exchange (as with India). Continued large-scale Soviet arms shipments to the Marxist Third World under Gorbachev is not only an anomaly in Soviet foreign policy, but in Soviet economic policy as well: at present, Moscow can ill-afford the burden of supporting its Marxist Third World allies. On Soviet military relations with non-Marxist Third World states under Gorbachev, see Katz (1989), ch. 5.

2. With regard to the conflict in Cambodia, Moscow is clearly as much or more concerned about China's intentions as it is about the USA's.

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