

The Intemperate Zone

The Third World
Challenge to U.S.
Foreign Policy



Richard E. Feinberg

THE INTIMATE ZONE

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Richard E. Feinberg THE
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*To my father who challenged me to think,
to my mother who instilled an appreciation for literature,
to my sister who keeps me honest,
and to Diane and Sonya always*

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原书缺页



Introduction

The seventh floor of the State Department is the exclusive preserve of the Secretary of State and his senior advisers. One day in early 1979, the seventh floor's central brain—the Policy Planning Staff—was meeting in one of the plush inner conference rooms to review U.S. global foreign policy. Together, the twenty-three staff members were responsible for devising policies across the full range of international issues of concern to the United States. The director of the planning staff asked each staff member briefly to summarize the major problems confronting the United States in his or her region of the world and explain the United States government's plan for resolving those difficulties. That day, the problem areas ranged widely and included civil war in Cambodia, instability in Iran, peace talks in the Middle East, the economy of Sudan, conflict in the Horn of Africa, arms sales to Morocco, the latest round of talks on Zimbabwe, foreign aid levels in the Caribbean, human rights violations in South America, and a series of issues involving Western Europe and the Soviet-Chinese relationship. As a staff member, I reviewed several international economic issues and the growing unrest facing Somoza in Nicaragua. This extensive menu covered most of the day's newspaper stories on foreign affairs and several that had not yet entered the public domain. But unlike the newspaper reader, the Policy Planning Staff was expected to provide

detailed recipes for coping with each problem.

The director struggled to find a pattern in the kaleidoscopic swirl of ideas being presented by all of the staffers. At the end of the 90-minute *tour d' horizon*, the director noted the sheer mindnumbing quantity of it all and sighed: "Sometimes I wonder, if we put all the problems on a circular board, all the proposed solutions on an outer wheel, and just spun away, and implemented each solution wherever it stopped on the wheel, whether we wouldn't do as well."

The pace on the seventh floor is hectic; the pressures are intense. Officials try to maintain the sense that they are on top of the crises of the moment and that U.S. policy is molding history in the desired direction. Only occasionally, even to themselves, do they admit that events are spinning beyond their control. For instance, I remember drafting a cable with a personal aide of the department's second-ranking official, the Deputy Secretary of State, during an especially difficult moment in El Salvador. The cable instructed our embassy in San Salvador to deliver messages to various Salvadoran government officials, military officers, politicians, businessmen, and clerics to gain their support for our plans for their country. The aide suddenly collapsed in his chair and blurted, "We're behaving as though we push buttons in Washington and the Salvadorans jump. It's a fantasy, a self-delusion."

Looking Backward

Every day, the Third World moves further and further beyond the control of the United States. Formerly subservient nations now march to their own drummers. The central debate in U.S. foreign policy in the 1980s will be over how the United States should react. Can we reverse the course of history at reasonable cost? If not, how can we ensure that the forces unleashed in the Third World march alongside us rather than against us?

Since the years immediately after World War II, the Third World has been the chief locus of international tensions. The United States and

the Soviet Union, separated by forbidding distances and restrained by the fear of mutual assured destruction, have concentrated their competition in "third areas." Europe retained its primordial importance, but its political systems were firmly established, and East-West boundaries were clearly drawn. With its political instabilities and localized wars, the developing world has provided a fertile, alternative battleground where the Great Powers could wage a shadow war by proxy, where each could seek to spread its own influence and deny or disrupt its opponent's ambitions.

Most of the major foreign policy crises since the Second World War have erupted in Asia, Africa, or Latin America. American attention and energies were consumed by veritable earthquakes in Korea, Cuba, and Vietnam, and by tremors in such places as Guatemala, Lebanon, Indonesia, the Congo, the Dominican Republic, and Chile. Today, Washington's attention is directed toward the rumblings emanating from the Middle East, Central America, southern Africa, the Horn of Africa, southwest Asia, and Indochina. The Soviet Union has sought to exploit some of these disturbances, while at the same time struggling to manage or cap explosions along a rim running from China through Afghanistan to the Balkans and Poland. Indeed, both superpowers find themselves embedded in "arcs" and "circles" of crises. Upheavals near to home are worrisome precisely because of their proximity, while those further away provoke anguish because greater distances are a barrier to influence.

In its dying days, the Carter administration was blamed for the worldwide decline of American power and prestige. As Henry Kissinger lamented, "We are sliding toward a world out of control, with our relative military power declining, with our economic lifeline increasingly vulnerable to blackmail, with hostile radical forces growing in every continent, and with the number of countries willing to stake their future on our friendship dwindling."¹

The Reagan administration promised to reverse these trends. In a speech delivered one year later to the same audience Kissinger addressed, the new Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, affirmed that the administration's primary foreign policy objective was "to enlarge our

capacity to influence events and to make more effective use of the full range of our moral, political, scientific, economic, and military resources in the pursuit of our interests.”² This reassertion of American power could come about largely through an act of will. “Confidence in ourselves,” Haig argued, “[is] the crucial psychological element in any foreign policy.” Increased military spending was also necessary, in order to stiffen our resolve, augment our capabilities, and make our threats and blandishments more credible.

Central America looked like a good place to begin to reassert the will and power of the United States. The countries were small, our supply lines were short, and the Soviet Union was far away. Secretary Haig announced that the United States was prepared to do “whatever is necessary” to prevail in El Salvador. Yet, Central America has refused to be pacified. Instead, the Caribbean Basin has become the United States’ own circle of crisis. The winds of political change carry sparks across the firebreaks we have made, igniting brushfires in country after country.

In Central America, the United States is trying to recapture control over events by resorting with increased rigor and determination to old formulae. As befits the postcolonial period, the United States recognizes it cannot rule directly and is working instead to align itself with selected local elites. Military officers, businessmen, and cooperative, “moderate” politicians are the political vehicles we have chosen. Our policymakers hope that with decisive American backing these groups can maintain or gain power and install regimes that are aligned with the United States. We are employing a wide range of traditional instruments to accomplish these objectives: economic and military aid, large-scale training of intelligence and army officers, covert aid to friendly parties and media, persistent propaganda for “our” friends and against “our” enemies, and incessant diplomatic maneuvering. The United States has followed similar strategies in many other places. On occasion they have worked—at least momentarily. But, as is evident in Central America, these policies are increasingly ineffective and, even when they do seem to work, increasingly costly.

The fires continue to burn in Central America: economies are contracting sharply; violence is escalating; and tensions among states are