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Edited by Mark N. Katz

Excerpt

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Introduction

MARK N. KATZ

The United States and the West as a whole have long been concerned that the Soviet Union poses a threat to their security through its enormous nuclear capability, conventional military strength, and ability to promote Marxist-Leninist revolution in other countries. This third concern, in fact, predates the buildup of Soviet conventional forces during World War II and the Soviet attainment of nuclear parity with the United States in the early 1970s.

In seeking to increase the number of pro-Soviet Marxist-Leninist states, the Soviets have never employed nuclear forces and have only rarely used their conventional forces. In the past, however, they have shown a willingness to use their conventional forces to keep a Marxist-Leninist regime both in power and pro-Soviet, as in Hungary in 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989. Although intervention has been infrequent, the Soviets have supported revolutionaries in a host of other countries virtually since the inception of the Soviet state. Except in Mongolia and most of Eastern Europe, Soviet support to revolutionaries has been the primary means by which the number of Marxist-Leninist states has grown.

The list of Marxist-Leninist regimes that have come to power via revolution is a long one. Revolution brought such regimes to power first in Russia in 1917; in Yugoslavia, Albania, China, and North Vietnam in the 1940s; in Cuba in the 1950s; in South Yemen in the 1960s; and in South Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua in the 1970s. Marxist revolutionaries did not succeed in coming to power anywhere in the 1980s, but they waged guerrilla warfare throughout the decade in the Philippines

and El Salvador; their efforts in these countries will probably continue well into the 1990s. Other countries may yet experience Marxist revolution.

Nevertheless, revolution has not always benefited Soviet interests or damaged Western ones. Several attempts at Marxist revolution have failed, even though fighting went on for several years in some cases. Other revolutions have succeeded but have not resulted in Marxist or significantly pro-Soviet regimes. Pro-Soviet Marxist-Leninist regimes came to power in other countries (Yugoslavia, China, Albania) that later broke away from Soviet influence. Finally, several of the Marxist regimes that came to power in the 1970s have been unable to consolidate their power fully and have required varying degrees of support from the established socialist states such as the USSR, Cuba, and Vietnam to prevent their internal opponents from overthrowing them.

Since he came to power in the mid-1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev has indicated that he wants to reduce the resource drain on the USSR and its allies in defending these weak Marxist-Leninist regimes. Nevertheless, Marxist revolution in the third world has been a persistent phenomenon of the twentieth century, and it could remain so into the twenty-first. It is important to understand the past relationship between the USSR and Marxist revolution in order to understand how this relationship might evolve in the future.

On 25–26 September 1986, the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars held a conference to explore the relations between the USSR and Marxist revolutionaries in the third world when these revolutionaries were attempting to come to power and later in those cases where they have succeeded in doing so. Much has changed since that conference was held. This volume contains four of the papers from that conference, all of which have had to be revised several times.

In Chapter 1, tracing the history of Soviet support to Marxist revolution in the third world since the Bolsheviks came to power, S. Neil MacFarlane points out repeatedly that the Soviets usually had only a small role in creating revolutionary situations that eventually resulted in the coming to power of Marxist regimes. He emphasizes that in almost all cases the Marxist revolutions stemmed primarily from problems in the countries where the revolutions have taken place—problems that the existing government was unable or unwilling to solve. In some cases, revolutionary groups approached the United States and other Western

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nations for support but were rebuffed and, therefore, sought assistance from the Soviet Union.

MacFarlane further argues that even when revolutionary groups have turned to Moscow, they have often received little support—sometimes none—from the USSR. Local guerrilla forces have usually assumed the burden of fighting the Western colonial power or pro-Western regime. The Soviets learned from the unsuccessful results of their advice to the Chinese Communists to launch a rebellion in the 1920s that revolutions cannot be successfully directed from abroad. The Soviets also learned that even strong support for a weak Marxist group cannot enable it to succeed against a popularly supported government or a non-Marxist revolutionary group. Having learned that it was counterproductive to hurry along a revolution prematurely, the Soviets in the 1950s and 1960s used to wait patiently while a revolutionary situation developed and a Marxist opposition group had a chance to develop before strongly supporting it.

During the 1970s, however, the Soviets did step up their military assistance to revolutionary groups and regimes. MacFarlane argues that several factors made this period unusual. First, a large number of revolutionary opportunities were available in the third world for the Soviet Union to exploit at that time. In addition, U.S. unwillingness to become militarily involved in the third world after the experience of Vietnam meant that the Soviets faced fewer constraints on their involvement in third-world countries than previously. Furthermore, in the 1970s the Soviets were optimistic that Marxist regimes in the third world could become reliable and stable Soviet allies. None of these factors that encouraged the Soviets actively to support revolution in the 1970s, however, was still present as we entered the 1990s.

Although the Soviets have given relatively little military assistance to Marxist revolutionary groups struggling to obtain power, Wayne P. Limberg demonstrates in Chapter 2 that during the 1970s and 1980s Moscow had to give substantial military assistance to supposedly victorious Marxists just to keep them in power. With some notable exceptions, substantial Soviet military assistance to a Marxist revolutionary group only began once it had seized power. The USSR and its allies have shown that they would go to extraordinary lengths to defend existing Marxist-Leninist regimes. Examples include the Soviet-Cuban intervention to defend Marxist Ethiopia when Moscow's erstwhile ally Somalia invaded the Ogaden, Soviet support for Ethiopian efforts to defeat Marxist guerrillas

in Eritrea and other provinces, Soviet backing of the 1978 Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia and the counterinsurgency effort Hanoi conducted there for more than a decade, direct Soviet intervention in Afghanistan to prevent a Marxist regime from being overthrown, and Soviet support of a large Cuban military presence to defend the Marxist regime in Angola from Western-backed guerrillas. Gorbachev dramatically changed this pattern by withdrawing Soviet troops from Afghanistan and by encouraging the withdrawal of the Cubans from Angola and of the Vietnamese from Cambodia. Nevertheless, Soviet arms transfers to beleaguered Marxist regimes remain large under Gorbachev.

In my own chapter on Gorbachev and revolution, I note that Gorbachev has drastically reduced Soviet support for Marxist revolution, for several reasons. Unlike Brezhnev, Gorbachev is trying to implement an ambitious domestic reform plan, which requires détente with the United States. Gorbachev has openly acknowledged that this détente cannot be preserved if the USSR aggressively supports revolution in the third world. In addition, unlike the 1970s, the 1980s offered Moscow few revolutionary opportunities in the third world. Gorbachev appears to have concluded that this situation may not simply be a temporary phenomenon, but that the prospects for revolution are likely to remain poor for the indefinite future, since unlike capitalism, the socialist model of development has proved a failure in the third world. Finally, Gorbachev has undertaken a diplomatic campaign to improve Soviet relations with the important non-Marxist states of the third world; continued Soviet aid to revolution would hurt this effort.

At this time, Gorbachev's domestic aims, his foreign-policy goals vis-à-vis both the West and the third world, and conditions in the third world itself all militate against active Soviet support for Marxist revolution. How long all these conditions will continue, however, is unclear.

In the concluding chapter, William E. Griffith examines Gorbachev's foreign policy toward existing Marxist revolutionary regimes in the third world. He observes that Gorbachev appears to apply a strict cost-benefit analysis in deciding on the amount of external support that should go to these regimes. The Soviet decision to withdraw from Afghanistan was probably made on the basis that the mujahedin could not be defeated. Moscow's encouragement of Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia and of Cuba to withdraw from Angola appears to have been made on a similar basis. But, Griffith notes, the military withdrawal by the USSR and its allies from Afghanistan, Cambodia, and Angola does not signal

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a Soviet abandonment of the Marxist third world generally. Strong Soviet support has continued not only to Moscow's long-standing allies Vietnam and Cuba but also to Afghanistan and Angola. Gorbachev has shown no sign of ending Soviet aid to those third-world Marxist regimes that are not in imminent danger of being overthrown.

The relationship between the USSR and Marxist revolutions in the third world has varied with the circumstances of the countries in which the revolutions have occurred and with larger Soviet foreign-policy considerations both regional and worldwide. For the United States to formulate intelligent, effective policy regarding this phenomenon, American citizens generally and American foreign policy-makers particularly must understand the complexity of the relationship between the USSR and Marxist revolutions. Not everyone will agree with the analyses presented and the conclusions reached by the authors of this volume. Indeed, the authors themselves do not share a common perspective. We hope, however, that we have made a contribution to the understanding of this complex matter.

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Successes and failures in Soviet policy toward Marxist revolutions in the third world, 1917–1985

S. NEIL MACFARLANE

SOVIET REVOLUTIONARY SUPPORT IN PERSPECTIVE

In the mid- and late 1970s, the number of regimes in the third world espousing Marxism-Leninism increased rapidly. Many of these regimes (the most prominent exception being Pol Pot's in Kampuchea) enjoyed cordial ties with the USSR and its socialist allies. In some cases they had benefited considerably from Soviet and Eastern bloc support in the struggle for power. They were generally ill-disposed toward the United States.¹

Americans tended to view these events in an undifferentiated fashion, to equate them with Soviet expansionism, and to characterize them as Soviet successes. By implication, they were failures of U.S. policy brought about by the USSR. Taken as a whole, these events suggested that the United States was losing the competition with the USSR in the third world. This situation was particularly galling because the Soviets appeared to be taking advantage of the soporific effect of détente in order to “end run” the United States on the periphery. These events and this American perception of them contributed to the worsening of U.S.-Soviet

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¹For accounts of this phenomenon, see Donald Zagoria, “Into the Breach: New Soviet Alliance in the Third World,” *Foreign Affairs* (Spring 1979): 733–43; Stephen Hosmer and Thomas Wolfe, *Soviet Policy and Practice towards Third World Conflicts* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1983); Peter Wiles, *The New Communist Third World* (London: Croom Helm, 1982).

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relations in the late 1970s and early 1980s. To judge from U.S. policy vis-à-vis Nicaragua and the rest of Central America, Marxist revolution in the third world and its relationship to Soviet policy continue to be a significant preoccupation of American decision makers.

Not surprisingly, many scholars have questioned whether Soviet policy should be seen in such holistic terms, whether the revolutionary events are interrelated or discrete, whether they are endogenously or externally determined, whether they are necessarily inimical to American interests, and even whether they are in any meaningful sense “Marxist” at all.

Although the renewed debate over Marxism and Soviet policy in the third world is largely a product of events of the late 1970s, the Soviet involvement in the revolutionary process in Asia, Africa, and Latin America dates back to the first days of Soviet power. As a result, a historical perspective on the subject may help shed light on the issues just raised.

DEFINITIONAL PROBLEMS

Many of the disagreements in the literature are results of a failure to define the terms of the debate. First, what is a Marxist revolution? Should anyone who claims to be a Marxist or to be making a Marxist revolution be considered *bona fide*? Accepting such a proposition seems unwise. Revolutionary forces in the third world have an interest in making such claims, whether or not these reflect true commitments, in that they may facilitate access to assistance from the USSR and its friends. Indeed, Soviet commentators have displayed reluctance to recognize in open writings the socialist character of many of what we consider to be Marxist revolutions in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Some Western analysts, generally operating from a regional perspective, have gone further to maintain that the socialist rhetoric of third-world radicals has no significance whatsoever.² Such a position seems extreme. Delayed implementation of Marxist programs should not necessarily be taken as evidence of the insincerity of the people promoting such programs. Delays in the transition to socialism may reflect the constraints under which a regime must operate, rather than its disingenuousness.³ Moreover, many self-styled Marxist or socialist regimes do

²See, for example, Christopher Clapham, “The Context of African Political Thought,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 8, no. 1 (1970).

³On this point, see Crawford Young, *Ideology and Development in Africa* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982), 10.

indeed attempt to implement programs that would normally be associated with Marxism, often at considerable political and economic cost: democratic centralism within a vanguard party; a single-party state and the use of party-dominated mass organizations to penetrate and politicize society; public ownership of the commanding heights of the economy; collective or cooperative property relations in agriculture; a general aversion to private-sector economic activity; and, in foreign policy, anti-imperialism and expressions of solidarity with similarly inclined movements and regimes in other countries. In this sense, there is an identifiable group of Marxist revolutions and Marxist regimes in the third world.

That said, the assumption apparently inherent in much discussion of Marxist revolution in the third world—that Marxism is a monolithic body of doctrine shared by third-world radicals and the Soviet bloc and spread by Soviet propaganda and training—is questionable. Marxism, as it is interpreted and implemented in the third world, varies greatly over time and space and frequently diverges from the Soviet brand. To cite two from a legion of possible examples, Mao's retreat to rural areas and his reliance on the peasantry in the establishment of Communist-dominated base areas were conspicuous departures from Soviet and traditional Marxist thought. They earned him repeated Soviet-inspired condemnation by the Communist International (Comintern) and his colleagues in the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).⁴ Ché Guevara and Régis Debray, in their elaboration of the concept of the guerrilla *foco*,⁵ were again amply criticized by many Soviet commentators for departing from the principle that the military wing of the revolution should be subordinate to the party and that the socialist revolution, far from shunning the city as these writers seemed to advocate, should base itself on the urban working class. Debray responded by noting that the prevailing Soviet concept of “national democracy,” along with the traditional Marxist-Leninist reliance on the urban working class, was “outworn” and “discredited.”⁶

In such instances, theoretical differences stimulate conflict between a Marxist movement and the USSR. The ideological affinity between the USSR and Marxist movements in the third world is often accompanied,

⁴See Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 132–36, 139–43.

⁵Régis Debray, “Castroism,” in Robin Blackburn, ed., *Strategy for Revolution* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), 33; and Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution?* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), 67–91, 114–15.

⁶Debray, *Revolution*, 32–37.

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if not counterbalanced, by dissonance resulting from a tendency to interpret and adapt the theory differently in different circumstances. These divergences may be all the more important because they are in part the product of differences of interest between the USSR and its third-world Marxist allies.

This discussion is closely related to a further point. The generic category of Marxist revolution in the third world is misleading in that it suggests that only one ideological influence is operating. Yet nationalism is often at least as significant as Marxism in its influence on the practice, and to some extent on the theory, of Marxist movements in the third world.

Turning to the question of Soviet assistance to Marxist movements in the third world, some delineation of what is meant by Soviet *support* for Marxist revolution is useful. Since the October Revolution of 1917, the Soviet regime has steadily advocated national liberation and social revolution throughout the third world. In this sense, its support has been universal and permanent. But Soviet support for revolution in the third world is meaningful only when translated into concrete political and military action.

Soviet support for such forces is one element among many in a multifaceted foreign policy, and not necessarily the most important. The promotion of revolution elsewhere has seldom been the primary consideration for the makers of Soviet foreign policy. Instead, the Soviets have tended to focus on the consolidation and maintenance of power internally and the security of the state externally. Their principal concerns have been particular rather than universal. The decision to support, to ignore, or to oppose such movements is closely related to the role that the struggle in question and third-world revolution in general play in the larger context of Soviet foreign policy and the Soviet leaders' calculation of their particular interest at a specific moment.

A further definitional problem concerns how to measure Soviet "success" or "failure" in the support of Marxist revolution. For purposes of this discussion, when a movement supported by the USSR wins state power, its victory is considered a success of Soviet policy. There are, however, a number of potential problems with this approach.

Although the basic objective animating Soviet policy is often assumed to be the desire to give Marxist movements state power, this is only one of a number of possible objectives. Others might be to destabilize third-world states, to induce Soviet adversaries to expend resources in an effort

to contain the revolutionary process, to induce third-world regimes to behave in a manner consistent with Soviet interests, or to polish the credentials of the USSR as a revolutionary actor in third-world politics. Whether a revolutionary movement attains power may or may not be relevant to judging Soviet success with regard to these other ends.

Even if we accept the proposition that the principal Soviet objective in involvement with Marxist revolutionary movements in the third world is the proliferation of Communist regimes, it remains questionable whether the outcome of the struggle is in itself an adequate measure of the success of Soviet policy. Such events should not be viewed in isolation but should be set in the context of more general Soviet foreign-policy objectives, and of the costs and benefits from support of revolution in relations with third parties. The events might also be weighed against the price paid for installing and maintaining a relationship with the regime in question. A determination of success or failure can also be influenced by the degree to which a regime installed by a Soviet-supported revolution subsequently confers anticipated benefits on the USSR. In short, broadening the criteria by which success or failure is measured may lead to fundamentally different judgments about Soviet support for third-world Marxist revolution.

THE HISTORY OF SOVIET POLICY IN THE THIRD WORLD

The history of Soviet policy in the third world is largely that of efforts to balance imperatives of doctrinal purity on issues such as the united front, nationalism, and national forms of socialism against political realities in the third world that have failed to conform to Soviet ideology; to balance revolutionary legitimacy against the practical pursuit of ties with Western states; and to balance proletarian internationalism against the dictates of the domestic transition to socialism— all this in the context of an effort to expand Soviet influence and undermine the influence of Western states.

The early period: 1917–1923. The initial phases of Soviet policy in the third world were long on rhetoric and modest in practice. Consistent with Lenin's theses on the national and colonial question,⁷ Soviet poli-

⁷V. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Question" (1920), *Collected Works* 31:146–49; and "Report of the Commission on the National and Colonial Question," *Collected Works* 31:240–42.