

DOUGLAS RIVERO

THE DÉTENTE DECEPTION

Soviet and Western Bloc Competition
and the Subversion of Cold War Peace



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Douglas Rivero




University Press of America,[®] Inc.
Lanham · Boulder · New York · Toronto · Plymouth, UK

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University Press of America,[®] Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard
Suite 200
Lanham, Maryland 20706
UPA Acquisitions Department (301) 459-3366**

**10 Thornbury Road
Plymouth PL6 7PP
United Kingdom**

**All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
British Library Cataloging in Publication Information Available**

**Library of Congress Control Number: 2012950701
ISBN: 978-0-7618-6043-3 (clothbound : alk. paper)
eISBN: 978-0-7618-6044-0**

 **The paper used in this publication meets the minimum
requirements of American National Standard for Information
Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials,
ANSI Z39.48-1992**

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my fiancée. Without her understanding, support and love, the completion of this work would not have been possible. I also dedicate this book to all of the children of the less developed world. May your future burn brighter. Finally, I dedicate this book to humanity. May we continue to evolve towards a future of peace and understanding.

Contents

List of Tables	vii
Abstract	1
I. Introduction and Methodology	3
II. The Soviet Aggression Thesis and its Critics	19
III. Soviet and Western Bloc Foreign Aid to the Less Developed World	37
IV. The Soviet Response in the Third World	63
V. U.S. Response to the Soviet Threat in the Third World	93
VI. Consequences of Détente: Collapse of Soviet Union	119
VII. Conclusion and Final Thoughts	127
Index	137
About the Author	143

List of Tables

3.1	Communist Bloc Military Aid to Indochina before and after Sino-Soviet Split	38
3.2	Soviet and Western Bloc Military Aid to Indochina and ASEAN Spheres of Influence	39
3.3	Soviet Economic Aid to Mongolia	40
3.4	Soviet and U.S. Economic Aid to Asia (Excluding Soviet Aid to Mongolia)	40
3.5	Soviet and Western Bloc Military Aid to Middle East	42
3.6	Soviet and U.S. Economic Aid to Middle East	42
3.7	Soviet and Western Bloc Military Aid to Strategic Areas of Middle East	43
3.8	Western Military Aid to Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait	43
3.9	Soviet Military Aid to Libya, Syria, and Egypt	43
3.10	Western Military Aid to Egypt	44
3.11	Soviet and Western Bloc Military Aid to Horn of Africa	44
3.12	Soviet and U.S. Economic Aid to Strategic Areas of Middle East	45
3.13	Soviet and Western Bloc Military Aid to Strategic Areas of Southern Africa	47
3.14	Soviet Economic Aid to Strategic Areas of Southern Africa	47
3.15	Soviet and U.S. Economic Aid to Sub-Saharan Africa	48

3.16	Soviet and Western Bloc Military Aid to Latin America	50
3.17	Soviet and Western Bloc Military Aid to Strategic Areas of Latin America	51
3.18	Soviet and Western Bloc Military Aid to Strategic Areas of Latin America (Excluding Cuban Aid to Angola)	52
3.19	Soviet Economic Aid to Cuba	53
3.20	Economic Aid to Nicaragua by Respective Countries/Agencies	53
3.21	Soviet and Western Bloc Military Aid to South America	54
3.22	Western Military Aid to South America	54
3.23	Soviet and Western/Chinese Military Aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan	56
3.24	Soviet and Western Bloc Military Aid to Buffer Zone	56
3.25	Soviet and Western Economic Aid to Buffer Zone	57
3.26	Soviet and U.S. Economic Aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan	57
3.27	Soviet Economic Aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan	58
3.28	Soviet Military Aid to Eastern Europe	59
3.29	Soviet Economic Aid to Eastern Europe	59

Abstract

The purpose of this book was to examine the competition between the U.S.-led Western bloc and the Soviet bloc in the less developed world during Détente. I assessed whether or not the Soviet bloc pushed for strategic gains in the less developed world in the middle-to-late 1970's and whether this contributed to the U.S. decision to abandon Détente in 1979. This was an attempt to test the Soviet aggression thesis articulated by such scholars as Stephen Walt (1992), John Gaddis (1997), and Vladislav Zubok (2007).

On the question of whether or not the Soviet bloc was aggressive, the comparative quantitative evidence, specifically military and economic aid, as well as U.S. and Soviet archives suggest Soviet actions during the final years of Détente in the Third World were restrained. Instead, the evidence points to U.S. aggression.

Eventually, I conclude that offensive realism, as well as structural Marxism, bureaucratic politics, offer better explanations for the collapse of Détente. For different reasons, these theories concur that hostile U.S. actions at the end of Détente had to do with U.S. attempts to quash revolutionary turmoil in areas of strategic and economic concern to the U.S.

Moreover, I also found that Melvyn Leffler's (1996) analysis of Soviet behavior during the onset of the Cold War offers a better analysis of Soviet behavior during the final years of Détente than that of mainstream historians (Gaddis and Zubok). Just as in the onset of the Cold War, the U.S. used its preponderance of power to maintain strategic and economic dominance over strategic areas of the world.

Chapter One

Introduction and Methodology

INTRODUCTION

This book examines the competition between the U.S.-led Western bloc and the Soviet bloc in the less developed world during the period of Détente (1972-1980). I assess whether or not the Soviet bloc pushed for strategic gains in the less developed world in the 1970's and whether this contributed to the U.S. decision to abandon Détente in 1979. Using quantitative evidence, in the form of military and economic aid, as well as Soviet and U.S. archives, I demonstrate that the Soviets were restrained, relative to the U.S., during the final years of Détente. On the other hand, evidence suggests the U.S. led Western Alliance pushed ahead (successfully) for strategic gains in the Middle East, Asia and Latin America

U.S. instigation in Afghanistan, as validated by U.S. officials, also baited the Soviets into a costly conflict that helped unleash perestroika and glasnost at home and abroad. No longer seen as the invincible Soviet Union, their defeat in Afghanistan opened the way for the restless Soviet republics of Central Asia and Eastern Europe to obtain their independence.

Soviet Aggression

According to Henry Kissinger, Détente, and the arms control that came with it, was effectively linked to the Soviets behaving appropriately in the less developed world. U.S. officials were under the impression that Détente amounted to a new code of conduct in which the U.S.S.R. would cede the Third World to Western influence. Kissinger goes further and explains that "in our minds, efforts to reduce the danger of nuclear war by the control of arms had to be linked to an end of the constant Soviet pressure against the balance of power."¹ The Soviets did not hold to this agreement. U.S. hawks

insist that the Soviets pushed ahead in areas of the less developed world that were undergoing revolutionary turmoil.

Indeed, the American national political discourse, led by the U.S. political right, and many U.S. mainstream academics have historically blamed for the Soviet Union for the collapse of *Détente*. One such academic is Stephen Walt. Deploying his balance of threat theory, Walt (1992) contends that, in a bipolar world, revolutions in the Third World destroy the old political infrastructure and temporally weaken the state, thereby causing important international actors (such as another superpower) to “improve their relative positions either by seizing land or by seeking important diplomatic concessions.”²

As such, Walt (1992) believes that revolutionary victories in U.S.-backed less developed countries during the middle-to late-1970’s, such as in Vietnam, motivated the Soviets to provide significant military and economic resources to revolutionaries in the less developed world. Consequently, the Soviets were compelled to take advantage of any emerging power vacuum. Soviet actions forced the US to undertake aggressive and covert actions in Central America, Angola, and Afghanistan during the Second Cold War.

Other scholars, such as John Lewis Gaddis and Vladislav Zubok, contend that the ideological nature of the Soviet regime was responsible for Soviet aggression during the Cold War. These scholars maintain that the ideology of Marxist-Leninism motivated the Soviets to help revolutionary struggles throughout the world to succeed against U.S.-led Western capitalism.

These two analyses of Soviet motivations provided much of the backbone for U.S. foreign policy towards the Soviet Union during the late 1970’s. In fact, they were the foundation of Team B’s interpretation of Soviet behavior during this time period. Team B, a panel of conservative political analysts (some of whom were former U.S. officials such as Paul Nitze), came together in 1976 and blasted the CIA’s estimate of the U.S.-Soviet military balance. They argued that the CIA was low-balling Soviet military spending and that their examination of Soviet capabilities “did not take into account Soviet ideological and strategic objectives.”³ Using their experts and formulas, Team B came to the conclusion that the Soviet Union was determined to promote socialism and achieve global hegemony. As such, *Détente* was:

A grand strategy adapted to the age of nuclear weapons. It entails a twin thrust: (1) stress on all sorts of political, economic, ideological, and other non-military instrumentalities to penetrate and weaken the capitalist zone . . . and (2) an intense military buildup in nuclear as well as conventional forces of all sorts, not moderated either by the West’s self-imposed restraints or by SALT.⁴

The Carter administration, during his final two years in office, and the Reagan administration headed the advice of Team B and put into practice their recommendations during the late 1970’s/early 1980’s.

Soviet Restraint

The quantitative and archival evidence (acquired from both U.S. and Soviet records) points to a different narrative. Records indicate the Soviet Union restrained itself in the Third World during Détente. Despite pleas for assistance from communists, nationalists, and revolutionary movements, the Soviet Union sat idly as its allies in the Third World faced significant threats. From the fall of Salvador Allende in Chile to the Egypt's and Syria's requests for assistance against Israel, the Soviets failed to help its allies overcome U.S.-backed aggression. All in all, the Soviets lost ground in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Afghanistan and Latin America during the final years of Détente.

My findings suggest the U.S. was far more aggressive than the Soviets during the final years of Détente. The U.S. Western Alliance actually gained ground against the Soviets in the Middle East, Latin America and Asia during the final years of Détente. Even more significant, U.S. intervention in Afghanistan during the final years of the Détente pushed the Soviets to invade Afghanistan. This conflict turned into a complete debacle for the Soviets. Evidence suggests the Afghan conflict unleashed perestroika and glasnost in the Soviet Union and within the non-Russian Soviet republics. No longer seen as the invincible Soviet Union, their defeat in Afghanistan opened the way for the restless Soviet republics of Central Asia and Eastern Europe to obtain their independence.

Moreover, the seeds for liberty and independence in Eastern Europe were planted in 1975 with the signings of the Helsinki Accords. Evidence shows the Carter administration stepped up anti-Soviet propaganda in Eastern Europe with the deployment of U.S.-backed Radio Liberty and Radio Europe. U.S. archives also demonstrate that the U.S. moved to increase trade contacts with Eastern Europe in an attempt to decrease the economic dependence of the Eastern bloc on the Soviet Union. Therefore, it is probably safe to say that the Helsinki Accords turned into a massive Trojan horse against the Soviets. Evidence indicates that it helped spawn the social movements that were on-standby and ready to wrestle power away from the weakening communists.

Parallels with the Onset of the Cold War: USA

Even more significant, the evidence on the final years of Détente parallels perfectly with Leffler's (1993) interpretation of the onset of the Cold War. As he described in *A Preponderance or Power* (1993), the U.S.'s overwhelming military and economic power gave American leaders the ability to act freely to protect and enhance control over areas of strategic and economic significance against rising revolutionary movements.

The evidence in my book will show that the USSR was not the principal concern of U.S. officials during the final years of Detente. Instead, U.S. policymakers were focused on curtailing the rise of revolutionary movements in areas that were strategically and economically vital to U.S. interests. These vital areas during the final years of Détente were none other than Latin America (Central America), Africa (Angola), the Middle East (Iran) and Southeast Asia.

According to Leffler, the same can be said for U.S. foreign policy during the onset of the Cold War. Of course, post WWII U.S. officials strategized aggressively. They continuously pushed to re-arm West Germany and they dangled the economic carrots of the Marshall Plan on Eastern Europe. With the help of NATO and Japan, the U.S.-led Western Alliance practically encircled the Soviets.

Nonetheless, U.S. officials were principally concerned with the rise of socialist movements in Western Europe. While the rising Soviet threat worried U.S. officials, the rise of revolutionary movements and economic devastation in Western Europe was seen as a larger threat to U.S. strategic and economic interests. This is because U.S. officials were under the impression that the development of an economic and military alliance with Western Europe was essential for the development of an open U.S.-led Western capitalist system.

U.S. deployment of its preponderance of power to protect and expand control over vital strategic and economic interests is not just confined to the onset of the Cold War or the final years of Détente. It was key part of the entire Cold War. Gareth Porter (2006), author of *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam*, chronicles how a preponderance of power motivated the U.S. to move aggressively in Southeast Asia. Porter (2006) argues that:

It was not Cold War ideology or exaggerated notions of the threat from communism in Southeast Asia that paved the U.S. road to war in Vietnam but the decisive military dominance of the United States over the Soviet Union. The extremely high level of confidence on the part of national security officials that the United States could assert its power in Vietnam without the risk of either a major war or a military confrontation with another major power conditioned the series of decisions that finally led to war. To put it another way, the imbalance of power so constrained the policies of Moscow and Beijing toward Vietnam (and toward the peripheral countries more generally) that it created incentives for ambitious U.S. objectives in that country.⁵

There were simply no checks and balances in the international system as China and the U.S.S.R. could not challenge U.S. power.

Parallels with the Onset of the Cold War: USSR

I believe Soviet behavior during the final years of *Détente* parallels Soviet behavior during the initial stages of the Cold War. The principal focus of Soviet leaders has always been to maintain order and control over Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Rather than going on an offensive push to promote revolution and socialism abroad Soviet officials "saw the Soviet sphere largely in terms of traditional geostrategic dominance and not of Sovietization, which, as all three understood, would hardly be acceptable to the Western allies."⁶ This is because, as acknowledge by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev "Stalin knew he was operating from a position of weakness, and wanted to avoid war with the United States."⁷

As a result, Soviet leaders turned all of their focus on security Eastern Europe as a buffer. From the very beginning:

The Kremlin wanted to safeguard the Soviet Union against a recrudescence of German power. Like all his contemporaries, Stalin had seen Germany, largely demilitarized and partially occupied after defeat in World War I, rebuild its army and power in less than a generation under the Nazis. Then German armies again attacked, killing some 20 million Soviet soldiers and civilians and almost destroying the Soviet regime. Stalin was determined after World War II to gain control over the East European periphery so that countries like Poland could not serve as a springboard for an offensive against the Soviet Union.⁸

To accomplish these goals, the Soviet Union immediately moved to strengthen its "political control over the East European armed forces and reshape them along Soviet military lines after World War II."⁹ To this end, "the Soviet Union instituted a system of local communist party controls over the military based on the Soviet model. The East European communist parties thoroughly penetrated the East European military establishments to ensure their loyalty to the newly established political order."¹⁰ Most importantly, the USSR "built these armies up to support local security and police forces against domestic disorder or other threats to communist party rule."¹¹

Of course, Soviet actions had a lot to do with countering NATO through the development of the Warsaw Pact. However, evidence suggests Soviet actions in Eastern Europe revolved more around "cultivating and monitoring political loyalty in its East European military allies than increasing their utility as combat forces."¹² That is, the Soviets were not really preparing to attack Western Europe. They were not in a position to do so. Instead, Soviet leaders were much more interested in consolidating control over Eastern Europe as a defensive buffer to NATO and a reconstituted Germany.

Besides obtaining Eastern Europe as a buffer against, the Soviets also pushed to maintain their hegemony over Central Asia in order to protect its southern flank. With the assistance of the Red Army and local communist officials, the Soviets pushed for complete control over historical Turkestan and Mongolia as buffers against China.

Soviet critics, such as Stephen Walt (1992), are certainly correct to point out that the Soviets pushed to upgrade their navy and conventional weapons in the 1960's which contributed heavily to the ability of the Soviet bloc to project force in Western-controlled areas of the Third World. This helped the Soviets gain new allies in the 1960's in Vietnam, Laos, Cuba, Egypt, Syria, as well as some nations in Africa.

However, the U.S.-led Western Alliance eventually had enough of Soviet assistance to nationalist and revolutionary movements abroad. When confronted head-on with U.S. and Western counter-attacks, following the signing of *Détente*, the quantitative and archival evidence suggests the Soviets backed away. This was especially the case in such strategic areas as Latin America and the Middle East.

Even more, the Helsinki Accords of 1975, which recognized Soviet control over Eastern Europe, turned out to be huge Trojan horse. The agreement opened the East to Western economic influences and planted the seeds for human rights movements that helped topple Soviet control over Eastern Europe. The rise of these movements, coupled with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, nurtured by the U.S. of course, helped trigger a devastating Soviet defeat in Afghanistan that arguably led to collapse of the Soviet bloc.

Thus, from the start of the Cold War to its eventual finale, the Soviet bloc was largely on the defensive against the U.S.-led Western Alliance. For this reason, Soviet leaders were mostly concerned with maintaining control over their peripheral regions.

Eastern Europe—The USSR's Third World

While Soviet actions can be viewed as defensive, at least in *realpolitik* terms, the people of Eastern Europe rightly viewed the Soviet Union as an oppressor. Following the end of World War II, the Soviets actually went ahead and "physically transported and relocated Eastern European industrial assets to the Soviet Union."¹³ The Soviets also forced the Eastern bloc nations "to provide coal, industrial equipment, technology, rolling stock and other resources to reconstruct the Soviet Union."¹⁴ So much so that "between 1945 and 1953, the Soviets received a net transfer of resources from the rest of the Eastern Bloc under this policy roughly comparable to the net transfer from the United States to western Europe in the Marshall Plan."¹⁵

Indeed, the Eastern European satellites were “regarded as a source of raw materials and of cheap manufactured goods” (Anderson, Section: Methods of Exploitation and Subjugation, para. 5). The exploitation model worked in two directions. First, Russia would secure the “satellites’ exports at below world prices.”¹⁶ In turn, “Russia would export to the Eastern European satellites at “above world prices.”¹⁷ For example,

shoes manufactured in Czechoslovakia at a cost of 300 crowns a pair were sold to Russia at 170 crowns a pair. Yet when the Czech government, owing to the severe drought of 1947, was forced to import large quantities of grain from the U.S.S.R., it had to pay more than 4 dollars a bushel for it. At the time, the U.S.A. was selling grain at 2.5 dollars per bushel on the world market.¹⁸

This also happened in Bulgaria. In 1948 Bulgaria sold “nearly all her tobacco crop to the U.S.S.R. at a very low price. Russia was then able to re-sell the tobacco to Italy, making a handsome profit - in dollars.”¹⁹ Such examples were prevalent throughout Eastern Europe.

In the end, the “policies of the U.S.S.R., according to the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations (ABN), paralleled those of Tsarist Russia. Workers, miners, and farmers across the Soviet Union labored with poor compensation, horrible conditions, and usually for the benefit of greater Russia.”²⁰ The Bolshevik Revolution did nothing to alter the foreign economic policies of Russia towards its periphery. Moreover, the ABN also made the case that the Soviet totalitarian system intruded heavily into the “culture and religion of subjugated nations.”²¹

The same exploitation was applied to the Central Asian republics. Eric Nasar of Turkestan has “spoken of his father’s plight as a farmer. The postwar Soviet Union economically subjugated the satellite by the creation of a cotton monoculture. Seventy percent of farmable land was converted to cotton production, 90% of which was directly exported to Russia²². Just as in Eastern Europe, the Soviets forced Central Asia to sell raw materials at below market prices. Sosenko (2010) makes the case that this “policy destroyed crop diversity and left farmers dependent on the state.”²³ The Soviets destroyed the economic independence of the Central Asian republics. Such policy could be argued to be pretty much in line with what the Western powers have promoted in such areas of the Third World as Latin America, Asia and Africa.

As you can see, there was no socialist brotherhood. The Soviets economically exploited and politically oppressed Eastern Europe in much the same way the U.S. and Western European nations exploited and repressed the Third World.

In terms of the Cold War, however, Soviet actions can be considered defensive. The Soviets coveted Eastern Europe as a shield and buffer against

the NATO alliance. Of course, should there have been no Cold War and/or no Western Alliance, one can certainly make the case that the Soviets would still have politically repressed and economically exploited Eastern Europe. After all, that is certainly the case today with respect to the U.S. and its strategic rear in Central America. Still, one can certainly make the case that Western superiority and Western intervention in the Soviet's periphery significantly increased Soviet repression and propaganda campaigns in Eastern Europe.

METHODOLOGICAL FORMAT

Chapter two begins by articulating the Soviet aggression thesis. Starting with the final years of Détente, the principal focus of this study, I summarize Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory and his contention that a declining U.S., combined with a rising Soviet Union and increasing revolutionary turmoil, created the conditions for renewed hostility between the Soviets and the U.S. I also summarize Gaddis and Zubok's thesis that the ideology of Marxist-Leninism motivated the Soviets to behave aggressively.

I challenge these assumptions. I do not believe that the Soviets were, relative to the U.S., the more aggressive superpower during Détente. I firmly believe the Soviets simply could not compete with the overwhelming military and economic power of the U.S. and its allies. In contrast to Walt's balance of threat realism, I contend that offensive realism provides a historical framework from which to understand US-Soviet competition during the final years of Détente. Structural Marxists and proponent of bureaucratic politics also contend that the US pushed aggressively to remain as the dominant superpower in the world. For these reasons, I reel in their analysis in this chapter as well.

In chapter three I measure the foreign aid allocations made by the Soviet and Western blocs towards the less developed world. I do so in a historical and analytical manner. For instance, I analyze the foreign aid expenditures of each superpower bloc towards the most strategic countries of each region, the timing of such foreign aid, the significance of each potential gain or loss, and other historical factors in my analysis of the final years of Détente.

Measuring the quantitative evidence in this manner is extremely prudent. I cannot simply look at the aggregate foreign aid figures in my attempt to measure whether the Soviets were aggressive. This is because quantitative data on its own fails to explain the complete story. Cases of large foreign aid contributions to non-strategic areas of the less developed world could throw off the analysis. The timing component is also extremely important in this analysis. Discovering that one bloc increased foreign aid (especially military