

countries. Cuba and Vietnam have already been mentioned (see note 14), but the Soviet Union has also at times shouldered a considerable amount of Eastern Europe's economic burdens.¹⁶ This limits Soviet capacities elsewhere. Moreover, political problems within the bloc, such as Poland since 1980, focus the attention of foreign policy-makers on matters closer to home. In addition, Third World conditions also impose constraints on Soviet strategy. Soviet involvement in Third World conflicts has historically been a response to opportunities carrying a reasonable chance of significant gain and a low risk of serious losses (see below). These have not been so common in Third World politics as one might expect since the invasion of Afghanistan. There have been few opportunities for interference as tempting as those which occurred in Southern Africa and the Horn. The Soviet Union's apparent restraint in the Third World in the 1980s may be largely a reflection of a dearth of inviting circumstances.

Yet another regional constraint on Soviet strategy is the nationalism of the local actors with whom the Soviets have to deal in order to further their interests. The national particularism even of self-avowed Marxist-Leninists, and the unpredictability of such Soviet clients contribute an element of uncertainty and risk in situations where the Soviets have not actually occupied and assumed control of the state in question. This was amply demonstrated in the Soviet ejection from Egypt and Somalia in the mid-1970s.

The risks which the Soviet Union runs in its involvement in Third World politics, however, derive not only from the proclivities of its clients but also from the sensitivity of the United States to Soviet activism. Indeed, the United States is itself the most substantial constraint on Soviet behaviour in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The constraining effect of the United States has a number of dimensions. First, Soviet challenges to what US decision-makers perceive to be vital interests carry risks of confrontation and escalation which may far outweigh the benefits likely to follow from such actions. There is considerable recognition of this danger in Soviet writing, judging from growing numbers of references in the Soviet literature to "hotbeds of tensions" in the Third World and to the possibility of escalation from local to general war.¹⁷

¹⁶ A recent estimate put Soviet assistance to the Eastern European satellites, primarily in the form of price supports and credits, at \$55 million US a day. Simon (note 14), p. 20.

¹⁷ S. Neil MacFarlane, "The Soviet Conception of Regional Security", *World Politics*, XXXVII (1985), #3, p. 309.