

**The Soviet Union in
the Third World:
Successes and Failures**

edited by
Robert H. Donaldson

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The Soviet Union in the Third World: Successes and Failures

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What are the Soviet objectives in the Third World? What instruments of foreign policy have been employed by the USSR toward the achievement of these objectives, and with what success? What are the implications of Soviet foreign policy in the Third World for the international system in general and for U.S. foreign and defense policies in particular? Twenty leading specialists address these and other questions in this analysis of Soviet involvement in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Discussing the subject from both security and economic perspectives, they conclude that the influence of the USSR in the Third World remains limited and that U.S. policymakers should not overestimate the Soviet's appeal. They also emphasize the importance of economic, rather than military, measures in the U.S. approach to Third World countries.

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PREFACE

The chapters in this volume evolved from a conference held in September 1979 at the US Army War College, under the auspices of the Strategic Studies Institute. The conference participants, drawn from both the academic world and government, assembled in the wake of conflicts involving Soviet power and presence in Indochina and Africa, in the midst of the controversy surrounding the Carter Administration's "discovery" of a Soviet training brigade in Cuba, and just in advance of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Although the swirl of current events provided ample occasion for discussion of Soviet intentions and activities in several "hot spots" of the Third World, the conference agenda and the papers that have been collected in this volume deliberately chose a longer-range perspective. Precisely because the attention of the public and policy-makers has lately been so intensely focused on Soviet activity in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, with overtones of crisis and potential superpower confrontation in each region, this assessment in the larger context is so vitally needed.

In this volume twenty prominent specialists on Soviet and/or Third World politics have surveyed the record of the Soviet Union's involvement in the regions and leading countries of the Third World, with an eye toward analyzing the factors that have contributed to Soviet success or failure. In preparing their analyses, all authors focused on a set of common issues:

- What are the objectives that the Soviet Union is pursuing in Third World countries?
- What instruments of foreign policy have been employed by the USSR toward the achievement of these objectives, and with what success?
- What trends or patterns in Soviet policy have been highlighted by the history of the USSR's involvement, and how does Moscow itself assess the costs and benefits of its activities?

- What are the implications of Soviet policy in the Third World for the future stability of the international system, and in particular, for the foreign and defense policies of the United States?

A summary of the contributors' assessments of Soviet policy and of the emerging patterns of Soviet behavior is provided in Joseph Nogee's concluding chapter. By way of preview, let it be noted here that the evidence adduced in these studies is that Soviet influence in the Third World remains limited, in part by the strong impulses toward autonomy and national self-determination of the Third World countries themselves. Many of Moscow's biggest "victories" have resulted from events over which it had little or no control. Thus US policy-makers should not overestimate the appeal of the Soviet Union in the Third World or its prospects for success there. Moreover, the US, in its own choice of policy instruments in these regions, should give as much or more careful attention to the promotion of economic development and political institutionalization as to the military aspects of enhancing security.

Our grateful appreciation for hosting the conference and for assisting in preparing this volume is extended to the staff of the Strategic Studies Institute and its director, Colonel Andrew C. Remson, Jr. Special thanks are due to the Institute's publications editor, Mrs. Marianne Cowling, for directing the preparation of the manuscript, and to Cathleen Brannen and Debra Hance (of Vanderbilt University) for applying the finishing touches.

Robert H. Donaldson
Nashville, Tennessee

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PART 1

THE SOVIET UNION IN LATIN AMERICA

1

SOVIET POWER IN LATIN AMERICA: SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

W. Raymond Duncan

Soviet policy in Latin America, at least from American perspectives, is deceptively easy to analyze. Moscow's power appears increasingly to extend to previous North American spheres of influence—or threatens to do so. This apparent transition began with Cuba's turn to Marxism-Leninism in 1961, became less pronounced in the early 1970's, then spread anew with Moscow's Caribbean and Mexican ties from the mid-1970's onward. By the summer and fall of 1979—with the victory of Marxist-led pro-Cuban revolutionaries over Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua, the ruckus over 3,000 Soviet troops in Cuba, and Fidel Castro's blatant attempt to move the sixth summit meeting of nonaligned countries toward open support of Moscow—Soviet presence in Latin America had reached crisis proportions in the minds of many influential observers, most notably in the US Congress.¹

The 1979 perception of escalated Soviet power in the Caribbean and Latin America in turn shaped American foreign policy. It prompted Washington to demand a change in the *status quo* of Havana-based Soviet "combat" troops and produced the

consequent image of a president not precisely in control of Caribbean foreign policy.² The threatening Soviet power image meanwhile adversely affected Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II), shaped growing negative moods about detente and the Russians in general, and added momentum toward increased military spending.³ As a result of these events—locked into US media coverage, congressional politics, executive-congressional relations, and public opinion surrounding Soviet and Cuban policies during the summer and fall of 1979—how easy it is to assess Kremlin power in Latin America as distinctly on the rise.

Admittedly, the idea of expanding Soviet power in Latin America is a compelling image. Cuba's "surrogate" or "proxy" role under Soviet leadership is central to the case.⁴ In the context of Soviet-Cuban military cooperation in Africa since 1975, any Cuban initiatives in the Caribbean or support for revolutionary leaders in Nicaragua and Central America naturally produce the assumption of Soviet conniving. Congressional responses to the Nicaraguan civil war in 1979 demonstrate this type of logic.⁵ More overt Soviet influence appears in expanded diplomatic and economic ties in Latin America since the early 1960's, the sale of SU-22 fighter-bombers to Peru in 1977, and Caribbean-Mexican links with the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CEMA) in the late 1970's—all of which denote Moscow's keen attention to Washington's "strategic rear" in the Caribbean.⁶ Meanwhile the Soviet Union continues to nourish its links with the Latin American Communist parties through multiple channels.⁷ To all appearances, this record surely suggests increased Soviet power over Latin America's internal, regional and global affairs.

Looking at conditions and trends in the Caribbean and Latin America, one side of the current Soviet debate about the region argues that it is characterized by a "mounting anti-imperialist struggle for democracy and social justice," and a positive "present upsurge in the Latin American countries' struggle for economic independence."⁸ The Caribbean is of special attention in this debate, with its proximity to revolutionary Cuba which has stirred "profound progressive changes in this region and raised the people's anti-imperialist struggle to a new level."⁹ This "progressive" interpretation coincides with a wider belief frequently asserted by Soviet analysts that the world "correlation of forces" now is running in favor of socialism, and that the forces

of capitalism, imperialism and neocolonialism, led by the United States, have entered a "protracted phase of profound difficulties."¹⁰

On the basis of this type of argument a number of Soviet writers naturally insist on the encouraging Latin America's economic nationalism and its regional organizations, such as the Economic System of Latin America (SELA, which includes Cuba), in an effort to weaken Washington's power. Other trends can be identified in Latin America that seem to support this interpretation that events there currently serve to strengthen the position of Moscow and the world socialist system. The quest for more control by Latin Americans over their natural resources and their territory, the expropriation of foreign multinational operations, and the spread of national liberation movements like the Sandinistas in Nicaragua or the Independistas of Puerto Rico are cases in point. From this specific Soviet point of view, then, Moscow's power is increasing in Latin America insofar as events weaken the United States and contribute to a positive correlation of socialist forces worldwide.

Easy conclusions can be drawn from this assumption of growing Soviet power in Latin America. One might conclude, for example, that a "Soviet threat" lurks behind indigenous revolutionary events or leftist civil disturbances, especially those close to home in the Caribbean and Central America where Moscow's "proxy," Cuba, operates. The conclusion naturally leads to the demand for military responses—as occurred in the Dominican Republic in 1965 and as was advocated in Nicaragua in 1979.¹¹ This type of military response argument rests upon the assumption that Soviet-backed Cuban action in Africa will likely be replicated in Latin America and the Caribbean, thus largely conditioning events there to the detriment of US interests, or at least that Soviet and Cuban military strength is *capable* of projection into Latin America and the Caribbean.

Aside from the possibility of a Soviet-backed Cuban military thrust, there is the prospect that Marxism-Leninism will spread through the Communist parties of the region, strengthened through continued Soviet and Cuban ties with these parties. Delegations of Latin American Communist parties continue to circulate through Moscow, and Havana convened major meetings of Latin American Communist parties in 1975 and in 1977. This type of analysis would stress, moreover, that despite the setback to continental

communism in Chile after 1973, Mexican Communist Party membership grew from 5,000 in 1973 to approximately 60,000 in 1977, with the Mexican Communist Party in 1978 becoming fully legal and capable of participating in elections.¹² Communist party membership also registered growth in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru, and Venezuela from 1972 to 1977.¹³ In the Caribbean it could be argued, the full impact of Soviet and Cuban ties has not yet been felt, but the 1977 return from Cuba of a Jamaican youth construction brigade, determined to organize itself into a movement along Marxist-Leninist lines, is ominous.¹⁴

Another possible conclusion from this prognosis of expanding Marxism-Leninism is that the underlying problem in Latin America is strictly economic, demanding more US economic aid. The conclusion rests upon the deterioration in many Latin American and Caribbean economies juxtaposed against the precipitous decline in US-Latin American relations during the 1970's caused by conflicts over international economic matters. The latter is mirrored in the sharpening identification of Latin American leaders with the Third World drive for a New International Economic Order, in Venezuela and Ecuadorian participation in oil increases through the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) since 1973, and in the post-1975 operation of SELA. These events, which Moscow cites as evidence of deteriorating US power in Latin America, drive home the Latin American focus on economic development and dissatisfaction with Washington's legendary treatment of the region as of secondary importance in global affairs except in times of violent crisis.¹⁵

These types of conclusions, resting upon the notion of expanded Soviet power in the Caribbean and Latin America, merit closer attention if we are to separate illusion from reality in the search for appropriate US policy responses. Is Soviet policy in Latin America as influential as it may at first appear? Is the record of Soviet diplomacy in the region one of unconditioned "success"? These questions are explored in this paper as we identify the discernible features of recent Soviet-Latin American relations, while suggesting some of the less perceptible underlying aspects of the relationship. The paper is divided into three sections: Soviet objectives; instruments of Soviet policy; and, implications for the United States.