

# CAN THE SUPERPOWERS PLOT PEACE?

By MARK N. KATZ

**To avoid another chill, the United States and the Soviet Union need to agree on some basic rules for resolving Third World conflicts.**

**W**hen detente broke down before, it was primarily because of U.S. and Soviet differences over the Third World. In 1979 the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and the Carter administration withdrew the SALT II treaty from the Senate. The Soviets insisted that arms control had nothing to do with what they did in the rest of the world; the United States insisted that it did.

Circumstances have changed drastically, but there are still serious differences between the two nations on what constitutes legitimate behavior in the Third World. Unless these differences are recognized and resolved, the current climate of goodwill could again turn sour, and progress in resolving regional conflicts could come to a halt.

Washington and Moscow have fundamentally different expectations about what should happen after a Third World conflict, involving their allies, is resolved. U.S. policymakers in the Reagan and Bush administrations, as well as in Congress, have expected

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Third World Marxist regimes to either collapse or undergo drastic change once the Soviet, Cuban, or Vietnamese troops go home. This happened, after all, on the U.S. side when it withdrew support from South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

Moscow, in turn, expects the Marxist regime to remain intact, but the U.S.-supported rebel groups are supposed to collapse in squabbling disarray after Western aid is cut off. The Soviet model is North Yemen, where for five years in the 1960s Soviet combat pilots and advisers helped 60,000 Egyptian troops defend a "republican" regime against royalist rebels. The war proceeded miserably and Egypt finally decided to give up in 1967. The regime seemed on the point of defeat and was barely being kept alive by a last-ditch Soviet airlift when the opposition literally fell apart. Soviet scholars often cite this as an example of what they expect to see happen in Marxist Third World countries today.

Each nation also believes it is wrong for the other to continue aiding an ally in a conflict that has supposedly been resolved. The Soviets have continued or increased their hefty arms shipments to Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia, and Cambodia.<sup>1</sup> And despite Gorbachev's claims that Soviet arms shipments to Nicaragua had stopped, they

continued to flow there via Cuba, and from Nicaragua on to El Salvador. This channel is likely to change now that Violeta Chamorro has been elected president of Nicaragua.

In Moscow's view, U.S. demands that it stop aiding its beleaguered allies altogether are unreasonable. The Soviets believe they have done their part by withdrawing troops—either their own or surrogate Cuban or Vietnamese forces. And they believe that the price Washington should pay for the withdrawal is to stop U.S. aid to rebel forces. They express particular displeasure with continued U.S. assistance to rebels in Afghanistan and Angola.<sup>2</sup>

Sooner or later, one will feel tricked and betrayed by the other. American conservatives are already suggesting that Gorbachev only wants to resolve conflicts in order to cut off U.S. aid to rebel forces, so that he may keep his Marxist allies in power without using troops.<sup>3</sup> The Soviets, on the other hand, may worry that the United States is taking advantage of current Soviet weakness to aggressively expand its own influence in the Third World.

Renewed skepticism will not enhance the prospects for resolving regional conflicts. If both sides continue to provide large-scale military assistance to their allies, the conflicts will continue and could become a major source of contention between the superpowers. Once again, disagreements and disillusionment about the Third World could

## TOP 10 SOVIET ARMS CUSTOMERS, 1983-87

figures in billions of 1987 dollars

Iraq	\$13.9
Syria	8.9
Vietnam	8.5
India	7.6
Cuba	7.0
Angola	5.8
Ethiopia	4.2
Afghanistan	4.0
Libya	3.9
Algeria	2.5

U.S. ACDA, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1988*

—Jo. L. Husbands

halt progress on arms control, end detente, and lead to a renewed period of hostile East-West relations.

The current minimalist approach to resolving Third World conflicts is flawed. In Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, and elsewhere, the superpowers have focused only on external aspects of the conflicts, primarily the presence of foreign troops. For the most part, they have not made serious efforts to deal with the causes of the disputes or to curtail arms transfers to the warring parties.

Before the two nations can actually help resolve conflicts, however, they must agree on general procedures and principles, which might include the following:

- Arms transfers to the contending parties should be halted by the superpowers and their allies simultaneously. Washington has called for this principle and should continue to insist on it.

- The warring parties should form a transitional coalition government which would conduct free elections within a few months. Some of the groups the United States supports, such as the Afghan mujaheddin, regard a coalition with their former enemies as unacceptable. But it may be their only way to come to power.

Nor are free elections impossible under these circumstances. Relatively free elections were held in Zimbabwe to end civil war in that country. The Nicaraguan elections went off smoothly, although implementation of the results may be more difficult. More significantly, Gorbachev has amply demonstrated his willingness to accept free elections in Eastern Europe and even in the Soviet Union.

- None of the internal parties or leaders should be excluded from participating in elections. The people themselves should decide whether Najibullah in Afghanistan, Jonas Savimbi in Angola, or the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia should be represented in government. Excluding leaders or groups from a settlement only gives them an incentive to fight on.

- Before elections, all foreign troops should leave and external arms supplies should be cut off. Otherwise the

## Soviet intervention didn't pay

Mikhail Gorbachev has dramatically altered the policy pursued by his predecessors, particularly Leonid Brezhnev, on regional conflict. Brezhnev's view of detente was that it was desirable to cooperate with the United States to prevent nuclear war, but that the basic competition between socialism and capitalism continued.

The 1970s seemed to provide extraordinary opportunities for the Soviets to intervene in the Third World. The United States, after Vietnam, was extremely reluctant to become involved militarily, and revolutionary situations were developing in a number of countries. The Soviets saw the United States as a declining power, in no position to link Soviet behavior in the Third World with progress on arms control: they believed the American public wanted both arms control and an end to U.S. military intervention. Moreover, Brezhnev believed that only low-cost, short-term intervention was needed to establish and secure new Marxist regimes.

By the time Gorbachev came to power, it was obvious that Brezhnev had miscalculated. The increasing intervention by the Soviet Union and its allies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America during the 1970s—culminating in the invasion of Afghanistan—contributed to the breakdown of detente, the election of Ronald Reagan, and huge increases in U.S. defense spending. In addition, most of the new Marxist regimes were unable to quell domestic opposition. In Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, and elsewhere, extremely costly, long-term military efforts were needed just to keep them in power.

Gorbachev's goal has been to reform the domestic economy, and that meant halting or even reversing the rise in defense spending. To do this, it was necessary to re-establish detente with the United States. Gorbachev also realized that whether the Soviets liked it or not, military involvement in the Third World would hurt detente as well as the economy.

He began by withdrawing all Soviet troops from Afghanistan by February 1989, where they had been fighting for nearly a decade to prop up a weak regime. He encouraged the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia, completed in September 1989, and the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola, scheduled to be completed in 1991. But Gorbachev's willingness to allow Soviet influence to evaporate in Eastern Europe, which is far more important than the Third World to Soviet security, casts serious doubt on his commitment to Soviet friends and allies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Nevertheless, despite the Soviet retreat from Eastern Europe, Moscow has continued to provide significant quantities of arms to several Marxist Third World regimes.

—M.N.K.

validity of the results will be subject to doubt. However, the presence of international peacekeeping forces from neutral countries not previously involved in the conflict might be helpful.

No single formula can resolve every conflict, and it will be difficult to incorporate all these principles in all settlements. But if the superpowers and their allies could at least agree on the principle of ending arms transfers, the contending parties might become more willing to negotiate. Even if this does not happen, ending arms transfers would at least detach the superpowers from a conflict so that it would do less

harm to East-West relations. •

1. David B. Ottaway, "U.S. Questions Soviet Change on Area Conflicts," *Washington Post*, Oct. 10, 1989; Patrick E. Tyler, "Soviets Said to Be 'Pouring' Arms, Equipment into Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, Feb. 9, 1990; Jane Perlez, "On the Ethiopian Front, Rebel Confidence Rises," *New York Times*, Feb. 14, 1990.

2. See, for example, Y. Dolgoplov, "Regional Conflicts: Solutions and Impasses," *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Nov. 10, 1989), p. 3, cited in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service-Soviet Union*, Nov. 17, 1989, p. 7.

3. See, for example, Jeane Kirkpatrick, "So We've 'Won' The Cold War?" *Washington Post*, Sept. 25, 1989; Richard Pipes, "The Russians Are Still Coming," *New York Times*, Oct. 9, 1988.