

Middle East and Vietnam. But it is reasonable to assume that they were also responses to demonstrations of resolve on the part of the Kennedy, Johnson, and Reagan Administrations. In other words, although the growing Soviet challenge to US interests in this region and in other areas of the Third World may be a more or less secular outgrowth of the Soviet Union's rise to global military power and its increasing "operational confidence" in the Third World, this challenge nonetheless remains responsive to American policy.

To judge from the cases considered here (and with the obvious exception of the Cuban Missile Crisis), Soviet policy in the Caribbean Basin is cautiously incremental and averse to taking risks.⁹⁸ The potential dangers of confrontation with the United States in an area which the latter deems to be of vital interest, in which it enjoys a considerable conventional military advantage and where it has repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to deploy military force in defence of these interests, outweigh the admittedly considerable gains which the Soviet Union believes would follow from a weakening of the American position in the Caribbean Basin and a significant increase in the Soviet military presence there. The Soviet Union appears, instead, to be content to wait upon regional events the trend of which is judged in any case to be corrosive of American interests in the long run. In this context, the currently popular maxim⁹⁹ that the Soviet Union recognizes no legitimate spheres of influence and evinces a desire to supplant the US globally deserves comment. The issue of whether the Soviet Union does or does not recognize the "legitimacy" of US spheres of influence is basically irrelevant in the context of policy-making. For that matter, our recognition of the legitimacy of the Soviet spheres of influences in Eastern Europe may also be called in question. But, in fact, each superpower tempers any challenge to the other's control of its spheres of influence because the risk of fundamental direct challenge to the status quo in these areas outweighs any potential gains which might arise from this action. In this operational, rather than normative, sense, the Soviet Union does recognize spheres of influence and adjusts its policies accordingly.

This is related to a third point. The Soviet Union, in its penetration of the region, is responsive to opportunities which are local in origin or which emerge out of US policy towards recalcitrant re-

⁹⁸ One might well argue that the experience of October 1962 strengthened this characteristic of Soviet policy in the region.

⁹⁹ H. Gelman, *The Brezhnev Politburo and the Decline of Détente* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984, pp. 35, 229).