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GORBACHEV and  
SOVIET POLICY in  
the THIRD WORLD

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THE INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL STRATEGIC STUDIES

*A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.*

James Madison to W.T. Barry  
August 4, 1822

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**R**ECENT EVENTS AROUND THE WORLD seem to indicate that Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev has made major changes in Soviet policy in the Third World. From developments such as the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, to a general decrease in military operations and arms transfers worldwide, evidence shows an increased Soviet willingness to seek political solutions to regional problems. While we in the West welcome such change with cautious optimism, we should nevertheless scrutinize it under the light of the history of Soviet foreign policy.

Thus I begin this paper with a look at the growth of Soviet foreign policy since the mid-1950s, noting the many Third World gains the Soviets have made. With these in mind, I next assess the changes themselves that Gorbachev, apparently disillusioned with military power, has initiated in Soviet military and foreign policy.

In looking at the future, I see Gorbachev showing no interest in replacing bases lost in Egypt and Somalia in the 1970s, or even in upgrading the poor facilities that Soviet naval vessels use in Angola, Ethiopia, South Yemen, or Syria. The current turmoil in East Europe, moreover, represents a direct challenge to all the USSR's radical allies and clients in the Third World.

If the Soviet Union is unwilling to challenge revolutionary change on its western frontier, then Third World leaders can only conclude that Moscow will do even less in areas far from Soviet territory.

## **The Evolution of Soviet Third World Policy**

Three decades ago the Soviet Union was a continental power whose military reach was limited to regions contiguous with its own borders. Today it is a global power with worldwide naval deployments and the ability to monitor Western naval forces. It has gained access to naval and air facilities in strategically located client states and is a factor to consider in any regional crisis or conflict.

However, the Soviets have rarely been willing to lend direct military support to key Third World clients in military engagements with US allies. A confidant of high-level Egyptian leaders, Mohamed Heikal, has recorded examples of Soviet reluctance to give military assistance to the Arabs at the time of the 1956 Suez Crisis and the 1967 June War. In the case of the Suez War, for example, Heikal has written that:

Immediately on arrival in October 1956 Kuwatly [president of Syria] asked to see the Soviet leaders. He insisted that Egypt must be helped. "But what can we do?" asked General Secretary Khrushchev.

Zhukov [Soviet defense minister] produced a map of the Middle East and spread it on the table. Then turning to Kuwatly, he said, "How can we go to the aid of Egypt? Tell me! Are we supposed to send our armies through Turkey, Iran, and then into Syria and Iraq and on into Israel and so eventually attack the British and French forces?"

Khrushchev folded up the map and told Kuwatly, "We'll see what we can do. At present we don't know how to help Egypt, but we are having continuous meetings to discuss the problem."

Heikal relates another example that occurred more than ten years later, during the Six-day War:

It was when Badran [Egyptian defense minister] and his party were leaving in June 1967 that the real misunderstanding took place. Marshal Grechko had come to the airport to see them off, and he was chatting to Badran at the foot of the aircraft steps. He said, "Stand firm. Whatever you have to face, you will find us with you."

Don't let yourselves be blackmailed by the Americans or anyone else." After the plane had taken off, the Egyptian ambassador to Moscow, Murad Ghaleb, who had heard Grechko's remarks, said to him, "That was very reassuring, Marshal," Grechko laughed, and said to him, "I just wanted to give him one for the road." <sup>1</sup>

The evolution of the USSR's Third World policy since the mid-1950s has reflected its perceived national interests and its ability to capitalize on international developments. The reluctance to become directly involved in military engagements in the Third World prior to Afghanistan reflects the conservatism and cautious nature of Soviet military thinking in general. It also illustrates the limits of Soviet power projection in noncontiguous areas in particular. The dominant Soviet role has been the provision of military assistance and advisory support to Third World clients and, on occasion, the provision of air defense support in Egypt, Syria, and Vietnam. Moscow only recently acknowledged its operational control over Hanoi's surface-to-air missile defense in the 1960s.

Although ideology has shaped Moscow's world view, it has not been a major factor in determining Soviet interests or behavior in the Third World. And although its policy in the Third World has been keyed to its ambitions vis-a-vis the United States, Moscow has not allowed concern for bilateral relations with the United States to deter it from pursuing its global interests.<sup>2</sup> Moscow's success in achieving many of its Third World objectives—acquiring a military position in every major region of the globe, challenging the West and China, and influencing the governments of key regional states—has been accomplished almost entirely with military instruments of policy. Through the use of military assistance and surrogate forces, the Soviets have served the national security needs of key Third World countries and have reaped the benefits.<sup>3</sup>

Over the past thirty years, the Soviets have made military and political gains in most regions of the world. In the Middle East, one of the USSR's top priority areas, the Soviets continue a close relationship with Syria through military weapons transfers. Moscow uses Syrian facilities at Tartus and Latakia for reconnaissance flights and has conducted several joint naval

exercises with the Syrians. The facilities themselves provide only a modest naval maintenance and support facility for the Soviet naval units of the Mediterranean squadron.

Over the past several years, the USSR has given the Syrians 25 to 30 Soviet MiG-29 fighter aircraft and reportedly will send them Soviet SU-24 ground-attack bombers. Damascus also has the capability to deliver chemical warheads on Soviet *Scud* and SS-21 missiles.<sup>4</sup> Soviet Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov arrived in Damascus on 27 March 1989, marking the first visit to Syria by a Soviet defense minister in nearly 20 years. Foreign Minister Shevardnadze's trip to Damascus in February 1989 was the first such trip in nearly 15 years.

Moscow also has access rights to naval and air facilities in South Yemen. Such access enhances Soviet logistics and reconnaissance capabilities in both the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean areas. The Soviets have a highly lucrative arms relationship with Libya, and arms sales to Iraq and Algeria provide the basis for ongoing bilateral ties. Moscow's limited entree to such moderate Arab states as Jordan and Kuwait has come through arms sales. The USSR has established diplomatic relations with Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar over the past several years, and political relations with Saudi Arabia have improved in the wake of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

In Southeast Asia, a Soviet military force has replaced the US presence at Cam Ranh Bay, thus providing Moscow with direct leverage against Beijing and with logistical support for Soviet naval operations in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. Indeed, the greatest gain for the USSR in Southeast Asia in the 1980s had been access to the American-built naval and air bases at Cam Ranh Bay and Da Nang in Vietnam: these facilities provide Moscow with its only operating military bases between Vladivostok and the east coast of Africa.<sup>5</sup> The USSR's presence in Vietnam includes naval units, a composite air unit, and a growing infrastructure for communications, intelligence collection, and logistics support. The three or four attack and cruise missile submarines operating from Cam Ranh Bay conduct patrols in the South China Sea and are well situated to operate against sea lines of communication in the region. If necessary, Soviet forces

at Cam Ranh Bay can augment the Indian Ocean Squadron. These facilities serve the 20 to 25 Soviet ships routinely deployed to the South China Sea.

In Africa, the Soviets have gained access to facilities on Dahlak Island in the Red Sea off the coast of Ethiopia, expanding their capabilities in the Indian Ocean area. In western Africa they have the use of Angolan facilities as well as the capability to use naval facilities in Guinea. These facilities bolster Moscow's ability to project force in southern Africa.

In the Caribbean basin, Moscow enjoys port and air facilities in Cuba, as well as intelligence capabilities relative to US activities in the Caribbean and North Atlantic region. These facilities allow Moscow to project power into international waters near the United States, to threaten potentially important US shipping lanes, and to apply a kind of counter-vailing power to offset Soviet perceptions of the US threat closer to Soviet borders. Soviet military aid to Nicaragua worked in a similar manner—strengthening a regime whose activities divert US attention, energies, and resources to the Caribbean Basin and away from regions more important in the Soviet perspective.

### **The Impact of Gorbachev**

Since coming to power in 1985, Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev has repeatedly expressed his intention to change the direction of Soviet foreign policy, particularly in the Third World. Recognizing that his ability to do so required sweeping personnel and organizational change, he replaced the top Soviet decisionmakers in the party and government in the field of foreign affairs and reorganized the major party and government institutions dealing with national security issues. He changed the top leadership of the foreign ministry and the central committee's International Department substantially and created a new foreign affairs department under Aleksandr Yakovlev to report directly to the Politburo.<sup>6</sup> The changes thus far indicate that Gorbachev has given high priority on the Soviet foreign policy agenda to improved relations with the United States and the West in general



and to political solutions for military problems in the Third World. The Soviets no longer are brusquely dismissing US demands that more conciliatory Soviet behavior in the Third World is a precondition to a more stable Soviet-American relationship.

Gorbachev displayed his disillusionment with the role of military power in the Third World at the 27th party congress of the Soviet communist party in 1986. He stressed that Moscow "would like in the nearest future to bring the Soviet force [in Afghanistan] back to their homeland" and that a "schedule has been worked out with the Afghan side for a step-by-step withdrawal."<sup>7</sup> This marked the first time that any Soviet leader had indicated that Moscow had a plan for a phased pullout of Soviet forces. Gorbachev ignored the friction between the Soviet and Afghan regimes on the issue of a Soviet troop withdrawal and, in February 1988, announced the first specific date for a withdrawal. He offered several new important concessions: a reduction in the proposed pullout schedule by two months and a stated willingness to remove a large number of troops in the early stages of the withdrawal regardless of whether the Afghans managed to reach an interim agreement with Pakistan. Exactly one year later, the Soviets had withdrawn more than 100,000 combat forces.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to withdrawing from Afghanistan, the Soviets were instrumental in arranging a ceasefire in Angola and Cuba's agreement to remove more than 50,000 Cuban combat forces from southern Africa over the next several years. More recently, the Soviets have contributed to the stabilization of problems in the Persian Gulf and Southeast Asia, which involve such Soviet clients as Iraq and Vietnam. All of these actions indicate that the Soviets are becoming less interested in the use of their own and their client states' military power in the Third World. The objective of improving bilateral relations with the United States, China, and the key states of West Europe requires Moscow to make far less use of the instruments of power projection to advance its interests in the Third World. US officials have acknowledged that Moscow played a positive role in the recent moderating of the position of the Palestine Liberation Organization which led to the opening of a political dialogue between the PLO and the United States.<sup>9</sup>

Diplomatic sources have remarked that the Soviets have urged Ethiopian President Mengistu Haile Mariam to find a political solution to the civil war that has been waged with Eritrea for nearly three decades.<sup>10</sup> In early 1989, the military forces of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front combined to force the ouster of the Ethiopian military from the northern province of Tigray, marking Ethiopia's first loss of a provincial capital. More than half of the Ethiopian budget is devoted to the war effort, and the economic situation in Addis Ababa continues to deteriorate. As a result, Mengistu has signalled his interest in a resumption of full diplomatic relations with the United States, presumably as part of an effort to gain Western economic assistance.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, he has visited North Korea and Zimbabwe, presumably in search of additional sources for military equipment.

Prior to these examples of moderation by Soviet clients in the Third World, Gorbachev's vague references at the party congress to the Third World and the emphasis on restoring Soviet-American stability had caused concern among key Soviet allies who spoke at the meetings in Moscow in 1986.<sup>12</sup> Cuban leader Fidel Castro reminded Gorbachev that "blood had been spilled" in the Third World and that the task of economic development in the underdeveloped world was just as important as avoiding nuclear war. Also, Mengistu urged the Soviets not to give the issue of regional conflict a lower priority than nuclear matters, and he put the Soviet leadership on notice that Moscow's Third World allies continued to expect Soviet support. Angolan President Jose Eduardo dos Santos also called for more support from Moscow and reminded his Soviet audience that Angola suffered not only from the effects of war but from the deterioration of the international situation, particularly the economic situation.<sup>13</sup>

All of these leaders appeared to be expressing concern that Moscow might back away from its international obligations. They also may believe that any effort by Gorbachev to address US concerns over East-West competition in the Third World could weaken the Soviet commitment to the countries of "socialist orientation." As a result, Castro, dos Santos, and Mengistu have begun to signal the United States that they too

are interested in improved bilateral relations. Soviet-American cooperation on the size and cost of the United Nations peacekeeping force for Namibia has convinced numerous African leaders that the superpowers intend to cooperate on matters that reduce the risk of flashpoint situations in the Third World. These leaders have obviously received Gorbachev's message.

In the wake of Gorbachev's remarks at the party congress and the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, a series of authoritative articles have appeared that document Moscow's disillusionment with some of its activities in the Third World. These articles also address the impact of Soviet actions on the East-West relationship, particularly Soviet-American relations. For example, an article appeared in the authoritative party journal *Kommunist*, written by three members of the Soviet Union's USA and Canada Institute (Deputy Director Vitaliy Zhurkin, section head Sergey Karaganov, and senior researcher Andrey Kortunov). They argued that, while the threat of premeditated nuclear aggression is decreasing, "the threat of war may be increasing in part due to the struggle in regional sectors."<sup>14</sup> These officials argued that any state that relies exclusively on military means "sets its own security against international security." They wrote that the search for security requires negotiations with adversaries as well as compromises that accommodate the interests of those adversaries. Gorbachev and others presumably used these arguments to explain the call for unilateral cuts in Soviet forces in Europe as well as the troop withdrawal from Afghanistan.

This view also reflects the positions taken by Gorbachev and Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze since the 27th party congress in 1986. Gorbachev has stated repeatedly that a resolution of the war in Afghanistan might pave the way for increased efforts to settle other regional conflicts, including those in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. The argument for Afghanistan as a paradigm for the resolution of regional confrontations was made in *Izvestia* in April 1988 by Konstantin Geyvandov. He stated that the Soviet Union and the United States, "as mediators and official guarantors of the settlement of the Afghan problem, have set a precedent for the constructive collaboration

which is extremely necessary for the improvement of international relations as a whole."<sup>15</sup> Moscow's new position on regional conflicts appears linked to Gorbachev's interest in improving relations with both the United States and China, relations which have been complicated over the past ten years by regional tensions in Southeast and Southwest Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

In May 1988, when the Soviets began their actual troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, Vyacheslav Dashichev of the Institute of the Economics of the World Socialist System, wrote about Soviet foreign policy in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*. He said that Moscow's aggressive policies during the postwar era had undermined its security interests and provoked the formation of rival coalitions seeking to counter perceived Soviet expansionism. He charged that Moscow had created the impression that the USSR was a dangerous power, seeking to eliminate bourgeois democracies and establish communism throughout the world. He accused Brezhnev of squandering opportunities created by the attainment of strategic parity with the United States. Dashichev also condemned past Soviet policy in the Third World, arguing that the Soviet leadership had no clear ideas about the USSR's state interests when it embarked on its Third World policy of the 1970s and that it had squandered material resources in the "pursuit of petty gains."<sup>16</sup>

Several months later, the deputy chief of the foreign ministry's International Organizations Administration, Andrey V. Kozyrev, wrote a serious critique of recent foreign policy, again emphasizing Soviet errors in the Third World.<sup>17</sup> Kozyrev argued that Moscow's "direct and indirect involvement in regional conflicts" had led to "colossal losses by increasing international tension, justifying the arms race and hindering the establishment of mutually advantageous ties with the West." He also argued that Soviet military aid to various Third World regimes contributed to "protracted conflicts with an opposition that in turn depends on outside support." He said that the Soviets themselves gained no returns from extending large amounts of economic assistance. Kozyrev concluded that it made no sense to build Soviet relations with Third World regimes on the basis of their

“opposition to Western influence” and called for cooperation on the basis of “mutually advantageous economic and technological cooperation.”<sup>18</sup>

Much of Kozyrev’s message was repeated in July 1988 at a foreign ministry meeting, when Shevardnadze stated that, in the past, the “Soviet confrontation spirit had been too strong.” He believed that Moscow’s withdrawal from Afghanistan could provide a model for the resolution of differences in Cambodia, southern Africa, Cyprus, and the Koreas.<sup>19</sup> Shevardnadze even asked if “everything had been done to prevent the confrontation with China.” He admonished his audience for failing to warn the Soviet political leadership that a prolonged war between Iran and Iraq could lead to a “massive US presence in the Persian Gulf.”<sup>20</sup>

These arguments, in turn, presumably formed the discussion that took place in Moscow in preparing Gorbachev’s speech to the United Nations General Assembly on 7 December 1988.<sup>21</sup> In addition to calling for a unilateral troop reduction from Europe, Gorbachev reminded his audience that the “bell of every regional conflict tolls for all of us” and reaffirmed Moscow’s commitment to remove its forces from Afghanistan. His call for ending the deliveries of all military supplies to the belligerents in Afghanistan, which Gorbachev hitherto had opposed, seemed to indicate that Moscow was more concerned with protecting the withdrawal of Soviet military forces than ensuring the staying power of the Afghan military. The Soviet general secretary appeared to use the occasion at the United Nations to gather additional support for his foreign policy agenda of increased cooperation with the West, particularly with the United States, and a search for regional settlements in the Third World.

Once again, the signal to Moscow’s clients in the Third World was the reduced role for Soviet military power in non-contiguous areas.

The first friendship and cooperation treaty under Gorbachev between the Soviet Union and a Third World state also reflected Moscow’s more cautious position toward regional commitments. During his visit to Cuba in April 1989, Gorbachev chose to dissociate Moscow from support for regional liberation movements and signed a Soviet-Cuban

Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation that differed significantly from other Soviet agreements with states of the Third World. The treaty did not contain an article on military cooperation and made no provision for consultations in case of an attack against one side or the other. The treaty made no mention of the revolutionary struggle in the Third World and no reference to the building of communism—which were standard items in previous treaties of friendship and cooperation. Instead, the treaty affirmed Cuban support for Gorbachev's foreign policy as outlined in his address to the United Nations in December 1988, and called for rechanneling resources from military purposes to "meet the economic and social development of the countries."<sup>22</sup> The structure of the treaty may reflect the differences between Moscow and Havana on military cooperation in the Third World and Gorbachev's "new thinking" toward the Third World, even toward such key clients as Cuba.

### **Gorbachev and Soviet Military Policy in the Third World**

In addition to signalling that the USSR planned to de-emphasize its commitment to developments in the Third World, Gorbachev also used the party congress in 1986 to indicate that Moscow was not willing to assign greater amounts of military resources for priority missions abroad. He suggested that the costs of substantial increases in forward-deployed forces may not be justified by the potential benefits or gains in the Third World. Clearly, Soviet naval activity in support of out-of-area missions and Third World client states has decreased in tempo since Gorbachev addressed the party congress in 1986.

The USSR, for example, sent no naval task force to the Caribbean in 1986 and 1987, and the task force that arrived in the Caribbean in 1988 stayed for a shorter period of time than usual and did not enter the Gulf of Mexico. The Soviets also have reduced the number of reconnaissance flights out of Cuba and Angola with a particular decline in TU-95 *Bear* deployments to Cuba.<sup>23</sup> Soviet naval operations are being conducted closer to the Soviet mainland and out-of-area deployment of Soviet ships has dropped everywhere, including

the South China Sea off the coast of Vietnam. There was also a slight reduction in Soviet force levels at Cam Ranh Bay over the past year. During a visit to the Philippines in 1988, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze suggested that Moscow may no longer need the naval and naval air facilities in Vietnam. This was the first time that a Soviet official had raised the possibility of leaving these facilities without linking such a move to a US military withdrawal from the Philippines. In January 1990, the Soviets began the withdrawal of MiG-23 fighter aircraft and TU-16 bombers from Cam Rahn Bay.

These cutbacks in Soviet naval maneuvers appear to be part of a larger picture of budget cuts for the Soviet navy that includes a reduction in submarine production, fewer naval operations in the Pacific, and more time in port for Soviet vessels in general. The director of US naval intelligence, Rear Admiral Thomas A. Brooks, reported to Congress early in 1989 that the Soviet navy also took more surface ships out of active service last year than in any year in recent history, and began selling deactivated major combat ships for scrap on the world market.<sup>24</sup>

These cuts in the Soviet navy and the recent Soviet emphasis on introducing naval limitation to the arms control arena suggest that Moscow recognizes it cannot afford to compete with the United States in the area of power projection to the Third World. Marshal Sergey Akhromeyev, who retired as chief of the Soviet general staff in December 1988, advanced a recent proposal that would have limited the objectives and mission of the US Navy. He suggested that if the United States and the USSR had no intention of threatening sea lines of communications, then five-to-seven US aircraft carriers could be placed in storage and the Soviet Union could mothball approximately 100 submarines. The potential trade-off in naval weapons systems in the Pacific is similar to Soviet suggestions that the United States trade tactical aircraft for Soviet ground forces divisions in Central Europe.

As part of the clamor for limiting the potential of the US navy in out-of-area waters, Soviet Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov in 1989 called for ending the asymmetries in Soviet and American naval and marine forces. Naval commander-in-chief Admiral Vladimir Chernavin displayed a particular sensitivity

to the "sea strike forces" and "amphibious assault" forces of the United States. This was presumably a reference to US aircraft carriers and the Tomahawk cruise missile that has been deployed on nuclear submarines.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the cuts in Soviet naval maneuvers, the USSR continues to improve qualitatively the operations of the Pacific fleet. It is the largest of Moscow's four fleets and accounts for nearly 30 percent of the total Soviet navy, including two of its three aircraft carriers. The Soviets have introduced the new *Akula*-class nuclear submarine to the Pacific fleet as well as three new classes of guided-missile cruisers and destroyers. Soviet bombers in support of the Pacific fleet are now deployed with AS-15 nuclear-armed cruise missiles and the deployments of the advanced MiG-31 tactical fighter have doubled in the past several years. The Soviets also have improved the airfield at Tennei on the island of Etorofu in the Northern Territories, where the Soviets have stationed 10,000 troops and MiG-23 fighter aircraft.<sup>26</sup>

Although the United States holds a significant edge over Soviet forces in the ability to project naval and air power abroad, the Soviets have had a logistics advantage over the United States in supplying military weapons systems to the Third World. Moscow's advantage derives from the large stockpiles of surplus equipment that exist in the USSR because, as one Western military official recently observed, "the Soviets never throw anything away. They just upgrade weapons and provide them to client states."<sup>27</sup> Soviet weapons are easier to maintain and Moscow's Warsaw Pact allies keep close military links to various Third World countries in order to deliver Soviet-made equipment from their own inventories. The Soviets, in turn, have leveraged generous amounts of military assistance to create an infrastructure of naval and naval air facilities in nearly every region of the world. This allows the Soviets to pursue a global foreign policy.

Nevertheless, in recent years, Soviet arms transfers to the Third World have declined, particularly to the Middle East and Africa. References to the liberating mission of the Soviet armed forces have virtually disappeared from Soviet military writings. Economic and political factors have played a key role in the recent decline in arms deliveries to the



Middle East, where seven of the ten leading Third World arms importers are located.<sup>28</sup> The Soviets earn a considerable amount of hard currency from weapons sales to the Middle East, particularly to Iraq and Libya, but the ceasefire between Iran and Iraq, various Libyan military setbacks, and Syria's need to invest in its civilian economy have reduced opportunities for the Soviets. It is unlikely, for example, that Soviet weapons deliveries to Iraq in the near term could match the \$10 billion in arms transfer agreements that took place in the 3-year period between 1984 and 1987.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to various political developments in the Middle East which will probably bring a decline in arms imports, the drop in revenues for oil producers in the region should contribute to reduced purchases from the Soviets and other arms exporters. Economic problems in Angola and Ethiopia probably will contribute to reduced Soviet arms transfers to Africa as well. Soviet deliveries to Vietnam in 1988 were down from 1987, and the Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia as well as Vietnam's economic morass should contribute to a continued decline in Soviet military deliveries. There was also a decrease in Soviet military deliveries to Nicaragua in 1987 and 1988, and Gorbachev more recently has committed himself to ending direct supplies of lethal equipment to the Sandinista regime.<sup>30</sup>

These steps in the Third World are consistent with recent efforts under Gorbachev to control military expenditures and to broaden political oversight over the military. At a Foreign Ministry conference in July 1988, Shevardnadze called for more political supervision of the military, including strengthening Gorbachev's presidency and the Supreme Soviet in deciding military policies, force structures, and budget allocations.<sup>31</sup> Outspoken reform advocates, including Vyacheslav Dashichev, head of the Department of International Relations of Socialist Countries in the Institute of Economics of the World Socialist System, and Aleksandr Bovin, an *Izvestia* political observer, have written commentaries on Shevardnadze's report. These statements indicate that Gorbachev is determined to encourage the discussion of national security issues in order to outflank his critics from the right and to bolster the image abroad of a more open Soviet

society. Presumably it will be easier for the Gorbachev leadership to limit Soviet involvement in the Third World as a part of cutbacks in defense expenditures than in more sensitive areas in the East-West relationship, particularly arms control.

In addition to reducing the presence of the Soviet military in the Third World, Gorbachev has been pursuing a campaign since 1985 to lower the public visibility and status of the military in Moscow. The current defense minister, Dmitri Yazov, is not a voting member of the Politburo, and Gorbachev has retired or overseen the resignation of the three marshals whom he inherited from the Brezhnev era: former defense minister Sokolov, former chief of the general staff Akhromeyev, and former Warsaw Pact commander Kulikov. Viktor Kulikov was one of nine Soviet generals and marshals who were purged from the central committee in April 1989 in another display of Gorbachev's political power. The purge included former chief of the general staff Nikolai Ogarkov, who was the USSR's top career military officer in the early 1980s. Gorbachev also won a major debate with the military when he gained acceptance of intrusive onsite inspection and asymmetry in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces agreement of 1987 and the unilateral cuts of Soviet forces which were announced at the United Nations in December 1988 and begun in Hungary in April 1989. In addition to politicizing the arms control agenda and beginning a series of deployment retreats from Central Europe and the Sino-Soviet border, Gorbachev has announced reductions in defense expenditures and military procurement over the next two years.<sup>32</sup>

### **Gorbachev and Soviet Foreign Policy in the Third World**

In the near term the Soviets can be expected to try to capitalize on their comparative advantage in various military instruments of influence, particularly arms sales and military assistance, to expand their political influence in the Third World. The public remarks of both Gorbachev and Shevardnadze indicate that the current Soviet leadership is becoming increasingly impatient with the instability and

discontinuity of political and military developments in the Third World. Nevertheless, the impasse in the Arab-Israeli peace process and the black liberation struggle in Africa should continue to make Soviet diplomatic and military support essential in the Middle East and southern Africa. The Soviet commitment to upgrade Cuban and Vietnamese military capabilities should assure continued use of their air and naval facilities, and there is no sign of reduced military deliveries to Havana and Hanoi. The success of Cuban forces in Angola and Vietnamese forces in Cambodia, moreover, can be attributed to Soviet-made military equipment. The Soviets can view the success of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua against the US-supported Contras as a major achievement in this regard as well.

In South Asia and the Indian Ocean, Indian dependence on the USSR for military aid should allow the Soviets to maintain their position over the next few years. Continued Soviet probing for additional military access can be expected, primarily in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, which is so near to the USSR and so critical to the perception of the balance of power between East and West. The Soviet sale of high performance SU-24 fighter bombers to Libya indicates that Moscow will continue to rely on military sales to gain political and military access even to "pariah" nations in the Middle East.<sup>33</sup> Southeast Asia is also important because it provides a useful base for exerting pressure on China and Japan and allows access to sea lanes to the Indian Ocean and southern Africa that are of significance to the USSR.

The trend of Soviet behavior in the Third World has been increased military and political involvement in key regional issues and crises, but Gorbachev has been signalling that Moscow is less interested in military involvement and more concerned with playing a visible role in political solutions to regional rivalries. The replacement of Andrey Gromyko as Foreign Minister in 1985 and his subsequent retirement from both the Politburo and the Soviet Presidency in 1988 and the Central Committee in 1989 marked the symbolic "passing of the torch" for the Soviet foreign policy establishment and Soviet policy toward the Third World. Gromyko's "promotion" to the presidency in 1985 was followed by a remarkable

improvement in Soviet-American relations as well as Soviet gains in relations with China, Japan, and such moderate Arab states as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

Gromyko's successor, Eduard Shevardnadze, significantly reorganized the foreign ministry. He established a new Near Eastern and North African Countries Administration under Vladimir Polyakov, who has argued for a more sophisticated and flexible Soviet policy toward the Middle East and Southwest Asia. Less than a year after Gromyko's removal as foreign minister, Gorbachev announced that the Central Committee's International Department would no longer be headed by Boris Ponomarev. He had led the department for 25 years and his sphere of interest was limited to the promotion of "progressive socialist forces" in the Third World. Ponomarev's successor was Anatoliy Dobrynin, who had served for 25 years as ambassador to the United States and immediately staffed his department with former colleagues from the Soviet embassy in Washington.

Both Shevardnadze and Dobrynin began to reshuffle their foreign affairs departments, promoting Soviet officials with experience in East-West affairs and arms control. As part of a general shake-up of the Soviet foreign ministry in 1986, for example, the Soviets changed and upgraded their representation in expert-level talks on a variety of regional issues. Igor Rogachev, a department chief in the foreign ministry, replaced Deputy Foreign Minister Kapitsa in conducting political and diplomatic exchanges dealing with East Asia; Kapitsa had worn out his welcome with the Chinese and Japanese years ago.

The Soviets also upgraded their representation in African matters from department chief to deputy foreign minister. Deputy Foreign Minister Adamishin received a great deal of credit from his US counterparts for the agreement in 1988 that called for the withdrawal of Cuban and South African forces from Angola. Adamishin secretly visited South Africa in March 1989, marking the first such visit to South Africa since the Soviets broke diplomatic relations more than 30 years ago. Similarly, Deputy Foreign Minister Komplektov replaced department chief Kasimrov in discussions on Latin America. Discussions on the Middle East remained with Vladimir Polyakov, but his department was reorganized and expanded

to include all Middle Eastern and North African states. In nearly every area, the new Soviet representative had experience in East-West and Soviet-American relations in addition to Third World expertise.

Gorbachev's apparent disillusionment with certain aspects of Soviet globalism presumably has various roots, both political and economic. On the one hand, Soviet military power was a major factor in allowing Agostinho Neto to remain in power in Angola in the 1970s; Soviet power also enabled Ethiopia's Mengistu Haile Mariam to deal with an invasion from Somalia and two separate secessionist threats over the past 15 years. But these successes created problems for Soviet interests in both regional issues as well as larger East-West concerns. The introduction of Soviet military power into Afghanistan not only failed to halt the flow of outside aid to the insurgents, but created serious bilateral problems with Iran and Pakistan as well as some strains with India. The use of Cam Ranh Bay as the largest Soviet naval forward deployment base outside the USSR and the use of Soviet naval and naval air assets in Vietnam to conduct military exercises in the South China Sea had their advantages; however, these moves seriously hurt Soviet efforts to improve relations with the states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The Soviets also have confronted difficult policy choices because of rivalries between Third World states.<sup>34</sup> From the beginning, the war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s created problems for Moscow. The eventual Soviet tilt toward Iraq created additional problems in the Soviet relationship with both Syria and Libya, who chose to supply Tehran with military assistance, including weapons received from Soviet inventories. Soviet efforts to ingratiate itself with the two Yemens (the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and the Yemen Arab Republic) have waxed and waned because of the military and political rivalry between Aden and Sanaa. The Soviets have had similar problems in North Africa over the years in trying to balance their interests with Algeria and Morocco as well as with Algeria and Libya.

The Soviets have had the greatest difficulty in trying to influence the external and internal policies of the clients who have received the greatest amounts of Soviet support. In Egypt,

the Soviets became deeply involved in the operations of the Arab Socialist Union and the key institutional agencies in the army and the secret police. However, this did not prevent then President Anwar Sadat's decision to expel 20,000 Soviet advisers and technicians present in the country in 1972 and to allow the United States to broker a peace process with Israel that began in 1973 after the October war.

The Syrians have pursued their own interests in Lebanon and Jordan despite large amounts of Soviet military and economic assistance. Libya has confronted states large and small in ignoring Soviet advice to end Tripoli's political isolation in the Mediterranean and to moderate its political and military tactics. The Iraqi decision to invade Iran in 1980 was not appreciated in the Kremlin and led to an immediate suspension of Soviet military assistance to Baghdad. The earlier Syrian decision to enter Lebanon in 1975 had also led to some slowdown in Soviet military supplies to Damascus.

The Soviets also have been concerned with their inability to influence the economic management plans of such client states as Cuba, Nicaragua, and Vietnam who receive billions of rubles from the USSR annually. This is particularly distressing to them in view of Gorbachev's inability thus far to reverse the sharp slowdown in growth of the Soviet economy that has occurred in recent years.<sup>35</sup> The escalating costs of aid to these Third World economies as well as their large foreign debts have caused the Soviets to become increasingly impatient with poor economic performance. The Soviets have been particularly critical of unnamed Third World leaders for expecting the socialist states to finance dubious efforts to "force" socio-economic change through rapid industrialization.<sup>36</sup>

At home, the Soviet economy itself has slowed down for the second straight year—particularly in the machine-building sector, which is the key to Gorbachev's modernization plan—registering no increase in output over the past two years.<sup>37</sup> Agricultural output is down following the records set in 1986, and producers of such basic materials as metals and chemicals failed to meet their goals. The Soviet economy continues to suffer from low worker productivity, poor quality machinery, and a society ill-prepared for economic reform. The Soviet promise of a 14.2 percent cut in defense spending over the next

two years suggests that the Soviets will cut assistance to the Third World as a result.

### **The Soviet Outlook in the Third World**

Soviet writings and statements over the past several years strongly indicate that they will continue to reduce their assets and commitments in the Third World and arrange regional solutions to crisis situations, preferably in conjunction with the United States. The Soviets already have completed their own withdrawal from Afghanistan and have encouraged such clients as Cuba and Vietnam to reduce military involvements in Angola and Cambodia, respectively. Moscow presumably will now turn its attention to the Middle East where there has been a growing Soviet concern with the proliferation of sophisticated weapons systems over the past several years.

Saudi Arabia has purchased an undisclosed number of Chinese CSS-2 intermediate-range ballistic missiles that are capable of reaching targets in Iran, Israel, and even the Soviet Union. The Saudis also signed an arms agreement with Great Britain in 1988 which calls for the purchase of 50 *Tornado* fighter-aircraft as well as the construction of two new air bases.

The successful test of a three-stage Israeli booster rocket in the launching of Israel's first satellite into orbit suggests that Israel could probably develop a warhead for its *Jericho* missile that could be targetted on Moscow. Israel also continues its extensive nuclear weapons program and is reported to have its own chemical weapons facilities.<sup>38</sup>

Also, both Iraq and Iran have acquired modified versions of the Soviet-produced *Scud* missile. Baghdad has upgraded its *Scuds* from their original range of 190 miles to more than 500 miles, and Tehran used its *Scuds* against Iraqi cities in 1988. Both states used chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq war. Egypt and Libya are reportedly working with Latin American states to develop surface-to-surface missiles that could have a range of over 600 miles. As a result, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, during a trip to Egypt in February 1989, proposed the establishment of a "military risk-reduction center" among the states

of the Middle East as well as a "nuclear-free and chemical-free zone" in the area.<sup>39</sup>

Shevardnadze's public remarks suggest that Moscow is not necessarily worried about actually being targeted by any of these systems. But the USSR probably realizes that another major confrontation in the Middle East between Arabs and Israelis or among various Arab states could lead to the use of ballistic missiles or chemical weapons against urban areas that could threaten a Soviet client state in the Middle East. Moscow's experience in previous wars in the Middle East in 1956, 1967, and 1973 has been that Arab states have pressured the Soviets for direct combat support that the USSR has been thus far unwilling to provide. The comments of Khrushchev and Brezhnev to high-level Egyptian officials during such crises in the 1950s and 1960s reveal Moscow's fundamental unwillingness to lend such direct support even to important clients. Crisis management in this region, in any event, will become more difficult and time-urgent as states acquire more sophisticated and lethal weaponry. It is particularly ironic that the Arab states and Israel are acquiring these weapons systems in the Middle East just as the United States and the Soviet Union have agreed to eliminate them from Europe.

This does not mean that the Soviets will stop using their military assets to protect significant gains in Cuba, Syria, and Vietnam in the future. The trend over the past three decades has been for increased Soviet military and political involvement in key regional issues and crises in the Third World. The Soviets have provided significant airlifts of arms in flashpoint situations, as well as support for large-scale introduction of Cuban forces armed with Soviet weapons in Third World conflicts. Moscow could be expected to do so again if there were a confrontation between Syrian and Israeli or Vietnamese and Chinese forces.

Soviet acquisition of overflight clearances and access to facilities abroad support Moscow's military operations as well as those of friendly forces. Soviet naval and naval air assets in Cuba and Vietnam are particularly important in this regard, and are used to protect and defend the USSR's interests abroad, asserting Soviet rights on the high seas and affirming Soviet support of Third World governments. Soviet leaders



presumably believe that the presence of their naval forces—as a visible symbol of Moscow’s concern and capability—inhibits Western military initiatives in areas of the Third World during periods of tension.

Although Moscow has accepted a measure of risk in introducing forces into conflicts, it has nevertheless exercised a policy that limits the role of Soviet forces and avoids confrontation with the United States. Soviet pilots and air defense units have engaged in combat but have not operated outside friendly territory. Soviet naval forces have established or augmented a presence in regions of conflict but have not engaged in combat. Airborne units have been placed on alert during times of conflict but have not been introduced into noncontiguous areas. In view of the limitations on Moscow’s ability to project power into the Third World, the Soviets will certainly continue to exercise constraint in the near term in committing their own forces to regional crises.

Indeed, the strategic logic of the Soviet position over the past several years seems to suggest that Moscow has become more skeptical about the use of military power to gain political influence. The Soviets are more reserved both in direct competition with the United States and in Third World areas where proxy or surrogate forces are used to gain an advantage vis-a-vis the United States. In an interview in 1987, for example, Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Petrovsky disavowed the notion of a “zero sum” game between the superpowers in the Third World and stated that Moscow could not “achieve a victory for itself by destroying someone.”<sup>40</sup>

During Secretary of State James Baker’s first official visit to the USSR in May 1989, Shevardnadze indicated that Moscow is prepared to compromise on various regional issues that divide the United States and the USSR, particularly the conflict in Central America. The Soviet foreign minister, referring to “certain new elements” in the US position, said that, as a result, a “reasonable basis is emerging for productive cooperation.” He also credited the United States with sharing Moscow’s goal of a “genuinely all-embracing settlement” in the Middle East. Shevardnadze’s only pessimism on regional matters was reserved for Afghanistan, where the

Soviets remain opposed to continued US military support for the insurgency.<sup>41</sup>

Moscow's professed interest in reducing its defense budget, as well as its withdrawal of forces from Central Europe, Afghanistan, Mongolia, and the Sino-Soviet frontier, also indicate that the current Soviet leaders have redefined the nature of the threat. They no longer believe that a greater military presence can assure greater political security. When Gorbachev addressed the United Nations General Assembly in December 1988, declaring that the "bell of each regional conflict tolls for all of us," his words appeared to reflect a certain amount of disillusionment with Soviet globalism of the past, as well as a recognition that minor confrontations in these areas could lead to major disputes among the superpowers.<sup>42</sup> Future Soviet actions in the Third World will test these attitudes.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Mohamed Heikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar* (New York: Harper and Row), pp. 70-71, 179-180.

<sup>2</sup>See Robert Donaldson, ed., *The Soviet Union and the Third World: Successes and Failures* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1981); Carol Saivetz and Sylvia Woodby, *Soviet Third World Relations* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1985).

<sup>3</sup>See Uri Ra'anan, Robert Pfaltzgraff, and Geoffrey Kemp, *Power Projection* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1982).

<sup>4</sup>Patrick E. Tyler and Nora Boustany, "Moscow Pursues Diplomacy but Syria Gets Soviet Arms," *Washington Post*, March 25, 1989, pp. 9-10.

<sup>5</sup>*Soviet Military Power* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1986), p. 138.

<sup>6</sup>*New York Times*, October 21, 1988, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup>The speeches and proceedings of the party congress were received from the daily reports on the Soviet Union of the United States Foreign Broadcasting Information Service (FBIS) for the period February 25 to March 1986. They were taken in most cases from TASS reports on Radio Moscow. General Secretary Gorbachev spoke to the party congress on opening day.

<sup>8</sup>*New York Times*, February 23, 1989, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup>*Washington Post*, April 22, 1989, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup>Mary Battiata, "Soviets Press Ethiopia to End War, Envoys Say," *Washington Post*, April 21, 1989, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>FBIS, February 25 to March 6, 1986, TASS reports on Radio Moscow.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>V. Zhurkin, S. Karaganov, A. Kortunov, "Challenges of Security: Old and New," *Kommunist* 1 (January 1988). (Zhurkin is currently head of the recently established Institute of Western European Studies.)

<sup>15</sup>*Izvestia*, April 22, 1988, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup>Vyacheslav Dashichev, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, May 1988, p. 17. Vyacheslav Dashichev is from the Institute of the Economics of the World Socialist System. The head of the institute, Oleg Bogomolov, published a letter in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* on March 16, 1988, in which he stated that his institute argued against the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan on the grounds that it would undermine detente and damage the USSR's international stature. In the first authoritative account of the high-level military debate surrounding the invasion of Afghanistan, General of the Army Valentin I. Varrenikov, a deputy defense minister, stated in an interview with the weekly magazine *Ogonyok* that the General Staff was opposed to the invasion but was overruled by Defense Minister Dmitri F. Ustinov. Varrenikov was the senior defense ministry official in Afghanistan for the last four years of the war and, after the Soviets completed the withdrawal of forces, was named commander of ground forces. Varrenikov added that Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, then chief of the general staff, and Marshal Sergei F. Akhromeyev, who later became chief of the general staff, also opposed the intervention. (See the Bill Keller article in *New York Times*, March 19, 1989, p. 27. Also see *Washington Post*, March 20, 1989, on the same topic.)

<sup>17</sup>Andrey V. Kozyrev, *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn [International Affairs]*, Summer 1988.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>*Vestnik Ministerstva Inostrannykh Sel SSR [Bulletin of the Soviet Foreign Ministry]*, August 1988, Speech by Foreign Minister Shevardnadze to the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, pp. 27-46.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>*New York Times*, December 8, 1988, p. 1, General Secretary Gorbachev to the UNGA.

<sup>22</sup>*New York Times*, April 7, 1989, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup>Unpublished paper by Wayne P. Limberg, "Moscow and Regional Conflicts: Linkage Revisited" (American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, 1988).

<sup>24</sup>Molly Moore, *Washington Post*, February 19, 1989. Testimony of Rear Adm. Brooks to the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee.

<sup>25</sup>Admiral Chernavin, *Morskoy Sbornik [Naval Digest]*, cited in FBIS/Soviet, 2 September 1988, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup>Rajan Menon, "New Thinking and Northeast Asian Security," *Problems of Communism* 38 (March-June 1989), pp. 1-29.

<sup>27</sup>Bernard E. Trainor, "US Reports New Iranian Missiles; Threat to Hormuz Oil Traffic Seen," *New York Times*, March 15, 1987, p. 16.

<sup>28</sup>Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Israel are seven of the ten largest recipients of military assistance; India, in fourth place, is the only country outside the region in the top five with purchases from the Soviet Union that include MiG-29 fighter aircraft, TU-142 *Bear* ASW aircraft, and the leasing of a nuclear submarine.

<sup>29</sup>Richard F. Grimmett, *Trends in Conventional Arms Transfers to the Third World by Major Supplier, 1980-1987* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 1988), p. 5.

<sup>30</sup>Rear Adm. Thomas A. Brooks, Testimony to the House Arms Services Committee, 22 February 1989.

<sup>31</sup>*Vestnik Ministerstva Inostrannykh Sel SSR [Bulletin of the Soviet Foreign Ministry]*, August 5, 1987, pp. 17-22, cited in FBIS/Soviet, September 2, 1987, pp. 25-31.

<sup>32</sup>See Menon, "New Thinking and Northeast Asian Security."

<sup>33</sup>Stephen Engelberg and Bernard E. Trainor, "Soviets Sold Libya Advanced Bomber," *New York Times*, April 5, 1989, p. 1. Libya's acquisition of these aircraft means that it will have the capacity for combat missions at night and in inclement weather for the first time.

<sup>34</sup>See Melvin A. Goodman, "Third World Clients and Third World Dilemmas" in Raj Menon and Dan Nelson, *The Limits of Soviet Power* (Lexington Press: 1989), pp. 179-203.

<sup>35</sup>On the rising costs the Soviets face in Third World countries, see Jerry Hough, *The Struggle for the Third World: Soviet Debates and American Options* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1986).

<sup>36</sup>Joseph Whelan, *The Soviet Union in the Third World, 1980-1982: An Imperial Burden or Political Asset* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1984), pp. 295-296.

<sup>37</sup> *Gorbachev's Economic Program: Problems Emerge*, June 1988, paper prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency for the Subcommittee on Economic Resources, Competitiveness and Security Economics of the Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States.

<sup>38</sup> Geoffrey Kemp, "Middle East Opportunities," *Foreign Affairs* 68 (1988-89): pp. 151-152.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, "Spread of Missiles Is Seen as Soviet Worry in Mideast," *New York Times*, March 24, 1989, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Washington Post*, May 27, 1987.

<sup>41</sup> *Pravda*, May 12, 1989, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> *Pravda*, December 8, 1988, pp. 1-2.

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