

of US naval vessels between the Pacific and Atlantic basins is greatly facilitated by secure access to the Panama Canal. The southern flank of the United States is poorly covered by early warning systems and has little if any air defence capability. Soviet commentators tend to agree with their US counterparts in stressing the importance of the region to US security, referring to it as part of the American "strategic rear" (*strategicheskii tyl'*). The establishment of a significant Soviet military presence in the region could substantially affect US security, thereby enhancing the relative position of the Soviet Union in the global balance of power. For these reasons, it is a region of great temptation.

Moreover, the politics of the region have in the past (the Cuban Revolution), and do at present, provide opportunities for Soviet entry which currently are rare elsewhere in the Third World. The Soviet realization of this proposition is evident in their fairly consistent reference to the radical movements of the area and their victories as principal moving forces of the "world revolutionary process" at its current stage.²²

A second element in the politics of the Caribbean Basin also bears upon this discussion. The paucity of close historical, cultural and diplomatic ties with Third World élites is particularly evident in Central America. Regimes in the area have traditionally been ill-disposed towards the Soviet Union, viewing it as the architect of an international conspiracy directed against them. Moreover, the United States has strongly discouraged the development of ties between the states of the region and the Soviet Union, and this policy has had considerable success until quite recently. The result is that Soviet reliance on revolutionary counter-élites rather than on more moderate or traditional élites is also particularly strong in Central America. In other words, the region, owing to its proximity to the United States, contains considerable temptations, while not only ideological proclivities but also historical handicaps dictate that Soviet attempts to gain entry into the region depend on ties with forces committed to a profound revolutionary transformation of the status quo.

²² G. Kim, for example, noted a qualitative leap in the process of national liberation in the 1970s, citing as major elements of this shift the victories in Vietnam and in Kampuchea and the "outstanding" victories won by revolutionary forces in Latin America.

G. Kim, "Sovetskii Soyuz i Natsional'no-Osvoboditel'noe Dvizhenie", *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnoshenia* (*World Economics and International Relations*), (1982), #9, p. 24.