CHAPTER 4

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Soviet-American Relations in the Third World

Among the factors that led to the end of the cold war, Soviet-U.S. relations in the third world are certainly not predominant. Nevertheless, the third world proved important in the process that culminated in what may be called a second edition of détente initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev.

Developments in Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s helped create an atmosphere in which the superpower rivalry came to be regarded by both sides as counterproductive and obsolete. The growing disenchantment of both the Soviet and the U.S. leadership regarding the possibility of achieving their global aims by activist policies in the third world strengthened the desire, first manifested by Gorbachev, to put an end to the worldwide confrontation. Moreover, as Gorbachev increasingly focused on accommodation with the West—first and foremost on terminating the arms race, which had become an intolerable burden for the Soviet economy—the conviction was growing that the continuation of the anti-imperialist drive in the third world was distinctly harmful for the newly formulated goals of Soviet policy. The traditional militant pattern of Soviet behavior in the third world that had been initiated by Nikita Khrushchev did not square with Gorbachev's new political thinking, much less with the new concept of de-ideologization of interstate relations. And it was not particularly painful for the Kremlin to embark on a strategic retreat from the third world. The point is that expansion in Asia, Africa, and Latin

America had never figured as a vital part of Soviet political thinking; it was subordinate to the overall design of undermining the West and strengthening the position of the socialist camp.

Moscow and the Third World

In order to understand the value of the third world for the Soviets, it is necessary to go back to the Khrushchev era. In the mid-1950s, it was already clear to the Kremlin that the confrontation between the two systems was deadlocked. No breakthrough in Europe was in sight, both sides being firmly entrenched to the east and west of the iron curtain and engaged in a positional warfare. The Leninist legacy of interests of world socialism dictated, however, the necessity of a relentless struggle against the imperialist forces. The only option was to try to undermine and sap those forces somewhere else. Encroachment in the third world, instead of a frontal assault, was quite promising as a means of bypassing the main bulwarks of the imperialist system.

The whole concept bears resemblance to a Maoist theory according to which the global village, or developing countries, would surround the global city, or the industrialized West, forcing the latter eventually to capitulate. In Moscow, however, nobody really expected to gain a decisive victory over the West by promoting socialism in Asia and Africa. Gone were the days when Soviet party ideologues and scholars seriously expounded the theory that the imperialist center was bound to collapse as soon as it was deprived of its colonial periphery. In the 1960s, it was abundantly clear that the liberated colonies remained dependent on the economy of their former masters and that Western monopolies were deriving even more profits from their dealings with Asian and African countries than in the past. It would be hard to believe in strangling Western capitalism by spreading Soviet influence and Socialist ideas in the third world.

The rationale for moving into the third world was different; in fact, it was of a rather defensive nature. Paradoxically, a certain feel-

ing of insecurity and vulnerability was typical of post-Khrushchev leadership in the realm of foreign policy. How could rulers of a superpower fail to feel absolutely secure and self-confident? Yet they were always apprehensive about the global growth of U.S. power and influence, always on the alert, anxiously scanning and monitoring every U.S. move, ever preoccupied with the issue of maintaining parity with Washington regarding the military balance. This phenomenon can be explained only by the peculiar mentality of *Homo Sovieticus*, that deplorable blend of ancient Russian prejudices and Communist ideology.

The Soviet leaders' paranoia reflected a deep-rooted Russian distrust toward the West, exacerbated by a typically Soviet suspicion of foreign subversion. Although Soviet propaganda claimed that imperialism would hardly dare launch an attack against the USSR, given the new balance of forces, deep down the Kremlin rulers were not at all certain about that. The Politburo members, poorly educated and lacking first-hand knowledge of the outside world, were prone to ascribe to foreign governments their own patterns of political behavior. They believed that the West was just as capable of breaking its promises and obligations, of double-crossing and even outright aggression, as they were themselves. I remember Boris Ponomarev, head of the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee, saying in 1977: ''Under no circumstances can we afford to let the Americans achieve even a small degree of military superiority, to rise just one notch above our level, because in this case the next U.S. president may be tempted to strike at our country. And we have no way of knowing who the next President will be, maybe some crazy warmonger like Reagan.''

So deep suspicion and distrust were paramount in the Soviet leaders' attitude toward the West. Particularly maddening for them was the U.S. pattern of pact-building. I remember how furious the Central Committee officials were when the Baghdad Pact was founded. The Soviet obsession with encirclement was a major psychological factor of the Kremlin's foreign policy. Soviet leaders al-

ways felt as though they were in a state of ongoing war, always on the frontline, watching through binoculars the movements of enemy forces. Every American move anywhere in the world was an attack, to be repulsed immediately with a counterstroke. They also knew that if you could not crush the enemy, the thing to do was to bypass its forces and strike at its rear. Thus, the creation of the Baghdad Pact was the main issue behind Khrushchev's decision to strike a deal with President Nasser; it was simply a necessary riposte, a countermove. Very soon, however, the Kremlin boss realized that this tactical move could be an initial step in a vast enveloping movement designed to shift the battlefield from the frozen trenches of a rigidly divided Europe to the only area where maneuver warfare was still possible: the third world.

It was a bold and imaginative pattern, and Brezhnev did not hesitate to follow it through. In the eyes of the Soviet leaders, peaceful coexistence by no means abolished the class struggle of two systems and thus was quite compatible with attempts to improve and strengthen the position of the world Socialist forces, primarily in the third world. As for the notion of détente (in Russian it sounded like "the policy of defusing international tension"), it was regarded, first, as a means to save forces and minimize the cost of engagement and, second, as a strategy of low-level actions calibrated in such a way as to avoid major clashes capable of triggering a global military confrontation.[1]

China should not be overlooked. As the Chinese threat was perceived to be growing, the old specter of encirclement reemerged in Soviet thinking. This time around, it seemed there was a remote possibility of an unholy alliance between China and the Western powers.[2] To prevent this, Soviet leaders believed that steps had to

1. For a review of Soviet-U.S. relations in the third world prior to détente, see John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 152–188.

2. This was a theoretically embarrassing situation. Marxism could not foresee the possibility of Socialist countries fighting each other. The way out of this deadlock was to assume that there was no socialism in China. Evgeni Primakov, with whom I studied at the Arabic department of the Moscow Institute of Oriental

be taken to normalize Soviet relations with the imperialist camp, particularly after Nixon's visit to China, which was an unpleasant surprise for Moscow.

U.S. Concepts of Détente in the Third World

The U.S. policy, as envisaged by President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger, was impressively designed. It aimed at containing the Soviet Union "through a network of linked rewards and punishments," ensuring world stability in a form that suited U.S. interests, and avoiding direct and costly U.S. involvement in regional conflicts, which, it was felt, might be instigated or promoted by the Kremlin unless it could be persuaded to desist.[3]

In the midst of the Vietnam imbroglio, the U.S. administration was anxious to prevent the Soviet Union from attempting to exploit regional conflicts that abounded in the third world. It was feared that the Kremlin, by fomenting unrest in the volatile areas of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, might try to sap U.S. influence worldwide and compel the United States to disperse and tie up its forces in local entanglements. In Kissinger's words, the Soviet practice was to "promote the attrition of adversaries by gradual increments."[4] He thought that the Soviet aim was to change the global balance of forces without a head-on collision with America. To counteract this, Kissinger assumed that an arrangement was possible whereby the Soviets could be persuaded that their interests could best be served by discarding their subversive strategy. At the same time, Kissinger, who was still saddled with the Vietnamese nightmare, supported cutting America's losses by withdrawal from Vietnam.[5]

Studies, told me sometime in the 1970s that he intended to prove beyond all doubt that Maoist China was not a Socialist country at all.

3. See Stanley Hoffmann, "Détente," in *The Making of America's Soviet Policy*, ed. Joseph S. Nye Jr. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 231, 237.

4. Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 118.

5. See Franz Schurmann, *The Foreign Politics of Richard Nixon: The Grand Design* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of International Studies, 1987), 87; Gerry Argyris Andrianopoulos, *Kissinger and Brzezinski* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 170.

It is not clear on what logic Kissinger based his assumptions or what led him to believe that the Soviets could somehow be talked out of their usual pattern of behavior. From the very beginning, it could have been surmised that Moscow had nothing to lose and much to gain by continuing what Kissinger called "the attrition of adversaries by gradual increments." Exploiting third world conflicts to strengthen the position of "the global forces of socialism" was something no Kremlin leader could neglect without being accused of failing to promote the Socialist cause. It is hard to imagine precisely what rewards America could promise to the Soviets in exchange for desisting from intervening in local conflicts; it is also difficult to fathom what punishment Washington could have meted out to Moscow in the event of the latter's bad behavior. As American author Stanley Hoffman put it, "The design was impressive but beyond reach, and the tools it used were inadequate."[6]

The most important concrete area where the Nixon-Kissinger doctrine was to be implemented was the Middle East. The foundation stones of U.S. Middle East policy were Israel and Iran, later to be joined by Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Israel's security and regular access to the region's oil were constant imperatives of every U.S. administration. For Washington, détente tactics in the Middle East were regarded as conducive to a substantive reduction in the level of Soviet involvement. Rivalry between the superpowers would go on in that region unabated, détente notwithstanding. In all likelihood, however, it was hoped that Moscow would refrain from instigating revolution in the Arabian Peninsula and from encouraging the Arab world to step up its anti-Israeli crusade.

There were similarities in the Soviet and U.S. concepts of détente. Both sides realized that the cold war was at a stalemate, yet there was no end in sight. So there emerged a tacit agreement to lower the level of conflict, to cease fighting to the hilt to ensure that the inevitable rivalry would not lead to a world war, and to avoid creating situations in which one of the conflicting sides would face a dreadful choice: to back down and lose face or to start a suicidal nuclear war.

6. Hoffmann, "Détente," in Nye, *The Making of America's Soviet Policy*, 231.

On a strategic level, the policy of both sides was defensive rather than offensive. The Soviet leaders, true to their Bolshevik paranoia, tried to thwart what they saw as an imperialist attempt to encircle Russia. The Soviet Union had to compensate for its geopolitical and economic weakness by reaching out to promising new areas to exploit the anticolonial inertia of Asian and African nations. The ultimate aim was not to beat America but to avoid being beaten. However, this defensive, or preemptive, strategy was translated into a tactical offensive. The Soviets tried to seize the initiative whenever and wherever they could.

The United States also appeared to have a defensive rationale aimed at containing Soviet expansion in gray areas. A deeper analysis would show, however, that America actually was much more on the offensive than was the Soviet Union. Successive U.S. administrations made persistent efforts to undermine Soviet positions in the third world, particularly in the Middle East. For instance, President Anwar Sadat's change of heart and his surprising reorientation was not just a result of his own reappraisal of the situation. He repeatedly said in the beginning of the 1970s that the United States held 90 percent of the trump cards in the Middle East, and it would be logical to assume that U.S. diplomacy reinforced this thinking. Subsequent events, including the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the complicated political game that ensued, finally gave Sadat exactly what he had wanted all along: the restoration of Egyptian sovereignty over the Sinai and the reopening of the Suez Canal. By the same token, Henry Kissinger had no reason to be disappointed by the outcome of the confrontation Sadat had initiated, probably with tacit U.S. encouragement. Kissinger, who made brilliant use of the deadlock resulting from the Yom Kippur War, could claim a victory over the Soviets.

The Collapse of Détente

As the Middle East was the principal battlefield in the Soviet-U.S. rivalry in the third world, it would have been logical to expect that it was precisely in that area that détente would be destined to col-

lapse, but this was not the case. The point is that the main lines of confrontation in the Middle East were clearly marked, and each side had its own allies, seemingly firmly committed and loyal. Moscow had a more advantageous position by the time détente was initiated. The most important country of the region, President Nasser's Egypt, seemed to be firmly under Soviet control. Together with its regional allies, Syria, Iraq, South Yemen, Algeria, Libya, and Sudan, Egypt was dependent on Soviet arms in anticipation of an inevitable new round of military confrontation with Israel. The Soviet Union lavishly supplied its local allies with arms, helping them build a position of strength vis-à-vis Israel.[7] Moscow also pinned its hopes on the nascent Palestinian resistance movement, backing Arafat's PLO. Except for Israel, the United States did not seem to have any bulwarks in the area. This situation was to change dramatically in America's favor in just a few years' time after the sharp rise in oil prices in the wake of the 1973 war, which resulted in the phenomenal growth of power and influence of Saudi Arabia and Iran. By the end of the 1960s, however, U.S. prospects appeared bleak. The Soviet Union was emerging as a key Middle Eastern power whereas U.S. influence in the area seemed to be waning.

President Nasser's death in the fall of 1970 changed everything. His successor, Anwar Sadat, continued to demand and receive more Soviet arms while beginning a subtle game of his own. Convinced that the United States held 90 percent of the trump cards in the Middle East, his challenge was to play skillfully and create a situation in which Washington would have no option but to put

7. Deliveries of Soviet military equipment by 1977 totaled more than $3.2 billion, and 23 percent of all the arms exports went to Egypt, which was the first non-Communist state to receive the SA-3 low-level SAM missile, the FROG tactical ground rocket, and the mobile ZSU–23–4 radar-controlled anti-aircraft gun. See Roger E. Kanet, ed., *Soviet Foreign Policy in the 1980s* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 154–161, 272–275, 285–287, 296–299; E. G. Feuchtwanger and Peter Nailor, eds., *The Soviet Union and the Third World* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 16, 124; Robert H. Donaldson, ed., *The Soviet Union in the Third World: Successes and Failures* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), 157, 386–390.

pressure on Israel to return Sinai to Egypt. Sadat's first bold move was to expel Russian military advisers in July 1972, which took the Kremlin by surprise and produced a veritable shock.[8] This sent an unmistakable signal to Washington, and it worked. Kissinger clearly became interested in dealing with Sadat, and, when the latter made his next bold move, attacking Israel in October 1973, it was Kissinger who played a decisive role in settling the conflict.

Sadat's notion of America holding most of trump cards was convincingly validated as he followed through on his new pro-American policy and crowned his efforts with the Camp David agreement. Completely sidelined, Moscow was embittered and frustrated. Paradoxically, however, the Kremlin did not regard the whole affair as a treacherous U.S. ploy but rather as a setback within the framework of the mutually recognized rules of the game, and all its anger was directed at Sadat. Evgeni Primakov, a leading Soviet expert in the field, wrote a book a few years later titled *The Story of a Treacherous Deal*.[9] The treason in question, of course, was that of Sadat. Washington had every reason to be happy with the outcome of the whole process, and Kissinger was justified in saying, "The USSR suffered a major setback in the Middle East and accepted it; the conflicts between us, while real, were managed."[10]

So détente was destined to collapse not in the Middle East but in Africa. In November 1975, the Soviets began an airlift of arms and Cuban troops to Angola, where a civil war was raging between pro-Soviet leftist forces and their right-wing adversaries. In January 1978, Cuban troops along with the Ethiopian army began a counteroffensive in the Ogaden region, which had been invaded by Somalia six months earlier. In both cases, the Soviet-Cuban inter-

8. By that time, more than 12,000 Soviet military personnel were stationed in Egypt, and about 4,000 military instructors were involved in an advisory capacity. Also withdrawn were Soviet missile launchers, bombers, and several squadrons of MIG-21s. See Schurmann, *The Foreign Politics of Richard Nixon*, 290; Donald R. Kelley, ed., *Soviet Politics in the Brezhnev Era* (New York: Praeger, 1980), 265.

9. Evgeni Primakov, *The Story of a Treacherous Deal* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1985).

10. Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), 246.

vention proved effective: the leftist MPLA won the war in Angola while Ethiopia's proto-Communist regime led by Mengistu Haile Mariam succeeded in pushing back the Somalis and retaking the Ogaden. The question remains: Why did the Soviets decide to intervene in the first place, and why did Washington react so decisively?

The Soviet Union did not create the conflicts in Angola and Ethiopia. Moscow was naturally happy when, after the revolution in Portugal, left-wing forces appeared victorious in the newly independent Angola. One more nation was added to the already formidable list of countries with Socialist orientations. So when the MPLA was threatened by a hostile and decidedly anti-Communist political force that had launched an armed attack, the Soviet government could not afford to stand idly by and refuse aid to the Angolan left-wing regime without risking a serious loss of face.

In the Ethiopia-Somali conflict over the Ogaden, the Soviet position was much more delicate because, unlike in Angola, there was no clear-cut choice between the revolutionary and reactionary forces. Both republics had proclaimed their Socialist orientation, were friendly with the USSR, and were hostile to the United States. The choice Moscow finally made was based not on the degree of Socialist commitment and loyalty to Marxism but on thoroughly pragmatic grounds: Ethiopia was the bigger, stronger, and more important of the two.

In neither case did the Soviets risk sending their own forces to fight; the Cuban proxy was used instead. Moscow was obviously reluctant to jeopardize its relations with the United States. An important question arises: Did the Soviet leadership know beforehand about Castro's intention to airlift Cuban troops to Angola? Speaking at a conference titled ''Global Competition and the Deterioration of U.S.-Soviet Relations, 1977–1980'' held by the Carter-Brezhnev Project in March 1995, Karen Brutents, former deputy head of the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU, said that the Soviet leadership as a whole ''was not informed about it. Furthermore, many members of the Soviet leader-

ship were unhappy with what they regarded as the Cuban drive to show independent action.'' Nevertheless, ''Soon they had adjusted to the circumstances, and even supported it. It was convenient in many respects: it was the Cubans, not us, who were involved . . .''[11] At another conference sponsored by the same project, ''SALT II and the Growth of Mistrust,'' held in May 1994, Sergei Tarasenko, a senior staff member of the Soviet foreign ministry, said that as soon as news about the Cuban airlift reached the USSR, the foreign ministry in Moscow sent a telegram to Havana asking Castro ''not to do it'' and ''to abstain.'' By that time, however, ''The planes were already in the air. The planes were flying while the telegram was going to Havana.''[12] However, at the same conference, General Sergei Kondrashov, special assistant to head of the KGB Yuri Andropov, admitted that the KGB ''knew beforehand of the intentions of Cubans to help Angolans. That information went to Moscow; so, practically speaking, the whole leadership knew about this forthcoming development. . . . Nothing happened without knowledge of the leadership of the country. . . . We didn't want to be involved in the Angolan situation ourselves; but we knew about Cuban intentions.''[13] So it appears that the Kremlin was informed about the planned Cuban action but, true to form, officially chose to pretend that it was ignorant of it. It even showed surprise so as to be able to convey the impression, primarily to the Americans, that it was purely the initiative of Fidel Castro, the Cuban leader.

Another angle that must be taken into consideration is Moscow's rivalry with Beijing, a bitter clash of two Communist giants over control of both the Communist and national-liberation movements. The Soviets were afraid that if they did not come to the aid of an embattled leftist regime, the Chinese would. At the 1995

11. ''Global Competition and the Deterioration of U.S.-Soviet Relations, 1977–1980,'' Conference No. 3 of the Carter-Brezhnev Project, Harbor Beach Resort, Fort Lauderdale, FL, March 23–26, 1995, 50.

12. ''SALT II and the Growth of Mistrust,'' Conference No. 2 of the Carter-Brezhnev Project, Musgrove Plantation, St. Simons Island, GA, May 6–9, 1994, 293–295.

13. Ibid., 300–301.

''Global Competition'' conference, Oleg Troianovski, former Soviet ambassador to the United Nations, said that the Soviet Union ''was under a constant fire from the Chinese side for not being active in the fight against imperialism. We were charged with appeasing the United States, and things like that. And sometimes this may have led to decisions which would not have been made under other circumstances.''[14]

In view of the growing Chinese penetration in Africa, it was also useful to secure the loyalty of yet another young African state. I recall that a few years after the events in Angola and Somalia, I clashed with Valentin Falin, deputy head of the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee. Speaking at a party meeting, I voiced my indignation regarding our diplomacy's flirtation with the Ugandan tyrant Idi Amin. Falin's reply was, ''Don't you realize that, after the Chinese had started a love affair with Tanzania, we just had to secure a friend nearby.''

The United States was furious over Angola and Ethiopia, believing the Soviet-Cuban intervention to be part of a sinister pattern. Zbigniew Brzezinski, a strong advocate of a tough American response, maintained that ''if the Soviets believe they could expand their influence with impunity, they might well do so next in the developing struggle in Rhodesia.''[15] President Jimmy Carter and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance did not concur with him and preferred a more moderate line, and Brzezinski said later, ''SALT lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden.''[16] Kissinger, too, later said that ''had they succeeded in Angola, there would have been no Ethiopia.''[17] Although President Carter had rejected Brzezinski's tough line on Africa, he obviously felt humiliated later, and these two episodes certainly contributed to his growing coolness toward détente. Of course, other developments regarding both the SALT

14. ''Global Competition,'' 79.

15. Alexander Moens, *Foreign Policy Under Carter* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 105.

16. Ibid., 103.

17. Andrianopoulos, *Kissinger and Brzezinski*, 173.

treaty and human rights issues affected him as well. By the end of his presidency, Carter had abandoned détente and returned to a cold war policy.[18]

The United States' outrage at the Soviet interventions in Africa is understandable. In the highly volatile conditions that abound in most African countries, there was no telling where violence would flare up next. Civil and ethnic conflicts could start at any moment in practically every part of the continent, and there can be no doubt that in the atmosphere of the 1970s, when the prestige of socialism was still high and rewards of an alliance with the Soviet Union quite tangible, pro-Soviet leftist movements calling for Soviet backing were likely to emerge anywhere. Brzezinski was not being paranoid when he voiced his concern over Rhodesia. Knowing the nature of Soviet leaders, it was easy to predict that if they met with feeble or token opposition from the West, they might be emboldened enough to undertake much larger-scale adventures, not only in Africa but in Asia and Latin America as well. Whereas in Angola and Ethiopia they simply reacted to crises they could not have been blamed for creating, in the future they could deliberately begin to provoke them.

Doesn't this suggestion invalidate the earlier thesis of the essentially defensive character of Soviet strategy in the third world? Not if we take into consideration the inherent duality of the Soviet leaders' mind-set. On the one hand, they no longer believed in the global victory of communism, they were quite apprehensive about the possibility of a new global war, and they were generally averse to taking risks. On the other hand, as true heirs to Lenin and Stalin, they would see themselves as unworthy of their predecessors' great legacy if they let slip an opportunity to promote the Socialist cause. This opportunity could be provided for them by the imperialist camp's weakness and lack of resolve. The weaker the Western resis-

18. William Stueck, "Placing Jimmy Carter's Foreign Policy," in *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices in the Post–New Deal Era*, ed. Gary M. Fink and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence, KS: United Press of Kansas, 1998), 259; Hoffmann, "Détente," 257–259.

tance, the more arrogant and aggressive they would grow. Both Kissinger and Brzezinski intuitively realized this, and their anxiety over Soviet moves in Africa appears to be justified. Soviet politicians could always be counted on to use any opportunity to exploit every weakness in the enemy camp to gain an advantage, no matter how limited. For the Kremlin leaders, life in general, including international relations, was a constant and implacable struggle; fair play and honoring one's commitments were notions they could only despise in the old Bolshevik tradition of contempt for bourgeois values.

The collapse of détente occurred mainly, although not exclusively, because of developments in the third world. In the arms race and in the military balance between the USSR and the United States, nothing new and surprising could happen. In Europe, low-level confrontations continued without any dramatic developments. It was in the shifting sands of the third world, a battlefield of maneuver warfare, that new and unforeseen collisions between the superpowers could be expected, and they did not take long to materialize. Détente, characterized by Samuel Huntington as a "brief interlude in an otherwise consistently competitive relationship,"[19] was weakest where the interests were too sensitive, asymmetrical, or diffuse to be negotiated, such as Soviet involvement with the third world and Western involvement with human rights.

The final nail in the coffin of détente was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.[20] Contrary to widespread notions of the time, this aggression was by no means motivated by a desire to obtain access to the Indian Ocean, much less grab Persian Gulf oil. The Afghan revolution of 1978 was neither planned nor anticipated by the Kremlin, although, of course, cadres for this kind of contingency had been trained for years. A representative of the Khalq (People's) Party, in a meeting with Boris Ponomarev, head of the Interna-

19. Samuel R. Huntington, "Renewed Hostility," in *The Making of America's Soviet Policy*, ed. Joseph S. Nye Jr. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 270.

20. Andrianopoulos, *Kissinger and Brzezinski*, 198–200.

tional Department of the CPSU Central Committee, explained the decision to strike at that precise moment: "We know what Lenin said about the timing of the October revolution in Russia: yesterday it was too early, tomorrow it would be too late. The right time is today. Arrests have already begun of our leading comrades, including the party leader Comrade Taraki, so we had to act swiftly." Karen Brutents, while speaking at the Nobel Symposium 95, "The Intervention in Afghanistan and the Fall of Détente" in September 1995, argued that "the Soviet Union had nothing to do with the April coup."[21] Thus, Brutents disagreed with Anatoli Dobrynin, former Soviet ambassador to the United States, who believed that the USSR supported the April coup for ideological reasons. In Brutents's view, "Ideological considerations did not play any major role whatsoever in our policy. State interests, as they were understood, were the main consideration. The ideological coloring remained."[22]

The ensuing events have been amply described elsewhere. Suffice it to say that the fatal decision to send Soviet troops to Kabul and kill President Hafizullah Amin was taken, against the advice of both the KGB and the army, by three Politburo members, Yuri Andropov, Dmitri Ustinov, and Andrei Gromyko, who succeeded in obtaining the consent of the frail and senile Leonid Brezhnev. General Valentin Varennikov, former deputy minister of defense, recalls that this decision was taken on December 10, 1979, and that Marshal Ogarkov, chief of the general staff, as well as two deputies of Minister of Defense Ustinov, were against the introduction of Soviet troops but were overruled by their boss. Ustinov told them bluntly that the political decision had already been made and that their duty was to obey. Ogarkov had already been reprimanded by Andropov, who told him at a Politburo meeting: "Comrade Ogarkov, we invited you here not because we wanted to hear your opin-

21. "The Intervention in Afghanistan and the Fall of Détente," Nobel Symposium 95, Lysebu, Norway, September 17–20, 1995, 6.

22. Ibid., 14, 29.

ion. You should take notes and follow orders.''[23] Nor was the KGB enthusiastic about the decision to send Soviet troops to Afghanistan, but its opinion was disregarded. The International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU was also apprehensive about the military intervention. Brutents recalls that as he was about to express ''a negative opinion on the issue in a memo, he was told by Aleksandrov, Brezhnev's assistant, ''So, do you suggest that we should give Afghanistan to the Americans?''[24]

General Aleksandr Diakhovski, who served at the Soviet Ministry of Defense at the time, mentions another factor: Brezhnev's personal animosity toward Amin, who had ordered the assassination of Mohammad Taraki. Brezhnev ''could not forgive Amin, because he [Brezhnev] personally gave Taraki assurances that he would be able to help him, yet they disregarded him completely and murdered Taraki.'' Brezhnev used to say, ''How could the world believe what Brezhnev says, if his word does not count?''[25]

Gromyko explained his position almost ten years later in an unsent letter to Gorbachev, quoted by Gromyko's son: ''Comrades, you know well that American ruling circles have been planning to destabilize progressive regimes, friendly to us. . . . The American government aspired to destabilize the situation on the southern flank of the Soviet borders and threaten our security. . . . Brezhnev believed that . . . Amin's group might gang up with the USA.''[26] It was the typical Soviet paranoid pattern, based on eternal suspicion, incredulity, and inner insecurity.

Brutents mentioned yet another aspect of the time and gave one more rationale for the Soviet intervention. He recalls that some of the conversations he heard at the end of 1979 ''were along the lines of 'What have we got to lose?' Everything had already been lost. . . . What was Afghanistan for us? It was a coup de grâce for dé-

23. Ibid., 74.
24. Ibid., 177.
25. Ibid., 81.
26. Anatoli Gromyko, *Andrei Gromyko. V labirintakh Kremlia*, trans. as *Andrei Gromyko: In the Kremlin's Labyrinths* (Moscow: IPO ''Avtor,'' 1997), 187, 188.

tente, nothing else.''[27] Indeed, it was clear by that time that détente was all but dead.

On the whole, the Soviet rationale for moving into Afghanistan was not to take the country but to prevent others from grabbing it. The action was essentially of a defensive and preemptive nature; but the West had no time for psychological analysis. It justly saw the invasion as an aggression and a breach of international law.

The Soviet leadership reacted to the world's outrage in a characteristic way: it exiled leading dissident Andrei Sakharov from Moscow and resumed the jamming of foreign broadcasts. In a matter of just a few days, Moscow managed to do practically all that was needed to alienate world public opinion and to finish off détente.

The Cold War's End

By the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, each of the superpowers had a mixed record of successes and failures in the third world. Moscow had lost Egypt, the linchpin of its Middle Eastern policy, and had become mired in Afghanistan. The United States had even more reason to feel gloomy; except for the Camp David accord, almost everything seemed to be going wrong. As Huntington put it: ''[The] April 1978 coup in Afghanistan, the June 1978 coup in South Yemen, the toppling of the Shah and Khomeini's accession to power in Iran in February 1979, and the victory of the Sandinistas over Somoza in July 1979. All these developments could be considered, and by many were perceived as, American defeats. Yet all were almost entirely the product of domestic forces within the respective societies, with virtually no known Soviet involvement.'' Feeling was widespread ''that the Carter administration could not or would not adequately protect American interests in the Third World.''[28]

27. ''The Intervention in Afghanistan,'' 99.

28. Huntington, ''Renewed Hostility,'' in Nye, *America's Soviet Policy*, 275–276.

It was in this environment that Ronald Reagan assumed office. In an apt description by U.S. diplomat Samuel Lewis, "a deeply convinced ideological warrior against world communism, totally suspicious of Soviet intentions, Reagan was the United States' first true ideological president."[29] His administration, although initially obsessed with the third world, in practice focused less on regional issues than it did on countering the USSR's subversive designs. However, its obsession with the Soviet Union as the evil empire could be quite misleading in its approach to third world conflicts, particularly in the Middle East. Reagan's advisers constantly warned that the Soviets were poised to take advantage of all the upheaval and turmoil in the region, though the Soviets had been remarkably unsuccessful in exploiting Middle Eastern instability since the late 1960s.[30] The irony of the situation, however, was that neither of the two dangerous situations with which the Reagan administration had to cope in the Middle East, Iran and Lebanon, had anything to do with Moscow. A new force of militant Islamic fundamentalism emerged in the area, and its spread could be seen as potentially detrimental to Soviet interests as well.

Practically the only area of the third world where Reagan felt he had to combat Soviet interests was Central America. The upsurge of the Cuban-backed left-wing forces in Nicaragua and El Salvador became the administration's main concern for years to come. True to his world view, Reagan could not fail to regard Central American revolutions as part of a sinister Soviet design; the "domino theory" was revived, and great efforts were made to thwart the pro-Cuban leftist forces. Elsewhere in the third world, however, the situation was fairly stable with respect to Soviet-U.S. confrontation. After the Egyptian fiasco, Moscow could not present a seri-

29. Samuel W. Lewis, "The United States and Israel: Constancy and Change," in *The Middle East Ten Years After Camp David,* ed. William B. Quandt (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1988), 227.

30. Philip S. Khoury, "The Reagan Administration and the Middle East," in *Reagan and the World,* ed. David E. Kyvig (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990), 73–74.

ous practical threat in the Middle East, although the Soviets, true to form, continued to meddle from time to time. All the attempts to "bury Camp David," a slogan loudly propagated in the early 1980s by Arabists of Primakov's school, proved ineffective, and the Front of Steadfastness and Confrontation, set up under Syrian and Soviet auspices, never became an efficient political instrument. Nor was there any real sign in Africa of the Soviets being up to some new intervention. Rather, the United States was suspected of indirectly backing, along with Saudi Arabia, the anti-government UNITA rebels in Angola who were waging war against the pro-Soviet regime. The Soviets, of course, were not slow in coming to the aid of their Angolan allies, but as détente was over anyway, this aid could be seen as something normal, even legitimate, within the framework of the renewed cold war.

By the time Gorbachev acceded to power in 1985, the Soviet-U.S. rivalry in the third world was by no means as acute as it had been a few years earlier. After Soviet successes and U.S. setbacks in the 1970s, things had dramatically changed all across the board: a spectacular revival of the Western economy, the end of the frustration in America caused by the Vietnam syndrome, a serious worsening of the Soviet Union's economic situation, and the Afghanistan quagmire. What was needed was a comprehensive reappraisal of policy both at home and abroad.

This reappraisal, which had begun surreptitiously prior to the Gorbachev era, was given a powerful boost as perestroika and glasnost managed to achieve something that had been utterly unthinkable just a few years earlier: to question some basic, traditional foundations of the Soviet world view. Such terms as "new political thinking" and "de-ideologization of interstate relations" symbolized a new approach to Soviet involvement abroad, particularly with regard to the third world. Numerous articles were published, some of them contributed by the present author, calling for a revision of usual Communist notions regarding patterns of development of Asian, African, and Latin American countries. Old clichés were being discarded one by one. This new approach was based

on irrefutable facts that tended to confirm what had already been suspected for years: a fiasco of the Soviet third world strategy.

By this time, Moscow felt a certain weariness stemming from a deep disillusionment about Soviet prospects in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It was evident that the great Khrushchev design had failed to bear fruit. No real breakthrough capable of shattering the West had been achieved. Afghanistan was by then a veritable quagmire, and African left-wing regimes had become largely irrelevant. Most of all, the Soviets were tired and disenchanted with the Arab world, upon which great hopes had once been pinned. When Eduard Shevardnadze took over as foreign minister in June 1985, this was the situation he found, as told by his American biographers: ''Reductions in Western influence were not always accompanied by increased Soviet influence. Important Third World leaders accepted aid, then pursued policies contrary to Soviet interests. Seemingly promising situations proved disappointing.''[31] The important last part of this gruesome catalogue of failed hopes was the failure of the whole pattern of Socialist orientation in the third world.

In 1987, I spoke at a conference convened by Shevardnadze and attended by, among others, approximately 100 Soviet ambassadors. I told them that in my view, the Socialist orientation had proved a failure. During the break, ambassadors who worked in Congo, Angola, and Mozambique came up to shake my hand. They said, ''We knew it all along, we warned the Ministry that the situation in the countries we are accredited in was a total disaster, but nobody seemed to care.''

Actually, Soviet policymakers had always been indifferent to the practical results of non-capitalist development in Asia and Africa. What mattered to them was the involvement of the states ruled by revolutionary democrats in a worldwide anti-Western coalition. Ideology as such, instrumental in bringing about a decisive change

31. Carolyn McGiffert Ekedani and Melvin A. Goodman, *The Wars of Eduard Shevardnadze* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 208–209.

in the correlation of global forces, was secondary. Third world leaders who proclaimed their allegiance to socialism were committing to side with the USSR. Just how successful they actually were in the business of Socialist transformation of their countries was not very important. What was vital was that, by proclaiming their Socialist commitment, they could be counted as Soviet allies and a net loss to the United States in a zero-sum game.

The propaganda aspect was crucial, too. What mattered for Brezhnev was to be able to say in his report to the party congress: "Comrades, the period under review has demonstrated once more that the ideas of socialism are on the march throughout the planet; more countries are joining us under the banner of socialism."

As perestroika progressed and momentous events were taking place in the Soviet Union, third world affairs were increasingly sidelined to the point of becoming largely irrelevant. The de-ideologization of interstate relations was the name of the game. The time came to cut the Soviet Union's losses, and the most urgent issue was Afghanistan.

Studying the CPSU Central Committee archives makes it possible to follow the evolution of Politburo thinking. At the meeting on May 6, 1980, when Brezhnev was still in power, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was routinely justified by the necessity to combat the United States. "The termination of military invasions or any other forms of meddling into Afghanistan's internal affairs as well as guarantees against the resumption of such actions would remove the reasons that compelled Afghanistan to ask the USSR to send the above-mentioned contingent into its territory."[32] Three years later, with Andropov in charge, the same line persisted. At the Politburo meeting on March 10, 1983, Andropov said: "We are being confronted here [in Afghanistan] by American imperialism, which perfectly understands that it has lost its positions in this sector of international politics. This is why we cannot afford to back down." At the same meeting, however, the issue of the eventual

32. CPSU Central Committee archives, fond #89, 1983, list 34, file 8, 2.

withdrawal of Soviet forces seems to have been raised for the first time, as evidenced by Gromyko's words: "At present it is impossible to give Pakistan a pledge as to the concrete terms of the withdrawal of our troops from the country."[33]

As Gorbachev took over in 1985, the Soviet leadership's position began to change. Sometime in 1986, Evgeni Primakov told me that a *political* decision to pull out of Afghanistan had already been taken by the Politburo, implying that the next stage would be the working out of a military plan of withdrawal. Ambassador Jack Matlock recalls that in February 1986, Gorbachev called the war in Afghanistan "a running sore." He said that henceforth, "Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan was to be treated as a problem that needed to be solved."[34]

The remarks of political and military leaders at the Politburo meeting on November 13, 1986, revealed the new mood in the Kremlin.

Gorbachev: "We have been fighting in Afghanistan for six years. If we do not change our approach to the issue, we'll be fighting for twenty or thirty years more. . . . Shall we wage an endless war, making plain the inability of our troops to deal with the situation? We need to put an end to this process in the nearest future."

Gromyko: "Not very long ago we talked about the necessity of closing Afghanistan's borders with Pakistan and Iran. We failed to achieve this because of the difficult terrain, with hundreds [of] mountain passes. Today, we must say frankly that our strategy should be to move toward the termination of the war."

Gorbachev: "In the resolution to be adopted, we must stress the necessity of ending the war not later than one year from now, maximum two years."

Gromyko: "We have not received their [Afghanistan's] support from inside. The number of new conscripts in the Afghan army is equal to the number of deserters."

33. CPSU Central Committee archives, fond #89, 1983, list 42, file 51, 2.

34. Jack Matlock Jr., *Autopsy on an Empire* (New York: Random House, 1995), 94.

General Akhromeev, deputy defense minister: "We have lost the struggle for the Afghan people. The government enjoys the support of the minority of the population."

Gorbachev: "In October of last year, at a Politburo meeting, we made clear our position in regard to Afghan settlement. Our goal was to accelerate the withdrawal of our forces from Afghanistan while ensuring the existence of a friendly Afghanistan. To achieve this, we tried to combine military and political measures. We have failed, however, to make progress in either field."[35]

Thus, it appears that the preliminary decision to pull out of Afghanistan was taken as early as October 1985, just a few months after Gorbachev had assumed office. This was also confirmed during my conversations with Primakov and others close to the decision-making circles. This preliminary decision was made in broad and rather vague terms: to work toward withdrawal sometime in the near future, after the existence of a "friendly Afghanistan" was ensured. The idea was to achieve some degree of military preponderance and to start actual withdrawal from a position of strength. However, a whole year was wasted before the Politburo, in November of the next year, came to the conclusion that it was time to decide on withdrawal without waiting for any serious military achievements.

What were the motives behind Gorbachev's decision to pull out of Afghanistan? As can be seen from the Politburo protocols, the most obvious reason was the sheer impossibility of winning the war without large-scale operations aimed at closing Afghanistan's border with Pakistan. Such an operation would have required a gigantic effort involving armed forces and financial resources probably exceeding the level of what the Soviet government was prepared to assign to Afghanistan even at the best of times, much less at a time of growing economic and political strain that marked the perestroika period. A second reason, never mentioned at Politburo meetings, was the growing feeling that the Afghanistan adventure

35. CPSU Central Committee archives, fond #89, 1986, list 42, file 16, 1–3.

seriously hampered Gorbachev's efforts to achieve an understanding with the West. And this understanding was badly needed in order to carry out the new leader's economic reforms.

It was only when Gorbachev assumed office that he was fully able to realize the extent of his country's economic backwardness compared with the West. He understood that in order to put things right he had to cut drastically the enormous defense budget, especially after President Reagan announced his Strategic Defense Initiative program, which was clearly beyond the power of the Soviets to counter or to imitate. At least that was what the Soviet military thought at the time, despite what was to be disclosed later about SDI's practical feasibility.

The reduction of military expenditure was an absolute priority; nothing less could provide the financial resources necessary for the modernization of the civilian economy. As the bulk of this expenditure went into maintaining the huge Soviet nuclear arsenal, it was essential to cut down immediately on the kind of armaments that were the backbone of the Soviet military machine. Strategic parity with America had always been the name of the game. Since unilateral disarmament was out of the question, the only way to achieve parity was to reach an agreement with the West, and first and foremost with the United States, on the question of gradual mutual disarmament. As Gorbachev's bad luck would have it, however, precisely at that critical moment the United States and Great Britain had staunch anti-Communists, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, as their leaders.

Thus, Gorbachev faced an uphill struggle trying to convince them that the Soviet Union was no longer an evil empire. His initial attempts to demonstrate a new spirit in Soviet foreign policy by proposing a nuclear test ban and a 50 percent reduction of strategic armaments were not good enough for the West. Something else was necessary: tangible and practical steps to prove that Moscow was really prepared to discard its traditional totalitarian and aggressive pattern. It amounted to liberalization at home and proof of genuinely peaceful intentions abroad. Such actions as the return of An-

drei Sakharov from exile in Gorky, the go-ahead for a new round of de-Stalinization, and the introduction of multicandidate elections were largely dictated by Gorbachev's willingness to promote perestroika and defeat his diehard adversaries. It would be a mistake, however, to focus only on the domestic dimension of those crucial political decisions. They were also motivated, although to a lesser extent, by Gorbachev's need to convince Western leaders of his goodwill and his genuine desire to achieve the liberalization and humanization of the Soviet system. It is in this context that the decision to end the war in Afghanistan should be viewed.

While trying to disentangle himself from Afghanistan, Gorbachev attempted to minimize Soviet commitment in other Socialist-oriented countries of the third world as well. At its meeting on September 18, 1989, the Politburo decided against sending more weapons to Ethiopia in response to a plea by Ethiopian dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam, who appeared to be heading for defeat in his war against the rebels.[36] At the next meeting on November 17, 1989, the Politburo approved a memo signed by Shevardnadze, Yakovlev, Yazov (the defense minister) and Kriuchkov (KGB chief), which stated: "A further increase in military assistance to the Ethiopian regime would hardly result in making it stronger; at the same time such an increase could provoke an upsurge of anti-Soviet sentiment in that country and cause harm to political interests of the Soviet Union. . . . It is necessary to complete the withdrawal of Soviet military advisers and experts from combat areas in the north of Ethiopia during November of 1989."[37]

In Nicaragua, the ruling Sandinistas suffered an astounding electoral defeat in the spring of 1990. At its meeting on April 13, 1990, the Politburo approved a memo signed by Shevardnadze, Yakovlev, and Kriuchkov in which it was suggested that "the emergence of a new leadership in Nicaragua calls for substantial corrections in Soviet-Nicaraguan relations with the aim of making them more prag-

36. CPSU Central Committee archives, fond #89, 1989, list 10, file 43, 2.
37. CPSU Central Committee archives, fond #89, 1989, list 10, file 45, 1.

matic and de-ideologized.''[38] No regrets were recorded as to the fiasco of the Sandinista ''comrades.''

At the same time, steps were being made toward restoring Soviet relations with Israel. At a meeting on December 29, 1989, the Politburo decided to upgrade the consular groups already in existence and to set up regular consulates.[39] The decision to restore relations with Israel may have been influenced by several considerations. First, it became apparent that the lopsided pro-Arab policy had brought no tangible results. After Sadat's maneuvers, culminating in the Camp David agreement, it was clear that no further deal with the Egyptian president could be possible; Sadat was no Nasser. So Egypt was out of the game for good and Iraq was completely engrossed in its confrontation with Iran. What remained was Syria, a rather enigmatic and unreliable ally, as well as the Palestinians, clearly unable at that time to influence events decisively. Thus, nothing could really be gained from continuing the old policy. Second, Gorbachev still wanted to retain some degree of influence in the Middle East. After all, the Soviet Union was, at least nominally, the United States' partner in the Geneva conference, and to be able to match the American influence it was necessary to play the game on the whole chessboard, not just on the Arab side of it. What was needed was the ability to ''stand on both legs, not on one leg,'' as the Chinese say. The USSR could only hope to influence the inevitable peace process in the Middle East if it had some foothold in Israel, too. Third, as perestroika and glasnost progressed, old anti-Israeli stereotypes and clichés were becoming increasingly irrelevant. The rapprochement with the United States was logically leading to a softening of the Soviet position on Israel. It would have been less than serious to move to an accommodation with the United States while maintaining a hostile attitude toward one of America's allies and going on, as usual, about ''Zionist aggressors,'' ''puppets,'' and so on. Fourth, anti-Semitism, ever present in the Kremlin's attitude toward Israel, was

38. CPSU Central Committee archives, fond #89, 1990, list 9, file 117, 2.
39. CPSU Central Committee archives, fond #89, 1989, list 9, file 68, 2.

definitely on the wane in the new atmosphere in Moscow. Both Gorbachev and Shevardnadze seemed to lack anti-Jewish sentiments, so they could not be motivated by the traditional bias.

Elsewhere in the third world, no serious events took place during the perestroika years that involved high-level Soviet policy decisions directly bearing on Soviet-U.S. relations. Thus, two developments in the Middle East dominated the political scene: the civil war in Lebanon and the Iran-Iraq War. In neither of these cases were any major Soviet political decisions recorded, which does not mean, however, that those events were insignificant in Soviet political thinking. The Lebanese civil war demonstrated the depth of internal differences in the Arab world, thus contributing to the growing feeling that the hope of creating a powerful Arab bulwark against U.S. domination was in fact groundless. The Iran-Iraq War introduced two new elements into the Soviet perception of the Middle East. First, the adventurism and unpredictability of Saddam Hussein, one of the traditional Soviet allies in the area, was clearly seen as one more sign of the dubious value of any alliances with ''countries of Socialist orientation'' in the Arab world. Second, Islamic fundamentalism emerged on the scene close to the USSR's southern borders, and from then on both the Americans and Soviets appeared to have a common enemy. So political thinkers close to Gorbachev increasingly displayed distinctly anti–third world sentiments; some of them even went so far as to stress objective convergence of the interests of the Soviet Union and the United States in regard to a new common danger. While playing no major part in shaping the new political thinking, events in the Middle East, if anything, strengthened the conviction that it was high time that the traditional concept of an irreconcilable clash of U.S. and Soviet interests in the third world be discarded as obsolete, thus paving the way for the idea of ending the cold war.

As regimes of Socialist orientation began crumbling one after another, nobody in Moscow seemed to be unduly disturbed. Perestroika and glasnost overshadowed everything else, the fundamentals of socialism were being questioned, and the fate of the Socialist

system was at stake. There is a Russian saying that ''Once you have had your head cut off, there is no need to fret about the hair.''

The practical effects of the new political thinking introduced by Gorbachev could probably be best illustrated by the Kremlin's stand during the Gulf crisis in 1990 and 1991. The former Soviet leader recalls in his memoirs: ''It was a major test for new political thinking. During the Cold War, this conflict could have led the opposing blocs to a military, even a nuclear, confrontation. . . . I met President Bush in Helsinki. This meeting, undertaken at his initiative, was of fundamental importance. Its crux was the issue of maintaining and consolidating the American-Soviet partnership in the face of the crisis that had broken out. . . . I was in complete agreement with Bush's point that 'Saddam Hussein cannot be allowed to profit from his aggression.' ''[40] This was a far cry indeed from Soviet thinking of the cold war era.

Conclusion

By the end of the 1980s, a whole era in international relations had come to a close, an era that in the Soviet Union was called peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition of the two world systems. The third world was bound to play a major role in world politics during the cold war if only because frontlines in the main battlefield, Europe, were frozen, with no chance for either of the opposing sides to achieve a breakthrough. Spreading Soviet influence in the third world looked quite promising; the idea was to strike at the soft underbelly of the imperialist camp, thus bypassing its main citadels in North America and Western Europe. The developing countries, seething with discontent and driven by the dynamics of anticolonial inertia, presented an excellent opportunity to undermine the imperialist system from within rather than engage it in an open clash.

This grand design was deeply flawed from the outset. Try as it

40. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 551, 553–554.

might, the Soviet Union could not substantially change the balance of global forces, which favored the U.S.-led Western coalition. The Soviets overplayed their hand, which resulted in an extraordinary squandering of resources.[41] The Socialist orientation proved a dismal failure; pro-Moscow left-wing regimes were just as corrupt and faction-ridden as almost all the others in the third world while being less efficient economically. Their downfall, which had always been just a matter of time, can be regarded as part of the same pattern that manifested itself in the demise of the Socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. As socialism crumbled in its main citadel, its collapse on the periphery was inevitable.

In the geopolitical and military struggle for the third world, the Soviet defensive and preemptive strategy proved just as inconclusive as the defensive and containment approach of the United States, no matter how many bold tactical moves Moscow could boast. For example, in Asia, the Soviet Union never had a chance of forging a real alliance with the pivotal state, India, however much Soviet diplomacy tried to play on Indian differences with U.S.-backed Pakistan. In the Middle East, the Kremlin proved unable to hold on to the key state, Egypt, in spite of being its main arms supplier. Attempts to secure a base on the African Horn for the benefit of a fast-growing Soviet navy so as to mirror American naval bases came to nothing as war broke out between Somalia and Ethiopia.

However, the United States soon had to part with the illusion that it was possible to transform the USSR into an honest and responsible partner, contain its expansion, and compel it to observe the rules of the game designed to ensure a U.S.-controlled stability in the third world. The United States lacked a sufficient supply of sticks and carrots; moreover, the third world had such an inexhaustible conflict potential that the United States could not expect

41. From 1954 through 1977 alone, the Soviet Union committed almost $13 billion worth of economic assistance to the countries of the third world. See Kelley, *Soviet Politics,* 240.

to cope with all the adventurous leaders, strongmen, and dictators who kept popping up everywhere, ready to condemn imperialism and proclaim their Socialist credentials in order to get Soviet jet fighters and tanks.

The former Soviet ambassador to the United States, Oleg Troianovski, admits that "in the context of the cold war, it was often enough for some warlord to say that he was going to build socialism in his country, and the Soviet Union would start helping him."[42] His assessment is reinforced by General Anatoli Gribkov, former chief of staff of the Warsaw Treaty Organization: "As soon as a leader in Mozambique, Angola, Ethiopia, or Somalia mentioned the word 'socialism,' our leaders immediately picked up on it and decided that this particular country would become socialist."[43]

Both Dobrynin and Troianovski maintain that neither of them ever heard anyone in the Soviet Union suggest that the third world was the main problem for the USSR.[44] But as the former high official in the Central Committee of the CPSU Georgi Shakhnazarov suggested, "It all reminded [one of] the soccer strategy known as man-to-man coverage: every player in one team has a player to follow from the opposing team. If a player from the other side moves, then one of our players must move with him. So it was with the United States: whenever they moved their forces, we had to move ours."

Shakhnazarov recalls a conversation with Andropov in 1965 during which Andropov said: "The future competition with the United States will take place not in Europe, and not in the Atlantic Ocean directly. It will take place in Africa, and in Latin America. We will compete for every piece of land, for every country. We need bases there, and then we will be able to enjoy an equal status with the Americans. We will not let them command there."[45]

At first, it might seem to be a contradiction: the third world was

42. "Global Competition," 12.
43. Ibid., 59.
44. Ibid., 47.
45. Ibid., 38, 39.

never a top priority for the Kremlin, but at the same time it was regarded as the main battlefield in the global competition. Actually, there is no contradiction here. The third world as such was not a major issue, but ever since Khrushchev's era it had been viewed as an area where the rival could be dealt the most painful blows. Countries in that area were just pawns in the game.

The third world refused to play to either the U.S. or the Russian tune; it was too heterogeneous, too volatile, and its traditions and mentality were too far from those of the two other worlds. It proved impossible to pigeonhole it and fit it into a pattern worked out in Moscow or Washington. Of course, it was possible to play on its formidable conflict potential, but this had its downside, too. Alliances all too often proved fragile, governments were prone to switch sides, and loyalties to superpowers were not binding. As the Arabs say, "The camel driver has his plans but the camel has his."

Neither side could win the third world, and deadlock could have continued for decades were it not for Mikhail Gorbachev and his perestroika. The last leader of the Communist Party intended to invigorate and rejuvenate the system. He probably never read Alexis de Tocqueville, who said that the most perilous hour for a bad government comes when it tries to mend its ways.

For Gorbachev, voluntary dismantling of the once-powerful Soviet positions in the third world was vital in the context of his new policy of rapprochement with the West. By 1986, he already had well-grounded hopes for reaching an understanding with President Reagan on major issues such as the end of the arms race, the reduction of strategic armaments, and the withdrawal of tactical missiles from Europe. This seemed to promise, first, a long overdue modernization and genuine transformation of the Soviet economy as the state budget would be freed from the burden of a truly monstrous military expenditure, and, second, a new boost to the process of humanization and democratization inside the country. Compared to such momentous benefits, continued clinging to Soviet positions in the third world was more trouble than it was worth. Asia, Africa, and Latin America had never been a priority in

Soviet foreign-policy guidelines; the third world had always been a secondary battlefield. Gorbachev, bent on striking a comprehensive deal with the West, would not want to see his great initiative compromised by the increasingly irrelevant concept of promoting socialism in distant tropical countries.

Once the idea of accommodation with the West and ending the cold war took hold in Moscow, it would have been futile to pretend that the overall goal—a crusade against imperialism as part of a universal class struggle—remained the same. In this situation, continued support of "class comrades" in the third world clearly lost its raison d'être.

The Reagan administration was wise enough to seek negotiated outcomes to the various third world conflicts then raging. An Afghan settlement was achieved in the Geneva framework; Chester Crocker and Anatoli Adamishin pursued an Angola/Namibia settlement that also involved South Africa and Cuba; and negotiations over Central America and Cambodia bore fruit later. Presidents Reagan and Bush accepted Gorbachev's good faith in seeking a new turn. Thus, it is possible to speak about a mutual interest in winding down third world conflicts, which amounted to an interaction of the two sides' policies.

In fact, Gorbachev's foreign policy, including its third world dimension, could be called a new détente. A fundamental difference between the first détente, initiated under Brezhnev, and that made possible by Gorbachev's fresh and imaginative approach to world affairs, is obvious: while the former merely served to disguise cardinal differences between Soviet and U.S. aims and resulted in attempts to achieve those aims under the cover of détente, the latter was based on completely new premises that ensured a genuine rejection of the very idea of confrontation. If the Brezhnev détente finally resulted in the resumption of the cold war and in increased international tension, the Gorbachev détente contributed to the end of the superpower rivalry and effectively signaled the termination of the cold war. In this context, events in the third world played a significant role, for they produced moral weariness and

disenchantment in the attitude of Soviet policymakers that encouraged them to look for new foreign policy guidelines.

As Karen Brutents notes, "There was a certain contradiction in the concept of détente from the very beginning, because the most serious . . . basic elements of the Cold War remained intact." In his opinion, politicians on both sides should also be blamed; instead of trying to soften the basic contradiction of détente and smooth it over gradually, they deepened and sharpened it and as a result ruined détente. It happened "because of short-sightedness and excessive fighting spirit on both sides."[46] It is also worthwhile to quote the prominent American Sovietologist Robert Legvold, who, after listing all the contradictory issues of the era of détente, came to the conclusion that "it was the cumulative effect of all these things that really mattered, and the extent to which the whole process turned out to be more important than the sum of the parts."[47]

The cold war did not come to a close because of developments in the third world. These developments did, however, contribute significantly to the realization on both sides that a new page in history had to be opened.

46. Ibid., 27, 28.

47. News conference at the National Press Club, Washington, DC, March 27, 1995. The Brown University News Bureau, 3–4.