ARMING THE REAGAN DOCTRINE

Charles Wolf, Jr.

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Both the goals and style of U.S. policies toward the 120 or so heterogeneous countries of the Third World differ enormously from those of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, with a few noteworthy exceptions, the policy instruments employed by the two superpowers are similar: diplomacy; military and economic assistance; advisors, experts, and technicians; technical and vocational training; information and disinformation; and clandestine operations of various sorts.

One of the exceptions is the development and use by the Soviet Union of a complex and effective network of cooperating “fraternal” communist states (e.g., Cuba, Vietnam, East Germany, Nicaragua, North Korea), as well as supportive noncommunist states and entities whose interests converge with those of the Soviet Union (e.g., Libya, the PLO, Syria). These participants perform military as well as nonmilitary roles, and provide contributions of different types and amounts. Although the operational details are obscure, the orchestration of these assets is provided by the Soviet Union, which also pays most of the bills.

Through this network of cooperating and coordinated elements (the “Red Orchestra”), the Soviet Union has acquired a significant advantage in its long-term, multi-faceted competition with the West. This is not to deny that the Soviet Union and international communism also have significant disadvantages in this competition. For example, disenchanted with centrally planned and tightly controlled Soviet-type economic systems has become widespread. Moreover, there are currently six anti-communist resistance movements actively underway within the extended Soviet empire: in Angola, Mozambique, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua.

Nevertheless, the balance between these advantages and disadvantages does not warrant complacency by the U.S. and the West.

I would like to suggest an innovation in U.S. policy which, while by no means unprecedented, would help offset the advantages that the Soviet empire enjoys as a result of this particular pattern of indirect, cooperative, and coordinated operations in the Third World. We should consider establishing, as a formal and explicit element in U.S. policy and in the programs that reflect this

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policy, the provision of material and non-material support for developing multinational, cooperative, mobile military forces of various types and sizes, capable of conducting low intensity military operations in the Third World. The purpose of these forces would be, in cooperation with the United States, to contain and to reverse communist imperialism in the Third World; to advance legitimate, indigenous movements that seek liberation from communist imperialism; and to further the mutual interests of the United States and its cooperator in developing more pluralistic and more open political systems in the Third World. The proposal would entail selective, measured, and increased U.S. assistance—rhetorical and diplomatic as well as tangible—to the indigenous forces of nationalism, independence, and pluralism which currently and potentially offer resistance to the communist empire of the Soviet Union and its principal associates. In other words, the Soviet doctrine of support for national liberation movements against “Western imperialism” should be paralleled by a U.S. doctrine of support for legitimate movements seeking national liberation from communist imperialism.

Though what I have in mind would represent a tactical innovation, it has obvious precedents both in prior U.S. policy endeavors, and in recent public policy pronouncements. The relevant past and current precedents include the deployment of Korean combat units in Vietnam in the late 1960s; forming, equipping, and supporting the Mbo hill tribes in Laos in the early 1960s; supporting freedom fighters in Afghanistan since 1980, and the contras in Nicaragua since 1981.

What I am proposing is also plainly foreshadowed in President Reagan’s State of the Union message on February 6, 1985:

Support for freedom fighters is self-defense, and is totally consistent with the OAS and UN charters... [We should] support the democratic forces whose struggle is tied to our own security.

Secretary Schultz further elaborated this stance in his speech to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco several weeks after the president’s State of the Union message. He asked:

So long as communist dictatorships feel free to aid and abet insurrections in the name of “Socialist Internationalism,” why must the democracies, the target of this threat, be inhibited from defending their own interests and the cause of democracy itself?

These and other such statements have led some to proclaim a “Reagan doctrine”; what I am proposing is that what goes by that name should be seen as embracing not merely direct American aid to those in the Third World who are resisting communist domination, but the creation of military and paramilitary forces, drawn from a number of countries, that could be used to fight alongside the resisters in appropriate circumstances or to assist beleaguered Third World governments in combating communist insurgencies directed against them.

The forces that I have in mind would be drawn from countries and movements within the Third World willing and able to act in concert with the United States for the advancement of mutual interests—notably, pluralism, human rights, open societies, and containment and reversal of the Soviet Union’s empire in the Third World. Although such common interests are likely to be only partial, my implicit premise is that the degree of commonality would be sufficient to achieve some division of labor and some sharing of burdens between the cooperating countries and the United States. The implementation of this doctrine would generally be overt and explicit, although in some instances there might

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be reasons for implementing the policy through more quiet channels.

In developing this proposal, we should emulate the stance of the Soviet Union in another respect: we should espouse the view that the development of such cooperative forces and the provision of U.S. support for legitimate movements seeking national liberation from communist imperialism are intended to be compatible with improvement of bilateral relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and with the conduct of arms reduction discussions and negotiations. The Soviet Union has repeatedly asserted that its support for wars of national liberation is consistent with maintaining and improving "peaceful coexistence" with the United States. Our position should be the same.

It is important to distinguish between the sort of cooperative forces that I am describing, and "proxies" or "surrogates." Proxies act at the behest of a controlling power, which bears all of the accompanying costs. Cooperative forces act from mutual interest, and share in the costs, responsibilities, and decision making. As examples of possible cooperating countries, I would suggest Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, Turkey, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Korea, and Taiwan.

From the standpoint of potential Third World cooperators, there may be important advantages and incentives to motivate participation: for example, helping to deter, contain, or reverse the common threat; advancing national interests through enhanced regional and international influence and stature; and improving their military and related capabilities.

From the U.S. standpoint, the development of cooperative forces also has numerous advantages: allowing for division of labor and some degree of specialization between the United States and its associates; providing a vehicle for sharing the burden of this common endeavor; increasing the political acceptability of various U.S. policies and activities in the Third World; and providing a means of reducing the gap between U.S. interests and commitments on the one hand, and U.S. capabilities on the other.

In both the deterrence and the conduct of low intensity warfare, cooperating countries can participate and contribute by the assumption of a wide range of roles and responsibilities; for example, by providing training, equipment, rebuild, maintenance, and other modest forms of logistic support, financing, and, finally, direct combat units.

In their military dimension, two different types of potential cooperative military forces should be distinguished: cooperative local forces (CLF), and cooperative mobile forces (CMF). CLF are essentially "freedom fighters," such as those currently active in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, and Angola. CMF would consist of combat and related military elements from cooperating Third World countries, with logistic and back-up support provided by the United States, and perhaps by other cooperating countries. CMF would be available at the invitation of beleaguered Third World countries to provide them with enhanced capabilities for resisting and defeating communist revolutionary movements in those states. El Salvador provides an example of the possible utility of CMF.

Further refinements in these force types can be identified. For example, a distinction can be made between insurgent local forces themselves, and the forces of "front line" states willing to provide support for the insurgent local forces. Another distinction is that between CMF deployable for intra-theater purposes, and CMF deployable for inter-theater use.

Clearly, the foregoing observations barely touch on many of the issues that would be involved in a serious effort to develop a network of cooperating forces to conduct low intensity warfare. Such issues as operational concepts, equipment, logistic support and costs, as well as legal, political, and other aspects will need to be addressed. Clearly, too, there are major political and organiz-

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tional ramifications that need to be considered, not only within the administration and the Congress but also in bilateral or multilateral discussions with potential cooperators.

What I am outlining is not a resurrection of the “rollback” effort of the 1950s. Instead, the aim is to reshape containment so that it can perform more effectively in the future within the low intensity part of the conflict spectrum. The aim is also to redress the fundamental asymmetry that has operated in this field to the advantage of the Soviet Union through its effective use of “fraternal” socialist states.