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CANADIAN INSTITUTE  
FOR INTERNATIONAL  
PEACE AND SECURITY

**SUPERPOWER RIVALRY  
AND  
SOVIET POLICY IN THE  
CARIBBEAN BASIN**

by  
**S.N. MacFarlane**

The Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security was established by Parliament on 15 August 1984. It is the purpose of the Institute to increase knowledge and understanding of the issues relating to international peace and security from a Canadian perspective, with particular emphasis on arms control, disarmament, defence and conflict resolution.

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# Preface

During the Parliamentary Committee hearings which preceded the final reading of the Bill establishing the Institute, witnesses agreed that one of the most useful tasks which such an organization could perform would be to sponsor sound academic research on matters related to peace and security. Such research would provide information and ideas on the basis of which those interested could develop informed opinions as to the best ways of reducing international tension. It was hoped that such research would not be confined to technical or to strictly military matters but would cast a wider net covering some of the underlying causes of conflict and international instability. It was also suggested that it should focus on matters of particular relevance and interest to Canada.

This paper, the first in our series of Occasional Papers, meets these requirements.

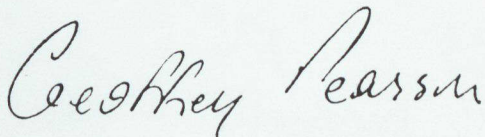
The author is a Canadian scholar who has specialized in Soviet foreign policy. His subject is the political crisis in Central America and the extent to which this has been exacerbated by the intrusion of the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. The area is one in which Canadians have a long-standing interest and where many Canadian non-governmental organizations play an active role.

Recent developments have only served to increase international concern regarding the situation in Central America. We believe therefore that a serious study of the East/West dimensions of the conflict is indeed timely and will help to explain the connections between local conditions and global tensions.

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This paper is an analysis of the nature and policy implications of Soviet involvement in the crisis in the Caribbean Basin. It is sometimes maintained that the Soviet Union, either directly or through "proxies" such as Cuba and Nicaragua, is the principal source of the region's instability and violence. According to this view, difficulties in the Caribbean Basin are one aspect of a global Soviet strategic threat to the United States and Western civilization, the states of the region being on a "hit list", as the Soviet Union's influence and power gradually close in on the US heartland. The region's conflicts are East-West rather than North-South, or, for





## I.

### INTRODUCTION

Let us not delude ourselves. The Soviet Union underlies all the unrest that is going on. If they weren't engaged in this game of dominoes, there wouldn't be any hot spots in the world.<sup>1</sup>

The current crisis in the Caribbean Basin (the island and littoral states of the Caribbean Sea) has thus far resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands caught in civil violence between left and right, the creation of an internal and cross border refugee problem affecting millions, and the crippling of the already weak economies of a number of states in the region. It has provoked a gradual but significant increase in United States military involvement in regional conflict and covert support for anti-Sandinista Nicaraguans. It raises the prospect of direct US military intervention (the deployment of regular combat units) either in support of the Salvadoran or against the Nicaraguan regime. The latter would entail substantial political problems within the United States and in US relations with its allies, including Canada. If the United States became bogged down in such a conflict, there would be considerable temptation, in Alexander Haig's words, "to go to the source", to attack Cuba. This in turn carries some risk of direct Soviet military involvement in the region or retaliation elsewhere, with attendant dangers of superpower confrontation and escalation. As such, the crisis demands the urgent attention not only of policy-makers and strategic analysts, but also of the informed public at large. It is a problem, moreover, of direct relevance not only to the nations of the region and the United States, but to the latter's allies as well.

This paper is an analysis of the nature and policy implications of Soviet involvement in the crisis in the Caribbean Basin. It is sometimes maintained that the Soviet Union, either directly or through "proxies" such as Cuba and Nicaragua, is the principal source of the region's instability and violence. According to this view, difficulties in the Caribbean Basin are one aspect of a global Soviet strategic threat to the United States and Western civilization, the states of the region being on a "hit list", as the Soviet Union's influence and power gradually close in on the US heartland. The region's conflicts are East-West rather than North-South, or, for

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Reagan, as cited in Arthur Schlesinger, "Foreign Policy and the American Character", *Foreign Affairs* 62 (Winter 1983), 3.



that matter, pre-eminently local in character. The citation above, from President Reagan himself, is an example of this genre of interpretation, as is ex-Secretary of State Haig's postulate that the East-West competition was being decided in El Salvador. A third would be Senator Helms' statements to the effect that Nicaragua was the first Soviet step on the road to Washington. Jeane Kirkpatrick maintained in a 1980 essay that even at that time,

the deterioration of the US position in the hemisphere has already created serious vulnerabilities where none previously existed and threatens now to confront the country with the unprecedented need to defend itself against a ring of Soviet bases on its southern flanks from Cuba to Central America.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, Howard Wiarda, one of the foremost American specialists on Central America, asserted in a recent publication that "no one really believes, despite frequent assertions to the contrary, that the Soviet Union is the prime cause of the upheavals [in Central America]".<sup>3</sup> Although with the passage of time the Reagan Administration has clearly developed greater sophistication in its analysis of regional issues, this generalization is difficult to accept without reservation. As Robert Packenham once noted, with regard to US doctrine concerning the Third World, often "the rhetoric is the reality".<sup>4</sup> Moreover, even if one accepts that this kind of argument is merely rhetorical posturing, it none the less has significant and pernicious political consequences. Once there is a public perception that instability in the region is the product of Soviet meddling and that the victory of hostile forces will bring serious threats to national security, it is difficult to withdraw from regional conflicts or to accept unfavourable changes in regime. Backing off or failing to act risks being criticized as a failure to defend the vital interests one said were at stake. In other words, those who employ such rhetoric risk being trapped by it. It favours entanglement and inhibits disengagement.

One also hears frequently, from domestic liberals, radical groups in the region, Soviet commentators and others that the Soviet Union has no significant role as a source of conflict in the Caribbean

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<sup>2</sup> Jeane Kirkpatrick, "US Security and Latin America", in H. Wiarda, ed., *Rift and Revolution* (Washington: AEI, 1984), p. 329. The essay appeared originally in *Commentary* (January 1981).

<sup>3</sup> H. Wiarda, "The Origins of the Crisis", in *ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> R. Packenham, *Liberal America and the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. xix.



Basin. They believe instability is the product of indigenous economic and social factors, and revolutionary agitation is essentially the natural product of massive inequities in land tenure and income distribution, inequities which, if anything, are growing with the passage of time. The masses in such circumstances have little stake in the status quo and are willing, indeed eager, to follow those radicals promising fundamental change. To the extent that any outside actor is responsible for the instability characteristic of the region, it is the United States, in her imposition of inequitable and impoverishing trade and investment relationships and in her political and military support for regimes established to perpetuate internal exploitation and external dependency.

By contrast, in their view, Soviet and Cuban assistance to revolutionary forces has been sporadic and quantitatively insignificant, and by and large a consequence of US backing of counter-revolutionary forces. The attempt to characterize social upheaval as the product of Soviet/Cuban expansionism is thus merely a pretext whereby the United States justifies permanent involvement in order to maintain her political, economic and military hegemony. Even if the Soviet Union wanted to establish itself in the region and was successful, this would not constitute a significant strategic threat to the United States, given

- a. continuing American conventional superiority in the region, allowing rapid suppression of Soviet forces and facilities;
- b. very long and vulnerable Soviet lines of communication to the region;
- c. the likelihood that any conflict involving the United States and the Soviet Union would escalate sufficiently quickly that non-nuclear facilities in the region would be irrelevant.

These two contrasting positions define the end points of a broad spectrum of opinion on the role of the Soviet Union in the Caribbean Basin and the significance of that role. Most analysts of Soviet policy fall between these two poles, taking the view that although the deep-seated causes of regional crisis are indigenous and socio-economic in character, Soviet and Cuban involvement (in the form of financial, technical, military and organizational assistance to anti-American revolutionary forces) is a significant contributing factor, expediting the transformation of revolutionary potential into the reality of civil conflict. They differ, however, in the emphasis they attach to indigenous versus external causation, and in their assessment of the degree to which this external involvement threatens the United States.



This paper is designed to put some meat on the bones of this argument; it will address the following questions:

1. How does Central America fit into Soviet strategy in the Third World?
2. What does the history of Soviet involvement in the region tell us about patterns of Soviet behaviour here?
3. What is the character and extent of current Soviet involvement in the Caribbean Basin?
4. What policy implications does the record suggest?

As shall quickly become evident, in the author's view it is not possible to understand the nature and timing of Soviet behaviour in the region without reference to American policy there. As such, although the primary focus of the paper is on Soviet policy in the Caribbean Basin, considerable attention is paid to American behaviour as well.

## II.

### SOVIET STRATEGY AND THE CARIBBEAN BASIN

#### 1. Methodology

In order to understand the place of the Caribbean Basin in Soviet policy, it is necessary to begin by examining the basic strategic considerations which inform Soviet policy in the Third World as a whole. The term "strategy" connotes a set of general principles according to which a state seeks to realize its basic objectives. A number of factors determine the character of any state's strategy. Strategy is shaped in the first place by the objectives being pursued and secondly by the instruments available. Finally, phenomena both internal and external to the state in question also affect the degree to which, and the ways in which, it can pursue its objectives. A state's strategy is basically a method of achieving its aims in the face of instrumental and environmental constraints.

There are several methodological problems in the analysis of Soviet strategy. Two types of data serve as sources from which we can draw inferences about Soviet strategy: Soviet writings and Soviet behaviour. The use of Soviet sources is problematic as Soviet publications pass through informal and formal censorship. Their status — as propaganda, disinformation, or genuine analysis and information — is often indeterminate. We have little or no independent access to primary source material through interviews or archival research.

This has led many in the West to focus on Soviet behaviour in the Third World as the data base for conclusions about motivation and strategy. However, it is often possible to draw very different and, ostensibly, equally valid conclusions about Soviet intentions from a single body of behavioural data.

There are no easy means of surmounting these methodological ambiguities. It is assumed here that the most promising approach to the analysis of Soviet strategy in the Third World is through attention to both statements and behaviour. Soviet practice serves, to some extent, as a test of the significance and validity of Soviet commentary. Soviet political and social analysis, particularly in Russian language publications intended primarily for internal



audiences of specialists, provide some indication of the analytical and prescriptive frameworks in which Soviet foreign policy is cast.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Objectives

In the early and mid-1970s, it became fashionable to argue that ideology as a determinant of Soviet political behaviour was declining in importance, that the Soviet Union "had arrived" as a status quo actor in international politics, and that it was a state like any other. Its behaviour in the Third World in the mid- and late 1970s, however, called in question the proposition that Soviet foreign policy had lost its fundamentally dynamic, revolutionary and competitive character. This gave rise to the countervailing proposition that the Soviet Union remained an essentially revolutionary actor in the international system, that the Soviet challenge to Western interests was universal in character and that the USSR, for both historical and ideological reasons, was organically expansionist.<sup>6</sup> The Soviet Union was willing, and increasingly able, to challenge the West throughout the globe, recognizing no spheres of influence.<sup>7</sup> Any idea that the Soviet Union might favour stability rather than change in certain circumstances, or that it might seek to come to terms with the West in the Third World rather than to supplant it, was dismissed as naive, if not dangerous. It was thought unlikely that the Soviet Union might exercise unilateral restraint.

To judge from the record of Soviet foreign policy, both of these paradigms are flawed. Peaceful coexistence, as this policy has been conceived by Soviet writers and policy-makers, has always combined elements of co-operation and conflict. It has never implied an abandonment of "class struggle" against the capitalist powers or an embrace of an international status quo. As the foremost Soviet academic exponent of the concept put it in 1979:

Peaceful coexistence is the dialectical interconnection, the blending of struggle and co-operation of states with dif-

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<sup>5</sup> For an interesting discussion of the significance of the Soviet professional literature on Latin America, see Jerry Hough, "The Soviet Debate on Latin America", *Latin American Research Review* XVI, #1, pp. 124-143.

<sup>6</sup> Z. Brzezinski, *The Soviet Union: Her Aims, Problems and Challenges to the West*, in *The Conduct of East-West Relations in the 1980s*, Part I, Adelphi Paper #189 (London: IISS, 1984), pp. 3-5; R. Pipes, "Détente: Moscow's View", as reprinted in E. Hoffmann and F. Fleron, eds. *The Conduct of Soviet Foreign Policy* (New York: Aldine, 1980), pp. 356, 358-9.

<sup>7</sup> H. Gelman, *The Brezhnev Politburo and the Decline of Détente* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 207.



ferent social systems . . . The peaceful coexistence policy has nothing in common with the “freezing” of the social status quo. This policy — and in this lies its strength — proceeds from the objective content of historical progress, from the inevitability of struggle against exploitation and inequality as long as they exist in the world.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, there is little empirical support for the proposition that Soviet foreign policy in the Third World is unambiguously maximalist, zero-sum, and expansionist. Although in some ultimate sense this may be so, Soviet policy-makers have demonstrated considerable flexibility in their adaptation of tactics to capabilities and to prevailing domestic and international conditions. Moreover, the Soviets have fish to fry that are bigger than most Third World varieties. Historically, the Third World beyond the Soviet periphery has been a luxury, ranking well down the list of Soviet priorities. This is reasonably clear, for example, in current Soviet discussions of economic support for allied Third World states. The opinion is often expressed that the Soviet Union can not sacrifice its own economic growth to further Third World development. Soviet commentators also recognize the trade-off which exists between maintaining the central military balance and financing the revolution in the Third World, and hold that the former has to take precedence.<sup>9</sup>

Soviet behaviour is a product of a complex set of objectives, some common to all states, some peculiar to the Soviet Union. In the first place, like any actor in an anarchical state system characterized by endemic conflict over scarce resources, the Soviet Union has security problems. Much of its international behaviour appears motivated by a desire to increase its own power and to reduce that of its adversaries. This would probably be so, whatever ideological baggage its leaders had in tow.

In the Soviet case, these concerns about security are enhanced by both ideological and historical factors specific to the Soviet Union. Leaving aside the prehistory of violent incursions into the Russian heartland by armies from both east and west, since the 1917 revolution the Soviet regime and its people have experienced two extremely destructive foreign invasions. This heritage, and the per-

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<sup>8</sup> N. Inozemtsev, “Policy of Peaceful Coexistence: Underlying Principles”, in *Soviet Policy of Peace* (Moscow: Academy of Sciences, 1979), pp. 26-7.

<sup>9</sup> T. Zamostny, “Moscow and the Third World: Recent Trends in Soviet Thinking”, *Soviet Studies* XXXVI, #2 (April, 1984), pp. 230-1.



sonal, material and human losses that it involved, have left a profound imprint on the Soviet Union. Soviet political culture displays a very deeply felt “never again” syndrome, which strengthens the systemically determined preoccupation with national security.

Beyond this, the Marxist-Leninist world view suggests that, during the global transition to communism, conflict between socialist and capitalist systems is an ineradicable element of world politics. Along these lines, a Soviet military writer recently quoted Lenin to the effect that

the mutual relations of peoples, the entire world system of states, is defined by the struggle of a small group of imperialist nations against the Soviet movement and the Soviet states, at the head of which is Soviet Russia.<sup>10</sup>

This assumption of permanent hostility between social systems — a hostility which in the Soviet view received empirical confirmation with the Entente intervention in 1919-22, with World War II, and with the Cold War — has informed Soviet diplomacy since the revolution and strengthens further the Soviet preoccupation with military power. Particular historical and ideological factors thus blend with general systemic ones to produce a Soviet conception of national security which is, to put it mildly, extreme.

The bipolar structure of the international system dictates that the major putative, if not actual, threat to Soviet security is the United States. It is not particularly surprising, therefore, that the Soviet Union is engaged on a global strategic rivalry with the United States and that much of its foreign policy seems directed at undermining American influence and position throughout the system. Since the United States is the established leading actor within the system, whereas the Soviet Union is a comparatively new arrival to global politics, Soviet behaviour in the Third World in particular has had a strong revisionist character. Paradoxically, therefore, motivations which are essentially defensive in origin have favoured an offensive global strategy directed against the United States.

Such a strategy is reinforced by other aspects of the role of ideology in the formulation of Soviet foreign policy. Ideology serves not only

<sup>10</sup> Col. S. Gusarevich, “KPSS ob anti-sotsialisticheskoi blokovoï politike imperIALIZMA”, *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal (Journal of Military History)* (1981), #4, p. 4. This journal is a leading military academic publication, directed at the officer corps and intended to improve officers’ understanding of historical and doctrinal questions.



as an analytical prism, but also as a guide to action. To the extent that the prescriptive component of Marxism-Leninism is taken seriously, it favours a systematic global assault on Western interests. There is, however, sufficient empirical evidence, as noted above, to cause one to question just how significant the Soviet commitment to global revolution is per se as a source of Soviet behaviour. It may be of greater importance as a means of establishing the legitimacy of the Soviet regime and the authority of its leaders. The regime justifies its rule over the Soviet Union, the political and economic privation it imposes on the country's population, and its position of leadership among the communist parties and other "progressive forces", in terms of its possession of a scientific theory of human development and of a revolutionary commitment to promote the advance of history towards its pre-determined conclusion. Failure to support revolutionary causes undermines this source of legitimacy among the regime's various constituencies. Lack of progress towards the millenium calls in question the theoretical basis of the party's rule.

The same could be said *a fortiori* for reversals in the fortunes of revolutionary actors to whom the Soviet Union has committed itself. The erosion of authority in this manner not only undermines the basis of the political system, but renders individual leaders vulnerable to ideological criticism from rivals within the party oligarchy. Thus, all other things being equal, considerations of internal legitimacy favour Soviet support of anti-Western radicalism in the Third World and render Soviet leaders highly sensitive to reversals of fortune there. It is significant in this regard that where Soviet forces have been deployed in actual or potential combat situations in the Third World, for example, Egypt in the War of Attrition (1969-70), Afghanistan since 1979, and Syria since 1982, this has been in defence of established positions that were jeopardized, rather than in fresh challenges to Western positions. To the extent that ideology is significant in establishing the legitimacy of the Soviet regime, it favours competition with the West in the Third World.

Many writers have suggested, however, that the role of ideology in this context has been declining, as few in the Soviet Union take seriously the commitments which it prescribes. Thomas Wolfe, for example, points to its replacement by nationalism.<sup>11</sup> But Russian nationalism, both as a fundamental commitment of the leadership

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<sup>11</sup> T. Wolfe, "Soviet Global Strategy", in K. London, ed., *The Soviet Impact on World Politics* (New York: Hawthorne, 1974), p. 238.



and as a further means of strengthening the regime's legitimacy, has a similar effect. National pride, in the Russian instance, appears to revolve around the presence and manifestation of military power and the quest for equality of status in military and therefore (in the Soviet view) diplomatic power. Statements by the Soviet leaders,<sup>12</sup> as well as the changing definition of the role of the Soviet forces,<sup>13</sup> suggest that one of the perceived attributes of this equality of status is the Soviet Union's active participation in Third World conflict and conflict resolution. As in the case of ideology, what is equally or more important than the expansion of Soviet influence and prestige is the maintenance of positions already established; this avoids the damage to national dignity associated with serious reversals. Parenthetically, it is germane to note that since Khrushchev the difficulty of abandoning established commitments has made the Soviet Union loth to assume new ones where its capacity to sustain them is in question. The principal national as well as ideological rival of the Soviet Union is once again the United States. Soviet leaders tend to measure their own performance by reference to that of the United States, and nationalism as a guide to policy is liable to be particularly strong where Soviet and American interests collide.

This consideration of the expansion of Soviet power into the Third World — whether in order to defuse or counter threats from the West, or for ideological or national reasons — brings me finally to a derivative source of Soviet policy in the Third World. To establish Soviet military power in distant regions requires a structure of support facilities — naval bases and port privileges, airbases or aircraft landing rights, storage facilities, and such like. These must be in reasonable proximity to areas of deployment in order to maximize the effectiveness of the forces deployed. Mounting and sustaining a substantial military presence in the Third World requires the cultivation of close relations with states which are capable of providing these requirements.

Soviet strategy in the Third World is not, however, merely a product of Soviet motivations. It does not operate in a vacuum, but it is shaped by a variety of internal and external constraints. In the first

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<sup>12</sup> L. Brezhnev (1970), as cited in R. Kolkowicz, "The Military and Soviet Foreign Policy", in R. Kanet, ed., *Soviet Foreign Policy in the 1980's* (New York: Praeger, 1982), p. 17. See also A. Gromyko (*Pravda*, 4 April, 1971).

<sup>13</sup> A. Grechko, "Rukovodyashchaya Rol' KPSS v Stroitel'stve Armii Razvitogo Sotsialisticheskogo Obshchestva", *Voprosy Istorii KPSS (Questions of the History of the CPSU)* (1974), #5, p. 39.



place, the Soviet Union lacks a well developed and varied array of instruments with which to implement its objectives in the Third World. The effectiveness of ideology as an instrument of policy has declined as the Soviet revolution has lost its élan and as the utility of the Soviet model as a strategy for economic development has increasingly been called in question. The Soviet Union's capacity to employ economic instruments (trade and aid) to further its aims is severely restricted in a general sense by the structure of the Soviet economy (the lack of surplus capacity and goods in a centrally planned full employment regime), by the small size of its economy relative to that of its principal rival, by the comparative insignificance of the Soviet Union in international trade and finance (particularly as these concern the South) and by the inconvertibility of its currency. More specifically, Soviet economic performance is uneven. In the early and mid-1960s, and more evidently in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Soviet Union has faced serious resource allocation problems and has had a dismal growth performance. In such circumstances, there simply is not a great deal left over to go around. Moreover, the Soviets have learned that the attempt to cement ties with Third World and other regimes by economic means can be a very costly proposition.<sup>14</sup>

Although Soviet diplomatic and cultural ties with Third World states have expanded dramatically in the past three decades, the Soviet Union remains at a disadvantage compared to the Western powers in its use of diplomacy to pursue its objectives, since it lacks the profound historical and cultural affinities which link Third World élites to the ex-colonial powers and to the United States. Attempts to foster such links through, for example, educational exchange (such as the Patrice Lumumba University) have often been counterproductive, as Third World élites gain direct exposure to the less attractive aspects of Soviet society. This relative lack of Soviet ties with established élites has strengthened the emphasis it places on developing relations with counter-élites, and with revolutionary groups committed to substantial alteration of the political and economic status quo of Third World societies. This emphasis, which is based on ideology, has further complicated Soviet efforts to establish rewarding and longlasting relations with Third World regimes.

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<sup>14</sup> The combined cost in the early 1980s of Soviet assistance to Vietnam and Cuba ranges between \$11 and \$18 million US a day. Figures derived from S. Simon, "The Superpower in Southeast Asia: A Security Assessment" (Paper presented at the March 1984 meeting of the International Studies Association, Atlanta, Georgia), pp. 19-20.



In such circumstances, it is not particularly surprising that Soviet strategy in the Third World relies heavily on military instruments — arms transfers, training, logistical support of military activity by client states, and, on occasion, the deployment of Soviet military effectives in deterrent, command and control, and ground combat roles. This emphasis on military activity has grown stronger with the passage of time, as is clear in the ratio of Soviet economic to military assistance, which has declined steadily since the early 1960s.<sup>15</sup> It is also evident in shifts in Soviet military procurement towards the development of a multi-faceted, conventional force capable of long-range activity. Similarly, changes in Soviet conventional military doctrine imply a greater readiness to contemplate direct military involvement in the Third World, as do changes in Soviet military practice of at least three types:

1. the more or less permanent stationing of Soviet naval forces in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea, and the Caribbean Sea;
2. the transfer of increasingly sophisticated weapons systems to friendly states in the Third World, such as Libya, Algeria, Syria, India, Vietnam, and Cuba; and
3. an increasing use of Soviet forces in Third World conflicts.

In general, the influence of outside actors in Third World politics depends on their being able to fulfil the needs of their clients. The Soviet Union, given that its capabilities are so one-dimensional, will appear most attractive to those actors involved in, or anticipating involvement in, conflict. That is to say, conflict in the Third World creates opportunities which the Soviet Union is well-placed to seize. Further, to the extent that Soviet influence rests on its client's continuing need for military assistance, the Soviet Union has a general interest in instability and regional conflict, for it is these conditions which sustain this need. This does not imply, however, that there may not be other circumstances tempering the Soviet interest in instability, and this brings us to the last topic for consideration here; external constraints shaping Soviet behaviour in the Third World.

In the first place, Soviet domestic economic difficulties are intensified by the necessity of providing assistance to fraternal socialist

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<sup>15</sup> In 1955-64, this ratio was approximately 60:100, in 1965-74 34:100, and in 1975-9 26:100. Derived from statistics presented in Gu Guan-fu, "Soviet Aid to the Third World: an Analysis of Its Strategy", *Soviet Studies* XXXV (1983), #1, pp. 72-74.



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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> 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.

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



Second, US defence policy may involve costs to the Soviet Union which impede the latter from committing substantial resources to lower priority concerns. In the current period, for example, Soviet writings suggest that the US arms build-up is creating strains on resource allocation in the Soviet Union. The need to keep up with the United States limits the Soviet capacity to provide assistance to Third World states.<sup>18</sup>

Third, despite Soviet denials of the validity of the concept of "linkage", Soviet-US competition in the Third World may spill over into the broader relationship between the two superpowers, rendering it difficult for the Soviet Union to pursue other objectives such as economic détente or arms control. There is considerable evidence that Soviet analysts in the 1970s simply failed to understand the nature of linkage in US politics and foreign policy. They apparently thought that US policy-makers understood, shared, and could implement the Soviet view that the central co-operative aspects of the Soviet-US relationship could be insulated from Third World issues. They considered that US claims to the contrary were merely vain attempts by "reactionary circles" to sabotage a process of détente which was objectively determined and hence irreversible.<sup>19</sup> There is some indication, both in the literature and in Soviet practice, that they are now more aware than they once were of the fragility of the détente process and of the consequences of Soviet activism in the Third World for Soviet-US relations.

The experience of the 1970s and early 1980s suggests that the inhibiting effect of the "American factor", in Soviet decision-making on Third World issues, depends strongly on Soviet perceptions of American capacity and will to defend US interests in the Third World and/or to inflict costs on the Soviet Union in other areas of the superpower relationship in response to Soviet challenges in the Third World. One source of Soviet activism in the mid-1970s may have been a Soviet perception, widely evident in the literature of the time, that the United States was a declining power unwilling and (owing to shrinkage in the defence budget) increasingly unable to defend its interests, that, if you will, the "correlation of forces" was shifting reasonably rapidly in favour of world socialism.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, I. Koshelev, "Ekonomicheskoe Sotrudnichestvo SSSR s Afrikanskimi Gosudarstvami", *Narody Azii i Afriki [Peoples of Asia and Africa]* (1982), #2, pp. 8-9.

<sup>19</sup> S.N. MacFarlane, *Third World Conflict and Arms Control: The Soviet View of Linkage* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Arms Control and Disarmament, forthcoming).

<sup>20</sup> cf. Tsentral'nyi Komitet KPSS, "Postanovlenie Ts. K. KPSS ot 31 yanvarya", *Pravda* (1.ii.77); L.I. Brezhnev, "Velikii Oktyabr' i Progress Chelovechestva", *Pravda* (3.xi.77); *inter alia*.



Today, Soviet commentary displays far less confidence in this regard. Arguably since the NATO rearmament decisions of 1978, and certainly since the election of Ronald Reagan, it has characterized the period as one of a new offensive on the part of imperialist forces led by the United States, an offensive which creates a significant new danger of war.<sup>21</sup> This would suggest a reassessment of US credibility on the part of Soviet writers and a more circumspect appraisal of the risks associated with Soviet military activism in the Third World.

Soviet interests are not homogenous in all regions. Nor are the risks evenly distributed. The Third World can be divided into four types of region from the point of view of the interests of and risks faced by the Soviet Union:

1. areas of vital interest to the Soviet Union where no comparable US interest exists;
2. areas of vital interest to the United States where no comparable Soviet interest exists;
3. areas where the vital interests of the two superpowers intersect;
4. areas where neither power's vital interests are at stake.

Incentives for involvement are highest in areas 1 and 3 and this presumably explains the long history of Soviet emphasis on Middle Eastern and Central Asian states lying along its southern periphery. Areas of the fourth type are attractive in that the potential costs of involvement are not great (as, for example, in Portuguese Southern Africa), but substantial commitments of resources are difficult to justify, given the improbability of significantly valuable returns. Areas of type 2 contain significant temptations, but these are accompanied by a high level of risk.

It is this last category which concerns us here. The most obvious example in the current historical context is the Caribbean Basin. In the light of the preceding discussion, two aspects of the Caribbean Basin are particularly relevant, its position and its politics. First of all, although the area is not significant from the point of view of Soviet defence, it does lie across extremely important US lines of communication. In the event of crisis, the United States would rely on sea lanes passing through the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean for reinforcement and resupply of its forces and of its allies in Europe. Oil from Mexico and Venezuela provides an alternative to dependence on Middle Eastern countries for energy. The transfer

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<sup>21</sup> On this point see MacFarlane, *op.cit.* (note 17), p. 310.



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.<sup>22</sup>

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.

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<sup>22</sup> 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.



On the other hand, the geographical situation of the Caribbean Basin, strongly favours restraint on the part of Soviet policy-makers. In the first place, its distance from the Soviet Union makes it difficult to sustain forces there. This is to some degree mitigated by access to facilities in Cuba, but the problem of logistical support over extended and vulnerable lines of communication remains. This is particularly true of reinforcement during crisis. Distance from the Soviet Union is coupled with closeness to the United States. The result is a massive potential, if not actual, American conventional superiority in the region — a superiority which has been repeatedly demonstrated in exercises and combat use (Grenada) in the region in recent years. The Soviet Union cannot redress this imbalance without seriously degrading its military posture elsewhere. In such circumstances, “advance posts” in the strategic backyard of the United States are both highly vulnerable and relatively easily suppressed. This imbalance encourages caution in the assumption of commitments which the Soviet Union might later feel compelled to defend. It is significant in this regard that the Soviet Union has never formally assumed a commitment to the defence of its closest regional ally, Cuba.<sup>23</sup>

Soviet statements, moreover, have not extended such guarantees to Nicaragua and indeed do not include Nicaragua in the categories of “socialist community” or “fraternal socialist countries”. This should be viewed in the context of the stated commitment of the Soviet armed forces to “defend the gains of socialism”.<sup>24</sup> It probably reflects not only doctrinal rectitude (Nicaragua is not, after all, socialist, as that term is understood in Soviet Marxist scholarship), but also again a reluctance to assume implicit let alone explicit commitments which, if challenged, would necessitate either surrender or escalation. This is particularly compelling since, in view of the perceived importance of US interests in the region and the favourable (from the American perspective) balance of forces in

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<sup>23</sup> M. Rothenberg “Latin America in Soviet Eyes”, *Problems of Communism* (Sept.-Oct. 1983), p. 3. This is not to say that the Soviet Union might not feel compelled, despite the lack of such a guarantee, to react in some fashion in the event of an American attack on Cuba. In this context, it is germane to note that Soviet leaders have identified Cuba as an inseparable part of the community of socialist states.

<sup>24</sup> The closest that Soviet commentators have come is a single mention of Nicaragua as a “state of socialist orientation” in *Pravda* in 1983. This is a category clearly inferior in Soviet eyes to that of the “socialist states”. See Robert Leiken, “The USSR and Central America: Great Expectations Dampened?”, in Joseph Cirincione, ed., *Central America and the Western Alliance* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), p. 167.



the area, United States military responses to Soviet provocations are more likely than they are in less sensitive areas.

To summarize, the region is highly tempting to the Soviets for strategic and ideological reasons and the gradual decay of political structures in Central America has presented the Soviet Union with a number of highly attractive opportunities to seek strategic gains. However, the Soviet Union is greatly disadvantaged by geography in any attempt to deepen its military involvement, while any such actions risk intensive US military responses against Soviet clients in the region. Strong incentives to meddle are balanced by significant constraints and risks.



### III.

#### SOVIET POLICY IN THE CARIBBEAN BASIN

This section traces the history of Soviet involvement in political crises in the area by focusing on five cases: (1) the rise and fall of the regime of Gustavo Arbenz in Guatemala in the early 1950s; (2) the coming to power of Fidel Castro in Cuba and the development of close Cuban-Soviet ties in 1959-62; (3) the revolution in Nicaragua, the establishment of Sandinista power in 1979, and the subsequent development of Soviet-Nicaraguan relations; (4) Soviet attitudes towards the guerrilla war in El Salvador; (5) Soviet relations with the Bishop Regime in Grenada.

In each of these cases, more or less radical political and social change (the term "radical" is used with some reservation in the case of Guatemala) in the region, mounted by forces to varying degrees hostile to the United States, was deemed by US policy-makers and opinion leaders to constitute a threat to US security because the local actors were either Soviet proxies or were rapidly moving to establish friendly relations with the Soviet Union.

It is difficult to determine just what Soviet attitudes and policies were in these instances, given that the principal Western and Soviet sources of information are all parties with interests at stake in these events. Nonetheless there is a body of scholarly work on the subject sufficient to suggest that US concerns about Soviet threats in the region have been consistently exaggerated. The Soviets have generally been interested in exploiting opportunities to accelerate the decay of US hegemony and to expand their own influence. But they have never had a consuming interest in the area, given their other more compelling preoccupations elsewhere. Moreover, with one notable exception (the Cuban Missile Crisis), they have demonstrated considerable caution in the face of the substantial risks associated with confrontational behaviour in this region.

Soviet gains (for example Cuba and, with some reservations, Grenada and Nicaragua) are to a considerable extent a consequence of US hostility towards left wing nationalist governments, a hostility which is in large part a product of mistaken assessments of Soviet influence over these groups. That is to say, US concern about the Soviet threat in the Caribbean, when translated into pressure against reformist and revolutionary regimes, had the character of self-fulfilling prophecy.



There are, of course, ideological affinities and historical and personal ties between some revolutionary groups in the region and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The Soviet Union has consistently expressed solidarity with the revolutionary movements there and has maintained varying levels of contact with and support of them. However, the outlook of those leftist forces which come to power tends to be one in which self-interested nationalism generally balances and often dominates transnational or international loyalties. The advantages which the Soviet Union can draw from these affinities are, all other things being equal, not substantial. But US pressure on these governments, in conjunction with the regional heritage of repeated US intervention to sustain or to re-establish conservative and co-operative regimes, induces radical regimes to seek assistance and protection wherever they may be found. The United States effectively establishes conditions in which the dictates of both nationalism and self-interest reinforce those of ideological affinity in creating and expanding opportunities for Soviet penetration.

### 1. Guatemala

In late October 1944, General Federico Ponce, the shortlived successor to General Jorge Ubico's 14-year dictatorship, was overthrown by a three-man junta dedicated to the establishment of a democratic constitutional structure. Juan José Arevalo rapidly emerged as the leading contender for the presidency and was overwhelmingly elected on the basis of a programme designed to strengthen and consolidate democracy and to offer poorer Guatemalans a measure of social justice through agrarian reform, education, and the protection of the rights of labour.<sup>25</sup> On the whole, Arevalo's approach to the critical question of land reform was cautious and slow, since he sought to avoid alienating major landowners, whether foreign (for example the United Fruit Company) or indigenous. Although he broadened the availability of credit and expertise to small farmers, established mechanisms whereby those holding ambiguous titles to land could legalize them, enacted legislation to force fallow land into productive use, and began the re-distribution of lands of German residents and Nazi sympathizers which had been confiscated during World War II, no new lands were confiscated and no substantial land reform undertaken. Despite his efforts to avoid internal polarization and the alienation of the United States, his enactment in 1947 of a labour code none the less provoked considerable hostility within the business sector.

<sup>25</sup> S. Schlesinger & S. Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), p. 37.



This code, which was designed to redress the unequal relationship between business and labour, by legalizing trade unions, establishing a minimum wage, and creating labour courts to adjudicate labour disputes, also raised questions in the United States about his purported communist sympathies.<sup>26</sup>

In the meantime, more liberal sectors of the élite were growing restive over the slow pace of reform. By 1949, liberal and left-leaning groups, including the labour movement and the Guatemalan communists, were grouping behind Jacobo Arbenz. The assassination of Arbenz's principal rival, Francisco Arana (who had led the 1944 coup with Arbenz and who, according to some, was planning a second coup, this time against Arevalo, in order to forestall a possible Arbenz victory in the upcoming presidential elections) removed Arbenz's principal competition, virtually ensuring his election in 1950.

Arbenz was committed to an acceleration of the process of social change begun by Arevalo, particularly in the area of land reform. In June 1952, an agrarian reform bill was passed, empowering the government to take over uncultivated portions of large landholdings, many of them US-owned, with compensation to be provided in the form of interest bearing government bonds. Confiscated lands were to be parcelled out in small and medium sized plots to landless peasants. Although the programme was quite moderate (indeed, in its focus on uncultivated land, it was much less ambitious than the Salvadoran land reform of 1980 which was sponsored by the United States government), it alienated the foreign business community even further. Arbenz's apparent determination to ease the stranglehold of foreign interests on the Guatemalan economy through infrastructural development — the construction of a port to rival that owned by United Fruit and of a highway to the Atlantic which would compete with the foreign-owned rail monopoly, and the proposal to create a government-owned power company to undercut the American-controlled monopoly on electricity — strengthened this alienation.

Although, as noted above, the agrarian reform as constituted was quite moderate, it proved difficult to control. Groups of peasants, often encouraged by communist agitators, took over large numbers of farms not covered under the reform. Arbenz was reluctant to suppress the squatters' movement, as it would have meant turning against a significant part of his popular support. These land

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.



seizures, communist involvement in them, and Arbenz' unwillingness to do anything about them led many, both in Guatemala and in the United States, to the conclusion that Guatemala was gradually drifting towards communism and that Arbenz himself was sympathetic to this trend.

Such conclusions were supported by the apparently growing strength of the communist movement, the various factions of which had merged in 1951-2 to form the Guatemalan Labour Party (GLP). This strength was evident not so much in expanding popular support for the party, as in growing communist control of the labour and peasant movements, the reasonably close ties between a number of leading communists and Arbenz and his wife, and in the appointment of communists to a number of sub-cabinet level posts. It would be difficult, however, on the basis of this evidence, to agree with Allen Dulles' assertion that Arbenz sought to create a communist state in Guatemala, with Eisenhower's reported contention that Guatemala constituted the communist danger for the Americas — the red menace in the western hemisphere, or with John Foster Dulles' (then Secretary of State) view that events in Guatemala constituted an intrusion of Soviet despotism, reflecting "the evil purpose of the Kremlin to destroy the inter-American system."<sup>27</sup> The communists held no cabinet posts and had no discernible influence over the principal coercive instruments of the state — the army and police. As Cole Blasier has pointed out, although the communists may have enjoyed considerable influence within the government, they clearly did not control it.<sup>28</sup>

Just as it is difficult to document communist control of the Arbenz government, it strains credibility to maintain that the government was a Soviet proxy, as was apparently believed by leading US statesmen of the day. It is reasonable to assume that the Soviets enjoyed a degree of influence over the Guatemalan Labour Party. But given the lack of any deep Soviet historical connection with the region, the indifference displayed by Soviet leaders towards the Third World in general and towards Latin America in particular during the Stalin era, and the preoccupation of the Soviet leadership in the aftermath of Stalin's death with the succession, it is improbable that the strategy and tactics of the local party were in

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<sup>27</sup> As cited in C. Blasier, *The Hovering Giant* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976), pp. 162, 165, 171.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 156-7.



any more than a very general sense defined in Moscow.<sup>29</sup> Even if they had been, we have already seen that the party did not control the government.

There is little evidence, moreover, of any sustained direct relationship between the Soviet Union and Guatemala during this period. The countries established diplomatic relations in 1945, but did not exchange representatives. The only documented exchanges between Arbenz and the Soviet Union and other East European countries were:

1. a conversation between Arbenz and a Czech commercial attaché in March 1953;
2. the presentation of credentials by a Czech diplomat to Arbenz in January 1954; and
3. a discussion between Arbenz and a Soviet commercial attaché in October 1953 in Mexico City.

In addition, US policy-makers pointed to two further pieces of evidence in support of their claim that Guatemala was the cutting edge of a Soviet bid to penetrate the western hemisphere. The first was a Guatemalan purchase of approximately two thousand tons of Czech light arms shipped from Szczecin, Poland, in 1954. But this action should be considered in context. From 1948 onward the United States had refused Guatemalan orders for arms. The Arevalo Administration responded to this by negotiating an arms deal with Denmark which, according to Arevalo, was vetoed by the United States. The latter also collaborated with Great Britain in the early 1950s in preventing third-party sales to Guatemala. Arbenz apparently managed none the less to negotiate a deal in Switzerland but the shipment was impounded in New York.

These efforts were made over a period in which Arbenz faced an increasing danger of revolt from within, and (as later happened) invasion by Guatemalan exiles based in Honduras who were armed, financed, and to some degree trained by the CIA. His purchase of Czech arms in 1954 appears to have been a last resort in desperate circumstances, and an action which he went to considerable lengths to avoid.

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<sup>29</sup> Indeed much of the behaviour of the GLP, and in particular its co-operation with "bourgeois reformists" was conspicuously at variance with the prevailing Soviet line on communist participation in national liberation movements in 1950-53.



The second was connected with the invasion itself. When Castillo Armas mounted his attack from Honduras, Guatemala complained to the United Nations Security Council. A compromise resolution sponsored by France was passed, calling for the termination of any actions likely to lead to further bloodshed. When the attacks continued, Guatemala's foreign minister cabled Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov — the Soviet Union having supported Guatemala's attempts to obtain a more strongly worded resolution — appealing for Soviet efforts to secure implementation of the resolution. Molotov responded by expressing his sympathy and said that Soviet representatives at the UN had been instructed to pursue the matter. John Foster Dulles seized upon this exchange, charging that the Guatemalans had openly "connived" with Molotov. It suffices to note that open exchanges between members of the UN, concerning duly adopted Security Council resolutions, are not particularly extraordinary, especially when one party to the exchange has been effectively isolated by the dominant power of its region, is the victim of an invasion mounted by insurgents armed by that power and based in a neighbouring state, and is on the verge of collapse. Dulles' assertion that Molotov and Toriello (the Guatemalan foreign minister) were in "ill-conceived privity" seems excessive.<sup>30</sup> In short, the Soviet Union was not the instigator of this episode of regional instability. Its policy was essentially a reaction to local events over which it had little influence. To the limited extent that it did become involved, the opportunity to do so was provided largely by American policy. Its involvement was reluctant, cautious, and restrained.

Given this rather unimpressive array of evidence concerning the connection between Guatemala and the Soviet Union, one is left wondering why the United States made the claims that it did concerning Soviet involvement. Three interpretations suggest themselves. First, the connections between John Foster Dulles and a number of other prominent participants in the policy debate on Guatemala, on the one hand, and the United Fruit Company on the other, have often been noted.<sup>31</sup> They may simply have been acting to defend the economic interests of themselves or their friends. Citing the communist threat facilitated the justification of action taken against the Arbenz Government to defend US economic interests.

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<sup>30</sup> The above account of Soviet-Guatemalan relations draws extensively from Blasier, *op. cit.* (note 27), pp. 158-70.

<sup>31</sup> See for example Schlesinger and Kinzer, *op. cit.* note 25, *passim*.



Second, the US government was being heavily lobbied by American interests in Guatemala, and notably by the United Fruit Company, to do something about anti-American trends in that country. The Administration may have judged it politically unwise to prevaricate, given the intense media barrage mounted by the company and its friends in the press and in Congress. Failure to act in such circumstances risked the accusation of being "soft on communism", an unpleasant prospect in the political conditions of the day.

Third, American policy-makers may well have believed what they were saying about Arbenz. United States statements and behaviour are consistent with the hypothesis that US policy-makers were prisoners of a doctrine that equates anti-American political and economic nationalism, and social reform at the expense of entrenched élites and foreign interests, with an international communist conspiracy.

## **2. Cuba, 1958-62**

With the passage of time, Khrushchev's consolidation of power, and the accumulation of a certain amount of experience in Third World diplomacy, Soviet policy in the Caribbean Basin came to display somewhat greater confidence. The first opportunity in the region that the Soviet Union had to display this new self-assertiveness came with the advent of the Castro regime in Cuba.

After several years of decay, the Batista regime collapsed in the face of a small but growing guerrilla insurgency led by Fidel Castro and a massive upswell of urban and rural unrest. Castro, leading the only armed force enjoying broad popular legitimacy, and benefiting from broad support from other opposition groups, quickly assumed power. Initially, he promised to abide by the 1940 Constitution, denied plans for action against foreign interests, and eschewed open criticism of the United States. The US Government fairly quickly recognized the Castro regime, the Eisenhower Administration having initially adopted a wait-and-see attitude.

The Cuban Revolution was a popular response to gross inequities in the distribution of income, to the oppressiveness and manifest corruption of the previous government, and to the domination of Cuban politics and the Cuban economy by US interests. There is no evidence of significant Soviet involvement in Castro's accession to power. Indeed, the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP), the Cuban Communist Party, had at times collaborated with Batista in return for relative freedom of operation and it had failed to support the



guerrillas until rather late in the struggle. Close ties between Castro and the PSP developed after his seizure of power, as he came to realize the need for a disciplined organized political party in order to consolidate his power.

Initial Soviet statements on the victory of the revolution were generally positive, though notably cautious. They suggest that the Soviets knew little about Castro, were uncertain about the degree of his commitment to social revolution at home and to a "progressive" posture in foreign policy, and had more important things (such as the simmering Berlin crisis and the growing tension with China) on their minds. They had apparently opposed the use of armed force at that stage of the revolutionary process. There is good reason to believe that the PSP's opposition to Castro's armed revolution reflected Moscow's own reservations.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, the USSR was notably slow (see below) to establish diplomatic relations. The view that the Soviet Union was behind the Cuban Revolution bears little scrutiny.

Once in power, Castro displayed a preoccupation with internal social transformation and a concern to reduce economic dependence on the United States. The Cubans were to a significant degree dependent on the US sugar quota and on preferential pricing of Cuban sugar for foreign exchange, giving the United States significant leverage over Cuban decision-making. US goods enjoyed tariff preferences in the Cuban market; US interests controlled approximately 40 percent of Cuban sugar production, 90 percent of telephone and electrical services, and 50 percent of public railroads, statistics similar to those of Guatemala which were discussed above. Castro was somewhat less circumspect, however, in pursuing his objectives.

In March 1959, Castro took over management of the Cuban Telephone Company, revoking a recent rates increase. He subsequently lowered power rates charged by the Cuban Electric Company. Both of these actions directly affected US investors. This was followed in May by the first agrarian reform act, which allowed seizures of the property of both Cuban and US landowners. No compensation was paid to those Americans affected, providing further cause for anti-Castro feeling in the United States.

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<sup>32</sup> An article written by a leading PSP member and critical of several aspects of the Castroite guerrilla was printed in a leading CPSU journal in 1958. P. Lopes, "Za Edinyi Front Bor'by protiv Krovavoi Diktatur Batisty" *Partiinaya Zhizn'* (*Party Life*) (1958), #20, pp. 52-3.



In March 1960, the Cuban government assumed control over a US-owned mining company and in June it nationalized four Havana hotels wholly or partially owned by US interests. Early in 1959, Castro, who was facing renewed domestic difficulties and also a threat of invasion, mounted either from hostile regional actors or from the United States, began to purchase arms abroad. These weapons were presumably intended not only to meet the threat of invasion but also to equip his own expeditions against hostile or ideologically unacceptable neighbouring regimes, as for example that against the Dominican Republic in mid-1959. In this sense, it should be stressed that Castro, while not perhaps a creature of the Soviets, was a deeply destabilizing new factor in regional politics. These insurrectionary activities were not particularly appreciated in the United States and the Americans refused Castro's request for a \$4 million arms deal. The United States, moreover, sought the cooperation of its friends and allies in maintaining the arms embargo against Cuba which it had put into effect late in the Batista period. Castro then sought to purchase weapons in Europe, with some success. When one of the ensuing shipments aboard the French ship *La Coubre* blew up in Havana harbour in March 1960, Castro accused the United States of sabotage and threatened to buy arms from the Soviet Union.

In the meantime, the Cubans were seeking through the diversification of their foreign trade to reduce their vulnerability to US economic pressure. This brings us to the beginnings of Soviet involvement in the growing rift between the United States and Cuba. In February 1960, Soviet Deputy Chairman Mikoyan arrived in Havana to conclude a trade agreement in which the Soviet Union would purchase one million tons of Cuban sugar a year from 1961 to 1964, 425 thousand tons to be purchased in the remainder of 1960 — in return for Soviet oil and capital goods. This was followed in late March by the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union (they had been broken by Batista in 1952), and Cuba's repudiation of the US-sponsored Rio Pact — a regional security arrangement bringing together almost all states in the hemisphere. These two steps together signalled a deliberate Cuban policy of loosening its ties with the United States and of balancing massive US preponderance in the region with ties to sympathetic great powers elsewhere. Soviet oil deliveries began in April 1960, bringing with them the first major US challenge to Castro's power.

Through most of 1959 and early 1960 the United States sought to avoid confrontation with Castro. The State Department, for exam-



ple, protested against non-payment for lands arbitrarily seized in contravention of the provisions of the land reform, but not against the law itself. However, Castro's bitter criticism of the United States over the explosion aboard *La Coubre*, his implication that he would seek to purchase arms from the Soviet Union, his negotiation of a trade agreement with the Soviets, and the beginnings of the expropriation of American businesses all exhausted the Eisenhower Administration's patience, already limited by the approach of the 1960 presidential elections.

The result was a dramatic shift in US policy towards Cuba in mid-1960. First, in mid-March, the president authorized the organization and finance by the CIA of an anti-Castro military force. Second, the US government urged Texaco, Esso, and Shell — the three companies controlling Cuba's oil refining capacity — to refuse to handle Soviet crude, posing a serious threat to Cuba's economy. Third, Eisenhower requested direct authority over the Cuban sugar quota. In the midst of appeals to "destroy Castro and communism in Cuba" and to stop "supporting the rapid growth of international communism at our very doorstep", Congress in mid-year gave Eisenhower the authority he requested. He then reduced the quota by 700 thousand tons in 1960 and to zero for 1961, thereby at a stroke eliminating Cuba's major source of foreign exchange. It was anticipated that these measures would either cause Castro's demise or bring him back into line. In fact, however, had they been explicitly designed to provide an opening for the expansion of Soviet influence in the region, they could not have been better tailored.

The combination of the sugar quota cancellation and the refusal to refine Soviet crude (in conjunction with foreign exchange problems which rendered it difficult for the Cubans to obtain oil elsewhere) was a recipe for economic disaster unless some other power bailed the Cubans out. The active sponsorship of an anti-Castro invasion force<sup>33</sup> greatly enhanced the Cuban need for arms, while the United States was blocking access to sources over whom it enjoyed influence. As Blasier put it:

Any one of the Eisenhower Administration's anti-Castro actions might have led to the fall of the Castro government. Castro reasoned, not implausibly, that he was in mortal peril.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Castro apparently learned of this decision in mid-1960. Blasier, *op. cit.* note 27, p. 195.

<sup>34</sup> *loc. cit.*



The way to stabilize himself in this situation was to turn to a rival power. If there had been no other power willing and able to take the place of the United States in these various roles, this American policy might well have been successful. But the Soviet Union of 1960 was not that of 1954. The Soviet Union was not merely more able to take advantage of such opportunities, but more eager to do so as well. The pursuit of peaceful coexistence in the central relationship with the United States gave Khrushchev strong incentives to respond positively, in such situations as the Cuban one, in order to maintain the Soviet Union's revolutionary credentials while accommodating the "class enemy" on European and nuclear issues. This was particularly compelling in the early 1960s, given the growing Chinese ideological challenge from the left. Soviet willingness to become involved in the Caribbean may also have been enhanced by the collapse of the May 1960 Paris Summit, ostensibly over the U-2 affair, and the subsequent rapid deterioration of the Soviet-American relationship. Khrushchev arguably had taken considerable risks both at home and in the international communist movement in embarking on his policy of détente with the United States. The latter's apparent failure to respond substantively may have embittered him and rendered him vulnerable to internal criticism. Open defiance of the United States over Cuba may have gone some distance towards deflecting such criticism and in addition diverted attention away from the increasingly chaotic domestic economic situation.

As it was, when the growing rift between Castro and the United States emerged and when as a result of this Castro's domestic and foreign policies grew increasingly radical, the Soviet Union moved rapidly to meet the needs of the Cuban regime. The first shipment of Soviet arms arrived in July 1960. By mid-November, the State Department was expressing "deep-concern" about the "arms build-up" in Cuba, claiming that the Cubans had built and armed a force ten times the size of Batista's army.

The Soviet Union also apparently promised Cuba a steady supply of oil, whereupon Castro nationalized foreign refineries at the end of June. But it was the cancellation of the sugar quota which was the occasion of the most dramatic Soviet initiative of the year. In the first place, three days after the cancellation of the quota on July 6, Khrushchev extended his "missile rattling" to the Caribbean Basin by noting that Soviet strategic missiles could be used in retaliation against an American intervention on the island. Later in the year (19 December 1960) a Soviet-Cuban communiqué noted "com-



plete" Soviet support in "maintaining Cuban independence against unprovoked aggression".

It was not until the next year, however, that the Soviets bit the bullet and agreed to buy 2.7 million tons of Cuban sugar. It is significant that this decision followed a pledge by China to buy one million tons. It should be seen therefore, at least in part, as a product of Sino-Soviet competition for influence over revolutionary forces in the Third World, a competition which was being waged by the Soviet regime largely to defend its legitimacy both internally and within the broader "anti-imperialism movement".

The momentum of events brought a formal rupture of Cuban-US relations in January 1961 and the Bay of Pigs invasion in April of the same year. The Soviets reacted, somewhat belatedly, to the invasion by threatening to provide Castro with all necessary assistance to repel the aggression, but the incursion was easily repulsed by the Cubans themselves. This was partly as a result of prior Soviet arms transfers, and partly because of President Kennedy's unwillingness to back the invasion force once it got into trouble.

Kennedy's indecisiveness over the Bay of Pigs affair, his poor performance at the Vienna Summit in June 1961, and the US acceptance of the construction of the Berlin Wall in August created the impression in the eyes of the Soviet leadership that the United States was unwilling to assume significant risks in defence of its interests in the Third World and elsewhere. In the terms used above in section II, the basic strategic constraint on Soviet activism in the Third World had weakened. Moreover, the incentives to adventurism were strong at the time, given Khrushchev's now considerable domestic difficulties and the mounting Chinese assault on Soviet revolutionary credentials. Finally, Khrushchev had badly misjudged the impact of his boasting about Soviet strategic nuclear capabilities. The US response at the turn of the decade was to mount the Minuteman and Polaris programmes, with the result that by 1962 the Soviets found themselves falling seriously behind in the strategic nuclear competition with the United States. Although the Soviets had postponed substantial investment in strategic capabilities, they had pushed forward with the development and production of medium- and intermediate-range missiles. One way to redress the growing imbalance at the intercontinental level was to find a missile deployment area from which these shorter-range systems could attain targets in the United States. Thus, strategic considerations reinforced those stemming from domestic



and inter-communist politics and from the Soviet misperception of Kennedy's resolve in providing a rationale for Soviet emplacement of missiles in Cuba.

Khrushchev rapidly found, however, that he had read Kennedy incorrectly. The US Government was adamant in its refusal to accept the emplacement of missiles in Cuba and was capable of preventing the completion of Soviet sites by means of a quarantine on further shipments and, arguably, by destroying them with conventional air power. Given the shortcomings of its force projection capabilities at the time, the only option left to the Soviet Union in the event of such an attack was escalation, either through a strategic nuclear attack on the United States or through the initiation of hostilities in Europe, where the Soviet Union enjoyed conventional superiority. Neither of these options was particularly promising, given US superiority in strategic nuclear weaponry. It was not surprising, therefore, that the Soviet Union backed down by removing the missiles and pledging to deploy no further nuclear systems in Cuba in return for an American pledge not to attack Cuba, something which by then the United States had no intention of doing anyway.

The Soviet Union occasionally tests the limits of this undertaking, as in 1970, when American reconnaissance capabilities detected preparations for a nuclear submarine base at Cienfuegos.<sup>35</sup> On the whole, however, they have abided by the agreement, and when challenged on potential violations, as in the case mentioned above, they have desisted. The agreement issuing from the Cuban Missile Crisis is perhaps the longest standing and most effective regional security arrangement between the two superpowers.

The debacle in Cuba contributed to Khrushchev's demise in 1964. More importantly, for our purposes, it put a rather sudden end to high risk Soviet ventures in the Caribbean Basin and — in conjunction with US belligerence on the Vietnam issue and intervention in the Dominican Republic — in the Third World generally. Khrushchev's successors returned to the caution that had characterized Soviet policy in Latin America in the 1950s. They refused to back Castro's efforts to launch guerrilla struggles elsewhere in the region, preferring to counsel local communists to eschew violence and to pursue instead a peaceful transition to socialism. They openly criticized the various Cuban-backed guerrilla movements

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<sup>35</sup> H. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), pp. 635-52.



that emerged in Venezuela, Central America, and Bolivia for “adventurism”, and branded the body of “Castroite” revolutionary theory — and notably the notion that the party should be built around the revolutionary army and that the establishment of the guerrilla column itself was more important than efforts to seek broad support among the masses — on which they were based “unmarxist”. In so doing they greatly strained the relationship with Castro himself.

The Soviets presumably followed this line because they felt that the Cuban Revolution was an exception rather than a model, conditions elsewhere in the region not being conducive to successful armed struggle. Moreover, their condemnation of “Castroite” theoretical innovation may have reflected not only actual Soviet understanding of conditions prevailing in Latin America but also concern to maintain their own doctrinal primacy within the “world revolutionary movement”. It is plausible to maintain that it was also in part a product of the uncomfortable experience of confrontation with the United States over Cuba, in conditions of strategic and conventional inferiority.

In this context, it is germane to note that the Soviet Union has not yet provided Cuba with any formal security guarantee although Cuba is clearly interested in this. This caution in the Soviet security relationship with Cuba reflects the Soviet Union’s desire to maintain its flexibility and to avoid the embarrassment of non-fulfilment of such a commitment, or the dangers of escalation that attempts to honour it might entail. In private conversations, Soviet scholars continue to stress the great danger of escalation associated with Soviet-US conflict over Cuba. The 1962 experience seems to have left a lasting impression despite considerable change in Soviet military capabilities.<sup>36</sup>

Soviet preferences for gradualistic peaceful tactics in Latin America were strengthened late in the decade by the growing influence of the left in Chilean politics and, ultimately, by Allende’s victory in the 1970 presidential elections. In diplomacy, the Soviet Union in the late 1960s and early 1970s worked hard to develop diplomatic ties with a broad array of Latin American states, achieving notable success in a number of instances such as Peru in 1968-75.

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<sup>36</sup> Conversations in Campinas, Brazil, July 1985.



Many have argued<sup>37</sup> that the counter-revolution in Chile brought with it a reconsideration of the tactics of peaceful struggle and a growing stress on revolutionary violence as a path to socialism. The effect of the Chilean affair on Soviet attitudes is, however, somewhat ambiguous. Some Soviet authors<sup>38</sup> argued that one reason for the coup had been the failure of Allende and his allies to move by "direct action" against the middle class and the army. This position was, however, contested by others who condemned the revolutionary romanticism of the extreme left Movimiento Izquierda Revolucionario (MIR) and argued that careless economic policy and the failure of the Allende regime to honour its promises of respect for private property were unwise, in that they alienated the middle class.<sup>39</sup> Jerry Hough notes that this intense disagreement in a single issue of a journal was highly unusual in Soviet publishing practice.<sup>40</sup>

Soviet leaders and many scholars took pains to stress that important progress had been made in Chile by peaceful means under Allende. Brezhnev in 1976 noted that the fall of the Allende regime should not be taken as a refutation of the tactic of peaceful struggle.<sup>41</sup> Allied parties in Central America continued to eschew in-

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<sup>37</sup> J. Valenta, "The Soviet Union", in A. Adelman and R. Reading, eds., *Confrontation in the Caribbean Basin* (Pittsburgh: Center for Latin American Studies, 1984), p. 242.

<sup>38</sup> K.I. Maidanik, "Vokrug Urokov Chili" *Latinskaia Amerika* (1974), #5, pp. 119-121.

<sup>39</sup> E.A. Kosarev, "Ekonomika i mirnyi put revolyutsii" *Latinskaya Amerika* (1974), #5, pp. 95, 96, 99-100.

<sup>40</sup> Ramet and Lopez-Alves incorrectly cite Hough in support of their contention that "the general consensus among Soviet observers of the Latin American scene . . . was that recourse to extra-legal means should not have been eschewed" (*op. cit.*, [note 37] p. 348). Hough actually referred to a general consensus of "major outsiders" (i.e. non-specialists in Latin American studies) (*op. cit.*, [note 2] p. 131) and went on to describe at length the lack of consensus on this subject among Latin Americanists. Ramet and Lopez-Alves asserted on the basis of this incorrect citation that: "It is a direct line from this conclusion to a Soviet encouragement of guerrilla activity in Latin America." (*loc. cit.*). This is not only of questionable accuracy, since Soviet Latin Americanists were careful not to generalize for the continent as a whole from the Chilean experience, and since the relative degree of influence enjoyed by "outsiders" in comparison with that of Latin Americanists is unknown. It is also a *non sequitur*, since "extra-legal means", or for that matter armed struggle, are far broader categories than is that of "guerrilla activity". As S. Mikoyan put it: "To examine the armed path solely in terms of the creation of partisan brigades and of the attempt relying solely on their forces to defeat the regular army — this is a vulgarization of revolutionary theory." S. Mikoyan, "Ob Osobennostyakh Revolyutsii v Nikaragua" *Latinskaya Amerika* (1980), #3, pp. 35-6.

<sup>41</sup> C. Blasier, Comment on Valenta's article in Adelman, *op. cit.*, note 37, p. 271.



volvement in renascent guerrilla movements, and in so doing lost the initiative to the non-communist radical left; this happened in El Salvador and Nicaragua. The Partido Socialista Nicaraguense (PSN) joined the armed struggle in Nicaragua only in 1977. In the Salvadoran case, the local party embraced the armed struggle in 1980, only after the victory of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

Indeed, not much changed in Soviet policy in Latin America in 1973-79. Despite the heightened scholarly effort after 1969 (the year that the Soviet publication *Latinskaya Amerika* was founded), the region remained one of rather low priority in the development of Soviet policy in the Third World; the Soviet Union was preoccupied with events in South-East Asia, the Middle East, and southern and north-eastern Africa. Among the various regions of the Americas, the one which received the least attention in the scholarly literature was Central America. The impression one gets from a survey of the literature during the period is that Soviet analysts just weren't paying much attention to it. The same might of course be said of Western scholars.

### 3. Nicaragua and the Crisis in Central America

Little had prepared the Soviet Union for the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua. The lack of comment on the subject until success was imminent suggests that the Soviets were taken by surprise. Sergo Mikoyan, the editor of *Latinskaya Amerika* noted in 1980:

However, the victory of the Sandinista revolution came as a joyous surprise (*radostnoi neozhidannosti*): even a year before 19 July 1979, hardly anybody could predict it.<sup>42</sup>

Once again, there is little compelling evidence of a significant Soviet role in fomenting or directing this revolutionary process.

The instability in Nicaragua was overwhelmingly local in origin. The principal reasons for the revolution were:

1. the emergence of new social groups (mainly middle and working class) as part of a gradual process of modernization since the 1930s and particularly since the late 1950s, together with the failure to develop governmental structures to draw these groups into the political process. Indeed, the Nicaraguan regime grew more oppressive as pressure from below increased;

<sup>42</sup> S. Mikoyan, "Revolutsionnoe tvorchestvo prokladyvaet put' k pobede" *Latinskaya Amerika* (1980), #2, p. 5.



2. the destruction or weakening of traditional social institutions as part of the same process, without the development of any substitutes. This left an institutional vacuum, with attendant alienation and frustration;
3. the uneven distribution of the gains of economic growth, with the result that economic development in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s actually widened the income gap between rich and poor. This was exacerbated by extremely rapid population growth at the lower end of the income scale;
4. massive corruption, which alienated not only the poor, but also many elements of the private sector of business;
5. the sudden end to economic growth associated with the oil price increases of 1973 and 1979 and the recessions and shrinking markets for Nicaraguan goods that followed. One major political consequence of this stifling of the growth process was that it became impossible to maintain political stability during a period of rapid social change by giving rising social groups a better economic, if not political, deal;
6. a rising tide of nationalism among the educated élite which, given the realities of power in the region, was and is generally expressed as anti-Americanism.

In such conditions, the development of armed groups committed to the destruction of the domestic politico-economic status quo and to a re-ordering of their country's relations with the United States was natural. There seems to be little need to explain it in terms of external involvement.

This is not to say that external forces had no role whatsoever in the Nicaraguan Revolution. Many of the leaders of the Sandinistas had longstanding ties to Cuba, and were inspired by the example of the Cuban Revolution. Although the Cubans remained aloof from what remained of the guerrilla movements in Central America in the early and mid-1970s, the abortive 1978 uprising in Nicaragua rekindled their interest in the region.<sup>43</sup> Though solid evidence is lacking, it would not be surprising if Cuba contributed to some degree to the financing and arming of the Sandinistas in the last stages of their struggle for power. It is generally accepted, however, that the major sources of external assistance to the Nicaraguan revolutionary movement were the sympathetic non-communist states of Panama, Venezuela and Costa Rica.

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<sup>43</sup> W. Leogrande, "Cuba", in R. Wesson, ed., *Communism in Central America and the Caribbean* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1982), pp. 39, 41.



More importantly perhaps, Cuba intervened in 1978 in the internal politics of the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN), when Castro urged the leaders of the movement's three factions to forget their differences for the moment and to concentrate on the principal enemy, Somoza. On the whole, however, Cuba's role in the revolution was not essential. Several factors account for this Cuban restraint: a lingering fear of possible US retaliation, fear that prominent assistance to the Sandinistas might crystallize both US and regional opposition to the Nicaraguan Revolution, and an awareness, at least from late 1978 onward, that the Sandinistas stood a good chance of succeeding under their own steam.

Even had there been a prominent Cuban role in the crisis, it would not necessarily have followed that this was a product of Soviet policy. In the abstract, it is just as dubious to argue that the Soviet Union "controls" Cuban policy in the region as it is to maintain that Cuba "controls" the various guerrilla movements in Central America, a position apparently assumed a priori by the Kissinger Commission.<sup>44</sup> Obviously, Cuba exercises some influence over the guerrillas as does the Soviet Union over Cuba. It is also true that Cuba's high profile foreign policy in the Third World is possible largely as a result of Soviet economic and military support. But it would make sense, in terms of Castro's own revolutionary commitment and Cuba's own security concerns, for that country to support movements dedicated to the destruction of pro-American regimes in the region and their replacement with regimes friendly to Cuba. Moreover, the quantity and quality of Cuban assistance to regimes (limited military aid, small amounts of credits, and the provision of substantial numbers of medical and technical personnel, and of police and military experts) and movements (limited finance, some provision of weapons and other military and communications equipment, and propaganda) in the region are not such as to create unbearable burdens for Cuba. This is in contrast to their deployment of substantial forces in Africa. The fact that Soviet and Cuban interests in the region coincide, and that they co-operate in the pursuit of them, does not imply that Cuba is in any meaningful sense a "proxy" of the Soviet Union. Maintaining that it does involves neglecting the reasons for anti-American behaviour on the part of Cuba, and the real possibilities of loosening Soviet-Cuban ties.

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<sup>44</sup> Henry Kissinger, *et. al.*, *The Report of the President's National Bipartisan Commission on Central America* (New York: Macmillan, 1984), p. 107.



This is not to say that this coincidence of interest is not amply exploited by the Soviets, since it provides an opportunity to further anti-American trends in the region without thereby bearing significant risks of the kind which would be associated with direct Soviet involvement. The fact that the Soviets appear to work through the Cubans implies their appreciation of the advantages of access to personnel who are intimately familiar with the region and who blend easily into it. It also suggests two principles motivating their policy in Central America — on the one hand, the Soviets continue to be significantly attracted by opportunities appearing in the “strategic rear” of the United States; but, on the other, they continue to be aware of US sensitivities about direct Soviet involvement and of the risks that are consequently associated with any high profile Soviet activity in this area.

The Soviets greeted the Nicaraguan Revolution and the subsequent dominance of the Sandinista front with considerable pleasure and optimism.<sup>45</sup> The revolution was perceived to be the first significant progress in the Caribbean Basin since the Cuban Revolution. It was seen as a harbinger of better things to come elsewhere in Central America<sup>46</sup> and as evidence of a qualitatively new phase in the Latin American Revolution.<sup>47</sup> It provided a new opportunity to take advantage of US vulnerabilities in the Third World, this time in a region of critical strategic importance to the United States.

It is often noted that one aspect of the Soviet reaction to the Nicaraguan Revolution was an increasing enthusiasm regarding violent revolution in the region, and the rehabilitation in the Soviet literature of figures such as Ché Guevara, previously condemned for ultraleftist adventurism.<sup>48</sup> What is ignored is that this enthusiasm was matched by frequent admonitions that the Nicaraguan experience was unique and that it was dangerous to draw universal conclusions from it concerning the necessity of armed struggle.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> cf. S. Mikoyan, *op. cit.* (note 42), p. 5; “Nikaragua, Nadezhda Kontinenta”, *Latinskaya Amerika* (1979), #4, pp. 221, 224; A. Shul’govskii, “Eksperiment Bol’shoi Istoricheskoi Vazhnosti”, *Latinskaya Amerika* (1980) #3, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> “Nikaragua, Nadezhda Kontinenta” (note 45), p. 221-2.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222; R. Arismendi, “Narodnaya Vesna v Nikaragua”, *Latinskaya Amerika* (1980), #2, pp. 12, 20; B.I. Koval’, “Revolutsia-Olitel’nyi Istoricheskii Protse’ss”, *Latinskaya Amerika* (1980), #3, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> See B.I. Koval’, *op. cit.* (note 47), pp. 15-6. See also Shafik Khandal, as cited in note 68.

<sup>49</sup> S. Mikoyan, *op. cit.* (note 40), p. 35; Shul’govskii, *op. cit.* (note 45), p. 7, Arismendi, *op. cit.* (note 47), p. 34.



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.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup> 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-

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<sup>50</sup> 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.

<sup>51</sup> 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.



tial amount of economic aid, beginning with 20,000 tons of wheat in 1980 and following with \$21 million in credits for agricultural and industrial projects. In 1981-2, the Soviets granted Nicaragua a further \$110 million in aid and credits and in the latter year agreed to purchase a substantial amount of Nicaraguan agricultural exports. By 1982, moreover, there were some 700 Nicaraguans studying in the Soviet Union; a further 300 scholarships were granted for 1982-3. More recently, the Soviet Union has become a principal source of petroleum products for Nicaragua, on what are apparently concessionary terms. Soviet economic assistance has been accompanied by further credits from other East European countries, totalling some \$70 million in 1981, and by Cuban credits and aid valued at \$150 million in 1980-2.

Although this level of economic assistance is impressive when compared to previous involvement in Central America, it is minute, for example, in comparison with the Soviet assistance to Cuba (currently running at around \$10 million a day), to Vietnam (\$3-6 million a day), and even to Ethiopia (\$1-3 million a day). The Soviet Union shows no inclination to assume the burdens associated with Nicaragua's reconstruction, and with the growing external debt problem, let alone that of the economic consolidation of the revolution. Indeed, many Soviet writers have specifically recommended caution in the socialization of the means of production in allied Third World states, and advised continued recourse to foreign private direct investment.<sup>52</sup> This suggests that the comments made in Section II with regard to the significance of economic constraints in the elaboration of current Soviet policy in the Third World have specific relevance to Soviet-Nicaraguan relations. What is true of the Soviet Union itself is even truer of those satellite states dependent for their very survival on Soviet assistance (this includes Cuba and many of the Eastern European states currently granting limited assistance to Nicaragua).

Economic assistance was followed by military aid totalling \$28 million in Soviet, East German, and Cuban arms transfers in 1981-82. These included T54 and T55 tanks, armoured personnel carriers, heavy artillery, air defence missiles, and large numbers of small arms.<sup>53</sup> This assistance has permitted the expansion of the Nic-

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<sup>52</sup> See Mikoyan's recommendation of the 1921-8 Soviet New Economic Policy as a strategy for Nicaragua in "Ob osobennostyakh revolyutsii v Nikaragua i eyo urokakh s tochki zrenii teorii i praktiki osvoboditel'nogo dvizhenii", *Latinskaya Amerika* (1980), #3, pp. 42-43.

<sup>53</sup> The bulk of the preceding figures are taken from J. Valenta, "The Soviet Union", *op. cit.* (note 2), in Wiarda, pp. 217-8.



araguan armed forces to the point where they are by far the largest in Central America. The Sandinista counter-insurgency effort owes its success, moreover, to the mobility and firepower provided by the Eastern Bloc. Such shipments continue. In 1984, East Germany delivered some 800 military trucks, while the Soviet Union recently provided Nicaragua with a number of MI-24 helicopters which have proven very effective in the anti-*contra* campaign. They have been accompanied by limited numbers of Soviet advisers (estimated at around 40-50)<sup>54</sup> and by far larger numbers of Cuban military personnel. The picture then is one of a growing multi-dimensional Soviet relationship with Nicaragua, a relationship that is viewed with considerable alarm in the neighbouring countries of Honduras, Costa Rica, and El Salvador, let alone in the United States.

The insecurity of Nicaragua's neighbours has been further enhanced by Nicaragua's involvement, to varying degrees and at various times, in military actions against neighbouring states. An example of this was Nicaragua's hot pursuit of anti-government guerrillas into Costa Rica and confrontation between Nicaraguan forces and the Costa Rican Civil Guard in the spring of 1985. Nicaragua has also been implicated in the provision of facilities and sanctuary for guerrilla forces operating in El Salvador and has allowed the trans-shipment of arms destined for these guerrillas through Nicaraguan territory (as during the period leading up to the "final offensive" of the FMLN in January 1981).

It is almost certainly the case that, whatever the circumstances, the Nicaraguan Revolution would have brought about an improvement in Soviet-Nicaraguan relations, and a corresponding reduction in the influence of the United States. The Soviet Union desires to expand its ties with Central American states and to undermine the US position in the Caribbean Basin. The Sandinista Front — or at least prominent elements of its leadership — has had from its inception a strong Marxist orientation (as in Humberto Ortega's assertion in 1980 that "Sandinism" and Marxism-Leninism were one and the same thing or Tomas Borge's affirmation that he is a communist), and consequently has had a degree of ideological affinity with the Soviet Union. This Marxist element of the Sandinista world view is complemented by a strong geopolitically and historically based anti-Americanism which has favoured disengagement from the web of US economic and political influence in the country and attempts to balance this influence with ties to other

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<sup>54</sup> *Soviet Military Power* (Washington: USGPO, 1985), p. 120.



states. This tendency has been reinforced by a deep concern among the leadership — a concern based on the US intervention in Nicaragua in the 1920s, the American role in placing the first member of the Somoza dynasty in a position to eliminate Sandino himself and subsequently to assume power at the expense of the civilian government in the 1930s, and sustained American sponsorship of the Somoza dictatorship — that the United States would intervene in Nicaragua to prevent or crush the revolution or direct it along more amenable lines.

Indeed, this concern was not so far-fetched. In the last months of Somoza's rule, the United States attempted to set up an Organization of American States (OAS) peacekeeping force which would be introduced into Nicaragua to stabilize the situation there while a compromise solution was worked out by *all* political forces in the country, including the "Somocistas". This initiative foundered owing to lack of enthusiasm, if not active hostility, on the part of the United States' Latin American allies. If anything, Sandinista concern over possible US military action has grown with the passage of time, for reasons noted below. It is natural in this context that the Nicaraguans should have sought to establish security relationships with rivals of the United States. For all of these reasons, US concerns about the broader regional and global implications of the Sandinista seizure of power were well-founded.

But the degree to which the Nicaraguan-American relationship has deteriorated and to which the Soviets have managed to implant themselves in Nicaragua at the expense of the United States was not pre-determined and is to a considerable extent the product of US policy. As in the case of Cuba, US actions have had the effect of driving Nicaragua into the arms of the Soviet Union. Although this is particularly true since the inauguration of the Reagan Administration, many of the actions of the Carter Administration had a similar effect.

When the Sandinistas came to power, they were counselled by Castro to avoid alienating the United States in order to retain access to US markets and assistance.<sup>55</sup> The Nicaraguans took this advice, perhaps in large part because of the monumental task of postwar reconstruction facing them<sup>56</sup>, but also because they had not yet

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<sup>55</sup> H. Sims, "Revolutionary Nicaragua", in Adelman and Reading, *op. cit.* (note 37), p. 60.

<sup>56</sup> It was estimated that the physical losses during the war amounted to some \$1.3 billion, *ibid.*, p. 59.



consolidated their hold on power and were co-operating with a wide array of domestic interests less committed to the process of social transformation than they were. Consequently, the process of land reform applied initially only to properties confiscated from the Somoza family and their leading collaborators. Elsewhere the process was slow. The Sandinista government refrained from taking any significant actions affecting foreign property in the country and they agreed to assume the debts of the previous regime in order to retain access to international financial markets.

Nonetheless, problems in the relationship with the United States appeared relatively quickly, in part as a result of Sandinista support for the revolution in El Salvador, but also as a result of trends to the right in US politics and the deteriorating domestic position of the Carter Administration. Aid to Nicaragua was reduced considerably, was delayed in Congress and, when finally approved, carried a number of conditions which were rather difficult for the Sandinistas to accept.<sup>57</sup>

Upon taking office, the Reagan Administration suspended food aid and credits to Nicaragua, citing the flow of arms from Nicaragua to the Salvadoran guerrillas. It is generally acknowledged that the Nicaraguans responded by cutting the flow of arms to El Salvador, on the assumption that US aid would then be resumed. This action was greeted not by any resumption, but by vague indications that the question would be taken up at some point in the future. Apparently the Reagan Administration's reasoning was that non-resumption would bring further concessions from the Sandinistas. As it was, the United States by responding in this fashion surrendered the use of aid as a basis for leverage on Nicaraguan policy.

Since then, the Administration has steadily increased economic pressure on Nicaragua. The United States has effectively blocked Nicaraguan efforts to deal with its debt and foreign exchange crises through access to international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Inter-American Development Bank. Lack of access to new lines of credit has greatly impeded the country's process of development, not only directly, but in its effect on potential private creditors, making it

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<sup>57</sup> The final 1980 aid package was \$75 million, apparently far less than the Nicaraguan government expected. None of it could be expended on projects involving Cuban participation. Sixty per cent of it had to be expended in the private sector.



imperative that the Nicaraguans seek credits or alternative trading arrangements wherever these may be found. Moreover, their incapacity to meet Nicaragua's energy needs on the private market, in part the result of the foreign exchange crisis, forced the Nicaraguans to seek access to alternative lines of supply.

In the military sphere, the United States has, not surprisingly, refused to provide the Nicaraguan regime with military assistance since the latter came to power. It has also attempted, with considerable success, to prevent Nicaragua from obtaining arms elsewhere in the Western world. The French, for example, three years ago cancelled an agreement to provide the Nicaraguan Armed Forces with trucks and helicopters owing to American pressure. This recalls US action in the face of Guatemalan and Cuban efforts to obtain weapons.

In the meantime, the Nicaraguan need for weaponry grew in the early 1980s as the Reagan Administration began backing efforts to destabilize, and ultimately overthrow, the Sandinista regime. The first official US involvement came in November 1981, when the Reagan Administration sought a \$20 million appropriation to support media and paramilitary campaigns against the Nicaraguan Government. Raids launched from Honduras in early 1982 brought the FSLN to declare a state of siege in February 1982. In July of that year, the *contras* launched the first of many large scale incursions into Nicaraguan territory. This campaign has grown gradually over the years, largely owing to US financial and material support, into an expanding sustained guerrilla war.<sup>58</sup>

This process has only been partially impeded by congressional reluctance to fund insurrectionary activities against Nicaragua. It has been accompanied by acts of sabotage against economic targets — the mining of the Port of Corinto and the destruction of oil storage and refining facilities — widely attributed to the CIA.

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<sup>58</sup> This is not to say that the sole source of armed opposition to the Nicaraguan Revolution is US policy. No doubt elements of Somoza's National Guard would have attempted to mount a guerrilla war whatever that policy was, and would have found considerable private financial support for such efforts in the United States and elsewhere. Moreover, the initial ineptitude of the Sandinista regime in its dealings with the Miskito Indians contributed substantially to the expansion of the insurgency problem. In their efforts to consolidate their power at the expense of allied and opposition groups in the country, the Sandinista leaders have pushed a number of erstwhile collaborators such as Eden Pastora into the guerrilla opposition. The point is that this problem would not have assumed the dimensions that it has if the *contras* had not benefited from the consistent support of the Reagan Administration.



In addition, the United States has funded and supplied a rapid build-up of the Honduran military and has mounted a substantial military construction programme in Honduras in proximity to the Nicaraguan frontier. These roads, storage depots, and air fields create the infrastructural base necessary for rapid military action against Nicaragua, should such a course be chosen. In the last two years, moreover, the US has mounted land and naval exercises involving thousands of its own personnel, who have been deployed to Honduras, and considerable numbers of ships along the Nicaraguan coasts.

The United States has also engaged in a five-year campaign of hostile rhetoric, focussing on the "Marxist" threat to regional stability emanating from Nicaragua, has financed the political activities of opposition groups within the country and, in the view of many in the region,<sup>59</sup> has procrastinated over, or has actively impeded, regional efforts at conflict resolution such as the Contadora process. This latter position persists despite Nicaraguan offers, such as that of May 1982, to include their relations with the Salvadoran guerrilla movement in the negotiating agenda.<sup>60</sup> In other words, the United States has enhanced the security problem faced by the Sandinistas while at the same time denying them access to Western military assistance, and showing disinterest in negotiations which would resolve the differences separating the United States and Nicaragua. The imperative to search for alternative sources of economic support has been matched by a similar need to seek out other military benefactors.

These US policies have had a number of detrimental effects. By posing a credible and imminent external threat to Nicaragua, they have facilitated the Sandinistas' consolidation of power within the country itself. The 1982 opening of the insurgent campaign, for example, resulted, as noted above, in the declaration of a state of siege, which, *inter alia*, involved the placing of significant limits on the Nicaraguan opposition's freedom of operation within the country. It was also followed by an acceleration of the socialization of Nicaraguan society. The "construction of socialism" was adopted in April 1982 as an official objective of the Sandinista Movement. The Sandinistas, in the context of the rapidly worsening economic situation, also decided at this time to place stringent controls on private commerce while loosening credit and investment constraints on the public sector. These political and economic mea-

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<sup>59</sup> Interviews conducted by the author in July 1985, in Campinas, Brazil.

<sup>60</sup> Sims, *op. cit.* (note 55), p. 66.



asures accelerated the flight of political moderates and private capital from the country. In short, American policy resulted in the weakening of the political and economic pluralism that the United States purported to be attempting to foster.

More importantly from our perspective, however, there is a relatively close chronological relationship between US actions and Soviet ones in the two superpowers' relations with Nicaragua. The record suggests that specific US actions have created Nicaraguan needs which the Sandinistas then seek to address by obtaining Eastern Bloc assistance. For example, the Soviet Union and Nicaragua signed their first trade and aid agreement in March 1980, immediately after the United States had attached a number of rather stringent conditions (see above) to an aid package which was considerably smaller than the Sandinistas had sought and which was minute compared to the financial demands of reconstruction after the civil war. The first Soviet food aid came directly after the Reagan Administration had cancelled PL 480 shipments to Nicaragua, upon taking office. Soviet agreement to ship petroleum to Nicaragua in early 1985 followed closely the US trade embargo which promised to complicate even further the Nicaraguan foreign exchange situation. The pattern appears to be one in which the United States unilaterally denies itself leverage which might have a moderating effect on Nicaraguan policy, with the result that the Nicaraguan interest in restraint (whether it be in support for the FMLN in El Salvador or in the evolution of its relationship with the Soviet Union) is weakened. The parallel with the Cuban case in the early 1960s is striking, and the generalization that the United States in part creates and sustains the very phenomena it purports to be responding to — appears to hold here as well.

To return to Soviet policy, the Soviet Union is clearly attracted to the opportunities created by local processes of political and social change and by the counterproductive character of US policies which have been developed to deal with these processes. But it remains significantly constrained in its attempts to respond not only by its economic weakness and its substantial commitments elsewhere, but also by the realities of US power in the region and by the Soviet assessment that the current US administration is more willing to use that power in the East-West competition than was the previous one. This concern is evident in Soviet writing, where early optimism about the process of revolution throughout Central America has been replaced by more measured assessments, and where the early emphasis on revolutionary solidarity has come to be increasingly balanced by a stress that revolutionary movements



and regimes must depend primarily on their own forces.<sup>61</sup> More broadly, Soviet writers seem to be increasingly concerned about the possibility of general war growing out of regional conflict.<sup>62</sup> Soviet statements are careful to limit the degree of their implied commitment to Nicaragua, conspicuously ignoring, for example, the claims of Sandinista leaders to be adhering to Marxism-Leninism, only occasionally referring to Nicaragua as a state of "socialist orientation"<sup>63</sup> and labelling the Nicaraguan Revolution as a "people's democratic" one rather than a socialist one.<sup>64</sup>

In practice, the Soviets have refrained from using Nicaraguan territory for their own military purposes<sup>65</sup> and have limited the categories of weapons transferred to Nicaragua, presumably out of a desire not to provoke precipitate US military action. For example, there were good grounds to suspect that the Soviet Union was preparing to deliver MIG 21 fighters to Nicaragua during the Carter period (a number of Nicaraguans were dispatched to Bulgaria for pilot training on jets) and again in 1982-3, when crated MIG fighters were off-loaded in Cuba with some evidence that they were to be trans-shipped to Nicaragua, while the Nicaraguans were upgrading the Punta Huete military airfield near Managua to handle such aircraft. But when in the latter instance the United States disclosed its knowledge of the impending transfer, and in a number of ways, such as interference with Soviet-Bloc shipping bound for Nicaragua, demonstrated its resolve that it should not occur, the Soviets backed off.<sup>66</sup> Soviet restraint is also evident in the number of Soviet military personnel stationed in Nicaragua.

To summarize, though the Soviets had no significant role in the revolution itself, they quickly recognized the consequent oppor-

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<sup>61</sup> For example, as early as July 1981, in an article dealing with problems of socio-economic development in revolutionary Nicaragua, no mention was made of Soviet or other external assistance in this process. I. Bulychev, "Uspekki i Problemy Sandinistskoi Revolyutsii" *Latinskaya Amerika* (1981), #7, pp. 26-41.

<sup>62</sup> See MacFarlane, *op. cit.* (note 17), pp. 309-10.

<sup>63</sup> For a discussion of the meaning and significance of this concept, see S.N. MacFarlane, *Superpower Rivalry and Third World Radicalism: The Idea of National Liberation* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 164-7.

<sup>64</sup> See the Soviet May Day slogans for 1982 (*Pravda*, 11.iv.82).

<sup>65</sup> It is of course unclear whether the Sandinistas would permit them to do so in any case, as both their nationalist commitments and their realistic assessment of probable American responses militate against providing the Soviet Union with extensive base rights.

<sup>66</sup> Contra Ramet and Lopez-Alvez, "Moscow and the Revolutionary Left in Latin America", *Orbis* XXVIII, #2 (summer 1984), p. 356, where it is maintained that the Nicaraguans had received 80 MIG fighters. There is no evidence of any such shipment.



tunity to expand their own influence and to undermine US positions in an area of great perceived strategic significance to the United States. By 1979, they were in a far better position to take advantage of opportunities in the region than they had been in the cases of Guatemala and Cuba, twenty five and twenty years before. The initial Soviet response to the Nicaraguan Revolution was accordingly far less hesitant.

The Sandinistas came to power committed, like their Cuban and Guatemalan predecessors, to deep socio-economic transformation and to discontinuing Nicaragua's previous alignment with the United States in foreign policy. Moreover, a number of the leaders of the movement had an openly avowed Marxist-Leninist orientation in their political and social thought, blamed many of their country's ills on what they perceived to be systematic US interference in Nicaraguan affairs and were dedicated to the spread of their revolution to other countries in Central America. These domestic and international attitudes on the part of the new Nicaraguan regime provided the local conditions for the establishment of friendly ties with the Soviet Union.

That Soviet-Nicaraguan relations have developed and Nicaraguan-American relations have deteriorated to the degree they have is, however, in large part the result of US policies which left the Nicaraguans little choice but to deepen their dependence on Cuba and the Soviet Union. This in turn has had the effect of confirming US suspicions and worsening relations between the two countries still further.

The degree to which the Soviet Union can consolidate its position in Nicaragua at the expense of the United States continues to be constrained by Soviet economic weakness, by the continuing preponderance of US military power in the region, and by the fact that Soviet involvement in regional conflict carries risks of military confrontation and escalation of a kind which the Soviet Union seeks to avoid. The latter consideration gained renewed strength with the election of Ronald Reagan and subsequent increases in US military activity in the region, culminating in the invasion of Grenada (see below). In this context, the Soviet response to regional crisis continues to be cautiously incremental. There is little evidence of any Soviet willingness to challenge US security in the region directly, and the insistence of many scholars that the crisis in the Caribbean is local and North-South, rather than East-West, in character seems sound. This has important policy implications, as shall be seen below.



#### 4. El Salvador

What has been said of Soviet caution with regard to Nicaragua applies with even greater force to Soviet policy towards the war in El Salvador. In contrast to the Nicaraguan case, the United States has assumed a clear political and military commitment to the survival of the Salvadoran government; and hence the risks of direct involvement are even greater.

Again, given what Alexander Dallin referred to as the preferability of "parsimonious explanations of causality"<sup>67</sup> there is little point in attempting to account for revolutionary activity in El Salvador by reference to some external agency. Many of the sources of revolution listed above in reference to Nicaragua are also present here.

The great majority of the population lives very poorly. Economic growth, although comparatively rapid in the 1950s and 1960s, was barely sufficient to keep pace with very rapid population growth. In any event, the process of growth fell victim in the mid and late 1970s, to the unravelling of the Central American economic community, increases in the price of energy and the global recession. Income distribution was massively and increasingly skewed in favour of a very narrow economic élite which, since the late 1930s, had surrendered political power to the military in return for the safeguarding of its privileged position. Corruption was, and is, endemic and intense.

The political system has demonstrated little capacity to reform itself in the absence of revolutionary pressure. Political oppression of opposition groups and the social forces they represented intensified in the 1970s and by 1980 it had attained a level of ferocity extraordinary even by regional standards. Democratic processes, when they operated at all, were massively and systematically abused. New educated élites were kept from meaningful participation and bore the brunt of regime brutality.

Mass privation, élite frustration, and systematic oppression provide the basic ingredients for a revolutionary challenge to the status quo. In the mid and late 1970s, increasing numbers of young intellectuals responded to this situation by taking to the hills and providing the raw material for a growing guerrilla movement. As the regime steadily alienated ever wider sections of the political

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<sup>67</sup> A. Dallin, "The Domestic Sources of Soviet Foreign Policy", in S. Bialer, *The Domestic Context of Soviet Foreign Policy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1981), p. 356.



spectrum, including a significant portion of Napoleon Duarte's Christian Democratic Party, the base of support for the guerrillas broadened dramatically. This process was only partially checked in the late 1970s by the 1979 coup and the willingness of the subsequent junta — under US pressure, but also reflecting the commitments of reformist groups within the military — to embark on a process of substantial economic and political reform. The position of moderates and reformers in the junta was, however, steadily eroded by more conservative elements within the military leadership. The growing influence of the latter, in addition to the distractions of the war and the assassination of leading officials associated with the process of reform, has considerably delayed, if it has not actually reversed, the process. This deterioration, in the eyes of many Salvadorans, effectively foreclosed the possibility of peaceful adaptation to pressure from below.

As in the case of Nicaragua, the position of the Salvadoran Communist Party during the 1970s was to oppose armed struggle, with the result that the party's influence over the guerrilla movement was, and is, limited. This position, moreover, divided the party itself, as party officials such as Caetano Carpio, impatient with the gradualist peaceful approach of the leadership, broke with it in order to form guerrilla groups. There is good reason to believe that this attitude of the party was approved of by, if it did not originate with, the party's Soviet mentors.

As noted earlier, in the aftermath of the success of the Nicaraguan Revolution, the party shifted its position to embrace armed struggle as the only promising tactic for the Salvadoran Revolution. The fact that this shift was revealed in articles by the party secretary, Shafik Khandal, in *Kommunist and Latinskaya Amerika*<sup>68</sup>, again suggests the backing of the CPSU. There was, however, good reason for the party to re-orient itself in any case, given

1. the foreclosure of gradualist options as oppression intensified in early 1980;
2. the growing success of the guerrilla movement, not only in the field, but in broadening its ties to more moderate opposition groups;
3. the party's steady loss of ground owing to its opposition to violent revolution.

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<sup>68</sup> "Salvador: Edinstvo Revolyutsionnykh Sil", *Latinskaya Amerika* (1980), #7, p. 83; S. Khandal', "Na Puti K Svobode", *Kommunist* (1980), #17, pp. 96-7, 101, 103.



Since 1980, the Soviet line on El Salvador has been one of sympathy for and solidarity with the guerrilla movement. Moreover, it is reasonably clear that in the initial days of optimism, prior to the ill-fated "final offensive" of January 1981, the Soviets assisted the Salvadoran guerrillas to obtain stocks of American light weaponry held by the Vietnamese and Ethiopians.<sup>69</sup> Meanwhile, Fidel Castro, presumably with Soviet approval, brought the leaders of the various guerrilla factions together in an attempt to get them to bury their differences during what the Cubans and Soviets apparently believed was the final stage of the war. The result of his mediation was the formation of a rather shaky united front.

Since the failure of the offensive, and in the context of an increasingly clear US commitment to prevent a guerrilla seizure of power and the Americans' partial success in producing a more or less legitimate and stable Salvadoran government under Napoleon Duarte, Soviet optimism concerning El Salvador has waned. Since 1981 there has been very little solid evidence of a significant Soviet role in the provision of finance and arms to the FMLN or its various component parts. This accounts for the brevity of this discussion.

Instead, it appears that the principal sources of external assistance to the FMLN have been the Nicaraguans and the Cubans.<sup>70</sup> Soviet policy vis-à-vis the Salvadoran Revolution in this sense conforms to the preference mentioned above, to rely on local actors whose interests coincide with those of the Soviet Union and who are committed to fuelling instability in the region. Once again it reflects an unwillingness to assume the risks and costs associated with more direct involvement. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the Salvadoran problem is one of indigenous unrest fuelled to a degree by other local actors who support regional revolutionary transformation and are deeply alienated from the United States, rather than — in any immediate sense — one of "Soviet expansionism". As such, its solution, from the US point of view, lies more in the recasting of regional policy than in tilting at Soviet windmills.

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<sup>69</sup> See J. Valenta and V. Valenta "Soviet Strategy and Policy in the Caribbean Basin", in Wiarda (op. cit. note 2), p. 230.

<sup>70</sup> Unless one counts the substantial and inadvertent US supply of weapons to the guerrillas via the Salvadoran Army.



## 5. Grenada

In some respects, the great differences between the political and cultural traditions of the Spanish-speaking states of Central America and the Caribbean on the one hand, and the English-speaking Caribbean states on the other, call in question the wisdom of including the Grenada affair in this study. But the geopolitical factors influencing Soviet (and American) policy towards Grenada are broadly similar to those affecting the superpowers' behaviour in the other cases considered here. And, indeed, the response of the Soviet Union and the United States to the emergence of a radical leftist regime in this quite different political environment resembles closely their behaviour in the cases discussed earlier. From a methodological perspective, moreover, this case is particularly illuminating, since researchers have access to a large body of primary source material on the ideological predispositions and internal workings of the New Jewel Movement, and on Grenadian relations with both Cuba and the Soviet Union.

As in the other cases, the emergence of the Bishop regime was largely a response to domestic political and economic crisis. Grenadian politics prior to and in the aftermath of independence were dominated by Eric Matthew Gairy. Gairy's initial political success rested on the support of a broadly based rural trade union movement. However, returning to power in 1967 after five years in opposition, he began to distance himself from his working class base, using the patronage powers of his office to enrich himself and to consolidate his support among the middle class of entrepreneurs and bureaucrats. Identifying himself to an increasing degree with domestic and international business, he enacted labour legislation effectively emasculating his former base of support, the trade union movement.

In order to retain power in the face of a growing opposition, he formed and relied to an increasing degree on a special police force, the "mongoose gang", which mounted a systematic campaign of intimidation and occasional assassination against opposition groups. With the passage of the time, Gairy displayed increasing evidence of personal instability and megalomania. His obsession with unidentified flying objects and his attempt to convince the United Nations to form an agency the purpose of which would be to communicate with extraterrestrial beings are perhaps evidence of the former. His equation of opposition to his rule with the rejection of God's wisdom provides an example of the latter.



In the meantime, partly owing to the incompetence, neglect and corruption of the incumbent regime, but also as a result of the 1973-4 oil crisis and subsequent global recession, the economy entered a period of extended stagnation and decline. Public utilities atrophied, infrastructure decayed, illiteracy and infant mortality rates rose and land seized from opponents of the regime stood idle. Unemployment by 1979 reached 49 per cent, with a rate of 80 per cent among persons under 23 years of age.<sup>71</sup> Economic decay brought with it growing middle class as well as peasant and worker discontent.

Attempts to express dissatisfaction by constitutional means were met with increasingly severe repression. Anti-labour legislation was extended in 1977-8, including strike bans which covered a substantial portion of the work force. Although the People's Alliance Opposition made an impressive showing in the last election of the Gairy era, Parliament was in fact ignored by Gairy while opposition politicians were increasingly the target of assassination.

The principal political effect of these trends was that:

By early 1979, Gairy had united the bulk of the population against him, notwithstanding barriers of colour and class. Moreover, a radical alternative to electoral change grew increasingly acceptable to many. The inevitable end was in sight.<sup>72</sup>

In tandem with this process of social, economic and political decay and the gradual discrediting of traditional political institutions and mainstream political forces in Grenada, there arose a dynamic radical force which provided an alternative to the status quo. This was the New Jewel Movement (NJM).

The institutional roots of the NJM lie in a regional gathering of socialist radicals on Rat Island, off St. Lucia, in 1970. Disillusioned to varying degrees with existing political and social arrangements in the area, and with Black Power as the major political and cultural critique of these arrangements in the late 1960s, those at the

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<sup>71</sup> T. Thorndike, *Grenada: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Frances Pinter Publishers), 1985), p. 48. Thorndike provides in this work an illuminating, though somewhat "engagé", account of the political evolution of Grenada. For the leadup to the 1979 coup, see in particular Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53



meeting sought consciously to assess alternatives to what they perceived to be the deepening dependency of the English Caribbean in the world capitalist economy and the cul-de-sac into which this economic and, consequently, political dependency had drawn their societies. They were strongly influenced in this exercise by theories of non-capitalist development elaborated by Soviet scholars such as Rostislav Ul'yanovsky.<sup>73</sup> In this sense, the Soviet Union may be said to have exercised a basic ideological influence on the NJM, though as Thorndike points out, there was not much ideological rigour evident at the meeting on Rat Island, and certainly no "grand strategy" for the socialization of the Caribbean states.<sup>74</sup> Instead, the approach was eclectic and experimental.

The meeting's participants decided that they should form socialist discussion groups in their home islands. When Maurice Bishop returned to Grenada, he accordingly founded a forum for discussion as a basis for subsequent political organization. This lasted a year, but was superseded by a mass organization devoted to political action rather than theoretical discussion, the Movement for the Advancement of Community Effort (MACE). It merged in turn with a middle class opposition grouping, the St. George's Committee of Concerned Citizens, to form the Movement for Assemblies of the Peoples (MAP). This in turn merged in 1973 with a rural organization, the Joint Endeavour for Welfare, Education, and Liberation (JEWEL), to form the New Jewel Movement. The Movement thus drew from a wide range of socio-economic groups opposed to Gairyism. Given this eclectic background, it is not surprising that, although the Movement was radically socialist in orientation, it was not Marxist-Leninist either in terms of organizational structure or worldview.

It was in the context of severe repression by the Gairy Administration that the NJM began to tighten up its organizational structure and to develop a more clearly Marxist body of doctrine. A Political

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<sup>73</sup> Viz. R. Ul'yanovsky, *Socialism and the Newly Independent Countries* (Moscow: Progress, 1974). For the influence of Soviet theories of socio-economic and political development in the Third World on the development of Caribbean Marxism, see Thorndike, *op. cit.* (note 71), pp. 19-24. For a brief discussion by Maurice Bishop of non-capitalist development during the "national democratic stage", see M. Bishop, "We'll Always Choose to Stand Up", in *Forward Ever! Three Years of the Grenadian Revolution: Speeches of Maurice Bishop* (Sydney: Pathfinder, 1982), pp. 35-38. The similarity with the Soviet concept of "national democracy", elaborated in 1960 at the Conference of Communist and Workers Parties, is striking.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24



Bureau was established to administer the party's affairs in September 1973. According to interviews conducted by Thorndike, the party leadership at this time embraced "scientific socialism" as a body of analytical principles and "non-capitalism development" as a strategy for liberation.<sup>75</sup> In April 1974, the NJM decided to adopt the Leninist concept of the "vanguard party" focussing on the creation of a narrow group of dedicated professional revolutionaries. In 1975, the party officially adopted Marxism-Leninism, losing a number of prominent moderates as a result. Although this decision was not publicized, it was none the less rather widely known, as it was given ample publicity in a newspaper founded by one of the more prominent defectors, George Brizan.

In short, although there was no known direct or indirect Soviet involvement in either the decaying political situation in the country or in the creation and radicalization of the NJM, Soviet principles of socio-economic development had an important influence in the formulation of the NJM's programme<sup>76</sup>, while the Soviet model of party organization was clearly adopted (though never particularly successfully implemented) by the movement.<sup>77</sup> The NJM saw itself as a Marxist-Leninist party in the Soviet tradition well before the 1979 revolution. If anything, this self-image grew stronger in its aftermath. Ideological borrowing, however, does not imply political influence.

That said, in its attitude towards the outside world, the NJM rather consistently displayed considerable sympathy towards Cuba, Nicaragua, and the socialist camp, and sought rather rapidly to establish relations with these states.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, the NJM regime consciously risked alienating the United States in pursuing this track of policy.<sup>79</sup> And, indeed, Grenadian commentary on the

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<sup>75</sup> Thorndike, *op. cit.* (note 71), pp. 48-9.

<sup>76</sup> For a mature version of this programme, which displays strong influence of Soviet notions of national democratic development in states of socialist orientation, see Maurice Bishop, "Line of March for the Party" (September 1982), as reprinted in Paul Seabury and Walter A. McDougall, eds., *The Grenada Papers* (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1984), pp. 63-6, 74-6.

<sup>77</sup> For the structure and role of the party in NJM doctrine, see *ibid.*, pp. 63, 73, 79, 81-87.

<sup>78</sup> Viz. Bishop's comments on Cuba in his speech to the Non-aligned Movement of 6 September, 1979, "Imperialism Is Not Invincible", as reprinted in *Forward Ever*, *op. cit.*, (note 73) p. 94; and his expressions of solidarity with the Sandinista Revolution in *Forward Ever* (13 March 1980), in *ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>79</sup> Viz. Maurice Bishop's comments on US Ambassador Ortiz's warning that the US would disapprove of any attempt to open relations with Cuba, in "Imperialism Is Not Invincible", *op. cit.*, (note 73), p. 96.



Western powers suggested a desire to dissociate the country from the American and European economic domination of the region and a basic lack of sympathy for the main lines of American policy in the Caribbean Basin. It is reasonable to assume that this refocusing of Grenadian foreign policy away from the country's traditional friends reflected not only a pragmatic desire to balance US preponderance in the region through ties to other states, but also a deep sense of grievance over purported foreign economic exploitation, and a genuine sense of solidarity with other components of what was perceived to be a global movement of struggle against imperialism and for national liberation.

Grenada is perhaps the clearest case considered here of *initial* deeply rooted hostility to the United States and ideological affinity with the socialist camp. That said, the Grenadian leadership also realized that there were solid pragmatic grounds for seeking to establish a good working relationship with the United States. Despite their antipathy towards "American imperialism", public statements of the NJM regime in the earliest stages of its rule are almost devoid of explicit criticism of the US. When reference was made to such issues as imperialism, oppression and dependency, these tended to be abstract, rather than pointed at any specific state.<sup>80</sup> This presumably reflected the leadership's concern to avoid provoking the United States into reprisals. It is also resulted from the considerable economic problems faced by the NJM and a consequent desire for economic assistance. This suggests that here, as elsewhere, the United States possessed considerable leverage over Grenadian foreign policy.

The United States, however, rebuffed early overtures on the part of Grenada. US Ambassador Ortiz was dispatched to Grenada from his base in Barbados on the 23rd March, immediately after the revolution, to assess the situation. In his meetings with Grenadian leaders, he pointed out the weakness of the country's foreign exchange position and warned against policies which might discourage tourism, noting the Jamaican experience under Manley. He stressed, as noted above, that the United States would view with disfavour any improvement in Grenadian ties with Cuba. He then responded to an early Grenadian request for economic assistance by offering \$5,000. Somewhat later, the United States refused to accept the credentials of Dessima Williams, the Grenadian Ambassador-designate to Washington.

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<sup>80</sup> Viz., for example, "Imperialism Is Not Invincible", *op. cit.* (note 73), *passim.*, and in particular pp. 88, 89.



Later still, in 1980, the Americans attempted to block OAS assistance to Grenada in the aftermath of serious flooding. They also prevented the extension of United States Agency for International Development (USAID) relief funds, disbursed through the Caribbean Development Bank, to Grenada. These clear demonstrations on the part of the Carter Administration of its disapproval of the new regime deepened Grenadian concerns over American intentions, while arousing further innate Grenadian hostility towards the United States. That the Grenadians were disappointed and offended by these American actions was evident in later comments of Maurice Bishop:

The truth is that from the earliest days of the revolution, we had problems with the Americans . . . In the first weeks of the revolution, in return for a promise of \$5,000 aid, their Ambassador Ortiz tried to dictate to us what our policies must be and in particular was bold enough to warn us against developing "close ties" with Cuba. Naturally, we gave him the answer that we were not for sale and that our internal and international policies were entirely a sovereign matter for us, not subject to any outside negotiation or dictation . . . The Americans also refused to accredit our permanent representative to the OAS as ambassador to Washington.<sup>81</sup>

Grenadian attitudes towards the United States hardened further in 1979-80 as a result of an attempted coup and repeated bombings and shooting incidents apparently aimed at destabilizing the regime. These were attributed by the Grenadian regime to exiles grouped around ex-prime minister Gairy, operating from bases in the United States with the support of the CIA.<sup>82</sup>

Although the degree of US involvement during the Carter Administration in this campaign of destabilization is unclear, it appears that the US Government made little effort to terminate such activities on its soil. Moreover, the refusal of the United States to

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<sup>81</sup> "We'll Always Choose to Stand Up", in *op cit.* (note 73), p. 49. See also Bishop's comments on US denial of disaster assistance and attempts to block multilateral assistance in *ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p. 49.



extradite Gairy to face charges of conspiracy to murder and attempted murder did nothing to calm Grenadian suspicions.<sup>83</sup>

It may well have been that Grenada would have moved under any circumstances to establish broad ties with the socialist community, and notably Cuba and the Soviet Union. But American hostility to the new regime, and the insecurities which American policy nurtured, could only have accelerated such a trend. Conversely, it is legitimate at least to ask, whether a more constructive American approach to the regime might not have slowed both the domestic radicalization of Grenadian social and economic policy and the Grenadian rapprochement with states whose influence in the region the United States has consistently sought to minimize. It is simply not good policy to attempt to dictate terms to radical Third World movements the leaders of which are prone to anti-Western attitudes, who harbour intense resentments of what they perceive to be a legacy of exploitation and domination by the Western Powers, and who are aware of the possibility of support from, and possess considerable affinities with, the international rivals of the United States.

The American position hardened further with the inauguration of President Reagan, and this despite a series of friendly overtures from Grenada. The United States International Communications Agency rapidly unleashed a media barrage against the Grenadian regime and enlisted in its efforts a number of prominent regional newspapers.<sup>84</sup> The CIA, meanwhile, embarked on a more substantial programme of political destabilization, but this was cut short by order of the Senate Intelligence Committee in July 1981.

The principal levers employed by the Reagan Administration, however, were again economic. In particular, the United States opposed Grenada's major development project, the Point Salines International Airport. Like many Caribbean Islands, Grenada was to a considerable degree dependent on tourist revenue as a source of foreign exchange and aware of the potential development gains associated with the expansion of the tourist trade, particularly if the industry were structured in such a way that a substantial portion of the profits stayed within the country. Grenada was seriously hampered, in its attempts to realize the potential of the tourist

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<sup>83</sup> At least one observer maintains, though without reference to documentary evidence, that these activities did benefit from the support of official agencies of the US government. Thorndike, *op. cit.* (note 71), p. 122.

<sup>84</sup> Thorndike, *op. cit.* (note 71), p. 123.



industry, by the inadequacy of the Pearls' Airport, which could not handle larger jet aircraft. The Point Salines project was designed to rectify this situation, but carried a substantial price tag (the initial estimate being around \$70 million). The Grenadians approached a wide array of states and multilateral institutions for assistance in financing the project.

The United States, however, fearful that the airport would be used as a base or landing facility for Soviet military aircraft, opposed the project, and was successful in seriously limiting Western participation in its finance. By contrast, Cuba in particular was willing to assist to whatever extent possible and necessary. Given Grenadian resolve to proceed, Western reluctance to provide assistance and Cuban willingness to participate, it was not surprising that the project increasingly took on the character of a Cuban affair.<sup>85</sup> This in turn strengthened American concern further.

Economic pressure was accompanied by limited use of military instruments. In August 1981, for example, the United States held substantial manoeuvres in the eastern Caribbean, involving air, naval and amphibious units. It is thus not only in terms of ideological affinity, but also in the context of considerable American hostility and mounting political, economic and military pressure that the evolving Soviet relationship with Grenada should be examined.

The Soviet response to the Grenadian Revolution was initially cautious and circumspect, for a number of reasons: unfamiliarity with the NJM coupled with a history of having "been burnt quite often . . . by giving support to governments which have either squandered that support, or turned around and become agents of imperialism, or lost power"<sup>86</sup>, and perhaps a fear of provoking a hostile US response to the NJM regime in conditions where the fulfilment of security commitments would be difficult. Moreover, as Jacobs noted in his assessment of Soviet-Grenadian relations, "the core of the matter is that they regard Grenada as a small distant country".<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> This is not to say that there was no significant Western participation. The British electronics firm Plessey, for example, contracted to provide the airport's radar and navigational aids systems, while much of the airport equipment was purchased from Japanese firms.

<sup>86</sup> R. Jacobs, "Letter of the Grenadian Ambassador" (11 July, 1983), in Seabury and McDougall, *op. cit.* (note 76), pp. 200-1.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.



There was little initial commentary on the establishment of revolutionary power in the party, academic and military press. In clear contrast to the Nicaraguan case, the Soviet Union failed to recognize the regime until October 1979, six months after the revolution. That relations were opened at all apparently had a great deal to do with Cuban support of Grenadian overtures, rather than with any conspicuous Soviet enthusiasm for ties with the new regime.<sup>88</sup> The record of interstate and interparty relations suggests, as Shearman notes, that it was Grenada that wooed a reluctant Soviet Union, rather than vice versa. The Soviet response, in Jacobs' words, was "maddeningly slow".<sup>89</sup>

The first official Grenadian delegation visited the Soviet Union in May 1980, where they met with Boris Ponomarev, the head of the CPSU Central Committee International Department. This was followed by the signature of a bilateral trade agreement in June 1980, and of a limited agreement in military aid in July of the same year.<sup>90</sup>

As the Soviets developed greater knowledge of and confidence in their Grenadian suitors, the relationship broadened. In a 1981 protocol, the two governments agreed to a further arms transfer valued at 5 million roubles. The first major Grenadian governmental delegation was dispatched to the Soviet Union in July 1982. At that time the two sides signed an interparty agreement, suggesting a growing Soviet recognition of the credentials of the Grenadian Revolution and a limited Soviet commitment to deepening it.<sup>91</sup>

They also agreed on additional cooperation in matters of trade, technology, planning and culture. There was at this time a further arms agreement, this one envisaging the supply of a further 10 million roubles of material. By 1983, the Soviets were apparently sufficiently happy about the course of events in Grenada that they were willing in private conversation to acknowledge the NJM as a communist party and Grenada itself to be a "state of socialist orientation".<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201. On this point, see also P. Shearman, "The Soviet Union and Grenada Under the New Jewel Movement", *International Affairs* LXI, #4 (Winter 1985/86).

<sup>89</sup> Jacobs, *op. cit.* (note 86), p. 201.

<sup>90</sup> The agreement envisaged the delivery "without charge" of "special and other equipment" of a value of 4 million roubles. Shearman, *op. cit.* (note 88).

<sup>91</sup> For the text of the agreement, see Seabury and McDougall, *op. cit.* (note 76), pp. 45-6.

<sup>92</sup> Jacobs, *op. cit.* (note 86), pp. 198-9.



In this instance too, it is clear, therefore, that increasing American pressure on a radical regime in the region was accompanied by a deepening relationship between the regional actor and the Soviet Union. The picture is again one of radical responses to local problems combining with American policy to create opportunities for Soviet penetration.

The latter in turn was the cause of a dramatic heightening of American hostility towards Grenada. In February and March of 1983, the Reagan Administration claimed that Grenada was being turned into a Soviet base, that the Point Salines airport was intended for use by Soviet aircraft, and that Grenada was being transformed by massive arms transfers into a catalyst for instability and revolution throughout the region.

It was in the context of this escalating rhetoric and in a climate of growing challenge to his leadership by hardliners such as Bernard Coard that Bishop made his final overture to the United States. In June 1983, he visited Washington and offered to resolve differences between the two countries through diplomatic channels. The Reagan Administration rebuffed his initiative. Indeed, no official higher than Judge Clark, then National Security Advisor, would agree to meet with him. It is reasonable to suppose that this refusal of the United States to deal with Bishop weakened the moderate faction within the Grenadian leadership, thereby contributing to the radicalization of the regime. This process culminated in the October coup d'état which removed Bishop from power, and ultimately in the civil disturbances which provided the justification for United States intervention.

In assessing the threat to United States security posed by the Soviet-Grenadian relationship, it is useful to examine three issues: the quantity of Soviet military assistance to Grenada; the nature of the Soviet-Grenadian military relationship; and the degree of Soviet commitment to Grenada. With regard to the first, it has been argued that the quantity of Soviet assistance to Grenada was well beyond that necessary for Grenadian security and thus suggested Soviet support for Grenadian "export of revolution" to other states in the Eastern Caribbean. Total Soviet military assistance to Grenada amounted to some twenty million roubles worth of equipment. An examination of the various arms transfer agreements indicates that Soviet assistance was made up in the main of small arms (7.62 mm rifles and ammunition, 76 mm guns, 57 mm anti-



tank weapons and ammunition, and so on). The same is true of arms transfers between Grenada and other communist states.<sup>93</sup> Grenadian military planning called for the creation of an armed force of some 4 regular and 14 reserve battalions, a force much larger than any known hitherto in the region. The Soviet and allied military assistance programmes together would have permitted substantial progress towards this objective. In this sense, the Grenadian military build-up constituted a potentially significant threat to other island states and was so seen by political figures such as Eugenia Charles of Dominica.

This suggests, superficially, offensive intent on the part of Grenada. But the principal perceived threat to Grenadian security (a perception which, it turned out, was not altogether unreasonable) was the major military power in the region, the United States. Seen in this context, the Grenadian build-up does not appear disproportionate to the requirements of regime and national security.

Moreover, there is a little evidence in the captured documents to suggest that the Grenadians, in conjunction with the Soviet Union and Cuba, contemplated the use of the weapons for the "export of revolution". Indeed, the documents display considerable awareness on the part of the leadership that actions of this sort carried a substantial risk of US counteraction. The limited interest, displayed in the documents, in the stimulation of instability elsewhere, appears to have been motivated not so much out of a principled commitment to the export of revolution as it was by the desire to prove Grenada's utility to the Soviet Union and thereby to enhance the Soviet perception of Grenada's international significance. Finally, one must ask how these designs, even if they were serious, would have been implemented, as the Soviet Union and its allies failed to transfer to Grenada the transport and logistical capabilities necessary to carry them out. The Soviet Union displayed restraint not just in the categories of weapons transferred, but in their apparent failure to seek substantial military facilities in Grenada.

In ideological terms, while their apparent recognition of the socialist character of Grenada's orientation and the communist status of the NJM are suggestive of a certain degree of optimism concerning the revolutionary process in Grenada, it bears stressing that these statements were private. In public, Soviet commentators paid little

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<sup>93</sup> See, for example, the "Agreement Between Grenada and North Korea" (15 April 1983), in Seabury and McDougall, *op. cit.* (note 76), pp. 47-9.



attention to Grenadian affairs in contrast to their interest in Nicaragua, and, when speaking of them, avoided such explicit embraces of Grenada. To cite an example, one of the few articles in *Latinskaya Amerika* dealing with the Grenadian question during Bishop's tenure in office referred to Grenada not as a state of socialist orientation, but as a state undergoing a "democratic anti-imperialist revolution".<sup>94</sup> The reason for this is that in Soviet eyes, such terminology carries with it a degree of economic and military commitment, given the purported irreversibility of the historical process. Jacobs, in his July 1983 letter, notes his suspicion that the Soviet Union was unwilling to undertake such commitments, in part out of a fear of provoking the United States and in part out of relative indifference towards this "small distant country".<sup>95</sup> This diffidence in theory was reflected in Soviet diplomatic practice. Jacobs noted with some frustration that Grenada was not treated as a part of the "inner circle" of the socialist community, while Grenadian representatives received treatment in the Soviet Union distinctly inferior to that accorded to representatives of other allied regimes, such as that of Nicaragua.<sup>96</sup>

Soviet-Grenadian economic agreements display a Soviet unwillingness to underwrite Grenada's economic development. The Soviet failure to sign a treaty of friendship and mutual assistance, as in the case of Cuba, suggests that the parameters of Soviet willingness to assume risks in its relationship with Caribbean states were rather narrow. This is also suggested by the Soviet insistence that its military aid be channelled through Cuba.<sup>97</sup> The risk averse character of Soviet policy was confirmed in the Soviet response to the US invasion of Grenada, in which the rhetoric flowed with abandon,

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<sup>94</sup> A. Fetisov, "Trudnosti i Nadezhdy Grenady", *Latinskaya Amerika* (1981), #1, p. 67.

<sup>95</sup> Jacobs, *op. cit.* (note 86), p. 200.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>97</sup> Although this suggests once again the utility of the USSR's Cuban connection in the implementation of Soviet policy in the region, it is not intended to give the impression here that Cuba acted as a Soviet "proxy" in the relationship with Grenada. It was, after all, Castro who first embraced the NJM regime and who assisted the Grenadians in the development of a relationship with the Soviet Union. Later events in Grenada displayed a certain degree of tension between the Soviet Union and Cuba. There is some indication that the Soviet Union favoured the Coard faction within the NJM and was not particularly unhappy about the unseating of Bishop in the fall of 1983. Castro, by contrast, adamantly condemned the coup and the subsequent murder of Bishop. This suggests once again that the conventional image of Cuba as a compliant tool of the Soviets in the region should be re-examined.



but where substantive Soviet action was negligible. If anything, the US action in Grenada served to confirm and strengthen Soviet caution in the region.

To summarize, the Grenadian experience is consistent with the general pattern of Soviet responsiveness to opportunities created by local instability and American hostility to radical political and social change in the region. The Soviet response was, however, clearly constrained by asymmetries in the superpowers' levels of interest in regional affairs, by asymmetries in the regional military balance, by the relative insignificance of Grenada in regional politics and, arguably, by the Soviet domestic economic situation.



#### IV.

### CONCLUSION

Several conclusions with regard to Soviet policy emerge from this analysis. First, the Soviet Union over the period under consideration has rather steadily developed its capacity to respond to opportunities in the Caribbean region. Moreover, Soviet perceptions of US strategic interests have developed in such a way that it now views the Caribbean Basin as an area of great interest to the United States. Hence, for reasons presented in Section II, the Soviet Union has a significant derivative interest in the region. The cases considered above demonstrate, moreover, that over the past three decades the Soviet Union has greatly deepened its involvement in regional affairs. It displays considerably greater confidence and resolve today than it did thirty years ago. The dimensions of, if you will, the Soviet challenge in the Caribbean Basin have grown. This justifies concern.

There are, however, several important reservations to this general conclusion.

First, although the Soviet Union has become increasingly able to address the military needs of its clients in the region, its current economic weakness greatly impedes any functional diversification and consolidation of Soviet relations with client left-wing regimes. The massive economic commitment to Cuba adds to this difficulty, in that it absorbs resources which might otherwise be available to other revolutionary actors, and in that the cost of this renders Soviet decision-makers reluctant to assume any further similar commitments.

Second, this trend of growing Soviet activity in the region is not linear. Soviet willingness to assume economic burdens and military risks apparently peaked in 1960-2, but dropped dramatically in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the demise of Khrushchev, and has never approached the 1962 level since. Soviet enthusiasm for, and willingness to support, revolutionary activity rose again after the Nicaraguan Revolution, but recently the Soviets have become more circumspect. Both of these retrenchments may have been largely determined by domestic developments such as the succession crises of 1964-5 and of 1981-5, and the economic difficulties of the two periods, which apparently favoured a re-orientation of policy towards domestic issues. They may also have reflected Soviet preoccupation with events elsewhere such as the



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.<sup>98</sup> 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 maxim<sup>99</sup> 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-

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

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



gional actors. Soviet involvement, in this sense, is far more a product rather than a cause of regional crisis. With regard to the first, the manifest and growing material poverty of much of the population, coupled with the intellectual and moral poverty of the ruling groups, has created a highly unstable situation in the region. The global recession and the debt crisis have exacerbated these local difficulties. With regard to US policy, the persistent tendency – evident in all of the cases considered here – on the part of the US government to equate the revolutionary activities, which emerge from these conditions, with Soviet challenges to US interests, encourages covert and overt military, diplomatic and economic pressure on radical regimes in the region. This reinforces their anti-American orientation and forces them to seek protection and assistance from the adversaries of the United States, notably in this context the Soviet Union. In this sense, to the extent that there is a “Soviet problem” in the region, it is in large part the creation of the United States.



## V.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This brings us, finally, to the policy implications of this analysis. These break down into three categories – policy towards the Soviet Union, towards radical regimes in the region, and towards more conservative allies threatened by revolutionary action (El Salvador, Guatemala, and to some extent Honduras). As far as the Soviet Union is concerned, Soviet caution is related to their perception of US capacity and will to defend American interests. The US effort to prevent large-scale direct Soviet involvement in revolutionary activity in the region has been reasonably successful and should be maintained. This requires the maintenance of credible threats – based upon US military superiority – to impose substantial costs on any Soviet attempts to expand their military presence in the area. It makes sense, for example, for the United States to continue to stress that attempts by the Soviet Union to establish bases in Central America or in the non-communist Caribbean carry a high probability of evoking a US military response, which would face the Soviet Union with the choice of retreat or escalation in highly unfavourable circumstances. This diplomatic effort should be backed by the maintenance of significant US military capabilities in the region. It is important to stress, however, that the establishment of credible deterrence in this sense does not require repeated use of force against radical regimes, unless one publicly equates the emergence of such regimes with Soviet expansionism.

With regard to Nicaragua and Cuba, and to other left wing regimes should they emerge, two lines of policy suggest themselves. First, such regimes have displayed a general commitment to support revolutionary activities elsewhere in the Caribbean Basin. Although, in some respects, revolutionary transformation might be preferable to continued oppressive and corrupt government by reactionary military élites, the United States and its allies have an interest in fostering peaceful and incremental change rather than violent revolution. As noted earlier, violent civil conflict creates needs on the part of local actors, which in turn provide opportunities for those external actors willing to address them. Moreover, although revolution in the small republics of Central America (other than Panama) is not, in and of itself, a concern of great significance to the United States, it might come to affect states such as Mexico and Venezuela, which are of far greater intrinsic importance to the United States. For these reasons, states seeking to



export revolution should understand that such activity carries high risks of unacceptable costs.

But the concept of proportionality should not be ignored in the effort to deter. Some forms of support of revolutionary activity are less noxious than others; rhetorical support of revolution in another state is less significant than material involvement in that revolution; the provision of sanctuary is less significant than the provision of troops. Responses to the "revolutionary internationalism" of Cuba and Nicaragua should focus on deterring them from direct military involvement (provision of arms and personnel).

It should be made clear that such responses are designed to deal with these revolutionary activities as and when they occur. They should not take on the character of a permanent and unremitting crusade to destroy the government concerned. Regimes, such as that of Nicaragua, when faced with disproportionate responses of this type, not unwisely conclude that their survival is at stake and seek assistance wherever it may be found.

Negative deterrent policies should, moreover, be accompanied by the prospect of reward for compliance with US wishes, both in domestic and in foreign policy. In particular, the United States should not deny itself the considerable leverage which it derives from its position as the preponderant economic power in the region. Doing so may merely accelerate trends which the United States opposes, or may perpetuate lines of policy which the Americans consider noxious. To cite an example referred to above, the United States ostensibly cancelled aid to Nicaragua in 1981 as a result of Nicaraguan assistance to the Salvadoran guerrillas. But when the Nicaraguans moderated their behaviour, the United States failed to respond by removing the sanction. The lesson that the Sandinistas drew from this experience was presumably that they were damned if they did comply and damned if they didn't. The apparent unwillingness of the United States to engage in a substantive dialogue on regional issues with the Nicaraguans (despite Nicaraguan offers to include their relations with the FMLN in the discussions), and US diffidence towards the Contadora initiatives presumably reinforce this conclusion. The United States gains little either in its relations with Nicaragua or in its regional diplomatic standing from this stubborn refusal to moderate its pressure in the face of Nicaraguan willingness to compromise. In their domestic policy, emergent radical regimes are likely to aim at some measure of internal transformation which will probably be detrimental to the established private sector, and are likely to make some



effort to reduce the role of foreign business interests. This is inevitable in view of their ideological orientation and the sources of their mass support. But in both the Cuban and Nicaraguan cases, the pace of such efforts was determined in part by the desire of these regimes for access to US skills, markets, credit and aid. It was only after the United States pulled the plug on them that the pace of internal socio-economic transformation accelerated.

With regard to conservative, friendly regimes (Jamaica, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala), the United States should urge these states to address the local socio-economic and political sources of regional crisis in order to prevent the development of violent revolutionary challenges to their rule. In particular, the United States should state its support for land reform where relevant, its support for the organization and integration into national politics of groups whose political and civil rights have traditionally been denied and its opposition to abuse of the human and civil rights of opponents of incumbent regimes. In instances where such initiatives are ignored, there is probably more to be gained from dissociation from such regimes than there is from continued support. These policy prescriptions may seem rather remote from reality. But it bears recalling that such positions were at the heart of the Carter Administration's approach to instability in El Salvador in 1979-80.

In addition, the United States could do much to alleviate many of the "North-South" aspects of the economic crisis in the region through increasing economic assistance, facilitating debt re-negotiation and access to new lines of credit, and improving regional access to the American market. Many of these measures were included in President Reagan's Caribbean Basin Initiative and subsequently died in Congress. Measures of this type might go some distance towards avoiding the kind of civil and regional conflict which presents the Soviet Union with opportunities for involvement.

Finally, given its rather unfortunate historical reputation in the region, the United States would do well to rely to whatever extent possible on efforts by regional actors to contain and resolve the area's conflicts. This would reduce the possibility of a hostile regional response to what is perceived as US meddling. Moreover, it could enhance US relations with important regional actors, such as Venezuela, Mexico, Colombia and Panama, who are involved in this. The Soviet Union and its allies are far less likely to try to circumvent or undermine regional attempts at conflict resolution,



if led by states with whom they seek to expand their influence, than they are to impede similar efforts managed by the United States in such a way as to secure its own interests.<sup>100</sup>

The outlook for the Caribbean Basin, and particularly for Central America, is not rosy. The area faces a prolonged period of economic privation and social and political instability. It is not inevitable, however, that this should produce violent revolution. Nor is it inevitable that revolution in the region should produce an expansion in Soviet power there, to the detriment of Western security. Whether these occur is largely a function of the policies of the United States and its allies. The situation demands wisdom, tolerance and restraint, rather than inflexible rhetorical posturing and military excess.



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<sup>100</sup> In interviews in Campinas, Brazil, in July 1985, Soviet personnel from the foreign ministry and the Institute of Latin American Studies repeatedly stated their support for the Contadora initiative, presumably as a result of an awareness of the regional diplomatic advantages of such a posture.



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