

The Third World: Cockpit of Conflict

By

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U.S. arms sales to the Third World, or security assistance, as we prefer to call it, is a matter of the most timely importance. The term "security assistance" is not chosen as a euphemism, but rather because it is more comprehensive. Not all assistance aimed at enhancing security consists of arms. Unfortunately, it is also true that not all assistance consisting of arms enhances security, and in the Third World, arms sales may in fact reduce a nation's real security.

The subject is timely in that security assistance to the Third World is a fundamental part of the Soviet strategy for global expansion and fits gun in fist with another part of that strategy: low-level aggression masquerading as wars of national liberation. "It must be stated clearly," the secretary of the International Department of the Central Committee, Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Boris Ponomoryov, tells us, "that the national liberation movements could not emerge victorious, if the Soviet Union did not exist."

If all of this appears merely to emphasize the obvious, it is intended to. For it is with the recognition of competition between the Soviet Union and the Free World that any analysis of the issue must begin. Put another way, it is not likely that we would have a great interest in arming friends in the Third World if our adversaries were not arming the neighbors of our friends.

But this formulation, acceptable as far as it goes, doesn't go much further. It is too pat as it stands, and the attending variables are too complex. The Soviets have constraints; so do we. Ours are considerably more onerous. And we have different interests.

Looking at these interests in an abbreviated fashion, we see the following:

- We rely on key raw materials from the Third World.
- We are inextricably a part of the global marketplace--we require unimpeded access to our partners and they to us.
- We have an exemplary political and economic life style, and, however ethnocentric the assumption may be, we reckon that others would emulate it if they could.
- At home, so abroad; we are reluctant that the state should meddle in the lives of its citizens, and we are reticent about meddling in the affairs of other nations.
- We do not believe that, left to their own devices, people will choose to enslave themselves.
- So our interest is in the continued free functioning of the global marketplace with all that that entails in terms of access and the freedom of others to choose for themselves how to order their lives.

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union subscribes to a different point of view, and so as not to have to elaborate further on facts with which we are painfully familiar, we can say for present purposes that that point of view is precisely the opposite of our own, and so is their interest.

Like the shark which must move constantly in order to survive, Soviet ideology is expansionist. Consistent with the keystone principle of that ideology, which is that man is solely and simply a creature of appetite, the Soviet Union is a predator state which must eat others to live.

The power of the United States, and more broadly, of its pluralistic friends, both economic and political, is a bar to the expansion of the Soviet Union. That power must be eroded and destroyed if Soviet interests are to be gratified.

This means in part the elimination of access to raw materials and to markets, and thus the control of nations that have raw materials or that offer the possibility of curtailing access to markets. Such control is acquired and in turn exerted by force. Many of those nations that possess raw materials in abundance are Third World nations. Most of those nations from which access can be controlled are Third World nations.

This is not a new idea. The Soviets are not creative, but they are very consistent. Lenin insisted that "The Achilles heel of the capitalist economy lies in the colonies . . . sever the raw materials flow from the colonies and you cut the spinal cord of the empire."

More than half a century later there are no colonies, and the Soviet Union is the world's only empire--and that one "an evil empire" as the president has said. But the goal remains the same, with Leonid Brezhnev echoing Lenin: "Our goal is to control the two great treasure houses upon which the West depends. The energy treasure house of the Middle East, and the mineral treasure house of central and southern Africa."

How successful has this strategy been? The jury is still out, but as we look at the treasure houses and the sea lanes of communication that access them and link them to the world's markets, you see the strategy unfolding.

While the defense strategists of the democracies focus on the nuclear threat and then on conventional conflict of the World War II variety, and while those who shape public opinion are caught up in a carefully orchestrated chronic anxiety about strategic weapons and arms reduction, the Soviet Union is quietly and patiently going after key global resources and global chokepoints, sometimes directly, sometimes through the use of surrogates.

Thus, the minerals of Africa's southern cone are bracketed by Marxist governments in Angola, supported by 35,000 Cuban troops, and in Mozambique, supported by Cuban and Eastern bloc elements. Mozambique sits astride a major sea lane of communication from the Persian Gulf oil fields.

The Soviets and their friends sit in Ethiopia and South Yemen, thus controlling the southern approach to the Suez Canal.

They sit in Vietnam, from which they can interdict seaborne traffic coming from the Persian Gulf through the Straits of Malacca to Japan.

They are in Cuba, and came close to consolidating their hold on Grenada, from which the Caribbean sea lanes of communications to our Gulf ports can be interdicted.

If they succeed in consolidating their position in Nicaragua, they will move on Costa Rica, and already we see subversive efforts there, and then into Panama and control of the canal.

In addition to these purely strategic moves, the Soviets look for targets of opportunity to prove the validity of Marxist-Leninism and historical determinism.

Theoretically, the "oppressed" of the Third World ought to grab at the Soviet model for development, but they don't. History has already made a determination on Marxist-Leninism and scrapped it. So other courses are required.

By this route we come to the question of security assistance--or arms sales, if you like--to the Third World.

Whatever else we may mean by the term Third World nation, economic inadequacy is intrinsic to the definition. Whether they are poor is almost beside the point, and many are not strictly speaking poor. The more common problem is the absence of an economic construct that permits the nation to generate and allocate economic goods--whether they be materials or competence, industrial output or services--in a way that broadly benefits the nation as a whole and engages its people in a consensus supporting the system that allocates the nation's benefits--including economic benefits.

Here the disadvantages for the United States and its fellow democracies comes into focus, as do the advantages for the Soviet Union.

We need not agree with Marxism to acknowledge that people have certain basic needs of an economic nature that must be met if political stability, social harmony, and national well-being are to be established and sustained. Yet it is precisely political stability, social harmony, and a general sense of national well-being that bars the door to Soviet penetration.

In short, a nation's poverty is a problem for the democracies and an opportunity for communism.

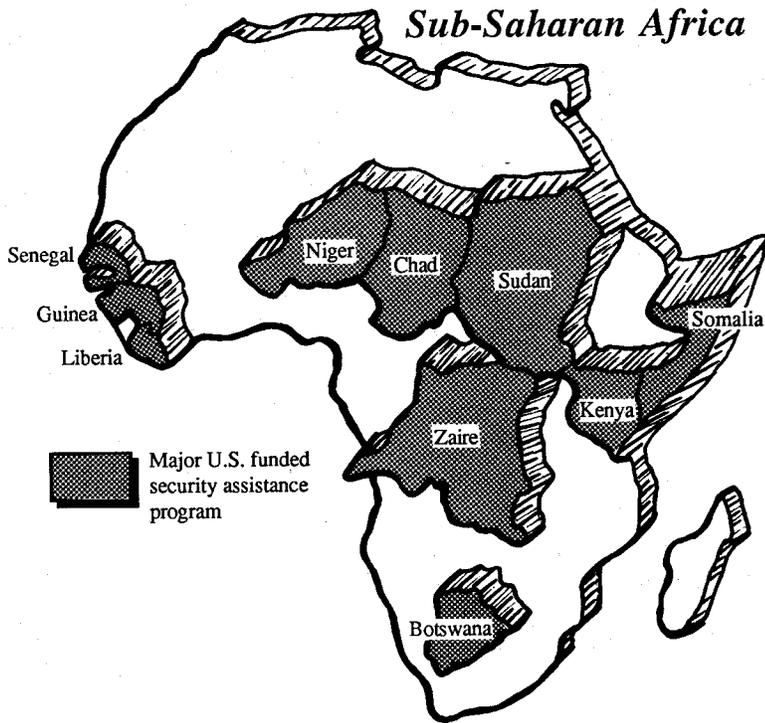
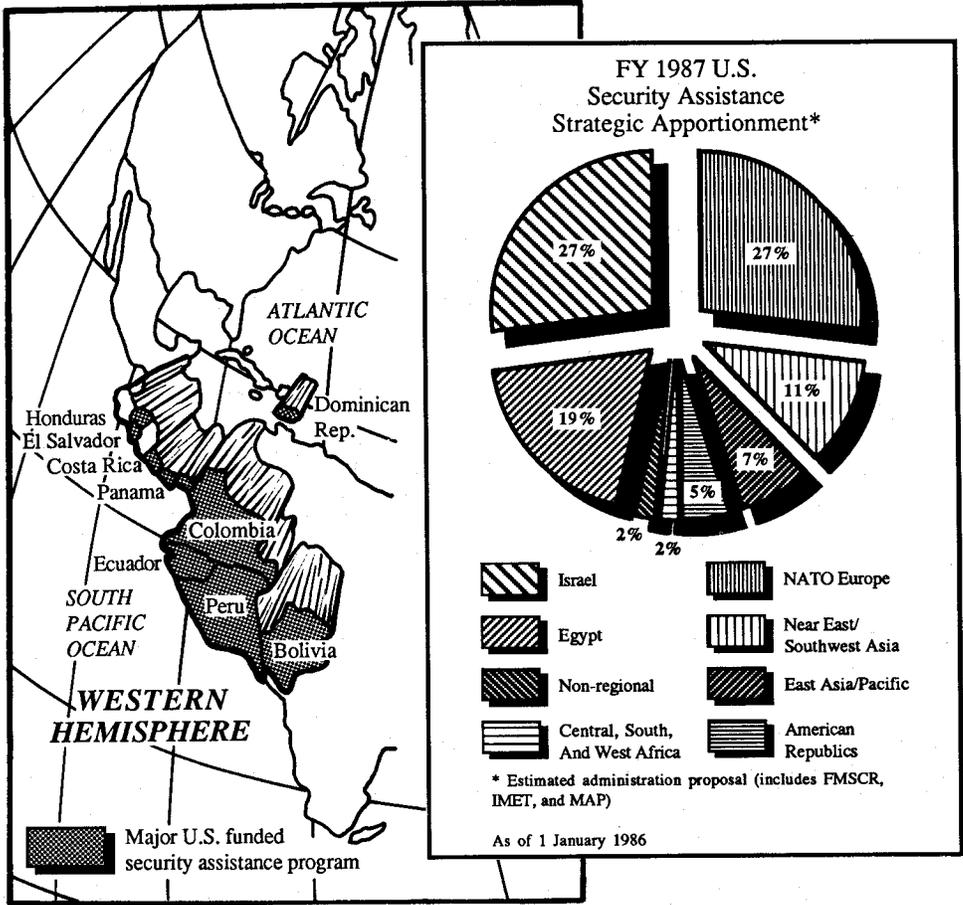
And so we come to a dilemma that remains largely unaddressed in the formulation of our security assistance policies and a contradiction that serves Soviet objectives as it contravenes our own.

First, let us establish a baseline against which we can make assessments at the end of the analysis. We are not being excessively candid if we admit that our security assistance programs are established to serve our own interests. We are an altruistic nation, but people can't eat guns or create anything with them, so the philanthropic motive is not at work here. We provide food and economic assistance to help others. We provide security assistance to help ourselves. Therefore, we must test the success of our security assistance policies by determining the extent to which they benefit our interests.

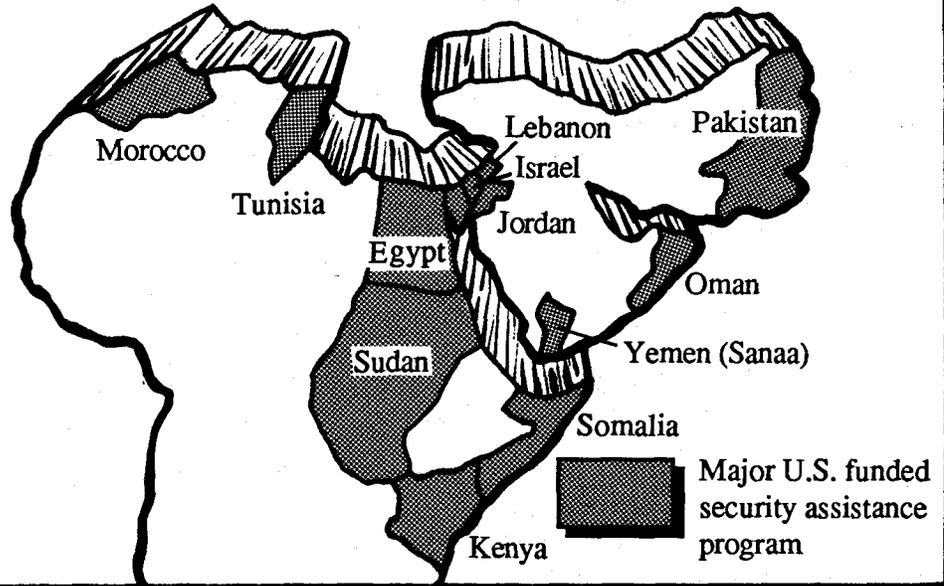
What do we get for this assistance--or hope to get?

First, and most theoretically, we strengthen our friends in the Third World, and so strengthen their regional influence and thus our own.

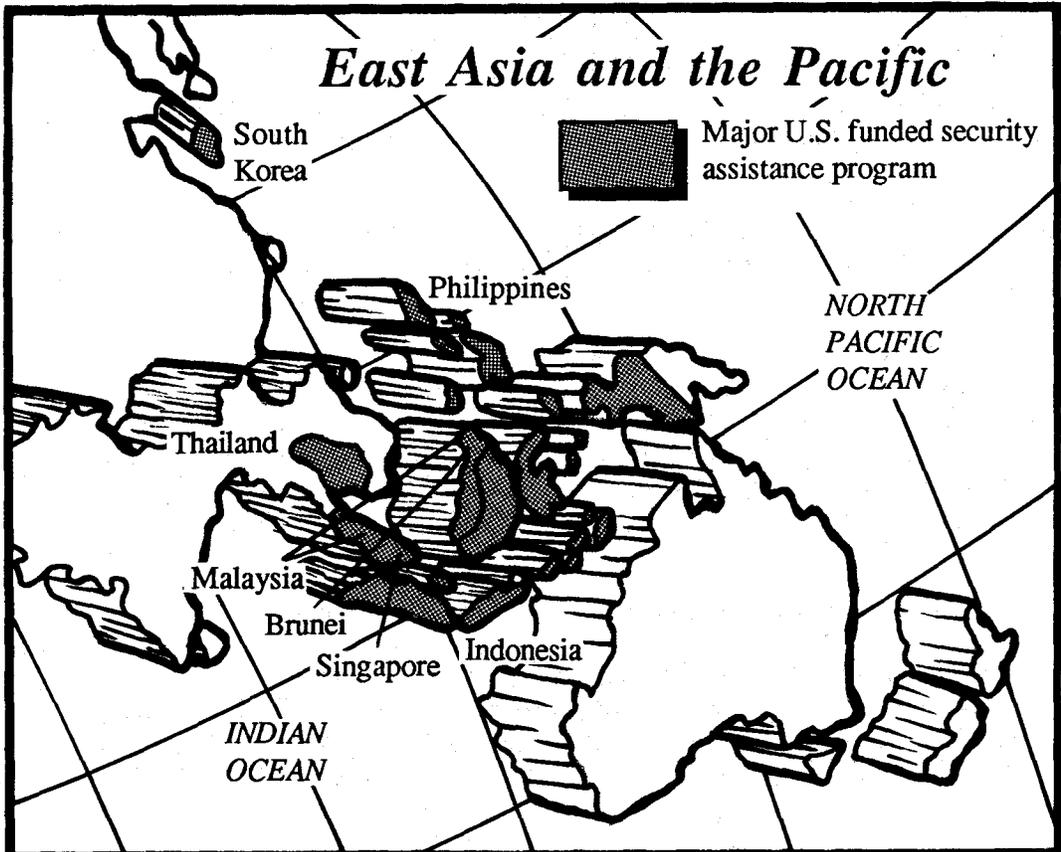
Second, we acquire base access rights for use in the event of larger contingencies. Obviously, if these rights are to be of lasting value, the nation providing them has to be stable enough and its successive governments friendly enough to us to assure the continuance of those rights.



Southwest Asia, the Middle East And North Africa



East Asia and the Pacific



Finally, we have a considerable economic benefit from that assistance because, call it assistance if you like, most of what we provide must be paid for. Even when it is not, as in the case of foreign military sales grant or military assistance program aid, one study estimates that 65 percent of the money we spend to provide the assistance is returned to the economy through the gross national product multiplier. For assistance provided through foreign military sales credit, it is estimated that the loan plus two-thirds of the face value of the loan comes back to the U.S. economy.

This is so because, with very few exceptions, it is a condition of the provision of foreign military sales credit that the loaned money be spent in the United States for the purchase of U.S. goods or services. In this manner, we help to amortize and sustain our own defense industrial base.

So this is what we get, or hope to.

How does it look if we consider it from the perspective of the Third world?

The only thing typical about Third World nations is our tendency to generalize about them. But it is not entirely unfair to cobble up a nameless example for illustrative purposes.

This exemplary nation may or may not have a resource base, but, if it does, the current price of its resources is severely depressed in current markets; and, even if it weren't, the proceeds of the commercial exploitation of those resources would benefit only a very small part of the country's population--the people who run it.

At the top of that small group is an authoritarian figure, probably with a military background, if not the actual head of the nation's military. He rules with the purported support of the nation's only legal party. While it is theoretically possible for a one-party state to have a democratically elected government, the head of our state will have managed to be elected again and again, calling into question the democratic propensities of his single party. He depends on his country's military, or a powerful quasi-military police and intelligence apparatus, to maintain himself in power.

The limited financial resources that get past this fellow are used to keep his friends happy and then to keep his military in a quiescent mood. Among the things required to keep them in this mood is equipment.

Now, if this fellow is our friend, or we want him to be, we will let him borrow money from us to buy equipment from us. And there the loop closes. He gets "X" millions in foreign military sales credit and embarks on the creation of an air force or an armored regiment or an air defense system or whatever. Notwithstanding the threat, and there may be no threat at all to speak of, what is frequently preferred in the way of equipment is whatever can be made to fly or roll past a reviewing stand on this country's national day. The equipment is of greater totemic, than military, significance.

This display betokens power and assures the military of its role in it.

But, out beyond the bleachers, the average citizen of this country still lives hand to mouth; the private sector businessman, if he exists, is not prospering; those who find an education have little or no use to which it can be put; and the bills for all that security assistance have to be paid. They have to be paid in hard currency, which is acquired through trade, of which this country has very little.

Thus, while the existence of any military apparatus at all in this country is a drain on its economy, that drain is accelerated by the use of foreign military sales credit. The result is further economic deterioration, further social dislocation, exacerbated political instability and not, incidentally, enhanced vulnerability to those pressures that lead to so-called wars of national liberation. And all in the service of improving that nation's security.

Now, if this were a universally accurate picture, we would be in difficult straits. In fact, the Third World contributes to global leadership its fair share of statesman and pluralistic governments and working economies and stable societies. But these are not the countries we are talking about.

We are not talking about the heads of Third World governments who simply will not accept United States credits for security assistance, because they know they can't afford those credits.

Or about those who seek the most modest kinds of assistance. It is heartening to be asked for boots and uniforms to help clothe a military force or for a thousand M-14 rifles, when you are accustomed to being asked for jet fighters or M-60 tanks.

Moreover, we ourselves can take credit for insisting on the provision of forms of assistance that will truly produce an effective military force rather than a colorful national day parade.

We urge our friends to look to logistical infrastructure, to command and control, to adequate training, to maintenance and even the restoration of existing equipment, rather than to big ticket lethal systems. This advice is not always well received, but it is a tribute to the Defense Security Assistance Agency and its people in the field that increasingly it is accepted.

Still, at the end of the day, it is necessary to question whether the purposes of our security assistance programs in the Third World are being or, under current circumstances, can be met.

In the game as it is now played, we have--as I said earlier--some serious disadvantages.

We determine annually how much money we are willing to allocate to security assistance. This utterly destroys any realistic planning process, either for ourselves or for the recipient of our assistance. Imagine that the recipient is allocated \$30 million in foreign military sales credit in year one and wants to improve his airlift. So together we establish a program for the acquisition of six C-130s. We begin to train his pilots, navigators, flight engineers, load masters, maintenance crews, and so forth, and he puts a portion of his loan down against the planes. Say two are delivered. Now he is in debt, overnight, up to his ears.

It may happen that the next year his credit allocation is reduced to \$25 million. Now he is having to service a large debt, which he may be managing, and he takes delivery of two more aircraft. He has more debt to service, he doesn't know what the following year's credit picture will be, and if he isn't servicing the debt, he can't use the credit anyway, and he may or may not get the rest of his aircraft. Either way, virtually all of his military budget--and you bet a good bit of the national budget--is tied up in cargo planes. The program has acquired its own momentum; he can't go back, he may not be able to go forward, and the assets he has acquired may or may not help him to deal with his threat--assuming he ever had a threat to deal with from the beginning.

Alongside the problem of force planning is financial planning.

When you or I go to make a major purchase on credit, our creditor takes some pains to assure that we have the capacity to meet the financial obligation we have incurred.

When a Third World country wants to make a purchase on credit, our primary concern is how much credit we have available to extend. Whether that country can meet its obligation is scarcely

considered and rarely has any effect on the final decision. What is considered is the friendliness of the leadership to us and its reliance on us for its survival; the political palatability of this leadership to Congress, and thus, Congress' willingness to extend credits; obviously, and necessarily, the geo-strategic position of the country, as well as its attitude toward matters of interest to us in the diplomatic arena. And, of course, how much credit we extended the previous year.

For, notwithstanding the nation's real defense needs, much less its economic circumstances, each allocation of assistance tends to establish a benchmark--a floor, in fact--from which our faithfulness in subsequent years will be measured. In common parlance, if we "loved" country X \$10 million last year, that country will expect to be "loved" something in excess of \$10 million this year.

But that affection is illusory, since it is purchased out of the coffers of the nation itself and out of the welfare of its people.

Nor are we always shoring up, in the Third World, a definitively pro-Western country. Many Third World nations profess non-alignment, and non-alignment may well be the philosophy of its government. But non-alignment is also frequently a cover for the practice of playing one power off against another, and if we do not meet the demands of this friendly government, we are very apt to see its friendship transferred elsewhere. It is not uncommon to see Third World nations move from the Western camp to the Soviet camp, from the Soviet to the West, and in some cases move back again or try to.

The Soviets have greater means to freeze this minuet when their partner is in their arms than we have. This points to a further difference between our respective approaches and to an additional disadvantage for us.

As a matter of policy, we try to make the recipients of our assistance self-sufficient and independent. If they acquire a system from us, we provide parts and spares along with it, and we train them not only to operate the system but, just as importantly, to maintain it. This is, in our view, a practical policy and one consistent with our own values. We would pursue this course irrespective of other constraints, but if we had a choice, we would pursue it with flexibility.

For the simple fact, and there is no blinking at it out of deference to Third World sensibilities, is that many Third World nations, for various reasons, do not pay any consistent attention to the need to maintain their equipment properly or to train their people in its use or to exercise with it. And the more complex the equipment is, the greater the problems of indifference to its maintenance.

This difficulty could be offset if we could put an appropriate number of trainers in the country, working with the forces and their equipment, on a full-time basis. Unfortunately, we are proscribed from doing this by the Foreign Assistance Act, which, with certain enumerated exceptions, dictates that "The number of members of the Armed Forces assigned to a foreign country . . . may not exceed six unless specifically authorized by Congress."

Such authority is difficult to come by. In 1984, we asked to increase our representation in Liberia to 16. Denied. In Zaire to 10. Denied. In Sudan to seven. One additional person. Denied.

In 1985, we again asked permission to increase our people in Sudan, this time by two to eight. Denied.

We have asked to go to seven in Sudan in 1986. Denied.

You may well believe that the Soviets have taken the fullest possible advantage of this astonishing gift from the U.S. Congress, and this is reflected in the number of Soviet forces operating in the Third World as opposed to U.S. forces. The number for the United States is slightly in excess of 600. For the Soviet Union, it is estimated at between 22,000 and 25,000. This does not include Soviet forces in Afghanistan, and it does not include Soviet surrogates, such as the 35,000 Cubans in Angola.

So our people do what they can, and with what they have, they do a heroic job. But the only edge they have is that they are well trained, they are not racists, and they know how to get along with others.

Contrast this with the Soviet approach. First, they can and will provide a target nation with what is effectively a turnkey military, with no unseemly discussions about payback. And don't worry about maintaining the stuff; the Soviets will handle it for you. In fact, they will send in hundreds of people to help make your military work, and as an added benefit, they will make your police and intelligence services work, too. In fact, they'll help you run them. Indeed, they'll insist on it.

In return for this, they will take a licensing agreement that enables them to steal hundreds of millions of dollars worth of your fish, assuming you are a littoral state. They will option any other resources you have, and finally, of course, they will expect you to pay for their equipment and their presence--which you will do at usurious rates.

The objective of Soviet assistance is very simply to win control of the government of the target country and through that expedient, to acquire control over the country itself.

The object of U.S. assistance is to benefit the country at large and through that expedient, to strengthen the government. In this regard, while the subject is security assistance, the fact is that the overwhelming share of U.S. foreign aid is economic assistance rather than military hardware. The Soviets provide relatively little in the way of economic assistance and, indeed, helping a nation to feed itself, develop its economic infrastructure, and prove a better life for its people would run directly counter to Soviet interests.

Let me give you some data that help to illuminate these points:

In 1984, Soviet economic assistance to the non-communist Third World amounted to roughly \$2 billion.

U.S. economic assistance was in excess of \$8.5 billion.

In 1984, Soviet arms deliveries to the Third World had an estimated value of almost \$9 billion, and that is a very conservative estimate.

U.S. security assistance was \$6.5 billion, roughly half of which goes to Egypt and Israel.

Now it may seem a bit too cute to refer to arms deliveries when we are talking about the Soviets and to security assistance when talking about ourselves. It isn't.

In 1981, by way of example, U.S. security assistance consisted of 29 percent for lethal systems and 71 percent for non-lethal aid such as engineering equipment, medical, housing, training, and so on. In the same year, the Soviet ratio was 75 percent lethal compared to our 29 percent, and 25 percent non-lethal compared to our 71 percent.

From the period 1972-1981, respective U.S./Soviet arms deliveries to the Third World looked like this:

- The United States provided 7,440 tanks and self-propelled guns; the USSR 13,220.
- The United States provided 8,225 artillery pieces; the USSR 16,400.
- The United States provided 2,600 combat aircraft; the USSR provided 4,275.
- The United States provided 8,890 surface-to-air missiles; the USSR 23,250.

And some of these numbers for the United States are skewed by the 1973 Yom Kippur War. [For an update of these figures, reflecting similar disparities in the period 1978-1985, see page 88 of this *Journal*.]

Now, of course there is a further difference between the way we do business and the way the Soviets do it, and this helps to explain why they will put out more military hardware and why more of the hardware they put out is lethal. We place three very rigid constraints on our military assistance.

First, the recipient isn't allowed to use it to commit aggression against his own citizens. The people of Afghanistan would probably appreciate it if this same restraint applied to Soviet "assistance."

Second, the recipient isn't allowed to use it to commit aggression against his neighbors. The people of Kampuchea and Thailand might prefer that the same restriction applied to Soviet "assistance" to Vietnam.

Third, the recipient isn't allowed to transfer these weapons to third parties without our prior consent, rarely given. Obviously, Nicaragua's neighbors would like it better if the same constraints were placed on Soviet arms, but of course the Soviets put arms in Nicaragua precisely to see them moved to neighboring countries.

We provide security assistance to help our friends defend themselves, and we provide economic assistance to help them develop their nations, feed their people, expand their economic bases, and move in time toward those ideals of social justice and political stability that we believe can alone ameliorate the ills of the Third World and so conduce to peace among nations. You may say that we believe in people.

The Soviet attitude is a little different. One representative attitude was expressed by Vadim Zagladin, a Soviet Communist Party theorist, explaining why the Third World needs the special attention of the Soviet Union: "Universal weakness, low cultural levels, and petty-bourgeois tribal religious prejudices" are widespread; Third World revolutionaries are "underdeveloped, disorganized, and politically immature." And Zagladin laments that "Afro-Asian people in particular must be given powerful external revolutionary stimuli in order to awaken them to the political struggle. . . ."

So we see a fundamental distinction between our respective approaches to the Third World, and it is one of confidence in people versus contempt for them.

Does this matter much in the long run? I frankly don't know. Power and sentimentality don't mix. Still, decency counts. Morality counts. You never know when they are going to pay off. The peasants of Ethiopia whose lives were saved by U.S. assistance in the famine have an odd name for sorghum, which was one of the things we poured in there. They call it "Reagan."

But one on one, we cannot compete with the Soviets in arming Third World countries. Not because we haven't the means, but because we are not willing to replicate the strategic arms race

and the conventional arms race in the Third World. We cannot look at Third World debt, now nearing a trillion dollars, and justify arms programs that further impoverish people and by so doing detract from our own security rather than contributing to it.

I have no grand, corrective scheme to offer, and while I have elaborated the risks of arms sales, I haven't offered much in the way of opportunities because I don't see a lot of them. But we have modeled some changes in the hope that if they work we can expand and extend them.

In Africa, all but three countries have been moved off the Foreign Military Sales Credit program, and we provide only Military Assistance Program aid, which, while it involves smaller sums, is grant aid. So that helps make a little dent on the debt side. How long this will continue I don't know. Congress doesn't like foreign aid much to begin with, and we are cutting back. Last year, we had only \$147 million for Military Assistance Program (MAP) aid to Africa, and in 1986, the sum will be less. [The FY 1986 MAP appropriation for Africa, after the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings sequestration, totaled \$96.4 million out of a total MAP appropriation of \$748.37 million.]

What we need is less expensive and simpler equipment to provide. This has nothing to do with Third World capabilities. In my view, we need simpler equipment for our own forces, too.

And we need to be able to put adequate numbers of people in the field to work with our friends. That means a change in the existing legislation.

In spite of the massive amounts of hardware the Soviets are willing to provide their targets, it is remarkable how fast they wear out their welcome. There are countries that have had security assistance relationships with the Soviets and thrown them out. What is left behind is equipment, without parts and spares, rusting away. There are also countries that want to get the Soviets out and feel they can't because they have such large investments in their equipment, and they need the Soviets for maintenance and for the parts and spares they keep on a short leash.

It was obvious that those who had dumped the Soviets, and those who might wish to do so, needed help in restoring and maintaining their equipment. That was the genesis of a program called "Bears Spares." It works nicely, but it works on a shoestring; and it would work better if it were funded better.

Finally, in Africa we have launched a small civic action program that provides non-lethal military equipment that can be used for the benefit of the military and for the betterment of the country as well. In my judgment, this is security assistance in the truest sense because it can contribute to internal stability.

Small programs are the first to die in a budget process, but if this one survives, it will offer opportunities for the development of inexpensive and innovative solutions to training requirements, engineering, medicine, coastal and riverine development, transportation, agricultural stabilization and so forth.

Opportunities in the whole area of security assistance to the Third World exist, but they will depend on new thinking and not conventional wisdom.

An old issue of *Armed Forces Management* contains this paragraph on the topic of arms sales:

In fiscal year 1961, the military Grant Aid program of the Department of Defense amounted to \$1.45 billion. Military sales were only \$630 million, or less than half those of the grant program. At the end of fiscal 1966, Grant Aid stood at \$824 million while the military arms sales had skyrocketed to \$1.937 billion, or 235 percent of the aid program. In five years, the military export sales program has emerged from an

afterthought to a major concern of the U.S. government. However, when the program started, it was by no means certain that the goal of reversing the aid-sales picture could be achieved. The attitude was, "we don't know if it can be done, but let's try."

They tried, and they succeeded, and great benefits came from it. But that was then, and this is now. Then gas was \$.30 a gallon, and economists were talking about developing nations reaching takeoff points, and Lyndon Johnson thought he'd found the answer to the guns-and-butter trade-off.

Today we face new realities. The Third World is the unacknowledged cockpit of great power conflict. We cannot afford to arm the Third World, and it cannot afford to be armed by us. The longer we ignore this reality, the less secure our position in the Third World will become.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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