

They oppose massive exchanges not out of ignorance or irrational fear, which we might be able to talk them out of, but because of a shrewd awareness of the demands for economic and political liberalization that such a process would inevitably promote and the threat that this would pose to the leadership's power and privileges.

Similarly, we do not promote clear thinking and a sober anticipation of future Soviet policy when we view the Soviet Union as being purely "defensive" in its policies. The Soviet Union has been active in such far flung countries as Cuba, South Yemen, Angola and Ethiopia not out of defensive necessity, but because the Kremlin's rulers believe that Moscow deserves to be recognized as one of the world's two superpowers, possessing all the rights and privileges (such as client states and military bases) which they believe the United States enjoys.

In attempting to expand Soviet power, the Politburo follows a policy of cautious but active opportunism. For this reason, the containment of Soviet expansionism requires both a stable balance of power and a clear demonstration that the Western alliance has the will and determination to resist encroachments on its vital interests. But we also must be careful not to exaggerate the nature of the Soviet threat, not to apply a distorting double standard in our appraisal of Soviet conduct, and not to impute grandiose and diabolical intentions to the Soviet leadership where other, more mundane factors might actually be shaping Soviet foreign policy.

All too often Soviet policy is discussed in an analytical vacuum devoid of any historical perspective. Throughout history, strong states have expanded and weak states have suffered. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries

witnessed the consolidation (and later the collapse) of European empires in Africa and Asia. The United States was actively policing Latin America in the early part of this century, long before the appearance of Soviet Communism provided an up-dated rationale for this policy. In



the past three decades alone U.S. troops have been used in the Dominican Republic and Grenada, proxy forces were utilized by Washington in Guatemala and Cuba, and attempts were made to destabilize Chile and Nicaragua. Without in any way attempting to justify Soviet imperialism or equating it with American actions, it is still necessary to take into account the way American power has actually been wielded – as opposed to the glorified self-image of U.S. policy that many Americans have – when trying to understand how the Soviet Union views the competitive struggle in the Third World. Moscow and Washington have very different conceptions of what constitutes a legitimate process of change in the Third World, and neither wishes to see its own freedom of action curtailed. For these reasons, their intense rivalry is destined to continue.

The long term challenge is to find ways of regulating this rivalry so that opportunities for self-determination by the nations of the Third World are maximized and so that it does not periodically threaten to escalate into a dangerous confrontation. The interests of the West are not advanced by either perceived weakness, which tempts the Soviet

Union to further adventurism, or by a panic-stricken over-reaction, which exaggerates the degree of menace to our security and may lead to direct military intervention in situations where our interests are better served by alternative responses (e.g., the use of economic incentives, support for

mutual disengagement, or patiently waiting for the combined influence of local nationalism and Soviet heavy-handedness to produce a more favorable shift in political orientation).

In attempting to understand better both Soviet perceptions of the world and the way in which our own analyses are sometimes deficient, it is worth trying to imagine for a moment what the reaction would be if it was a Soviet leader, and not the American President, who announced a massive program to create a missile shield in space, who insisted – in defiance of all previous strategic thinking – that defense and offense were entirely separate matters, and who attempted to allay fears that the nuclear balance might be disrupted by promising to share with other countries whatever technological breakthroughs were achieved (including advances in super computers, new software techniques, and high energy lasers). Such a stance would provoke scorn for the obviously untenable claims that were being made and would lead to much fevered speculation as to the "true intentions" of the Soviet leadership. Yet when it is the American leader who utters such words, his goals are accepted largely at face value. Even the critics of Star Wars have focused mainly on its technical aspects (i.e., on what

they see as its staggering cost, its impracticality, and its potential for destabilizing the nuclear balance). All this is not to argue that we should doubt American intentions, but rather to suggest that we should be careful not to engage unthinkingly in worst case analysis of Soviet policy, imputing sinister intentions to the Soviet leadership which are not necessarily supported by the available evidence.

That all of humanity lives together on a small and vulnerable planet was at least partially reflected in the summit conversations between Reagan and Gorbachev. "I couldn't help but say to him," Reagan subsequently informed a group of high school students, "just think how easy his task and mine might be in these meetings that we held if suddenly there was a threat to this world from another species from another planet outside in the universe. We'd forget all the little local differences that we have between our countries and we would find out once and for all that we really are all human beings here on this earth together." (*The Globe and Mail*, Dec. 6, 1986, p. A15). What needs to be fully grasped is that we already face a clear and present danger, in the form of a fiery holocaust triggered by accidental or inadvertent nuclear war, which is no less urgent than an invasion of aliens and which cannot be solved by some sort of technological fix. As Einstein put it, we need to change our "modes of thinking." This means fully recognizing our mutual peril, learning the hard lessons of history, avoiding simplistic categorizations of Soviet conduct, recognizing that there are no easy and quick solutions to the problems and dilemmas we face, and beginning a sustained effort to put East-West relations on a more even keel. Six decades on a roller coaster is long enough.