



GORBACHEV'S THIRD WORLD DILEMMAS

Edited by
Kurt M Campbell
and
S Neil MacFarlane

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This volume is dedicated to the late Hedley Bull, the Montague Burton Professor of International Politics at Oxford University. Professor Bull served as academic supervisor for several of the contributors to the study and he left a profound and lasting impression on each of us. Although not a Soviet specialist himself, Professor Bull's sense of history and attention to evidence, we hope, will be apparent in the work of his students. Professor Bull's capabilities as a teacher and a scholar were complemented by a marvelous wit which he often displayed to his too serious students. He once sent a postcard from Brazil to one of the editors which read: 'After crossing the Andes on a mule and canoeing down the Amazon, I managed to get down the coast to Rio on a Cuban boat smuggling supplies to insurgents. Greetings, HB.' Professor Bull is missed and remembered by all of us who had the good fortune to study under him.

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Foreword

This volume on current Soviet dilemmas in the Third World originated from a conference on the same subject sponsored by the Avoidance of Nuclear War project at Harvard University's Center for Science and International Affairs. The meeting, held in February 1986, examined a number of key issues concerning the USSR's present predicaments in the Third World. The working papers which were presented and debated that day have been expanded, updated and edited for inclusion in this collection.

The editors are grateful to a number of institutions and individuals who assisted in the preparation of this volume. First and foremost, the Carnegie Corporation of New York provided financial support for the effort through the Avoiding Nuclear War grant project. Lynn Whitaker and Marie Allito provided essential support both in the preparation of the conference and in this, the subsequent written product. Alison Stanger provided a superb rapporteur's report of the conference proceedings which helped to guide revision and editing. Professor Joe Nye devoted his time and energy in critiquing the authors' oral and prose presentations. Finally, the editors would like to offer their heartfelt thanks to the contributors to the volume who worked patiently, long hours with little remuneration. Without their persistence and commitment, this collection would not be possible.

Kurt M. Campbell
S. Neil MacFarlane
1989

Introduction

The Soviet Union stands at a crossroads in its policies toward the Third World. Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev has ushered in a brave new foreign policy agenda for the USSR in this era of domestic perestroika. Since his rise to leadership, Gorbachev has sponsored a diverse range of domestic and international policies which, taken together, represent a dramatic shift from his gerontocratic predecessors. Domestically, he is striving to revitalize the lethargic and inefficient state sector and party structure. Internationally, he has introduced a broad range of arms control proposals to the United States, offered trade packages to the West as a whole, engaged west Europeans in a dialogue about the concepts and consequences of 'mutual security', and has more openly sought better relations with China and Japan. These are all countries where the USSR is principally engaged, and the outlines of Gorbachev's policies toward the United States and states bordering the Warsaw Pact have become more apparent over time.

However, Gorbachev has spoken relatively sparingly about Soviet policy in the Third World, and only recently have signs of a new Soviet approach to the developing world become visible. Perhaps most strikingly, the Soviet Union began a phased withdrawal of 115,000 soldiers from Afghanistan on 15 May 1988. It marked the first time in history that the Red Army retreated in defeat from territory previously seized in battle (the Soviet pullout from Austria on 15 May 1955 was the result of international negotiations rather than defeat at the hands of rebels). In addition to the momentous move from Afghanistan, the Soviets have also taken a number of new steps as well. Soviet statesmen have openly sought increased leverage and visibility in the Third World by courting influential

non-Marxist states. There is renewed attention to methods and means of superpower crisis prevention and resolution in the Third World. In addition — and in contrast — the Soviets continue to stand firm in a number of revolutionary pursuits in the Third World, providing arms and assistance to Marxist regimes in Angola, Nicaragua, Ethiopia and Vietnam.

The purpose of this volume is to explore these elements of change and continuity in Soviet policy in the Third World. Gorbachev has inherited an activist foreign policy in the developing world from his gerontocratic predecessors. Some of these previous commitments and objectives stand in stark contrast to the new tenets of Gorbachev's foreign policy. The dilemmas that Gorbachev and the Soviets face in the Third World are the central issues of inquiry addressed by the contributors to this collection.

The collection opens with a general treatment of the Soviet conception of regional security. Following from there, the chapters consider a number of contemporary issue areas in Soviet policy toward the Third World. There is a treatment of the trend to counterinsurgency in the theory and practice of the USSR's political-military relations in the developing world. The author considers a number of country case studies and examines the Soviet response to the Reagan doctrine, and the legacy of the Brezhnev doctrine in Eastern Europe and the Third World. Two further chapters explore other military questions in Soviet policy in the Third World. The first looks at the history of Soviet arms trade with less-developed states and speculates about future Soviet practices in the field of military sales and shipments. The second considers the evolving Soviet military attitudes and approach to Third World combat situations and contingency planning.

The next section views Soviet perceptions and practices toward international regimes involving Third World crises. Specifically, there is an exploration of Soviet attitudes about and attention to the proliferation of nuclear technology and materials to the developing countries. Further, the volume contains a discussion of Soviet perceptions of superpower crisis prevention practices and centers, particularly as these relate to the Third World.

The penultimate portion concentrates on Soviet policy toward specific regions and countries in the Third World. One chapter examines the evolution and present nature of the USSR's relations with Latin America. Another explores the twists and turns in Soviet

policy toward Southern Africa, with particular reference to Angola and Mozambique. Yet another looks at the legacy of Soviet policy in South Asia after the USSR's retreat from Afghanistan.

The volume's conclusion seeks to distill and tie together the material presented in preceding chapters.

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The Soviet Conception of Regional Security

S. Neil MacFarlane, University of Virginia¹

Introduction

Disagreements between East and West on questions of regional security in Africa, South West Asia, and South East Asia have, since the mid-1970s, contributed considerably to the deterioration of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. In the period of poor relations in the early 1980s, one of the most plausible avenues to the outbreak of nuclear war is that of escalation from crisis and confrontation in the Third World — specifically in the Middle East, where the interests of the two blocs most clearly intersect.

For the United States, one way to reduce the likelihood of such an eventuality is through clearly defining — and subsequently displaying the capacity and resolve to defend — vital Western interests in the Third World, with a view of forestalling Soviet challenges to these interests. But this strategy is expensive, and carries within itself the danger of entanglement in local disputes as well as the very possibility of confrontation that it is designed to forestall. Moreover, it is difficult to sustain for any length of time in a pluralist democracy, and it may have ethically questionable consequences. Conventional deterrence alone, therefore, may be inadequate as a strategy for dealing with Soviet initiatives in the Third World.

A second approach is to enter into a dialogue on Third World security with the USSR in the hope of reaching agreements on mutual restraint in situations of regional conflict that carry the potential for a superpower confrontation, and on cooperation in the attempt to limit or resolve such conflicts. Along these lines,

Donald Zagoria argued in 1979 that it was time to 'engage the Russians in a broad dialogue on regional security issues and offer them a role in helping to maintain regional security'.² Such appeals were heard with growing frequency in the mid-1980s.³ The Reagan Administration began discussing issues of regional conflict with the USSR at this time. Since Gorbachev's accession to power in 1985, the pace has quickened. The superpowers have achieved major progress in cooperation to limit or resolve regional conflicts.⁴

For an interchange of this type to be useful, there must be something to talk about. In contemplating such an approach, one should recall that disagreements over Third World issues may be ascribed in part to faulty Western perceptions of the Soviet attitude toward conflict in the Third World, as well as the relationship between superpower involvement in such conflicts and East-West relations. An understanding of Soviet thinking about regional security and political change in the Third World would, therefore, be useful in assessing the prospects for a dialogue on regional issues, and in defining the parameters of such a dialogue. It is curious that, although Western scholars have accepted that an understanding of Soviet strategic doctrine is a precondition for the development of a durable deterrence and arms control relationship,⁵ there appears to be far less acceptance of the notion that an understanding of Soviet thinking on regional security and political change in the Third World is essential in the attempt to arrive at agreements on behavior in the Third World.

In this chapter, I will examine Soviet discussions of change and conflict in the Third World. Such an examination is particularly timely. The period since the death of Brezhnev has witnessed substantial change in Soviet thinking on regional conflicts and the role of the superpowers in them. In analyzing Soviet conceptions of regional security, I address a number of issues:

1. The sources of instability and conflict in the less-developed world.
2. The role of external actors in regional crises.
3. The character of Western attempts to resolve Third World conflicts.
4. The dimensions of Soviet regional security proposals.
5. The implications of Third World conflict for East-West relations.
6. The nature of Soviet interests in Third World conflicts.

I begin with an extensive treatment of Soviet perspectives on these issues during the Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko leaderships. I then contrast these with the development of official and scholarly attitudes on the subject during the Gorbachev period. I conclude by considering the implications of the analysis for Soviet-American relations in the Third World.

Analysis of the pre-Gorbachev era suggests the existence of considerable conceptual impediments to meaningful negotiation with the USSR on regional security issues and justified considerable pessimism regarding prospects for such a dialogue. For example Third World conflicts were seen as a result of imperialist meddling and as an important element of a global competition between world capitalism and world socialism. Soviet commentators rejected the possibility that there might exist common superpower interests in Third World conflict resolution. The possibility that Soviet behaviour in the Third World might impede the realization of Soviet objectives in the East-West relationship was denied.

However, the clear Soviet desire for recognition of its status as a player in Third World politics, their later concern with prospects for escalation, their recognition that in specific instances Soviet security interests might be affected by regional conflicts all indicated that even prior to Gorbachev, there was perhaps more scope for useful superpower discussion of such issues than the bedrock of Soviet doctrine might have suggested. Moreover, consistent Soviet verbal support of regionally originating efforts at conflict resolution betrayed a realization that the Soviet diplomatic position in the regions of the Third World might be negatively affected by transparent obstruction of local peace initiatives. This too gave the USSR at least some stake in conflict management and resolution.

These qualifications bore upon prospects for East-West accord on regional issues in a number of ways. The Soviets' desire for equal status gave them a stake in bilateral negotiations that recognize their equality and legitimize their role in the Third World. Their recognition of dangers of escalation, particularly in periods of tension, established an interest in agreements on crisis management and perhaps crisis prevention in areas where the critical concerns of the two superpowers overlap (e.g., the Middle East). It also favored in practice, and perhaps in putative agreements, non-interference by one superpower in situations where well-defined vital interests of the other were at stake (e.g., Central America and