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THE USSR, CUBA, AND THE CRISIS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

The USSR, Cuba, and the Crisis in Central America

With the 1979 Sandinista victory in Nicaragua and the ongoing civil war in El Salvador, the analysis of Soviet and Cuban involvement in the Caribbean has taken on a new urgency. This is especially true against the background of the recent vigorous Soviet and Cuban activity in the Third World in general, most notably in Africa and Afghanistan. The following paper examines Soviet-Cuban strategy, tactics, and interests in the Caribbean. It addresses the question of why the Soviets and Cubans became involved in Central America, their ties with the Central American communist parties and guerrillas, and how Central America fits into the Soviets' overall global strategy.

The paper begins by examining historical aspects of Soviet and Cuban relationships with Central America, taking into consideration the internal conditions of the countries of this region. It then relates these observations to more recent events in Central America. While the joining of Cuba to the Soviet camp is seen as a major crack in the Monroe Doctrine, the humiliation suffered by the USSR in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis temporarily dampened Soviet enthusiasm for promoting revolution in Central America. On the other hand, the U.S. assurance that it would not attack Cuba allowed the latter to remain a viable partner of the Soviets in the Third World.

Soviet involvement in the Caribbean is examined in terms of ideological, political, security, and economic interests. Likewise, Cuba's involvement in the region is considered in terms of corresponding interests of her own, for while Cuba's activities are by no means independent of the USSR's, nor are they those of a completely subservient proxy. Thus, the paper examines the degree of Cuba's dependence on the Soviet Union as well as the Soviet Union's reliance on Cuba in supporting Soviet policies in the Third World. It also considers the differing Cuban and Soviet approaches at various times in promoting their various interests in the Caribbean basin.

In addition, the paper considers the strategic value of the Caribbean for the United States. Particular attention is given to the revolution in Nicaragua and, in light of this event, the renewed vigor of the Soviets and Cubans in the promotion of revolution in Central America. Also considered is the recent aggressive posture of the hitherto mild pro-Soviet Communist party in neighboring El Salvador and the Soviet- and Cuban-sponsored changes in its tactics.

The paper concludes that Central America's volatility is governed first and foremost by socioeconomic conditions there, with Cuban/Soviet-backed activity in the region seen to a large degree as the skillful exploitation of opportunity, and not just the result of a preconceived strategy. Finally, the author remarks on the role which the United States plays in influencing Soviet policy in the Caribbean basin.

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> The Russians are the whip of reform. But these impatient and generous men, darkened as they are by anger, are not the ones who are going to lay the foundation for the new world! They are the spur, and they come in time as the voice of man's conscience. But the steel that makes a good spur will not do for the builder's hammer.
>
> José Martí (1883)

Because of the victory of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in July 1979 and the ongoing civil war in El Salvador, both supported in varying degrees by the Cubans and Soviets, Soviet and Cuban strategy and tactics in Central America are being analyzed more seriously than ever before. The revolution in Nicaragua, according to some observers, is transforming that country into a "second Cuba." Meanwhile the Reagan administration has presented an array of evidence about cautious yet active Soviet support (armaments and military instruction) relayed by the Cubans via Nicaragua to left-leaning guerrillas in El Salvador.

Aside from their importance within a specific regional context, these latest developments shed new light on the even more crucial issue of Soviet-Cuban strategy in the Third World in general.[1] The Soviet-backed and Cuban-orchestrated support to left-leaning allies in Central America follows a decade of limited Soviet-Cuban military and security assistance to other Third World countries--Mozambique, Guinea, and Zambia in Africa, and Syria and South Yemen in the Middle East--and comes on the heels of two Soviet-Cuban military interventions on behalf of revolutionary forces in Angola (1975-76) and Ethiopia (1977-78). These activities--along with Soviet support of the 1978 intervention on behalf of "true revolutionaries" in Kampuchea (Cambodia) conducted by the North Vietnamese (the "Cubans of the Orient" as the Chinese call them), and the Soviets' own military intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 on behalf of the Parcham faction of the Afghan Communist Party--are perceived by U.S. policymakers as fitting into an overall Soviet plan.

Secretary of State Alexander Haig views developments in Central America in particular as being part of "a very clearly delineated Soviet-Cuban strategy," whose clear objective is "to create Marxist-Leninism in Central America--Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras."[2] In Haig's view, the Soviet-sponsored interventions in Central America are "an extension of the 'Brezhnev doctrine' [once only applied to Eastern Europe] outside the area of Soviet hegemony." This school of thought was echoed by

President Reagan himself, who explained that "the terrorists aren't just aiming at El Salvador," but "at the whole of Central and possibly later South America, I'm sure, eventually North America."[3] The Reagan administration has apparently decided to counter what it sees as Soviet implementation of the "Brezhnev doctrine" by acting on the principle of the Monroe Doctrine wherein the United States government announced its intention to oppose outside interference in the Americas. Thus the crises in Central America in general and El Salvador in particular have become a crucial test of this administration's determination to challenge Soviet-Cuban designs, whatever they may be, in the western hemisphere and perhaps other areas of the Third World as well.

This analysis will be limited to Cuban and Soviet perceptions and strategies with regard to Central America and the Caribbean region, with emphasis on specific tactics employed in Nicaragua and El Salvador. However, a brief statement must be made about the complex beginnings of the ongoing conflict in the region and the reasons for the revolutionary transformation occurring there. The present crises in Central America cannot be attributed solely to Cuban and Soviet interference. What is occurring in El Salvador and to varying degrees in other Central American countries, particularly the northernmost of these, is the rapid decay of anciens régimes.[4] This process has already been witnessed in other Third World countries such as Ethiopia. The decay of outmoded political and economic structures and social orders is the product of the dynamic interaction of a number of factors internal to the countries themselves. The societies of Central America are polarized by antagonism between a small upper class of patrones and a very poor majority, and in most of the region the middle class remains weak and underdeveloped. Socioeconomic polarization and the specific political culture have contributed significantly to the rise of internal and interregional conflict.

Though internal and regional forces have provided the central impetus for radicalism in the area, several decades of U.S. hegemony and policies ranging from intervention to benign neglect contributed to the development of nationalist reaction. The prevailing feeling of many nationalists and radicals south of the Rio Grande regarding the United States has been similar to the traditional attitude of the Poles and Hungarians regarding the Russians. This view was well articulated by prerevolutionary Mexican president Porfirio Díaz, who once lamented: "Poor Mexico, so far from God, so near the United States." More recently, the crisis has been exacerbated by Cuba, the USSR, and other communist and Third World states who have sought to exploit radical currents and capitalize on the tides of revolution.

In examining the various aspects of Soviet-Cuban strategies and tactics in Central America, the following questions will guide the discussion: How and why did the Soviets and Cubans become involved in Central America? What have been their ties with both the more traditional communist parties as well as with the guerrilla groups of the region? How does Central America fit into the Soviets' overall global strategy? To what degree does Cuba have her own strategy in the region? Are Cuba, the USSR, and their common allies competing with the United States for influence in Nicaragua and El Salvador, as they have done for several years in Africa, particularly Angola and Ethiopia? If so, are they prepared to risk further deterioration

of U.S.-Soviet relations in order to accomplish this? Are the Soviets motivated simply by the desire to cause problems for the United States or by more complex desires? Do Soviet and Cuban commitments in Angola, Ethiopia, and South Yemen, and the Soviet preoccupation with the war in Afghanistan, the crisis in Poland, and the Iran-Iraq war limit their ability to become heavily involved in Nicaragua and El Salvador?

The USSR and Cuba in Central America: An Historical Perspective

Unlike Cuba, which is an integral part of the Caribbean basin (defined here as the area including the Caribbean archipelago and the littoral nations of Central America), Russia has no longstanding cultural, political, or commercial ties with the countries of Central America. It only began to develop such ties in the 1960s. Unlike in Europe and Asia, Soviet interaction in Central and South America has until recently been rather modest. This was due primarily to the area's geographic remoteness and therefore marginal importance to the USSR, and to the traditional hegemony of the United States.

The element of geographic remoteness, however, has been an asset to the Soviet Union in her efforts to gradually become involved in the region since the 1960s. Like the United States in Eastern Europe, the USSR does not have a strong imperial record here. Like the U.S. image in Eastern Europe, the Soviet image in some Central American countries, particularly Mexico, has been a favorable one in the minds of many people. The Bolsheviks, as "enemies of American imperialism," were viewed after the October Revolution of 1917 as natural allies by revolutionary and patriotic circles in Mexico. Despite U.S. intervention in favor of revolutionary forces in 1916, two years later the military boss of a Mexican region said: "I don't know what socialism is but I am a Bolshevik, like all patriotic Mexicans--The Yankees do not like the Bolsheviks. They are our enemies; therefore the Bolsheviks must be our friends and we must be their friends. We are all Bolsheviks."[5]

Although there was sympathy for the Bolshevik revolution and the Soviet regime among revolutionary elements, the Soviets were ostracized for several decades by the ruling elites of Central America and handicapped by the absence of diplomatic relations. With the exception of Mexico, Soviet relations with the countries of the Caribbean basin until the 1960s were limited to relations with their respective Communist parties. In fact, until the Cuban revolution, the USSR had diplomatic relations with very few Latin American countries, namely Mexico, Uruguay, and Argentina. Thus, firsthand Soviet knowledge of the Caribbean basin was limited primarily to Mexico.

Before World War II, Mexico was the principal center for the dissemination of Comintern publications to Spanish-speaking countries in the region. With the help of Mexican Communist Party officials, the Comintern was able to supervise the founding of the Communist Party of Guatemala and assist with the founding of other Communist parties in the region. Unlike in Mexico and Cuba, however, where the Communist parties were legitimate mass parties, the Communist parties of Central America have been illegal, with memberships ranging from several dozen to a few hundred. In Cuba,

with Soviet encouragement, the party even entered into a coalition with the government of Fulgencio Batista during the Popular Front era of the 1930s and again briefly in the 1940s. The Central American parties, on the other hand, with the notable exception of the Communist Party of Costa Rica, have traditionally operated in a conspiratorial or semilegal fashion. Even in Costa Rica, the party is weak and has participated in national politics in only a limited fashion.

Comintern officials have traditionally discounted the prospects for communism in Central and South America, displaying, like Marx and Engels, a certain Eurocentric disdain for Latin peoples and viewing the countries within the framework of a colonial context in which the United States was firmly in command. Until the Cuban revolution, the Communist Party of the USSR (CPSU) had had only sporadic contacts with Latin American Communist parties, through individual party and Comintern officials. Soviet financial subsidies to these parties have been small, although regular.[6]

There have been unsuccessful insurrections in Central America in which local Communist parties were involved. One was the 1932 uprising in El Salvador, which was crushed by government forces. In Guatemala in 1953-54 the nationalistic regime of President Jacobo Arbenz attempted a swing toward radicalism with the backing of the Communist Party of Guatemala, a small but influential party which was in control of the labor movement. Available evidence suggests that the Soviets provided Arbenz's regime with financial and political support and even shipped 2,000 tons of Czech-manufactured weapons to Arbenz and his supporters. Yet this support was marginal and there is little evidence pointing to direct Soviet involvement. The meager level of support was in part determined by the Soviets' then-limited capabilities and by the fact that the United States treated Guatemala as a major issue, thus warding off further Soviet involvement. With covert support from the Central Intelligence Agency, anti-Arbenz forces launched an invasion from Honduras and soon overthrew the regime.[7]

The turning point in Soviet relations with Central America came in 1959-60 after the Cuban revolution. When U.S.-Cuban differences became unbridgeable and the United States withdrew from Cuba, the Soviets, after a period of hesitation, tried to fill the political and economic vacuum thus created. After the Bay of Pigs invasion, Nikita Khrushchev and his colleagues painstakingly built a major alliance with Cuba. Despite ups and downs and even great tension in 1966-67 resulting from disagreements about strategies in the Third World in general and Latin America in particular, the alliance begun at this time has remained solid.

Initially, at least until the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, the Soviets were quite exuberant about the success of the Cuban revolution. It spurred Soviet research in Latin American affairs and in 1961 the Soviet leadership established a new institute for the study of Latin America. For a brief time during this period of euphoria, the Soviets seemed to believe that the Cuban style of revolution could be exported, with their backing, to Central America. Thus in 1959 and 1960 respectively the Communist parties of Nicaragua and El Salvador tried to overthrow their countries' regimes. The Cuban missile crisis, which the Chinese describe as the "Caribbean Munich," reminded the Soviets of the limits

of their power in the area. Khrushchev's decision to remove the Soviet missiles had some repercussions for the USSR in Cuba. In the aftermath, marching militia in Havana chanted "Nikita mariquita, lo que se da no se quita (Nikita, you little braggart--what one gives, one doesn't take away)."[8] Castro naturally was worried at this time about the degree of Soviet commitment to protecting Cuba against the United States. Like many others, he failed to realize something that became clear only in the 1970s. Though humiliated, Khrushchev achieved at least one of his objectives during the missile crisis: while agreeing to remove the missiles from Cuba, he was able to extract a U.S. pledge not to topple the revolutionary Cuban regime. In retrospect, considering the success of joint Soviet-Cuban operations in the Third World in the 1970s, it appears that Nikita Khrushchev and not John Kennedy was the winner in the 1962 confrontation.

The resolution of the Cuban missile crisis had a sobering impact on Soviet perceptions of the potential for revolution in the Caribbean basin. So did U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965, when the motto "never a second Cuba" became the imperative for U.S. policy in Latin America. The failure of Cuban-backed guerrilla revolutionaries in the 1960s in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and elsewhere on the continent (Bolivia, Peru, and Venezuela) further ingrained this Soviet attitude, which Castro did not share, at least not immediately. In the 1960s there were indeed profound differences between the Soviets and Cubans about what strategies to pursue in Latin America. As a result of doctrinal differences, Soviet-Cuban relations were strained in 1966-67 almost to the breaking point. It was not only their pessimistic assessment regarding "revolutionary potential" in the Caribbean basin nor their realistic appraisal of the U.S. response to Soviet-Cuban supported guerrilla revolution which restrained the Soviets; there were other internal and external factors. Because of their preoccupation with their internal power struggle after Khrushchev's dismissal in 1964, the subsequent consolidation of power by Brezhnev, the Vietnam war, and the deepening of the Sino-Soviet dispute, the Soviets in the late 1960s were unwilling and unable to sponsor Castro's call to create "two or three" and even "four or five more Vietnams" for the United States in Latin America. Castro, who was in favor of a "genuine revolutionary road," dragged his feet for a while and criticized the USSR for dealing with capitalist governments in Latin America. He even clashed over the issue with pro-Soviet leaders in some Caribbean-basin parties, such as those of Guatemala and Venezuela, where young, pro-Castroist elements resisted Soviet advice to proceed gradually and with caution.

After the death of "Che" Guevara in 1967, however, when most of the guerrillas were wiped out, the Cubans soon came to realize the need for overcoming their differences and coordinating their policies with those of the Soviets. As Castro saw it, there were no immediate revolutionary opportunities in Latin America in the 1970s, whereas there were in Africa. Thus he grudgingly approved the Soviet policy of employing--in addition to a revolutionary strategy, when feasible--diplomatic, commercial, and cultural channels so as to expand relations with "progressive forces" in Latin America. In the Caribbean basin, until very recently, the Soviets and Cubans have been less successful in dispelling traditional anti-communist hostilities than on the South American continent. Not counting Mexico and Jamaica, the USSR, prior to the revolution in Nicaragua, had only one ambassador in Central America (Costa Rica). In some other

countries of the region, however, the Soviets were able to accredit non-resident ambassadors (Panama and Honduras) and negotiate trade representation (El Salvador).[9] The Soviets were also able to promote better economic cooperation with a friendly Mexico by helping to bring about a new cooperation treaty between Mexico and the COMECON in 1975.

Soviet diplomatic initiatives in Latin America in the 1970s engendered some political payoffs, helping among other things to invalidate the political and economic blockade of Cuba. Subsequently, Cuba was able to normalize relations with many Latin American countries. Cuba exchanged consuls with Costa Rica, established diplomatic relations with Panama, and extended her influence to the Caribbean countries of Jamaica, Guyana, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago.

It is misleading to think, because of these trends, that the USSR and Cuba had given up the notion of supporting revolutionary movements in the region. Although their posture was realistic, it was not one of acquiescence. Neither the Soviets nor the Cubans entirely renounced the efficacy of revolution as a means for overthrowing unfriendly, anticommunist governments. In the mid-1970s, when conditions were simply not ripe for revolution in Latin America, the Soviets and Cubans were busy supporting their allies elsewhere, particularly Africa. This situation changed dramatically with the successful revolution in Nicaragua in 1979, and the upswing in guerrilla warfare in El Salvador in 1980.

The USSR and Central America: A Strategic Perspective

Needless to say, the behavior of the Soviets and Cubans in the Third World is not motivated solely by their respective historical experiences and available opportunities. Both the USSR and Cuba have developed a coherent strategic vision with regard to the Third World. Theirs is an integrated, though flexible, plan of action aimed at achieving specific long-term objectives. What are those objectives, and how does Central America figure in them? As far as Soviet strategy is concerned, one discerns four distinct components which can be verified with Soviet sources: ideology, politics, security, and economics. In terms of ideology, the Soviet objective is to create Marxist-Leninist regimes in the Third World (though in the long run this does not always work to the benefit of the USSR, as was the case with China). While it is misleading to assume that the Soviets support revolutionary political movements in the Third World primarily because of claimed unselfishness and ideological affinity with said movements, ideology cannot be discounted.

The Soviets believe that at least some radical Third World nations will some day embark on a path toward truly socialist development, as Cuba did in the 1970s. Meanwhile, however, because of their experience in the 1960s and 1970s--when revolutionary or radical regimes were overthrown and/or more moderate regimes substantially reduced the Soviet presence and influence in their countries--they feel impelled to exercise caution and prudence in making commitments to the variety of socialist and would-be socialist regimes in developing countries.

Indeed, with the exception of probably only Cuba, the Soviets in the early 1980s hardly view the radical regimes of the Third World as truly Marxist-Leninist in the Soviet understanding of the term. Thus Soviet officials in the Central Committee responsible for dealing with Third World revolutionary regimes refer to them as being "progressive," "anti-imperialist," "revolutionary-democratic," and at most (when referring to Angola and Ethiopia) as having a "socialist orientation" and pursuing "noncapitalist" (but not "socialist") development. Soviet experts on Latin America, such as M. F. Kudachkin who is responsible for the Latin American section of the Central Committee of the CPSU, appreciate the diversity and unevenness of economic and political development in Latin America and recognize that the continent holds a special place in the Third World because of its success in throwing off the Spanish colonial yoke in the 19th century, and because, unlike in Africa and most of Asia, capitalism has reached a high state of development in parts of Latin America--particularly Argentina and Chile, and to a certain degree Mexico.[10] In these countries there also exists a significant working class and in Mexico and Chile (before the anti-Allende coup), large Communist parties. In the Soviet view, the situation in the Caribbean basin is different, not only because of a lower level of capitalist development, but also, as stressed, because of a weak communist movement and more pervasive U.S. hegemony. However, the Marxist inclination of new regimes in such countries as Nicaragua and Grenada cannot but be appreciated and applauded by the Soviets. Because of it they are better able to justify to Soviet domestic constituencies the aid extended to these countries. By the same token, as demonstrated by Jerry Hough, there exists an evolving debate among Soviet experts about the prospects of revolution in Latin America.[11]

The USSR also has political objectives in the Third World. These appear to be primarily the fomentation and furtherance of "progressive" anti-U.S. and anti-Chinese regimes. By exploiting growing anti-U.S. currents, the Soviets hope to win influence at U.S. expense without projecting direct military power. They also try to counter the activity of another major rival, China, particularly in such areas of the Third World as Asia, East Africa, and the Middle East; China's influence in Latin America is minimal. Though some Marxist groups on the continent have identified with Maoism, most of the Communist parties have taken a pro-Soviet position in the Sino-Soviet conflict, identifying Maoism with Trotskyism and adventurism.

Since the Soviets view Central America as being the "strategic rear" of the United States,[12] until recently they have exercised caution in forming policy regarding the region. However, from the Cuban revolution onward they have believed the Monroe Doctrine to be no longer viable in Central America. In 1960, Khrushchev declared that "the Monroe Doctrine has outlived its times." U.S. acceptance of the Cuban revolution was proof that it had died "a natural death."[13] In spite of this new attitude, Soviet strategy in Central America during the last two decades has been refined and subtle. It provides for revolutionary transformation which can use violent methods and/or follow a "peaceful road,"--e.g., a prolonged political process during which anti-U.S. "progressive forces" build national coalitions to challenge U.S. hegemony. As pointed out in the Havana Declaration adopted at the 1975 regional conference of Latin American and Caribbean Communist parties:

> The utilization of all legal possibilities is an indispensable obligation of the anti-imperialist forces. . . . Revolutionaries are not the first to resort to violence. But it is the right and duty of all revolutionary forces to be ready to answer counter-revolutionary violence with revolutionary violence.[14]

The formulation of Soviet strategy in the 1960s was affected significantly by the Soviet-Cuban dialogue and even by Soviet-Cuban disputes. In the 1960s, the Cubans decided to promote revolution when the Organization of American States undertook sanctions against them. They favored and originally even insisted on Soviet-Cuban support of revolutionary guerrilla movements in Latin America, with the exception of such friendly states as Mexico. By adhering to "Che's" and Regis Debray's concept of guerrilla-peasant insurgency (see Debray's Revolution in the Revolution?), Castro's strategy in Central America in the 1960s contradicted and even challenged the Soviet doctrine allowing for diversified roads toward socialism. Yet, as Herbert Dinerstein notes, in the late 1960s the Soviets and Cubans arrived at a kind of compromise strategy by making mutual concessions. Thus the Soviets approved support for guerrilla activities in some Latin American countries with extremely pro-U.S. and anticommunist regimes, while the Cubans gave their blessing to the pursuit of diplomacy with others.[15] Overall, however, the Cubans basically accepted the Soviets' more gradual and realistic "anti-imperialist" strategy.

Thus in the 1970s diplomatic channels were pursued in Panama (where Torrijos' dictatorial yet "progressive" regime was avidly courted by the Cubans and Soviets), in Costa Rica to a certain degree, and even more so in Mexico--both the latter being (in the Soviet view) liberal-democratic regimes. In the Caribbean proper, the Cubans courted the "progressive" Jamaican regime of Michael Manley. Available evidence suggests that the Soviets and Cubans have dissuaded the Communist parties and other leftist groups from trying to overthrow these regimes, encouraging them rather to expand their influence and work toward the greater goal of building "anti-imperialist" coalitions.

The Soviet and Cuban strategy in Central American countries having pro-U.S., anticommunist regimes--e.g., Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras--has been to encourage revolutionary struggle, although not necessarily by fostering terrorism. In the late 1970s, more emphasis was placed on revolutionary struggle than on peaceful coexistence. Yet even at that time, the party's role was designated as one of gradual coalition-building among all revolutionary forces and as the leader of their struggle (inasmuch as possible). In the Soviet view, the "correlation of forces" in the 1970s was shifting on a worldwide scale because of the U.S. defeat in Vietnam. In Central America, this was manifested in a growing wave of radical anti-U.S. sentiment. This and the Soviets' greater military and economic capabilities paved the way for a more mature, assertive globalism in the Third World. From the Soviet standpoint, the 1973 Chilean debacle illustrated that peaceful and revolutionary strategies should not be mutually exclusive. At the same time, however, it seemed to increase Soviet doubts about the feasibility of a "peaceful path" toward socialism in Latin America.[16]

Security concerns are another important component of the Soviets' strategic vision regarding Central America and the Caribbean. Soviet security objectives in the region fit into the Soviets' overall "anti-imperialist" strategy in the Third World. This strategy includes gradually securing access to and maintaining naval and air facilities in the basin so as to better project Soviet influence, while undermining the influence of the West--particularly the United States and her allies. The basin--whose confines have grown out of a geopolitical concept--constitutes a key transit zone for oil and vital raw materials enroute from Guatemala, Venezuela, and the Caribbean islands to the United States, as well as for all seagoing vessels approaching the Panama Canal. In an extreme case, such as during wartime, a substantial Soviet military presence in the basin would endanger logistic support for U.S. allies in Europe and the delivery of oil and other strategic materials to the United States. During such times, Cuba, although highly vulnerable, nevertheless might serve as a forward submarine and aircraft-carrier base. The Soviets recognize the strategic importance of the basin and that it is an area of special security concern for the United States, much like Eastern Europe is for them. As one Soviet writer put it: "In military-strategic terms, it [the Caribbean] is a sort of hinterland on whose stability freedom of U.S. action in other parts of the globe depends."[17] Thus the Soviets remained passive throughout U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965 and the U.S.-supported anti-Allende coup in Chile in 1973. Likewise the United States took no action during the Soviet interventions in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. So far, Soviet military presence in the region is limited by a lack of facilities necessary for permanent deployment. As of the early 1980s, the Soviets do not have sufficient strength in the region to be able to disrupt the flow of oil to the United States, a scenario feared by some analysts. Moreover, they would probably attempt such action only in case of all-out war.

Despite these limitations, the Soviets were able to establish a military presence in Cuba after 1961 which has grown considerably in the last two decades. At present, thanks to Soviet financial and advanced technical assistance, the Soviets are permitted to use modern docking facilities, (potential) submarine facilities in Cienfuegos, air facilities for reconnaissance aircraft, satellite stations, and sophisticated intelligence facilities for monitoring U.S. satellite and microwave conversations and NATO advanced-weapons-testing in the Atlantic. Since 1978, Soviet pilots have been flying MIG-27s on patrol missions in Cuba while Cuban pilots serve in Africa. Meanwhile, Soviet reconnaissance planes (TU-95s) conduct regular missions monitoring U.S. naval activities in the Atlantic. Cuba is also a center for close Soviet-Cuban coordination in gathering intelligence information in the basin itself.

Though proceeding with caution, the Soviets would undoubtedly like to see their military presence in the Caribbean basin expanded. This has been suggested by the increasing number of Soviet submarine visits to Cuba since 1969, as indication of Soviet plans to make permanent use of the facilities at Cienfuegos, which were partly shelved in 1970 because of vociferous U.S. protests. The Soviets are trying to establish other strategic footholds in the area. Thus, in revolutionary Grenada, Soviet equipment and financial assistance from the USSR and Libya have enabled the Cubans to commence building a new international airport capable of

handling all types of jet aircraft, including the Soviet Backfire bomber. While the Cubans work to build a revolutionary army, the Soviets assist in building and promoting a fishing industry on the island. After Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Navy Fleet Admiral Sergei Gorshkov's visit to the island in 1980, there were unconfirmed reports of Soviet intentions to build naval facilities there as well.[18] The Soviets may be seeking similar facilities in Nicaragua.

To the present time, given the Soviets' awareness of the basin's paramount importance to the United States, Soviet naval activities in the area seem to have been designed to establish the legitimacy of a Soviet naval presence with regular visits by warships. There have been 20 such visits to the Caribbean Sea in the last 12 years. During the most recent visit, which occurred in April 1981, the group included a cruiser equipped to carry small nuclear weapons. The Soviets deploy not only warships, however, but also intelligence, fishing, and merchant vessels. The Soviets have also sponsored joint Soviet-Cuban marine cruises for the purpose of conducting fishery and oceanographic research as well as gathering and establishing future channels of information. Soviet naval deployment is designed to help encourage long-term political and economic transformation of the area along the lines of what Gorshkov refers to as "progressive changes" offshore. In this aspect, the security, political, and economic aspects of Soviet strategy in the region are mutually complementary, since Soviet naval visits to the Caribbean are facilitated by the establishment of diplomatic and economic relations. As the Soviets see it, "progressive changes" offshore make the environment more amenable to Soviet interests in the region.

Economic calculations also play a role in Soviet strategies in Central America. Soviet trade and investment in the region, although growing, are limited primarily to Costa Rica where the Soviets are apparently running a large deficit, like everyone else in Latin America. Since they generally have to pay for imports in hard currency, it seems the Soviets would not tend to view Central America as a priority interest in strictly economic terms. Soon, however, one can expect the Soviets to establish regular trade relations with the new regime in Nicaragua.

There is little doubt, however, that the discovery of natural resources--particularly in Guatemala, Mexico, and the Caribbean proper--has spurred increasing interest in the basin. Thus the Soviets are working with the Mexicans on long-term cooperation in oil matters and may be interested in similar cooperation with other oil producers in the region. (Mexico has also agreed to supply crude oil to Cuba, assist with Cuba's oil-exploration efforts, and help expand Cuban oil-refining facilities.) Soviet-bloc trade and economic aid to such "progressive regimes" as the one in Nicaragua encourage the Soviets' overall "anti-imperialist" strategy in the area. In the long run, the Soviets may calculate, Central America may offer a more lucrative potential for COMECON trade than do many of the African and Asian countries now courted by the Soviets. Cuba, a full COMECON member since 1972, can play a key role in this effort. The Soviets view Cuba as a useful instrument in restructuring the economic base of the Caribbean basin by reducing the preponderance of U.S.-based multinational corporations. Thus, the Soviets applauded Cuba's important role in founding the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) and the

Latin American Economic System (SELA) cosponsored by Mexico and Venezuela. In 1975, with Cuban help, COMECON was able to work out a special agreement with Mexico, which may be followed in the not-too-distant future by a similar agreement with Nicaragua.

Cuba and Central America: A Strategic Perspective

There are two extreme views regarding the Soviet-Cuban alliance in the Third World. The first portrays Cuba as a surrogate of the USSR, simply implementing Soviet orders. The second depicts Cuba as an almost totally unconstrained, autonomous actor, having its own independent strategic vision. As this writer has argued elsewhere, Cuba is neither of these.[19] The view that Cuban policy is necessarily subservient to that of the USSR is unsophisticated and obscures the existence of mutual constraints and leverages in the alliance. Thus, while the USSR plays the dominant role and exercises great influence upon Cuban foreign policy, Cuba provides certain inputs into Soviet decisionmaking regarding the Third World. The degree of Cuban autonomy in the Third World seems to vary according to the area of involvement. Whereas in Africa Cuba appears to enjoy only a small degree of relative autonomy, in the Caribbean basin Cuba's autonomy seems to be rather significant.

Even the Soviets' African policy, however, has been dependent to some extent on the willingness of Fidel Castro and his colleagues to provide ground forces for joint enterprises in Africa. In Angola and Ethiopia, unlike Afghanistan, the Soviets were cautious about committing their own troops in direct military fashion. The use of Soviet combat units might have elicited a firmer response from the United States, with resulting detrimental consequences for the USSR. Furthermore, the similarity of the physical environment of Africa, particularly Angola, to that of Cuba, and the presence of a substantial number of blacks and mulattoes in the Cuban forces, who share a racial and cultural affinity with the black Africans, make the Cubans much more suitable for the task than the Soviets. Soviet strategic decisions regarding the Third World thus reflect, at least marginally, Cuba's desire to support revolutionary operations there and her willingness to supply the necessary manpower. Castro, who is currently president of the nonaligned movement, exercised some influence on the USSR both directly (by consulting with Soviet leaders) and indirectly (by serving as a broker between Soviet and Third World leaders, many of whom see Castro as brave, courageous, self-confident, and charming). As in Africa, Castro can serve as a useful mediator between the USSR and Central American leaders, since he is viewed by many radicals and revolutionaries in the region, if not as a second Bolívar--a modern continental liberator--then at least as a type of new "caudillo socialista"[20] worthy of being emulated and followed.

Although Castro's foreign policy cannot be viewed as totally subservient to that of the USSR, it would be far-fetched to think of Cuba as an independent or even semi-independent actor. Cuba's emergence as a major player in the Third World in the 1970s and early 1980s has been possible mainly because of growing Soviet military and economic power and Soviet willingness to exploit changes in the international system. More specifically, Cuban ascendancy in the Third World--particularly Africa and the

Middle East in the 1970s and more recently the Caribbean basin--has been possible because of Soviet military-strategic cover and Cuba's expectation that Soviet support and protection will be forthcoming in the event of an attack on the island. Moreover, the Soviets subsidize the Cuban economy with an estimated $7 million per day. Without this help, Cuba's faltering economy could never have absorbed the cost of the military intervention in Africa. Certainly in Africa the major portion of these expenses has been picked up by the Soviets or by the recipient countries, who in turn have received the money from the USSR. The basic subordination of Cuban foreign policy to that of the Soviet Union seemed to be acknowledged at the First Cuban Party Congress of December 1975.[21] Another important factor suggesting Soviet preponderance in the Soviet-Cuban alliance was the growing Soviet military, security, and economic presence in Cuba in the 1970s. At the onset of the 1980s, there are 2,700 Soviet soldiers in Cuba as well as several thousand intelligence personnel, technicians, and other specialists. In addition to protecting sophisticated communications facilities, the Soviets train the Cuban armed forces.

Cuban dependence on the USSR in carrying out military and security operations in Africa was first demonstrated during the Angolan crisis of 1975-76. The view that the Soviet role was confined primarily to the supply of weaponry is not correct. It is true that because of initial uncertainty regarding the U.S. response, the Soviets were cautious about committing themselves in direct military fashion in Angola. Nevertheless, in early November 1975 they took over the Cuban air- and sea-lift, transforming the Angolan campaign into a massive operation during which both the Soviet air force and navy were operationally effective. A small yet effective Soviet naval task force provided physical and psychological support to the Cuban combat troops, protected the Cuban staging areas against local threats, served as a strategic cover for established sea and air communications, and worked as a deterrent against possible U.S. naval deployment. It is quite possible that if Moscow had not become so involved in Angola and had the South Africans been encouraged actively by the United States to continue their blitz campaigns, the Cubans would have been defeated.

The alliance between the Soviets and Cubans was even tighter in the case of the intervention in Ethiopia in 1977, where four Soviet generals ran the entire operation from start to finish. Whereas during the original state of the operation in Angola the Cubans temporarily functioned independently, Cuba functioned as a very subordinate actor, if not a Soviet proxy, during the conflict in the Ogaden between Somalia and Ethiopia. Clearly the Soviet leadership determines the limits of Cuban options in Africa. Although Cuba could choose <u>not</u> to get involved in a large-scale military operation with the USSR (the war in Eritrea), Cuba could not undertake a substantial military operation not approved of or supported by the Soviets. Cuba is also highly vulnerable to Soviet politico-economic coercion, which the Soviet leaders used to their advantage in the late 1960s, when they slowed down the supply of oil and arms to Cuba to make Castro more amenable to the subtleties of Soviet "anti-imperialist" strategy. The Soviets are likely to use this leverage again should the need arise.

There exists a basic agreement between Cuba and the USSR regarding the joint coordination and implementation of strategy so as to promote

Soviet global interests and policies. Some Cuban strategic priorities, however, are not necessarily identical with those of the Soviets. As a result, there are often subtle and not-so-subtle emphasis and nuances which differentiate Soviet and Cuban policies. This is more true in the Caribbean basin than in Africa. Whereas the basin is of marginal geopolitical importance to the USSR, its importance is paramount to Cuba. The USSR is a superpower with global interests, responsibilities, and capabilities; Cuba, in spite of her copious rhetoric, is basically a regional power. Although culturally and historically part of the Latin American community, Cuba's strategic vision extends beyond Latin America to a broader spectrum of the Third World, with emphasis on the countries of Africa.

What are the perceived ideological, political, security, and economic payoffs that Cuba expects to receive for helping to promote a joint "anti-imperialist" strategy? Though Castro has never been renowned for his theoretical conceptualization of Marxism-Leninism, it seems that his ideological commitment to the revolutionaries in Africa and Central America has been more genuine than that of the USSR. The Cuban revolution is young in comparison with the Soviets' 1917 revolution. Whereas Soviet strategic priorities are now forged under the shadow of Central Committee bureaucrats, Cuban strategic vision arose out of the revolutionary battle against Batista. In Cuba there exists a strong ideological affinity with the Third World nations which has been conditioned by common Latin and African ancestries, colonial legacies, and exploitation by outside powers resulting in wounded national sentiments. Thus, in Castro's words, Cuban support of revolution comes as a natural "result of our principles, our convictions, and our own blood."[22] Castro, who is himself a sort of Red Robin Hood, has been a vehement and longstanding supporter of various revolutionary movements and a close friend of the leaders who have spearheaded them. Cuban support of revolutionary groups in Africa and Latin America in most cases has been consistent since 1960, without the ups and downs characteristic of Soviet support for some of these organizations.

The joint strategies pursued in Central America are important to Castro's regime for reasons other than ideology and cultural affinity. Though more ideologically motivated than the Soviets, Cuba has already witnessed the passing of an initial revolutionary exuberance and enthusiasm (aptly dubbed "socialism with the pachanga" [a Cuban dance] by "Che" Guevara). Today Castro has some very pragmatic security, political, and economic interests in pursuing a joint "anti-imperialist" strategy with the USSR. His objective in being closely associated with the USSR is to ensure the survival of the Cuban revolution, preserve Cuba's political independence, and secure further security guarantees for his state in the face of continuous U.S. hostility. Further, Castro's regime hopes to build bridges to Central American countries, all of whom supported the expulsion of Cuba from the Organization of American States in 1962.

In political terms, Castro wants now, more than ever, to increase the prestige and influence of his regime in the Third World. In the wake of the unpopular Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, many Third World countries have become less willing to accept Castro as leader of the nonaligned world and defender of progressive Third World regimes. They realize that "natural alliance" with the USSR, as advocated by Castro, can also lead to

"unnatural death," as in the case of Afghan president H. Amin. Indeed, Afghanistan has had a detrimental political effect on Cuba's standing in the Third World and on Castro's ambitions about refurbishing the prestige of his regime and his personal image as recognized leader of the nonaligned movement. Proof of this was the withdrawal of support by the nonaligned nations for the election of Cuba, and the subsequent selection of Mexico, as Latin America's nonpermanent representative to the United Nations Security Council in 1980. It is not surprising, given this turn of events, that Cuba voted against the U.N. resolution condemning the USSR while at the same time signalling frustration over Soviet policies in Afghanistan and making no effort to support or defend the Soviet rationale for the invasion. The Cuban leadership, obviously displeased with the invasion, decided, as in the case of the Czechoslovak invasion of 1968, to give only qualified support to the USSR. Unlike other Soviet allies, the Cubans did not object to the United Nations' right to deal with the Afghan question. This is a good illustration of Cuba's dilemma as both titular leader of the nonaligned movement and Soviet ally. Cuban aid to Nicaragua and support of the rebels in El Salvador in 1980-81 have provided Castro with new opportunities for cementing his image as an independent and fearless defender of revolution in the Third World.

Cuba also receives some economic payoffs in the Caribbean basin itself for her pursuit of an "anti-imperialist" strategy. Although economic relations with the Caribbean and Central American countries are modest, Cuban leaders, like their Soviet counterparts, may hope for more substantial relations in the future similar to those now in effect with Mexico.

More important than the promise of future dividends are the actual economic payoffs awarded to Cuba for her support of "anti-imperialist" strategies. Because Cuban willingness to deploy regular troops in Africa and support the revolutionary forces in Nicaragua and El Salvador became indispensable to the implementation of Soviet "anti-imperialist" strategy in these regions, Cuba gained the status of a privileged ally and was able to insist on adjustments in Soviet-Cuban economic relations, although these are difficult to specify. Thus in the aftermath of the invasion of Angola in 1975, and again after the intervention in Ethiopia in 1978, the Cubans obtained even more favorable agreements from the USSR. This and Cuban support for the Nicaraguan revolution and the guerrillas in El Salvador may have insured continuation into the 1980s of Soviet subsidies of Cuban sugar and nickel production and of prices paid for petroleum. One source estimates that the USSR paid $0.44 a pound for Cuban sugar when the world market price for this commodity was about $0.10. (In 1979 alone Cuba sold four million tons of sugar to the USSR.) The price Cuba pays for oil is estimated to be about 50 percent of that which prevails on the world market.[23]

One can speculate that Castro is expecting that new instances of his country's "internationalism" in El Salvador will be rewarded, as previously in Africa and Nicaragua, by increased economic aid from the USSR, such as a rescheduling of the repayment of the enormous Cuban debt, new credits, and an increase in commerce with the USSR. The USSR ensures a continuously stable market for a large part of Cuban output. It is noteworthy that the trade agreement signed in Moscow during the Cuban-orchestrated arms transfer to El Salvador provides for trade between Cuba and the USSR in 1980-85

amounting to 30 billion rubles--a significant increase over the 1976-80 trade level. The USSR has apparently pledged to supply all of Cuba's oil during this period. To further facilitate the solution to Cuba's energy problem, the Soviets plan to build a nuclear power plant in Cuba in 1981-85.

Another payoff for Cuban assistance in implementing the USSR's Third World policies has been the Soviet modernization of Cuba's armed forces with sophisticated weaponry. The Cuban forces (190,000 men and 60,000 reservists) are now more formidable than any others in the basin, including those of Mexico. In the whole of Latin America they are second in size only to the armed forces of Brazil. Of the USSR's Warsaw Pact allies, only Poland, which is four times larger than Cuba, has greater forces. Thanks to Soviet-supplied MIG-21s and MIG-23s, Cuba has the best-equipped air force in Latin America. Moreover, the Soviets have helped to build a small but very modern and efficient Cuban coastal navy and merchant fleet. In the last few years, they have equipped the Cubans with seven guided-missile patrol boats, more than a dozen Turya-class patrol boats, several landing craft, and one Foxtrot and one Whiskey-class submarine, with another expected. The Cuban army, meanwhile, has been equipped with Soviet T-62 tanks. The Soviet arms transfer to Cuba is relatively advanced in the overall context of the Soviet arms aid program.

Despite various past disagreements and existing differences, the Soviets and Cubans in the 1970s discovered that their strategies in the Third World, which were a subject of disagreement in the 1960s, are inexorably linked. The Soviets have made enormous ideological, political, economic, and security investments in Cuba. To turn their backs on Castro's regime now would seriously undermine Soviet strategies in Africa and Central America. Likewise, Soviet strategic, economic, and political support is essential to Cuba. Cuba is too dependent on the USSR to try to alter the relationship, and, furthermore, is still too committed to revolutionary change to do so.

The Nicaraguan Revolution: Soviet and Cuban Tactics

For the jubilant Soviets and Cubans, the triumph of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1979 signaled an important juncture in the revolutionary transformation of the Caribbean basin, equal in importance only to the victory of the Fidelistas in Cuba 20 years earlier. In both cases, the United States was perceived by the Soviets to have suffered humiliating political defeat. In view of such Soviet officials as deputy head of the International Department of the Central Committee V. Zagladin, the Nicaraguan revolution was one of the "starlets" of the anti-imperialist movement in Latin America. Zagladin, at least implicitly, has tried to link the "victory of Nicaragua" with Soviet-Cuban supported anti-imperialist strategy, and has expressed the hope that Nicaragua will "have its continuators."[24] As during the Allende era of 1971-73, revolutionary change in Latin America has become a favorite topic in Moscow.

Was the triumph in Nicaragua indeed the result of coordinated Soviet-Cuban strategies and tactics in Central America, or more the result of a complex interplay of internal and regional as well as external

forces? Like the Cuba revolution in 1959, the revolution in Nicaragua was conditioned by various internal forces: the unpopularity of the Somoza regime, underdevelopment, unequal distribution of wealth, enormous poverty, and other deep social and economic cleavages. Nicaragua has long been dominated by military dictators or caudillos, Anastasio "Tacho" Somoza (1936-1956) and his son Anastasio "Tachito" Somoza (1967-1979) being the most recent. Also, the great powers have traditionally played a role in national policy-making.[25] The fact that Nicaragua holds a promising site for an interocean canal and lies in close proximity to the existing Panama Canal has caused Nicaragua's foreign policy to be of great concern to the United States. Thus U.S. strategic interests were largely the motivating force behind the U.S. interventions in 1912 and in 1927, when, except for a brief interlude from 1926-27, until 1933 Nicaragua was virtually a U.S. protectorate.

U.S. interventionism in Nicaragua gave rise to Yankee-phobia characterized by resentment and even violent resistance to the United States. The symbol of this resistance in 1927-1933 was Augusto César Sandino who, like Castro in the 1950s, was a staunch radical nationalist who opposed the corrupt dictatorship in his country and what he saw as U.S. interference. Although Sandino is exalted as an "anti-imperialist" hero by the Soviet press in the early 1980s, in the 1930s the Soviets and Comintern denounced his "rebel bands." Although the USSR condemned the U.S. intervention of 1927, the Soviets failed to display much admiration for Sandino and his original Sandinistas. Though Sandino had cooperated with the communists in the 1920s, he denounced their activities in 1936. After the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Nicaragua, Sandino actually made peace with the Nicaraguan government. The Comintern meanwhile accused him of "capitulation. . .over to the side of the counterrevolutionary government."[26]

Communism in Nicaragua, as elsewhere in Central America, traditionally has been a weak movement. In the last two decades there have been three Marxist parties in Nicaragua--all of them illegal and clandestine or semiclandestine groups: a very small Maoist group, the anti-Soviet Communist Party of Nicaragua, and the pro-Soviet Socialist Party of Nicaragua (PSN), a semiclandestine organization founded in 1937 of never more than 250 members. Though some members of the PSN had links with the Sandinistas in the 1960s and 1970s, the PSN was not the main force behind the revolution. The Sandinista Liberation Front (FSLN) was founded in 1961 by radical, left-leaning nationalists led by the late Carlos Fonseca Amador who, though not a communist, had visited the USSR in 1957. The Sandinistas, from the very beginning inspired and supported by Castro, tried to overthrow the Somoza regime but were quickly crushed by the National Guard in 1961. In time, the FSLN evolved into a conglomerate of heterogeneous Marxist and non-Marxist elements united under an anti-Somoza banner, yet still separate from the PSN. Though Amador later died while fighting Somoza, the Sandinistas continued their struggle in the 1970s, with only limited support from the USSR and Cuba. (Cuba actually sent material aid to the Somoza regime following the earthquake in 1972.) Although the revolutionary struggle in Nicaragua coincided with Soviet-Cuban "anti-imperialist" strategy, geographic remoteness and general pessimism about the prospects for revolution in Latin America following the anti-Allende coup of 1973 caused the Cubans and Soviets to be rather pessimistic about the prospects of the Sandinista struggle. Additional reasons for the

Soviets' low-key support up to 1979 were probably Soviet and Cuban military involvement in Angola, Ethiopia, and elsewhere in the Third World and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which were occupying the greater part of Soviet attention from 1975 to 1979. Soviet support of the FLSN continued to be modest even in 1978, when a unified FSLN directorate brought together in one coalition all guerrilla factions, whose struggle had begun to assume a genuinely revolutionary character. Even during this high point, the PSN's role was limited mainly to propaganda support, clandestine radio broadcasts, and some financial aid.

Although by 1978 the Soviets probably knew about Somoza's critical situation, they might have thought that President Carter, despite his human-rights rhetoric, would not let Somoza fall. Nevertheless, in the 1970s the Cubans, with Soviet blessings and perhaps even financial help, were training the FSLN in Cuba and providing them with arms (primarily rifles) and money.[27] However, the FSLN was securing weapons from elsewhere as well. Although we do not have enough evidence at this time to suggest that the Soviets and Cubans coordinated arms transfers for the Sandinistas, as they did for the guerrillas in El Salvador in 1980, we do know that some weapons flowed from Cuba to the FSLN via such Third World countries as Costa Rica and Panama. We also know that the FSLN used weapons coming from Venezuela, Panama, the Middle East, and, as the Sandinistas maintain, Mafia sources in the United States and Europe. Though many guerrillas were trained in Cuba, there is no evidence that Cubans were involved in command and control functions for the Sandinistas prior to early 1979. Though the Cuban factor was important, it was not crucial. The Sandinistas also received active political, economic, and moral support from various groups in Venezuela, Panama, and Mexico, and found sanctuaries and a training site on the territory of democratic Costa Rica. The Costa Rican capital of San José was the site of the FSLN government in exile. Leftists from other Central American countries, including the Victoriano Lorenzo Brigade from Panama and various groups from Costa Rica, fought alongside FSLN forces in Nicaragua.[28]

The Cubans and particularly the Soviets exercised a great deal of caution prior to the Sandinista victory of 1979. Indeed, the Soviets published few analyses of the Nicaraguan struggle and only in 1978 did the Soviets and Cubans begin reassessing the chances for a successful revolution. In early 1979, the Cubans finally decided to set up intelligence headquarters in Costa Rica to monitor the anti-Somoza struggle and sent military personnel to advise the Sandinistas. Within several months of the Sandinistas' assumption of power on July 19, 1979, Castro sent a large number of Cuban specialists to help with the reconstruction of Nicaragua: 1,200 teachers, 250 doctors and health personnel, technicians, some security and propaganda experts, and a large number of construction workers to build a road uniting Nicaragua's east and west. At the same time, he reportedly cautioned the Sandinistas not to push their socialist program too far or too fast. The Cubans perceived the victory of the Sandinistas as a great opportunity for them to pursue their own strategic objectives in Nicaragua as well as in other countries of the region. Unlike in the 1960s, the risks of Cuban involvement seemed to be low because of apparent U.S. inability to intervene, and because the United States basically opposed Somoza and recognized the Sandinistas.

In contrast to the Cubans, the Soviets, who opened an embassy in Nicaragua in October 1979, were typically guarded in their willingness to make commitments to the new Sandinista regime, as they were originally in 1959 in Cuba. The only Soviet initiative at this time was the decision to provide a variety of emergency donations in the weeks following the overthrow of Somoza. These were much smaller, however, than U.S., Mexican, and Venezuelan donations and deliveries during this period. Only after a gradual reassessment of their options did the Soviets decide to become more assertive in Nicaragua. This "new chapter," as the Soviets called it, commenced in March 1980 during the first high-level visit of Sandinistas to the USSR since the overthrow of Somoza.[29] Subsequently, the Soviets concluded a variety of economic, technical, and trade agreements, mainly in the areas of fishing and marine affairs, waterpower resources, mining and geological surveys, communications, and air traffic. The FSLN and the CPSU also agreed on future party-to-party contacts, apparently along the same lines pursued by the Soviets with various other revolutionary organizations--such as the regimes in Angola and Ethiopia--whom they consider reliable, long-term partners. By the spring of 1981, the Soviets, Cubans, and East Europeans (particularly the East Germans and Bulgarians) concluded with Nicaragua several other related agreements for economic aid (including the donation of 20,000 tons of wheat), scientific and cultural cooperation, and technical assistance in telecommunications, agriculture, transportation, and other fields. There were also signs of some sort of future military cooperation, as evidenced by the Soviet loan of a few helicopters to the FSLN along with training by Soviet pilots on how to use them, and East Germany's credit sale to the FSLN of 800 military trucks. As the crisis in neighboring El Salvador began to mount in late 1980, there were also unconfirmed reports about the influx into Nicaragua of additional Cuban military officials (who were supposedly running training camps) and about arms transfers of tanks and helicopters, possibly for use in El Salvador. Western reports that the Soviets were building naval facilities in Nicaragua were denied by Soviet ambassador to Nicaragua G. Schlyapnikov. The Nicaraguan government, however, has confirmed that the Soviets' floating workshop, designed for repairing ships, will be operating off the Pacific coast of Nicaragua.[30]

Soviet and Cuban Tactics in El Salvador

How do Soviet and Cuban perceptions of the crisis in Nicaragua (before the overthrow of Somoza) and the ongoing crisis in neighboring El Salvador compare? What were the similarities and differences in Soviet and Cuban tactics with regard to these two countries? The victory of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua prompted the Soviets to anticipate a chain reaction of leftist upheavals and revolutions throughout Central America. Thus, in an important speech on October 20, 1980, B. Ponomarev, candidate Politburo member and a Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, added the countries of Central America to the list of states in Africa and Asia which could be expected to undergo revolutionary changes of "a socialist orientation." Ponomarev described the revolution in Nicaragua as a "major success" and compared it with the revolution in Angola and Ethiopia.[31] President of the Soviet Association of Friendship with Latin American Countries Professor Viktor Volskiy assessed the Nicaraguan revolution as a "triumph for the people of Latin America and the Caribbean" and a "model for all peoples fighting for liberation."[32]

After Nicaragua, the Central American country singled out by Soviet writers as being most pregnant with revolutionary opportunities was, of course, El Salvador, which the Soviets see as occupying "an important strategic position in the region."[33] Like Nicaragua, El Salvador has a strong heritage of instability caused by a rigid class structure, unequal distribution of wealth, and 30 percent or more unemployment. In El Salvador--the smallest yet most densely populated country in Latin America (400 people per square mile)--socioeconomic life has been dominated by an oligarchy of wealthy families while military caudillos have run the politics of the country.

Also like in Nicaragua, the communist movement has been very weak. The pro-Soviet Communist party in El Salvador (PCES) was founded in 1930 and was actively involved in a massive peasant insurrection in 1932 which was crushed by the military and resulted in 30,000 deaths. Since this time, the PCES has been an illegal, clandestine organization. As late as 1979, it still had only 225 members. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, the PCES, like the PSN, had to compete with more radical and relatively larger groups such as the Maoist-leaning People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), the Trotskyite Popular Liberation Forces (FPL), and other groups. The latter organizations, and not the miniscule PCES, were responsible for the organized terrorism and guerrilla activities of the 1970s. In fact, with Soviet blessings, the well-known General Secretary of the PCES, Schafik Jorge Handal, published a severe critique of these groups in the Soviet journal Latinskaia Amerika in early 1979, before the fall of Somoza. He accused them of violence and nihilism.[34] Unlike in Nicaragua, the various guerrilla factions have not yet united, despite rhetoric to the contrary. In El Salvador, there is no Sandinista legacy. In contrast to the meager support given the Nicaraguan party, the Soviets have given strong public support to the PCES, particularly its leader Handal, who seems to be following the tactical advice of the Soviets. With the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua and the increase in political violence in El Salvador, the PCES and the Soviets have become more optimistic than ever before about the revolutionary potential of the region in general and El Salvador in particular. These changing perceptions certainly have been shared by the Cubans. Although in their public reports the Cubans continue to be somewhat more cautious than the Soviets, they nevertheless began to directly support the various competing guerrilla factions and in late 1979 and early 1980 played an important role in minimizing their differences and trying to unite them.[35]

The Soviets, unlike the Cubans, however, continued to proceed with caution, at least for some time. Although they initially promised to supply weapons to the guerrillas during a meeting organized by Castro in Havana in December 1979, only in the spring and summer of 1980 did the Soviets decide to switch completely to the new tactics of fully supporting the guerrillas. They agreed to provide the military training of a few dozen Salvadoran youths. This decision became evident when the pro-Soviet PCES endorsed violent revolution at its Seventh National Congress in May 1980. Up to that time, as noted, the PCES, though committed to revolution, opposed armed struggle and terrorism as revolutionary means in El Salvador. In the fall of 1979, Handal, though jubilant about the victory in Nicaragua, was cautious about making comments regarding the prospects for revolution in El Salvador. In April 1980, however, he

became much more optimistic and, according to Soviet sources, expressed "confidence" in the "defeat of internal reaction, despite the fact that the latter is backed by imperialist forces."[36]

Although the example of Nicaragua was very important, it was not the only motive for the changing perceptions and tactics of the PCES and the Soviets in the spring of 1980. Both the Soviets and Cubans probably feared that if the PCES did not use violence to implement its "anti-imperialist" strategy it would soon be outdone and overshadowed by its more radical rivals, who were quickly gaining popular strength. The PCES should not be suddenly surprised by a success of the noncommunist guerrillas and thereby deprived of responsibility for the victory, as happened in Nicaragua to the PSN, who were outshone by the Sandinistas. Thus Cuban and Soviet tactics since the spring of 1980 were directed at transforming the numerically small PCES into a leading force in the guerrilla struggle in El Salvador.

The Soviet assessment of the U.S. ability to maintain hegemony in the region also seemed to have changed. In spite of the Cuban revolution, as noted, the Soviets continued to believe throughout the 1960s and 1970s that the United States had the ability and will to challenge outright revolution in Central America. In Nicaragua, however, the U.S. administration made one mistake after another. It failed to break completely with Somoza, and tried too late to modify the outcome of a Sandinista victory. A Soviet analyst, quoting an anonymous official in Washington, wrote in July 1980 that the Carter administration was "too late and too indecisive" with its intervention in the Nicaraguan crisis, that it therefore could not prevent the complete victory of the Sandinistas, and that "a different course of action" must be taken by the United States in El Salvador.[37] According to this analyst, the situation in El Salvador, which is arousing the "anxiety" of U.S. strategists, is even more "tense" than in Nicaragua before the fall of Somoza.

Developments in El Salvador may have been likened to Soviet-perceived changes in Soviet-U.S. relations in the wake of the Iranian and Afghan crises in late 1979. In the Soviet view, as this writer has argued elsewhere, the U.S. administration was veering toward a dangerous new cold war by encouraging a semialliance with China, threatening Iran, and sabotaging SALT II negotiations.[38] Most grievous in the Soviet view was U.S., Chinese, and Egyptian "allied" support of the Afghan rebels with Soviet-made weapons. (Whether this was a fact of reality in 1979 is still a matter of speculation; the Soviets profess to have believed it was so and sometimes the perceptions of policymakers are more important than the facts.) The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, a matter of necessity as the Soviets saw it, was met with retaliatory policies by the zigzagging Carter administration aimed at further punishing the USSR. The Soviets may have thought, after Nicaragua, that El Salvador provided an easily exploitable opportunity in the same geographic proximity of the United States as Afghanistan is to the USSR. The idea of making El Salvador an "American Afghanistan" in retaliation for perceived Egyptian-U.S.-Chinese support for the Afghan rebels, and/or using the issue as a bargaining chip in future negotiations, may have played a part in the Soviet decision to back the Cuban orchestration of support for the guerrilla struggle.

Though we can only speculate on the motives for the Soviet decision, the facts of the story are well-known. Unlike in Nicaragua, the Soviet-backed Cuban orchestration of the supply of armaments from Soviet allied countries has been significant. It appears that the involvement of Cuba, backed by the USSR, has significantly strengthened the guerrillas in El Salvador. Handal's search for arms in the East, which seems to be well documented by the U.S. administration, began around the time of the Seventh Congress of the PCES, during which a passive line was radically exchanged for one of organized violence intended to topple a regime. After the Congress, the Cubans took charge of clandestine operations in El Salvador and Castro actively assumed the role of broker in attempting to unify the various revolutionary groups. In June-July, with the assistance of Soviet officials responsible for Third World affairs in the Soviet Secretariat, such as K. Brutens and his deputy Kudachkin, Handal visited the USSR and some East European countries and obtained U.S.-made weapons (M-14 and M-16 rifles, M-79 grenades) from Vietnam and Ethiopia, both of which hold large stocks of U.S. weapons. Thus the USSR (initially unwilling to transport arms from Vietnam by air) could, by proceeding with caution, deny its involvement if accused. The East European allies (minus Poland and Romania) promised to provide communications equipment, uniforms, and medical supplies, while the Soviets helped to arrange for the transportation of the weapons to Cuba in the fall of 1980. In Cuba they were reloaded and transported to Nicaragua, and from there directly by ship or air to El Salvador or by land through Honduras to El Salvador. Following the U.S. presidential elections, Cuban experts, with cautious yet active Soviet backing, played a key role in the arms transfer and the preparation of the "final" guerrilla offensive. As a U.S. State Department report concluded, "the political direction, organization, and arming of the insurgency is coordinated and heavily influenced by Cuba--with active support of the Soviet Union, East Germany, Vietnam, and other Communist states."[39]

Conclusions

The joint strategy for dealing with Third World countries worked out by the USSR and Cuba in the late 1960s and 1970s is not necessarily designed to create Marxist-Leninist regimes in these countries but rather to achieve a variety of "anti-imperialist" political, ideological, security, and economic objectives. Soviet and Cuban strategic visions have not always been identical, particularly in the 1960s when there were some rather serious disagreements regarding doctrine and tactics. As recent Soviet-Cuban policies in Africa and Central America attest, however, most of these differences have been overcome in the last several years. Although Cuba is not subservient to the USSR, for a variety of reasons its foreign policies are basically dependent upon Soviet support (Africa) or linked to Soviet foreign policy (Central America). Both the Soviets and Cubans happen to have linked strategic visions regarding Central America. Though the Soviets are newcomers, with Cuban help they have been able to exploit the socioeconomic malaise and anti-U.S. sentiment characteristic of the region. In doing so they have employed a variety of tactics: peaceful and legal, violent, and often a combination of both.

Undoubtedly, deep socioeconomic cleavages are the main source of the ongoing crisis in Central America, particularly in the countries

located in the region's northern tier: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and, to a certain degree, Honduras. Though the more southern countries of Costa Rica and Panama do not have such pronounced social problems, they face severe economic difficulties (particularly Costa Rica) and are not immune to revolutionary change. The civil war in El Salvador could escalate into a regional war, perhaps even leading to the involvement of Mexico and Venezuela, with Guatemala and Honduras assisting the regime, and Nicaragua and Cuba assisting the guerrillas.

Internal forces were the main impetus for local insurgency and revolution in Nicaragua in 1979; the Soviet and Cubans were deeply involved in Africa prior to 1978-79, when it peaked, and their involvement in Nicaragua was marginal. Afterwards, however, the Nicaraguan revolution became an inspiration to other revolutionaries in the region and a catalyst in changing the perceptions and tactics of the USSR and Cuba. Both seemed to believe that the Nicaraguan "example" could be repeated soon in "strategically located" El Salvador. The dramatic change in Soviet and Cuban tactics in the spring of 1980, after the Nicaraguan revolution, is proof of their flexibility in the implementation of "anti-imperialist" strategy.

Though the socioeconomic problems in Nicaragua and El Salvador are similar, there are some profound differences between the situations in the two countries. Whereas Nicaragua's revolution was more genuine, in that it expressed the will of a majority of the people in overthrowing the hated dictatorship of Somoza, in El Salvador the revolution is less genuine, having significant Cuban support while cautiously being backed by the Soviets. Both of the latter supported, if not encouraged, a dramatic change in the tactics of El Salvador's Communist party in May 1980 and facilitated an impressive arms transfer in the fall of the same year. In late 1980, the guerrillas in El Salvador announced the creation of a united liberation front--the Farabundo Marti People's Liberation Front, whose general command includes Handal. Although the so-called final offensive in early 1981 failed, El Salvador may still develop into a "second Nicaragua." Still, however, guerrilla offensive in El Salvador has failed so far to spark a popular insurrection as in Nicaragua. As of early 1981, the majority of the people do not appear to support the leftist guerrillas. One can "spur" revolutionary struggles, but one cannot sustain them without genuine popular support.

The vigorous Soviet and Cuban support of Salvadoran leftists and their new closer relationship with Nicaragua in 1980-81 were the result of more than preconceived strategy. They also illustrate Soviet and Cuban tactical skill in implementing this strategy by exploiting available opportunities. In the case of Nicaragua, such an opportunity was the hesitancy of the U.S. Congress in providing aid to that country and U.S. failure to assume a more active role.

In El Salvador there might be additional reasons for the Soviets' position other than the desire to exploit revolutionary opportunities. Though the Soviets will not tell us, it may be that the USSR, by taking a tough stand on that country, was trying to tie down the United States and eventually be in a position to bargain on other issues, such as Afghanistan and Poland. The internal situations in both of these

countries, which border the USSR, are causing serious problems, which the Soviets have attributed to outside provocation and assistance. Does the USSR want to bargain with the United States? It may be, as suggested by some Central American observers, that Soviet tactics in El Salvador are being used to divert Western attention from Soviet domestic failures and the problems faced in Poland and Afghanistan in order to prepare for a hardening of Soviet policies in these countries, including perhaps some form of intervention in Poland. In exchange for U.S. acquiescence to such hard-line policies, the USSR would change its tactics in El Salvador. The Soviet leadership appears to link the crises in Poland and Central America. While delivering an important speech on the Polish crisis on April 7, Brezhnev unexpectedly concluded his remarks by stressing the Soviets' role as protector of Cuba's security.[40]

As of the spring of 1981, any firm conclusions about the outcome of the struggle in El Salvador are of course premature. Indeed, there exist a number of internal and external constraints which can mitigate against assertive Cuban and Soviet implementation of "anti-imperialist" strategy in the Caribbean basin. First, the Cuban economic situation is the worst it has been since the revolution, despite massive Soviet economic support. The economic malaise, to which the costly African adventures have certainly contributed, led to a radical reorganization of the Cuban government in early 1980 and the rationing of essentials.

Public resentment was further fed by the soaring cost of living. This culminated in open dissent in the spring of 1980: over 10,000 Cuban dissidents sought asylum in the Peruvian embassy in Havana and subsequently emigrated to the United States. Cuban economic difficulties, however, failed to elicit any major antiwar movement, or, for that matter, any visible opposition or even political debate. Despite the difficulties arising from its alliance with the Soviet Union, Cuba in 1980-81 succeeded in maintaining its overseas commitments and somehow was able to expand them, as seen in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

Local conditions in the Caribbean basin, however, may not always favor revolutionary upheaval and its exploitation by the Cubans and the Soviets. A crucial setback for Cuba was the defeat of the left-leaning Manley regime in Jamaica and the election in October 1980 of the more pro-Western Edward Seaga. In the last few years, Soviet economic backing allowed the Cubans to expand their influence in that important country. Like Nicaragua and Grenada, Jamaica was offered financial credits by Cuba (perhaps with Soviet help) and the assistance of several hundred Cuban civilian teachers, technicians, and construction workers, as well as some security officials to train the Jamaican security forces. The fall of Manley's regime was a setback for Cuban and Soviet policies in the Caribbean basin. So were the electoral defeats of other parties with close Cuban ties on the small Caribbean islands of St. Vincent, Dominica, Antigua, and St. Christopher.

Vigorous Cuban involvement in Africa and the Caribbean basin can also be constrained by the Soviets themselves, whose support determines the limits of Cuban assertiveness in the Third World. Indeed, in the future, Soviet leaders may be less willing to back Cuba's role in Africa and the Caribbean basin because of their economic difficulties at home and because

of new developments having greater importance. Given Soviet preoccupation with the Polish crisis, the continuing resistance of Muslim rebels in Afghanistan, and the ongoing war between Iran and Iraq, Soviet concern in 1981-82 may be directed at Eastern Europe and the strategic "arc of instability" to the south of the Soviet borders in Asia (e.g., Afghanistan and Iran). A significant shift in Soviet priorities could have a significant effect on Cuban foreign policy. Hence Castro reportedly believes that the USSR is being too "patient" with Poland and has repeatedly assaulted the Polish free trade unions, whose activities, he says, are prompted by "imperialist provocation."[41] This should not come as a surprise. Continuous Soviet preoccupation with Poland and Afghanistan could impose some hard choices on the Soviet leadership with regard to its strategy in the Third World, including Cuba. What effect will all of this have on Soviet-Cuban commitments in other parts of the Third World, particularly Angola and Ethiopia but also Central America? How long can Soviet-backed Cuban deployment in Angola and Ethiopia be maintained and how effectively? These questions, for which there are no pat answers, are probably being posed by foreign-policy experts in the USSR who may feel that Caribbean and Central American anti-U.S. nationalism simply cannot be exploited as vigorously as the Cuban leaders believe, at least not in the foreseeable future.

The most important factor affecting Soviet-Cuban strategy in Central America is the future course of U.S. policy vis-a-vis the USSR and Cuba. In the wake of the Vietnam debacle, Cuba and the Soviet Union did not seem to function within definite U.S. constraints due to the unwillingness of the U.S. public and Congress to support a forceful response to their assertive behavior. This was well demonstrated during the Angolan and Ethiopian interventions. It seems that the political mood in the United States is now changing, as was demonstrated to some degree by the election of Ronald Reagan, who earlier in 1980 suggested a naval blockade of Cuba as a response to the invasion of Afghanistan. In early 1981 President Reagan and his advisors have repeatedly warned that the United States will take all measures necessary to stop the arms transfer to El Salvador, not excluding actions against Cuba. These threats were taken seriously by the Cubans, who in late 1980 decided to organize a territorial militia defense system. One thing is almost certain. The Soviets themselves are not going to undertake a direct military intervention in Central America. They still do not have the capabilities to effectively do so, in spite of what they see as a "weakening of U.S. hegemony" in the region.

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