

2 of 6 DOCUMENTS

The Washington Quarterly

1991 Winter

Beyond the Reagan Doctrine: Reassessing U.S. Policy Toward Regional Conflicts

BYLINE: Mark N. Katz

Mark N. Katz is an assistant professor of government and politics at George Mason University.

SECTION: REGIONAL SECURITY POST-1990; Vol. 14, No. 1; Pg. 169

LENGTH: 5994 words

HIGHLIGHT: The crisis in the Persian Gulf region has brought into sharp focus the transformation of problems of regional security in the post-cold war era and the special promise of international consensus in an era not divided by East-West discord. Yet it also has demonstrated the continued and growing problem of North-South and South-South conflict, especially with the proliferation of advanced military capabilities. The Following essays assess different aspects of the regional security challenge.

IT HAS BECOME commonplace by now to note that enormous changes have occurred in international relations, and that these changes will affect both the role of the United States in the world and U.S. foreign policy. But how exactly should U.S. foreign policy deal with lingering vestiges of the past and new problems of international security in an era of improved Soviet-U.S. relations? The answer is by no means clear because the full implications of the new international situation are not clear.

Response of the Bush Administration

In this uncertain environment, the Bush administration initially adopted the prudent course of pursuing those foreign policies that were successful in the past: supporting the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), continuing good relations in China, and opposing Marxist and other radical third world regimes backed by Moscow, among others. This impulse was understandable. What worked in the past should not be lightly abandoned. Indeed, the pursuit of these policies played a large role in bringing about positive changes (from the Western point of view) in Soviet foreign and domestic policies. Why fix what isn't broken?

The Bush administration, however, has concluded that not all the policies of the past, however successful, should be carried into the future. This is particularly true of the Reagan Doctrine -- the provision of military aid by the United States and its allies to guerrillas fighting against pro-Soviet Marxist third world regimes. The Reagan Doctrine was undoubtedly instrumental in convincing President Mikhail S. Gorbachev that Moscow could not easily spread Marxist revolution to the Third World or keep Marxist regimes there in power cheaply. It is highly doubtful that the Soviets would have withdrawn their troops from Afghanistan or encouraged the Cubans and Vietnamese to withdraw theirs from Angola and Cambodia if the United States and its allies had not supported the guerrilla forces that the Marxists were trying to defeat.

In mid-1990, though, the Bush administration effectively began to turn away from the Reagan Doctrine in Cambodia and Afghanistan. For many years, Washington provided diplomatic and military backing to the Cambodian resistance coalition (the Marxist Khmer Rouge and two non-Communist movements) fighting against the Soviet- and Vietnamese-backed Hun Sen regime in Phnom Penh. Although the completion of the Vietnamese troop withdrawal

from Cambodia in September 1989 did not induce the Bush administration to change this policy, in July 1990 Secretary of State James A. Baker III announced that the United States would no longer support the opposition coalition and would negotiate with Vietnam on a peace settlement for Cambodia.

Following the completion of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in February 1989, the Bush administration resisted Soviet calls for elections to be held there while the Marxist leader Najibullah remained in power. In mid-1990, however, Washington and Moscow reportedly made progress toward a peace settlement for Afghanistan in which both superpowers would cease arming their allies and elections would be held with the Najibullah regime still in power.

The Reagan Doctrine appears to remain fully operative only in Angola, although it would not be surprising if the United States and the Soviet Union soon agreed to an internal settlement there, especially as Cuban troops are withdrawn from Angola under the provisions of the December 1988 accords.

Critics of the Bush administration, nevertheless, still see the Soviet Union as the primary threat to U.S. interests in the Third World. They point out that although Moscow has acquiesced in democratization in Eastern Europe and the withdrawal of Communist armed forces from Afghanistan, Angola, and Cambodia, the Soviet Union is still shipping weapons to Afghanistan, Angola, Cuba, Vietnam, and to a lesser extent, Cambodia and Ethiopia. Even if it ceases to do so, Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, and Vietnam already may possess enough weapons to defeat their opponents if the latter are cut off from Western arms. Despite the loss of Eastern Europe, conservatives fear that the Soviets do not want to give up their influence in the Third World. The only way to get them out, some conclude, is to push them out.

The Soviet Response

Soviet policy, however, does not draw such a firm distinction between Eastern Europe and the Third World. Just as Moscow has accepted indigenously supported political change in Eastern Europe, it has also accepted such change in the Third World. The Soviets accepted the results of the February 1990 Nicaraguan elections, in which the pro-Soviet Sandinista government was displaced by a pro-American one. Moscow has also accepted the complete disappearance of the Marxist regime in South Yemen, which in May 1990 voluntarily merged with (and submitted to being ruled by the leader of) non-Marxist North Yemen. Nor has Gorbachev done anything to prevent the increasingly Western orientation of once-Marxist Mozambique. In line with his policy toward all the East European countries where peaceful change took place, Gorbachev since 1989 has not acted to prevent peaceful political change in the Third World, even if this has meant the dissolution of a Marxist regime. And just as he did nothing to prevent the violent downfall of the Marxist regime in Romania, he appears less than fully committed to preventing the Marxist regime in Ethiopia from meeting with a similar fate. While still shipping arms to Addis Ababa, Moscow has reportedly withdrawn its military advisers and is distancing itself from the regime. One reason for this might be that, as in Romania, the threat to the Ethiopian regime comes primarily from internal forces, none of which receives military assistance from the West or China.

Gorbachev seemed determined to prop up existing Marxist regimes only in those countries where the United States and/or its allies were providing substantial assistance to guerrilla groups seeking to overthrow them: Afghanistan, Cambodia, and Angola. But why would Gorbachev do this after the loss of Eastern Europe, as well as continue military assistance to Cuba and Vietnam? I have posed this question to several senior Soviet scholars since the fall of the Berlin Wall. According to one, the Soviet leadership is determined to hang on to some of Moscow's third world allies precisely because they have given up Eastern Europe. For the Soviet Union to be forced out of the Third World by the United States would demonstrate to all that the Soviet Union had completely lost its superpower status.

Another Soviet scholar drew a sharp distinction between countries from which the Soviet Union withdrew voluntarily and countries in which the United States and its allies were heavily involved in attempting to oust pro-Soviet regimes by force. To withdraw from a country at the request of its government was an act of magnanimity that might be expected to enhance Soviet prestige. But for the Soviet Union to abandon governments that still wanted its support would give Moscow the reputation of being weak and unreliable. Among other negative consequences, the Soviet

Union could not expect the West to treat Moscow with respect if the United States and its allies succeeded in helping rebel groups to overthrow Marxist third world regimes.

Most of the other Soviet scholars I spoke with indicated that Moscow continues to support certain third world Marxist regimes not because these regimes are strategically valuable to the Soviet Union, but because it fears the consequences if its reputation as a superpower declines further.

Moscow, then has a strong incentive to prevent its remaining third world Marxist allies from being forcibly ousted with Western support. As the Bush administration has learned, it takes much less assistance from the Soviet Union to help its allies avoid being overthrown by opposition forces than to defeat these forces. Contrary to optimistic forecasts at the time of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in February 1989, the mujaheddin were unable to oust the Najibullah regime by force. Nor do they appear likely to do so in the foreseeable future. Similarly, UNITA has been unable to make inroads against the MPLA in Angola despite the withdrawal of Cuban troops. Cambodia is the one case where the opposition is likely to oust the pro-Soviet regime, but the Bush administration has decided not to support this outcome because the murderous pro-Chinese Khmer Rouge would then come to power.

Implications for the Reagan Doctrine

Soviet behavior in Eastern Europe and in the Third World has led the Bush administration to conclude that the Soviet Union might not be so insistent on supporting third world regimes if the United States and its allies did not seem determined to have them overthrown and replaced by anti-Soviet governments. Under current circumstances, then, the continuation of the Reagan Doctrine, which U.S. conservatives advocate, is counterproductive, especially since the Soviets have demonstrated that they will give up their influence in a country as a result of peaceful political change.

Continuation of the Reagan Doctrine is also counterproductive in the larger context of U.S. foreign policy in a changing era. The doctrine was designed to counter the expansion of Soviet influence at a time when Soviet expansionism was the most important threat to world order and to U.S. interests. This is no longer so, and for the United States to behave as if it were is simply inappropriate. Why devote such effort to punishing the Soviet Union when its influence is already receding? Nor is continued U.S. adherence to the Reagan Doctrine likely to further U.S. interests or enhance the reputation of the United States with its democratic allies when the most likely beneficiaries of the doctrine are undemocratic forces in Afghanistan, Angola, and Cambodia.

Potential Regional Hegemons

The retreat of Soviet influence, however, does not mean that international relations will be marked by inevitable progress toward democracy, the peaceful resolution of all outstanding disputes under Soviet-U.S. direction, and increasing harmony among nations generally. Some serious threats to stability exist in regions of the developing world where certain states pursue hegemonic ambitions.

Even at the height of Soviet expansionism, the Soviet Union was by no means the only expansionist power in the Third World. While Moscow may have become disillusioned with expansionism, others have not. For while no one power poses the same threat of global expansionism as the Soviet Union once did, the behavior of several indicates that they are actively or potentially seeking hegemony within certain regions. And U.S. interests would be hurt if any power, not just the Soviet Union, came to dominate certain regions of the Third World such as the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Latin America, or any of the world's important sea lanes.

The Persian Gulf. An Iranian victory in the Iran-Iraq war could have resulted in Iranian dominance over the entire Gulf region. The United States, eager to prevent Iran from gaining control over even more of the Gulf's oil reserves, worked to prevent this. The threat of Iranian hegemony over the region has subsided, but the threat of Iraqi hegemony arose when Saddam Hussein's forces overran Kuwait and menaced Saudi Arabia. The United States and its allies certainly have no interest in allowing Iraq to gain greater control over the Gulf, on which the West depends so heavily for its oil,

or to obtain greater influence in the Middle East, which is already volatile enough. Iraq now poses and Iran has posed (and may again pose) a far greater threat of such hegemony than the Soviet Union, and they are thus greater threats than Moscow to U.S. interests in this vital region.

Southeast Asia. In Southeast Asia, U.S. and Western interests would suffer if any power were in a position to dominate the economically prosperous states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). During the 1970s and 1980s, the United States and ASEAN saw an aggressive Vietnam, backed by the Soviet Union, as posing the greatest threat to regional security. In consequence, both worked with China to thwart Soviet and Vietnamese efforts to dominate Cambodia. The U.S. motive was not the strategic importance of Cambodia, but fear of what the Soviet Union and Vietnam would do next in the region if they succeeded in dominating that country.

Now, however, Vietnam has withdrawn its troops from Cambodia and neither Hanoi nor Moscow appears interested in pursuing an expansionist policy in the region. Yet, despite this change, China continues to provide substantial quantities of arms to the genocidal Khmer Rouge. In addition to being concerned about how the Khmer Rouge would behave if they returned to power, the United States and its allies ought to be concerned about China's motives. Why is China not satisfied with the decline of Soviet and Vietnamese influence in Cambodia? If it succeeds in doing so, how will it behave toward ASEAN? Unlike the government of the Soviet Union, the ruling party in China has become increasingly authoritarian. If ASEAN was worth protecting from Soviet influence, it is surely worth protecting from Chinese influence too. And although the threat of expanding Soviet and Vietnamese influence in the region may not have disappeared, it is receding while the threat of expanding Chinese influence is growing.

The Indian Ocean. The United States and its allies have a strong interest in maintaining maritime access to the Indian Ocean, if only to secure the flow of oil from the Gulf. For years the Soviet Union attempted to constrain that access through proposing various "zone of peace" formulas. Moscow never really expected the West to accept them, but apparently hoped that the states of the region would, thereby limiting Western naval access.

Although the Soviets did not succeed in rousing the region's enthusiasm for this goal, and their efforts in pursuing it have notably flagged, one important nation -- India -- enthusiastically advocated limiting the naval presence of outside parties in the Indian Ocean. New Delhi may well pursue this goal because, if it could be achieved, India would have the largest naval presence in the region. How would India behave if it achieved naval dominance in the Indian Ocean? Could the West depend on India to safeguard its access to Gulf oil? India's often belligerent attitude toward its weaker South Asian neighbors appears to indicate a desire to dominate where it can. If India achieved greater influence in South Asia, how would it behave in the broader Indian Ocean region? Although India can hardly be said to pose as serious a threat of regional expansionism as Iraq or China, New Delhi's policies are definitely a potential problem. Washington should be no less concerned about India's efforts to limit or exclude Western access to the Indian Ocean than it was about Moscow's.

Latin America. The United States has a strong interest in preventing any hostile power from gaining predominant influence in Latin America. This concern, the basis of the Monroe Doctrine, long predates the Cold War. Under Gorbachev, Soviet support for revolution in Latin America has declined markedly. But Cuban support for revolutions against U.S.-supported governments continues, especially in Central America. What is Fidel Castro's goal in seeking to promote revolution? Does he aspire to some form of regional hegemony? Even if his actions are not supported by the Soviet Union, his efforts to extend his influence at the expense of the United States are clearly undesirable from Washington's point of view.

Hegemony and U.S. Foreign Policy

The United States has a strong interest in seeing that states aspiring to hegemony do not succeed. Hegemonic powers could cause serious problems for U.S. interests, and not just by constraining or excluding a regional U.S. presence. Even in regions that are remote or have little strategic value to the United States, a hegemon could threaten U.S.

interests in other more important regions.

U.S. concern for the future of the Third World, then, is in one sense similar to its past concern: to prevent regional hegemony. The difference is that while the United States was primarily concerned about preventing Soviet efforts to achieve hegemony in various regions in the past, it should now be concerned to prevent any regional hegemony. Continued pursuit of the Reagan Doctrine is inappropriate for achieving this goal because, although its main objective -- halting Soviet expansionism -- has already been achieved, it does not address the task of halting the expansionism of regional hegemons.

To pursue this goal successfully, the United States will have to make considerable changes in its foreign policy. During the Cold War, it enjoyed the certainty of having one prime enemy and a relatively constant set of allies. Further, this one enemy was clearly threatening, and the U.S. government could usually (but not always) rouse the public to support defense expenditures against it.

In the future, the United States probably will not enjoy the certainty of having either permanent friends or permanent enemies in the Third World. A case in point is that while Iraq was an ally in preventing Iranian regional hegemony during the latter part of the Iran-Iraq war, that ally has now become an aspiring hegemon itself. Similarly, the alliance between China and the United States was based on the common fear of Soviet expansion, but now that this danger has receded, China may be pursuing hegemonic ambitions of its own.

Although the United States should oppose their aspirations to hegemony, it must be prepared to cooperate with Iraq and China once again if Iran, Vietnam, or some other country more aggressively and effectively pursues hegemonic ambitions in the future.

Some may object that for the United States to cooperate with China after it suppressed the democracy movement in 1989 or Iraq after it invaded Kuwait would be immoral, unthinkable, and unacceptable to the American public. But in a world where there may be many potential sources of expansionism in addition to the ones that are most threatening at any one time, the U.S. government should avoid public demands to vilify its current opponents completely so that cooperation with them is impossible. If President Bush had acceded to congressional and public insistence on isolating Beijing after Tiananmen Square, China might have vetoed the United Nations resolutions against Iraq for invading Kuwait simply to thwart the United States. The Bush administration's insistence on maintaining a high-level dialogue with Beijing may have been largely responsible for avoiding a Chinese veto, which could have made rallying worldwide support for sanctions and other measures against Iraq more difficult to achieve.

There can be no cooperation with Iraq while it is pursuing an expansionist course, but it must be noted that Iraq has the same regime now as it had when Iran threatened to defeat it in the latter part of the Gulf war. Cooperating with Saddam Hussein to prevent Iranian expansion was a worthwhile goal. Indeed, the United States and the world must be careful that their efforts to thwart Saddam Hussein do not lead to a power vacuum in Iraq into which Iran could easily move.

Similarly, if Iraqi or Chinese actions become even more threatening to regional balances of power, the United States will not be able to afford the luxury of treating Iran and Vietnam as permanent enemies just because their governments bested Washington in the 1970s and may need actively to cooperate with them to maintain the balance of power.

The cold war pattern in which the United States supported a relatively permanent set of friends against a permanent enemy is not likely to serve as a useful guidepost for U.S. foreign policy toward the Third World in the future. Instead, the U.S. role vis-a-vis the Third World may resemble that of the British vis-a-vis Europe in the eighteenth, nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries: the balancer that sought to prevent any state or alliance from gaining or threatening to gain hegemony. The British acted to frustrate the ambitions of any and all hegemons, not just one special enemy; so too should the United States.

How can the United States effectively act as a balancer in various regions of the Third World? As the British did when they played this role, the United States should employ diplomatic means primarily and employ military means only as a last resort. Indeed, the United States will want to do its utmost diplomatically to prevent conflict from breaking out in order to avoid the drain on U.S. resources and public tolerance that would result from frequent intervention. Rallying other nations to support economic sanctions against regional aggressors is especially important; greater world economic integration means that fewer nations can afford to be isolated economically from the rest of the world.

Playing the role of balancer, though, will also involve a military dimension. Some of the same military policies Washington pursued in order to thwart Soviet hegemonism can also be employed to thwart regional hegemonies. These include providing security assistance for defensive purposes to countries being threatened, diplomatic efforts aimed at denying military aid to aggressive nations, supplying weapons to nations in conflict with hegemonic powers, or preventing hegemonic powers from interrupting the sea lines of communication on which the targets of their aggression depend (just as the United States and others protected Kuwaiti oil shipping against Iranian attack).

A serious problem is posed by the buildup of substantial military forces by aspiring hegemonies with which vulnerable neighbors cannot cope militarily. The United States will face certain dilemmas in such cases. When and how should it become directly involved militarily to protect weaker nations against threatening states? It is far from certain that Americans would tolerate direct involvement in a protracted conflict to prevent regional hegemony if they did not perceive themselves as directly threatened or their allies as worth defending.

In the past, the United States has relied on the threat of nuclear attack to deal with a militarily robust opponent in Europe, but this strategy does not translate easily to the developing world. There are several reasons: the U.S. public would be unlikely to support such a policy; aspiring hegemonies might not believe the United States would actually employ nuclear weapons, or they would pursue their aims in a more piecemeal way against which nuclear retaliation would be less appropriate or credible; and some potential hegemonies already or may soon possess nuclear weapons and might be able to deter U.S. use of nuclear weapons because they could retaliate against U.S. interests, or the United States itself.

There may also be obstacles to deterring regional hegemonies with the threat of military intervention by conventional forces. The example of U.S. military withdrawal from Indochina in 1973 and from Lebanon in 1984 may lead some states to doubt the credibility of U.S. threats to intervene against them. A well-armed aggressor may calculate that the U.S. Congress and public will not be willing to pay the human costs of intervention against it -- or at least not pay them for very long. If the United States is perceived as continuing to suffer from the "Vietnam syndrome," some hegemonies might be willing to engage it in protracted conflict. In some cases, then, conventional deterrence may not be possible; some form of intervention may be necessary.

Is this an exaggerated portrait of the real security dilemmas the United States faces in the Third World? Perhaps not. Kuwaiti armed forces were obviously unable to deter or prevent Iraq from conquering their country. The large number of troops that the United States and other countries have sent to defend Saudi Arabia is indicative of the enormous effort needed to defend weaker states against regional aggressors.

Iraq is not the only example. If there is war between India and Pakistan, and if India emerges a militarized winner (and especially if the war has a nuclear component), who in the region will not fear the consequences? What if an expansionist Khmer Rouge regime is ensconced in Cambodia and backed by China, and turns its attention toward Thailand? What if several attempts to achieve regional hegemony occur simultaneously?

U.S. interests would be best served by the emergence of regional balances of power rather than acute threats to achieve hegemony because the requirements for maintaining stability will be far less than those of restoring stability once it has been upset by an ambitious and well-armed regional military power. The United States cannot achieve this goal alone. Cooperation with its Western allies on problems of regional security is growing more important, not less.

Support for beleaguered third world allies would be easier to muster, and the isolation of aspiring hegemony easier to achieve, if the United States, Europe, and Japan acted in concert than if the United States acted alone. Such cooperation would signal to those contemplating aggressive behavior that they could not play off the Western powers against each other -- a danger that may grow when Western nations no longer fear a common Soviet threat. Maintaining regional balances of power would be more difficult if the Western allies disagreed over whether a particular nation was pursuing a hegemonic policy, or if some sold weapons to an aggressive state while others sought to deny them. Close collaboration among the Western allies will be necessary to ensure that such scenarios do not arise.

What Role for the Soviet Union?

U.S. efforts to play the role of regional balancer will be affected not just by the attitudes of its Western allies, but also by the policy of the Soviet Union. Even a weakened Soviet Union could thwart U.S. efforts by either selling or giving weapons from its huge surplus arsenal to aggressive states. On the other hand, U.S.-Soviet cooperation in maintaining regional balances of power in the Third World could be highly effective in deterring or thwarting hegemonic aspirations. Indeed, if the United States, the Soviet Union and the Western allies all worked together, even the most aggressive state would probably see that the prospects for achieving its ambitions were extremely poor. Although Western actions were not coordinated with the Soviet Union, their parallel efforts during the Iran-Iraq war to protect oil shipping in the Gulf may have been instrumental in convincing Tehran that it could not stop the conservative Gulf monarchies from providing substantial economic assistance to Iraq and that its efforts to defeat Iraq were futile. Iran might not have come to this conclusion so soon, or even at all, if it had not seen all the great powers working against it in the Gulf. Similarly, Saddam Hussein's threat to the Arabian Peninsula would have been far more difficult for the United States to contain if it had occurred during the cold war era and Moscow had acted to insulate Iraq from economic and military sanctions.

The West and the Soviet Union could undertake several actions jointly to deter or defuse threats to regional balances of power elsewhere. If the great powers could agree that a particular nation was pursuing a hegemonic policy, they could act jointly to halt arms transfers to it. Arms, of course, can be obtained from other sources; many countries have large stocks of Soviet or Western weapons, and increasing numbers of countries make their own. It is doubtful, however, that other potential arms suppliers would be willing to transfer large quantities of weapons on concessionary terms as the United States and the Soviet Union have done in the past. Even if an aspiring hegemon could pay hard currency, it probably could not obtain from other sources the sophisticated systems available from the great powers. And if the great powers acted to cut off arms to a hegemonic power while they supplied arms to neighboring states, these actions alone might serve to deter aggressive policies.

The great powers could also undertake joint diplomatic initiatives to defuse regional conflicts. The primary importance of these initiatives would be to show states contemplating aggressive behavior that they cannot exploit differences between the Soviet Union and the West in order to gain support for expansionism. Rivalry among the great powers in the past has made it easier for smaller powers to pursue regional imperialism.

The great powers could also work together to find democratic solutions to regional conflicts. The Soviet Union has opposed such solutions in the past. Since 1989, however, Moscow has accepted the results of free elections in Eastern Europe and Nicaragua. Increasingly open elections are occurring within the Soviet Union itself. Soviet and Western support for the principle of free elections provides a face-saving means for accepting the victory of a contestant previously opposed by one or more of the great powers. Elections may also lay the basis for more lasting solutions to regional conflicts.

Finally, if all else fails, the joint use of force (or threat to use force) by the great powers at various levels, from maintaining freedom of navigation to intervention, would be far more effective than if the United States attempted such activity on its own.

This type of Soviet-U.S. or Soviet-Western cooperation on regional conflicts is not a proposal for a Northern

condominium over the South. An attempt to achieve such a condominium would unite the South against the North, would be extremely costly to maintain, and would not be supported domestically in the North. Instead, this is a proposal for Soviet-U.S. cooperation to prevent some developing countries from exercising condominium over others and thereby threatening the security interests of the majority of states in both the North and South.

Is such Soviet-Western cooperation possible? Is it desirable?

To begin with the question of possibility: Why would the Soviet Union cooperate with the United States and the West in countering attempts to achieve regional hegemony? Certain efforts to achieve regional hegemony would hurt Soviet interests as much or more than they would hurt U.S. interests, especially in areas near the Soviet borders. Particularly at a time when Soviet power is declining, Moscow has no interest in seeing Chinese power grow too strong. Soviet interests would suffer if China became so powerful in Southeast Asia that Beijing was able to pressure Hanoi into refusing Moscow's continued access to naval facilities in Vietnam. This would result in reduced Soviet ability to secure its vital sea line of communication between the western Soviet Union and Vladivostok and perhaps encourage China to press its substantial territorial claims against the Soviet Union. For fear of similar consequences, Moscow would not want India or any other power to constrain Soviet naval access to the Indian Ocean. Nor would Moscow want to see a regional hegemon emerge in the Middle East that could undermine Soviet control of its own increasingly fractious Moslem republics. The Soviets, then, may have considerable incentive to oppose attempts to achieve hegemony in the regions near their borders.

Yet, even if Moscow were willing to cooperate with the West, would this be desirable? The danger U.S. conservatives point out is that the Soviet Union may be able to expand its own power to the West's disadvantage under the guise of cooperating with the West in countering regional hegemons. This is clearly a danger, and the West must guard against it. The United States and its Western allies must make it clear to the Soviet Union that mutually beneficial cooperation in East-West relations generally will not be possible if the Soviet Union reverts to pursuing its own unilateral advantage in the Third World. Although possible, this is less likely now as a result of voluntary Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe and parts of the Third World, in addition to the steps taken toward democratization inside the Soviet Union. There is far greater risk to the West in insufficiently countering the rising hegemonic ambitions of regional powers through overzealously guarding against the declining threat of Soviet expansionism.

Although Soviet cooperation with the West in countering expansionism by regional powers may be both possible and desirable, it is still doubtful that Washington will convince Moscow to undertake such cooperation so long as the United States pursues the Reagan Doctrine. U.S. interests would hardly be served if the Soviets decided Washington was deliberately attempting to deprive their country of its superpower status and so retaliated by increasing their aid to expansionist states such as Iraq, Libya, and Cuba. Western security will not be advanced if Washington's zeal to punish Moscow for its now exhausted and abandoned expansionism distracts both Washington and Moscow from countering new, vigorous expansionisms that, if unchecked, could threaten both.

Conclusion

As the effort to counter Saddam Hussein's aggression has demonstrated, the United States cannot undertake the task of halting regional expansionism alone. Cooperation with other states in the region, regional organizations, other Western states, and even the Soviet Union as well as others is required. Preventing or countering regional expansionism successfully in the future will depend on U.S. ability to maximize the number of other states participating in a united front to oppose it. Achieving this goal will depend on minimizing differences with those states with which Washington may have serious disagreements, but which are not actively pursuing expansionism either.

In addition, U.S. intelligence must be alert to the need to judge whether an ally in opposing one state's hegemonism is itself becoming a threat to the balance of power in a given region. U.S. diplomacy must also be flexible enough to promote new united fronts against new aggressors that might arise. The conquest of Kuwait should serve as an object lesson as to what can happen when potential aggression is not identified soon enough or actions to counter it are

insufficient. Finally, care must be taken to ensure that actions to counter aggression by one state do not result in a situation that allows another state to pursue expansionism more easily and effectively.

Instead of a new age of peace in the Third World, the post-cold war era may well witness the pursuit of expansionist policies by several regional powers. As Iraqi aggression has shown, the hegemonic ambitions of even relatively small states can have extremely serious repercussions throughout the world as well as in a particular region. No one regional power's expansionism poses the same worldwide threat as Soviet expansionism did in the past. But because regional hegemonism does pose serious threats to U.S. security interest, and because there are numerous potential hegemonies in the developing world, the task of deterring and countering regional expansionism will require a more flexible and sophisticated U.S. foreign policy in the post-cold war era than did countering Soviet expansionism in the past.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

Copyright 1991 The Center for Strategic and International Studies
and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology