

The Soviet embrace of the Nicaraguan Revolution may have reflected not only optimism about the general trend of events within the region itself, but also their appreciation of the failure of the United States to act to prevent it. This may have been interpreted as further evidence of US unwillingness or incapacity to defend its interests in the Third World, and hence as an indication that risks associated with forward Soviet policies there remained low. It was no doubt all the warmer, however, since this was a period of growing difficulties for the Soviet Union in international and domestic affairs.⁵⁰ Recent gains in Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, South Yemen and Afghanistan were to an increasing degree counterbalanced by growing hostility towards and determination to contain the Soviet Union, on the part of the latter's principal adversaries (for example, the 1978 NATO re-armament decisions, the Sino-Japanese Treaty of the same year, the movement towards normalization of relations between the United States and People's Republic of China, the NATO two-track decision of December 1979, and the apparently growing influence of "reactionary circles" within the American government). As time passed, these unfavourable trends outside the Soviet Bloc were joined by the Polish issue within it. In the meantime, growth inside the Soviet Union continued to falter in the face of increasing rigidities in factor supply and in the process of technical innovation. Events in Central America were to an increasing degree one of the few bright lights in an otherwise darkening landscape.

Just as the Soviet Union of 1960 was not the Soviet Union of 1954, so the Soviet Union of 1979-80 was in a number of ways far more capable of rapid and effective response than it had been two decades previously.⁵¹ Since the Nicaraguan Revolution, the Soviet Union has made a sustained and multi-faceted effort to deepen and consolidate its relations with the new Nicaraguan regime.

The Soviet Union established its first diplomatic mission in Managua in March 1980. The CPSU also moved rapidly to establish an inter-party relationship with the FSLN. Since the establishment of relations, the Soviet Union has provided Nicaragua with a substan-

⁵⁰ Brezhnev, in his 1981 overview of the international scene at the 26th Party Congress, referred to the period as turbulent and complex, in distinct contrast to his remarks at the 25th Congress in 1976.

⁵¹ Viz. the sustained growth in Soviet conventional force projection capabilities outlined in S.N. MacFarlane, "Soviet Policy in the Third World: Objectives, Interests, Capabilities, and Constraints", forthcoming as part of a volume on Third World security sponsored by the Wilson Center of the Smithsonian Institution.