

Director of Central Intelligence

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National Intelligence Estimate

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
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The USSR and the Third World

Key Judgments

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NIE 11-10/2-84
19 September 1984

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NIE 11-10/2-84

THE USSR AND
THE THIRD WORLD

Information available as of 13 September 1984
was used in the preparation of this Estimate,
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THIS ESTIMATE IS ISSUED BY THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE.

THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD CONCURS.

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the Estimate:

The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence organization of the Department of State.

Also Participating:

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army
The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy
The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force
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SCOPE NOTE

Despite the diversity—political, economic, cultural, and racial—of the Third World, the USSR since the time of Lenin has viewed it as a whole and as a weak link of the West and has fashioned policies to gain influence there. These policies have undergone some changes reflecting Soviet adjustment to changed circumstances in the Third World and Soviet capabilities for exploiting new opportunities. This National Intelligence Estimate examines Soviet policies toward the Third World in the last 10 years and assesses the outlook for the remainder of the 1980s.

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KEY JUDGMENTS

The Third World will continue to be the most volatile arena of US-Soviet political struggle in the coming years. Its inherent instability will continue to present the USSR with tempting targets to expand Soviet influence at Western expense. We believe that Moscow, despite an array of obstacles and constraints, will seek as vigorously as it has in the recent past to press its decades-old strategy of Third World penetration.

Moscow's efforts in the Third World began in earnest in the 1950s. Although the USSR in some instances failed conspicuously, as for example in Indonesia, Ghana, Sudan, and Egypt, Soviet influence and presence in the Third World have expanded considerably. This overall Soviet advance has bolstered the USSR's claim to be a global power, and has created new threats to US and Western interests. Now the Soviets have:

- Access to distant air and naval facilities in some eight countries.
- Military assistance programs in some 34 additional Third World countries.
- Treaties of friendship and cooperation with 10 Third World associates.
- An increased capability to mount airlift and sealift to distant places.
- New pro-Soviet regimes in southern Africa, Central America, and South and Southeast Asia.
- Substantial means for undercutting US interests in the Third World by encouraging and supporting opposition groups, subversion, and insurrection.

These Soviet gains were facilitated by the emergence of exploitable opportunities, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and Central America, by inhibitions of US policy in the immediate post-Vietnam period, by the USSR's growing military capabilities, and by a more subtle blending of tactics.

Over the years, Moscow has refined and improved such techniques and instruments of policy as:

- A willingness to deal with a wide ideological range of governments and opposition groups.

- The exploitation of residual Third World anticolonialism and anti-US sentiments in particular areas.
- The training and education of increasing numbers of Third World students, military personnel, and political cadres.
- Friendship treaties to symbolize and dramatize the Soviet presence in the Third World.
- An increase of arms sales to the Third World.
- The use of active measures.¹
- The use of naval and airlift capabilities to “show the flag” and, in the absence of major opposition, to project limited power into the Third World.

Since the mid-1970s the USSR has also given special attention to other techniques:

- The sale of more sophisticated weapon systems to favored clients.
- The extensive employment of intermediaries to train intelligence services, to provide technical aid, and (in the case of the Cubans) to deploy combat troops in defense of certain Third World regimes.
- Perhaps most important, more emphasis on the training of intelligence and security services and the provision of Praetorian guards to bolster client regimes and institutionalize Soviet influence, in the hope of preventing a repetition of earlier setbacks.

For the future, the primary *Soviet objectives in the Third World* will continue to be:

- *To obtain political support from Third World entities against the United States and the West or at least to weaken their ties to the West.*
- *To promote the creation of Marxist regimes closely allied with the USSR, and to protect those regimes, especially from internal opposition.*
- *To gain, or deny to the West, access to naval and air facilities that would be useful in promoting Moscow's foreign policy goals and that could be used in some crisis or wartime situation.*

¹ The Soviet term *active measures* is used to distinguish influence operations from espionage and counterintelligence. Soviet active measures involve activities by virtually every element of the Soviet party and state structure and supplement traditional diplomacy. They include manipulation of the media, written or oral disinformation, use of foreign Communist parties and fronts, clandestine radio, economic activities, military operations, and other political influence operations.

- *To divert and distract the United States* by sponsoring or supporting challenges in the world—some major, some minor.
- *To establish commercial relations*, so as to acquire hard currency and cheap raw materials, and pave the way for closer political ties.
- *To prevent China from enhancing its role in the Third World.*
- *Over the longer term, to enhance Soviet access to regions rich in strategic raw materials*, and to create the potential to hinder Western access.

In pursuing these objectives, the Soviets have continued to differentiate among Third World regions according to their strategic value:

- *The Middle East and Southwest Asia region has always been and remains by far the USSR's most important Third World target* primarily because of its proximity to the USSR and its centrality to the larger East-West struggle. We expect, therefore, to see Moscow place great emphasis in the years ahead on broadening its influence with Arab states and exploiting any opening for penetration of Iran.
- *In South Asia* the Soviets have the ability to bring military force to bear. Their occupation of Afghanistan has put Soviet forces on the border with Pakistan for the first time, and increased their ability to threaten Iran. But *armed resistance by Afghan rebels has obliged the USSR to concentrate on preserving the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. The Soviets are also maintaining their close relations with India*, and are trying to induce that country to bring pressure against Pakistan in order to undermine Islamabad's support of the Afghan resistance.
- *Southeast Asia is important to Moscow because of its potential for containing China.*
- *Africa and Latin America are of less direct strategic importance to Moscow, but are useful sites of influence for diverting US resources and fortifying an image of expanding Soviet power. Central America is particularly useful in this context.*

In pursuit of these objectives, *Soviet strategy will in particular stress:*

- *Support and control of radical regimes.* Both directly and through intermediaries the Soviets will want to make Marxist revolutions irreversible in those countries—Ethiopia, Angola,

Mozambique, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua—that are currently threatened by insurgents.

- *Extensive use of intermediaries*, especially East Europeans and Cubans. For their own reasons the Cubans are likely to continue to provide combat troops to prop up regimes like those in Angola and Ethiopia, and to be on the cutting edge of support to revolutionary regimes in Central America. Moscow's other associates will continue to furnish the USSR valuable services on occasion in the form of base rights, support of insurrection, and the applying of military, political, and subversive pressures.
- *Supply of sophisticated weaponry to certain Third World states*, such as conventionally armed short-range ballistic missiles, more advanced fighter aircraft, and modern naval platforms and systems, which might alter, but not necessarily upset, local or regional balances of power, and will probably require reassurance by the United States and matching support to its own regional friends.
- *Military-political use of the USSR's expanding military power*. Soviet military capabilities in distant areas of the Third World have improved, but remain constrained by certain limitations and deficiencies of equipment, organization, and force structure. These deficiencies are likely to limit major Soviet advances into distant areas within the time frame of this Estimate. Nonetheless, the Soviets are working to overcome these deficiencies. New systems likely to come into the inventory in the early 1990s will widen the range of Soviet options in distant areas and will complicate US policy in the Third World.
- *Soviet refusal to curb Third World activities in the interest of better relations with the United States*. Although the Soviets realize that their aggressive actions have carried some costs and have affected the overall approach of the West toward the Soviet Union, we do not expect the threat of political or economic sanctions will prevent the Soviets from exploiting a major opportunity to penetrate a key area such as Iran or the Arabian Peninsula.

Constraints and vulnerabilities the USSR will face in the Third World will influence its strategy and prospects to a greater extent than during the late 1970s. Moscow's successes in the Third World have also created vulnerabilities that may lead to Soviet setbacks. To an important degree the USSR's successes in the last decade were due to

special circumstances. *In future Third World efforts the Soviets will confront an array of obstacles, including:*

- *The renewed US effort to oppose further Soviet and pro-Soviet advances in the Third World; and the inability of the USSR to match the much greater power projection capabilities of the United States.*
- *The new imperial problems created by the USSR's successes in the 1970s. There is now much more of an investment to protect. The Soviets are involved in the defense of certain pro-Soviet regimes—Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua—all of which are confronting varying degrees of active insurgency.*
- *An almost certain rise of economic distress in many parts of the Third World, and an unwillingness on the part of the USSR to furnish needed assistance, investment funds, and markets for Third World exports. It is possible that one or more Third World countries may turn to the USSR for financial aid and may even repudiate debts to Western creditors. Most Third World governments, however, will almost certainly consider that their economic expectations can be best met if they cooperate with the international lending agencies (from which the Soviets are frozen out), and will look to the West for economic succor.*
- *Growing economic difficulties within the USSR, complicating Soviet efforts to bear the sharply rising burden of supporting Cuba, Vietnam, and other costly associates in the Third World (and Eastern Europe). This type of constraint will probably not be great enough in itself, however, to deter the Soviets from taking on new clients if particularly promising opportunities arise.*
- *A widespread—indeed growing—desire among Third World leaders not to permit Soviet or pro-Soviet elements to gain influence over their countries' destinies: a desire to use the USSR without becoming fatally caught in its embrace. This will apply as well for the USSR's own clients. These entities are more than Soviet agents; they have their own policy aims, some of which will on occasion conflict with Soviet aims.*

The Soviets, nevertheless, still view the Third World as the Achilles' heel of the West, and will persevere in their efforts to enhance their power and influence there. Although the special circumstances of the 1970s are not necessarily repeatable, the instability and turmoil likely to prevail in much of the Third World in the late 1980s

will assure the Soviets abundant opportunities to make advances. The Soviets will continue to give top priority to efforts to gain influence in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. Soviet willingness to probe for openings and advantages in an area of such high sensitivity to both the USSR and the West will inevitably give rise to risks of miscalculation and possible superpower confrontation.

But Soviet prospects for success in the Middle East as well as in the rest of the Third World will depend more than ever on the interplay of a number of new factors, some of which will be beyond the direct control of the Kremlin decisionmakers:

- *The capability of the Soviet Union to deploy forces and provide advanced weapons to countries in distant areas will continue to grow. But acquisition of modern military technology gives relatively weak countries the ability to challenge limited deployments of modern naval and air power.*
- *Another variable is the capability of the USSR to cope with low-intensity warfare of the type now besetting a number of Soviet client states. It is by no means certain that all pro-Soviet regimes can maintain power in their own countries. If a Soviet client regime were to be overthrown by anti-Soviet insurgents, or reached a compromise with the internal opposition by ousting the Soviets, the consequences for Soviet prestige in the Third World would be adverse, but hard to assess at this stage.*
- *Turbulence in the Third World will not be easily controlled and may precipitate events that neither superpower would find desirable. It is even conceivable that the United States and the USSR will find themselves taking parallel actions to prevent escalation of some conflicts, especially in volatile areas and situations—such as the Koreas, or the Iran-Iraq or Lebanon-Syria-Israel arenas. In the main, however, the Soviets will see regional troubles as presenting opportunities to advance Soviet power.*

There is a possibility that, facing a variety of obstacles, particularly the intractability of the Third World to great-power dictates or more vigorous US political and military actions to combat their influence, the Soviets might deliberately restrain their actions in some low-priority area to buy time for later opportunities, or in deference to larger East-West concerns. However, they would be very unlikely to see this as a permanent retrenchment. They would in no case accept explicit limitations on their claimed prerogative to expand their power in the Third World.

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In sum, we believe the Soviets will continue to see their actions in the Third World primarily as an essential element of East-West rivalry. The Soviet approach will oblige the West to address the challenge of Soviet power and more sophisticated tactics, but this should not obscure the social and economic problems that pave the way for Soviet penetration. This means that the key external variables determining Soviet Third World prospects will be the stability or lack of it in Third World societies; the economic health of the United States, Europe, and Japan; and the durability of US internationalist foreign policy, military strength, and national will to commit considerable power and resources to the Third World arena.

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