Introduction: Soviet Perceptions of the regional conflicts in the Third World from Stalin to Gorbachev

The Soviet Union always gave an important, perhaps even vital place to the Third World in its worldview of international relations, and maintained a firm and active commitment to the developing countries of the Third World. Over the years, the Soviets expanded the geographic range of their involvement in Third World countries by significantly intensifying their political, military and economic activity. They maintained that the destinies of the Third World countries were ideologically linked to the Soviet Union, and an unchanged Soviet ideological objective was, therefore, to reinforce that linkage. Though the Soviet policy towards the Third World has been complex and diverse, yet, the most generalised ideological posture has been that of support to the "national liberation movements".
This ideological concept dates back to Lenin who initially perceived the vulnerability of the West's colonial system and held that the colonial world was destined to be a "natural ally" of the Soviet Union in the larger global struggle against imperialism and capitalism. In the context of international relations and the foreign policy of socialist Russia, Lenin had visualised the importance of revolution in colonial countries even before World War-I and gave a theoretical perspective to the idea of co-operation between the proletariat of the advanced countries and the liberation movements in the colonial countries. In his famous work *Imperialism as the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin noted that imperialism had caused the growth of nationalist tendencies in the colonial countries which could be termed progressive under the circumstances. This was an extremely important conclusion on which the Soviet theory of relations with the Third World in later years was based.

In order to correctly study the Soviet policy towards the Third World countries, it would be appropriate, first of all, to identify and evaluate the Soviet perspective on the Third World which developed over a period of time. The major purpose of this chapter is to gain an insight into the Soviet behaviour in the Third World. It is done not only by examining the steps Soviet Union has taken in these countries, but also, and more importantly, by scrutinising the Soviet academic debate about Third World issues. The understanding of this debate provides a framework in which Soviet policies towards Third World countries have been formulated.

Before embarking upon such an exercise it would be proper to understand the role of ideology in Soviet Third World policy formulations. The Marxist-Leninist ideology has provided the Soviet scholars and leaders basic guidelines to formulate both domestic and foreign policy.
1 Role of Ideology

The strong input of ideology has certain demerits of course. One such is the self-opinionated appraisal of situations which lead to either their over or under estimation. But even then the Soviets have been justified in using an ideological approach. As an eminent Indian expert on Soviet affairs argues,

The ideological Soviet approach has rescued itself from temporary spells of dogmatism through reality. The ideological approach permits a combination of basic doctrinal postulates with principles and concepts derived from the theory but closely reflecting the specific reality confronted by adherents of the ideology. Thus there is room for change in ideological approach, but change need not be confused with erosion.¹

As noted earlier the most pronounced Soviet ideological commitment to the Third World, the support to "national liberation movements" was rooted in Lenin’s perspicacity of viewing the interdependence and complementarity of socialism and anti-imperialist struggles for national liberation.² The Soviet approach is based on the dialectics of the class and national liberation struggle and the Leninist concept of a single world revolutionary process directed in the first place against imperialism and eventually aimed against capitalism.³ The basic objectives of Soviet Union as put forward by Lenin were: "We shall exert every effort to foster association and merger with the Mongolians, Persians, Indians, Egyptians. We believe it is our duty and in our interest to do this, for otherwise socialism in Europe will not be secure. We shall

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
endeavour to render these nations, more backward and oppressed than we are, 'disinterested cultural assistance' --- we will help them to use the machinery, to the lightening of labour, to democracy, to socialism."

2 Lenin’s Legacy

Lenin’s greatest achievement was that he assessed on a profound scientific basis, the real and potential strength of the national liberation movements, and also mapped out the ways for involving the people of the colonial countries in their revolutionary struggle against imperialism.

He wrote:

All nations will arrive at socialism - this is inevitable - but all will do so in not exactly the same way, each will contribute something of its own to some form of democracy, to some variety of dictatorship of the proletariat, to the varying rate of social transformations in the different aspects of social life.⁵

He stressed the need for the joining of hands by Soviets, the working class movement in advanced capitalist countries, and the national liberation movement for the elimination of the colonial system.

According to Lenin, for socialism to prevail and national liberation movements to succeed, the society, in these countries had to reach a certain stage of social development bypassing or cutting short the capitalist stage. Thus emerged the theory of non-capitalist path of development which is an organic component of Marxist-Leninist concept of the revolutionary process and socialist construction. As an alternative to capitalist path of development it means that pre-capitalist structures are transformed on socialist lines through various transitional stages and

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⁵ Ibid., pp. 69-70.
usage of various special forms and methods of struggle. Powerful assistance by the countries in which proletarian dictatorship is established is provided to the nations developing along non-capitalist path. Lenin’s concept of non-capitalist path was related to an analysis of the national colonial question, world proletarian revolution and socialist construction. Lenin thus interwined the non-capitalist path with the liberation of the oppressed nations from imperialist rule through an alliance between national liberation movement and the proletarian revolution.

Lenin’s ideological pronouncements on the national liberation movements viewed them as an essential component of the world socialist revolution. These revolutions formed an integral part of a theory of world socialist revolution which was being carried out by a fight between the imperialist oppressor and oppressed nations. Lenin believed that imperialism would topple as a result of interaction between socialist working-class revolutions in the advanced industrial countries and the national liberation movements of the oppressed people in the Third World. He urged for a total unity of the socialists and the workers of the oppressed and the oppressing nations. Emphasising the joint revolutionary struggle to overthrow imperialist powers, Lenin pointed out,

---- a policy must be pursued that will achieve the closest alliance, with Soviet Russia, of all the national and colonial liberation movements. The form of this alliance should be determined by the degree of development of the communist movement in the proletariat of each country, or of the bourgeois democratic liberation movement of the workers and peasants in backward countries or among backward nationalities.\(^6\)

It is important here to note that even though Lenin’s stand was one of opposition to all kind of nationalism, he repeatedly made it clear that, historically speaking, the nationalism of oppressed

nations had a concrete democratic and progressive element which the Communists must support, regardless of the fact that the bourgeoisie was spearheading this nationalism.

3. Stalin’s Era

After Lenin’s death the Soviet theory and policy reflected more and more the views of Stalin. He always maintained the concept of unity of the world revolutionary process with its essential implication for support to the national liberation movements. For example, in 1924, Stalin emphasised a common revolutionary front between the working class in the developed countries and the liberation movements of the oppressed people. Stalin initially, did not dwell on the question of support to a precise strata, or those forces of society which were fighting against imperialism. But later on he spelled out which national movements were to be supported and when. In 1925, Stalin advocated the formation of a "national revolutionary bloc of workers, peasants and the revolutionary intelligentsia against the bloc of compromising national bourgeoisie and imperialism." Thus he asserted, that wherever these movements came into conflict with the proletarian development, they should not be supported. Stalin in fact, framed a policy of ‘United Fronts’ of communists with other non-communists as his form of support to the national liberation movements. Stalin was skeptical of the role of national-bourgeoisie in these movements and stressed the need of the proletariat to become hegemonic in such situations.

These theoretical perceptions of Stalin were reflected in his policy towards China from 1924 to


9. Ibid., p.218.
These theoretical perceptions of Stalin were reflected in his policy towards China from 1924 to 1927. Despite its rectification at the 7th Congress of the Comintern which in the context of resisting the rise of fascism advocated a line of United Front with the bourgeoisie, Stalin’s approach to the national movements in the colonies of the Western powers remained largely dogmatic and sectarian. Stalin viewed independent India as a semi-colony, governed by a reactionary regime representing the interests of the big monopolist bourgeoisie which was in league with foreign Capital and tied to big landlords. The Leninist concept of non-capitalist path of development got eclipsed.

4. Post Stalin Era-I (Khrushchev’s Policies)

Whereas the Stalin era (1924-1953) saw the underplaying of the role of national bourgeoisie in the national liberation movements and also of the concept of non capitalist path of development, the post Stalin period saw the idea of non capitalist path gain currency with reorientations and reconstitutions according to the specific needs.

In the early Khrushchevian times the newly liberated colonial countries were accorded special and important status even if they were not exactly following the non capitalist path. Soviet writings, full of praise for those countries described the path adopted by them in their fight against imperialist and for their economic development as correct. For example, at the 20th CPSU Congress (1956), Khrushchev, while asserting closer ties between the newly free countries and the world socialist system headed by USSR, stated, "a vast zone of peace, including peace
Khrushchev also endorsed the idea of "national democracy" and the role of the proletariat and the working class in the internal development of the newly free countries. He, however, asserted that working class should be headed by a Vanguard in its transition to socialism. During the 1960's, the term non capitalist path of development, though not forgotten, was used sparsely because of some reservations on part of the Soviet leaders and academicians on the ways and means of realising it practically. These reservations stemmed from the objective international conditions existing in that period of time. For example, the continued rise in the number of countries which denoted themselves as 'socialist' and the need to allow them certain ideological autonomy, the stringent rules for the definition of socialism via non-capitalist path of development were relaxed and the concept of revolutionary democracy approved, headed by the revolutionary democrats.

Another reason for Soviet reservations about the non-capitalist path of development was the "willingness of some sections of Soviet academe to legitimise the official line favouring cordial relations with the third world countries following the path of independent capitalist development." 11

Last, but not the least, the question of the composition of classes those would handle the power during the non-capitalist stage was also responsible for the temporary underplaying of the


concept. Once the role of coalition of working class and peasant masses as the determining factor for non-capitalist path was accepted, further additions were made to it as per the requirements of time and specific conditions. Thus, the complex class structure and the prevalent socio-economic condition in the Third World led Soviet theoreticians to accept the non-capitalist path via the national democracy which meant a type of rule, not exercised by a particular party or class but by alliances of popular fronts, (excluding imperialists and the comprador bourgeoisie) not yet under the hegemony of the proletariat.

So it is clear from the foregoing analysis that the refinement of the non-capitalist concept was not an abandonment of it, or of the Marxist-Leninist ideology. It was, in fact, responsible for enhanced social mobilisations all over the world in the struggle against imperialism of the Third World in general, and Soviet Union in particular.

After its re-emergence in 1950’s, (since its inception in the 1920s) the non-capitalist path of development underwent further reappraisals in the 1960’s as the transitional path to socialism. The primary question behind the re-evaluation of this path concerned the adoption of revolutionary strategies in the likelihood of a real transition to socialism in the Third World and particularly the transition under a non-communist leadership. This point was highlighted by the reversals faced by Kwame N Krumah in Ghana, Mobido Keita in Mali, and Sukarno in Indonesia. In resolving this question of adoption of revolutionary strategies (i.e. the non-capitalist path) by non-communist leaders of the various national liberation movements, there was great debate among the Soviet scholars. Involved in this debate were eminent Soviet theorists like R. Ulyanovsky, N. Simonia, G. Mirsky, K. Brutents, V. Tiagunenko, Kiselev and
many others.

4.1 The Simonia Query

The acceleration to this debate was provided by a book by N. Simonia entitled *Strany Vostoka: Puti Razvitia [Countries of the East: Paths of Development]*, published in 1975. In his book Simonia analysed the national liberation movements of the developing countries in an innovative and different way. He differed in his approach from the usual Soviet theoretical analyses of the liberation movements. Taking a lot of help from texts by Marx, Engels and Lenin, he compared those movements with the one in Russia in 1905. He doubted the revolutionary potentials of the bourgeoisie of those revolutions and found them incapable of 'growing-over' into a socialist one. The reason he assigned to this incapability was that of their backwardness (owing to an underdeveloped economic base) and irrational ethnic or tribal geographic identities. He argued,

> The national-colonial question has two aspects - the internal and external. Prior to the achievement of political independence, the external aspect - that is, the struggle for political, state sovereignty - subordinates the internal to itself and muffles its impact .... The struggle against colonialism was a factor that unified all the political forces within the existing territorial boundaries .... The achievement of political independence began swiftly to advance the internal national aspect of the problem to the forefront.\(^{12}\)

Highlighting Simonia’s argument about the backwardness of the developing countries of ‘socialist orientation’ in his book *Strany Vostoka*, Kaushik writes, "He maintained that ‘socialist-orientation’ countries would be unable to proceed towards genuine socialism unless they first

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overcome their backwardness.\(^{13}\)

Simonia did not accord any special character to the national liberation movements and emphasised that they were only political, not social movements or revolutions. He called them as classical bourgeois revolutions, necessitating, later, purely socialist revolutions. In this sense he argued about their not 'growing over' to socialism.

These views of Simonia came in for sharp criticism from various quarters and the most vehement opposition was from Ulyanovsky to whom such conclusions regarding the Third World were crucial and unacceptable. Ulyanovsky argued that Simonia had misinterpreted Marx and Lenin in his analysis. He had, in fact, "ignored the Marxist teaching of dialectical unity of the political and social aspects of the revolutions, in general, artificially separating the two and putting them against each other."\(^{14}\) Ulyanovsky further criticized Simonia over his position of the underdeveloped economic base of the countries engaged in national liberation movements. He said that the revolution would change the production base itself i.e. the economic base would be widened by a political revolution and the eventual transformation to socialism would be brought about. Ulyanovsky accused Simonia of underestimating the socialist potential of the developing countries and of Lenin's theory of the possibility of skipping over the stage of capitalism, and of rejecting the whole idea of the non-capitalist path for the Third World.\(^{15}\)

Simonia, however, denied that he had rejected the non-capitalist path approach in his work.

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14. Ibid.
He stated that his work was limited only to the countries of Asia and North Africa, and that he did not want to discredit the socialist oriented non-capitalist path of development. He advocated a cautious approach as against a 'too-fast' one of the others who were overlooking the 'unripe conditions' for genuine socialism in the "present stage" societies of the Third World. As put by an author, "Generally less optimistic than other theoreticians, he was apparently arguing against any idea of precipitously trying to convert these regimes to scientific socialism." 16

Thus this debate saw the various theoretical advancements by authors who viewed the national liberation movements as bourgeois in nature and remaining so, and by those who opined that such movements would bring about radical transformations in the society and develop them into socialism.

4.2 Multistructural Society

Details about the nature of the developing world undergoing national liberation movements and their pre-industrial societies which took long time periods in their advance to socialism, led to the exploration of causes for this delay. It was observed that besides backwardness, the complexity of structural composition of these societies undergoing the transition stage accounted for an inordinate delay in growing over to socialism.

While discussing the pre-industrial societies, the Marxian theory of their historical development from feudalism to capitalism to socialism was taken cognisance of. Great care was taken in ideological calculations about the evolution of stages of history in the concerned societies. Hence the concept of "multistructural society" evolved which was a departure from,

16. Ibid., p.125.
but not abandonment of Marxist - Leninist class analysis.

Even Lenin had discussed a number of presocialist modes of production that existed in Russia after the revolution. He listed at least four such competing modes of production in addition to the socialist one. Those were: patriarchal (either nomads or peasants producing for themselves rather than the market), small scale commodity production (peasants producing largely for the market, usually grain), private capitalism, and state capitalism (nationalised industries). A society with such a number of modes of production came to be known as a "multi-structural" one.

Taking a clue from Lenin, this concept of "multistuctureness" of the Third World societies, undergoing a prolonged transitional period to socialism, was, further advanced by A.I. Levkovsky and L.I. Reisner.

Defining the complex socio-economic character of the Third World societies undergoing different social formations on the basis of their modes of production, Levkovsky maintained that the multistructural societies could go either the capitalist or the socialist way. He mentioned six stages in the evolution of these transitional societies to any social formation. He argued that the capitalist mode of production was a leading one in the development of these societies. Due to this reason he called the future of the Third World societies as 'open' and maintained that they would move from transition stage directly to socialism. He assigned the task of accomplishing this goal to the "petty-bourgeoisie, the non-proletarian and semi-proletarian

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17. Ibid., p.125.

18. For details of six stages of 'multistuctural-societies' see Kaushik, no.1, pp. 90-91.
masses of the developing countries.”

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that ideology always provided an important input in determining the Soviet foreign policy goals vis-a-vis the Third World. Ofcourse, the Soviet ideological perception of the Third World realities kept on changing as a result of interaction with the realities on the ground. Hence the Soviet scholars’ and leaders’ continued evaluation and re-evaluation of their ideas and policies in the light of Marxist - Leninist ideological pronouncements. Thus we see that the Soviet foreign policy in general, and in relation to the Third World in particular, accepted change as a permanent feature of the historical process. As put by Rubinstein, "... it is clear that the engineers of Soviet state are not rigid determinists. Their sharing of Marxist - Leninist heritage does not signify unanimity on all major policy questions. Though they may agree at a given time in the evaluation of the "objective" conditions controlling the ever shifting pattern of international forces, they may disagree on which policy of alternatives to adopt. A common perception of reality does not necessarily produce uniform answers to specific policy problems ...." 

After explaining the underlying assumptions of Soviet policy towards the Third World by this framework, it is necessary to analyse the actual Soviet behaviour in the Third World countries.

The beginning of the Soviet Union’s dealings with the Third World since October Revolution of 1917 was a modest one and consistent with Lenin’s theses on the national and colonial question. Soviets supported those Marxist or socialist regimes which attempted to implement

19. Ibid.

programmes that were associated with Marxism. These included democratic centralism within a vanguard party; a single party state and the use of party dominated mass organisations to penetrate and politicise society; public ownership of the commanding heights of the economy; collective or co-operative property relations in agriculture; a general aversion to private sector economic activity; and, in foreign policy, anti-imperialism and expression of solidarity with similarly inclined movements and regimes in other countries. 21

Following these objectives in its policy towards Third World countries, the initial phase of Soviet activity endeavoured at Communist collaboration and Soviet support for "national revolutionary movements" (also called national liberation movements) led by bourgeoisie in the struggle against imperialism. In the period following the October revolution, the young Soviet power was not well established to pursue great power politics and was interested in partner-like relations with the liberation movements. Although it had no elaborate strategy worked out for these movements, it took her ideological claim seriously in the 1920s. The Soviet policymakers pursued a liberal approach to the nationalist movements of the Third World and adopted a policy that would prevent the use of states on the Soviet periphery as bases for intervention, and, reduce the intensity of the challenge to the Soviet state by the victorious Allied and Associated powers (Great Britain, France, Japan and the United States) by challenging European control over colonial possessions. 22 These considerations were clearly highlighted at the Comintern


22. Ibid., p.11.
sponsored Baku Congress organised by Zinov'ev and Radek in 1920, and a "holy-war" was declared against "British imperialism". But the Soviets could not achieve any continuity in propaganda mobilisation aimed at gaining influence in the Third World. They found out that overt involvement in anti-colonial struggle was complicating their efforts to normalise relations with Great Britain in particular. For the next two years the idea of support to the national liberation movements was played down and Soviet foreign policy was dominated by European issues such as normalisation of relations with the capitalist states. Infact, Comintern activities were directed predominantly towards Europe. 23

Even while normalising its relations with the capitalist world, Soviet Russia always remained vigilant about its own security which could be endangered by Western intervention in the states along its periphery. It always hoped to cultivate and establish good relations with national revolutionary regimes along its borders. One such early indication of this policy was the signing of a treaty of friendship with Turkey in 1921, between Soviet government and Mustapha Kamal Pasha's nationalist regime in Ankara. Kamal was then fighting the Greek army, which was attempting to occupy Anatolia under the terms of the treaty of Sevres, and the Soviet leadership evidently believed that victory by Kamal would undermine the influence of Great Britain and other Western powers in the near east, thereby serving Soviet security interests, as well as contributing in a roundabout manner to the revolutionary struggle in Europe. 24 As a result of


this treaty, Turkey was aided not only by Soviet military supplies, but, also by financial credits to purchase arms and ammunition. Although Soviet aid was not decisive in Kamal's victory over Greek army in 1922, but it was the first case of Soviet military assistance to a foreign regime at war.

Another key feature of this period and the second example of Soviet diplomatic and military involvement in a local conflict was the assistance to Canton-based National Revolutionary Party of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the Kuminthang (KMT), from 1923 to 1927. The KMT was trying to achieve primacy in a divided China under his leadership. In 1922 the Soviets were able to construct a 'united-front' of small Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Kuminthang, simultaneously maintaining diplomatic relations with the established government of the 'Chinese Republic' in Peking. In 1923, Soviet diplomat Adolf Joffe and Sun Yat-sen signed an agreement effectively establishing a political and military alliance. As result of this agreement a number of political and military advisors—notably, Mikhail Borodin in political and General Galin in military matters reached China. They started wielding considerable influence on the KMT and helped in reorganising the National Revolutionary Army (NRA) and restructuring the Chinese Communist Party along the Leninist lines. This was followed by granting of considerable amount of material and military equipment to KMT to help in its efforts of widening the area under its control.

Extending of help to China by the Soviets was beset with specific attractions to Soviet

Union. China's long border with USSR and the chaotic conditions prevailing therein had the potential of intervention by other great powers which, in turn, was detrimental to Soviet security interests. But this affair with China proved to be short lived as dissention between Communists and KMT grew leading to a number of unpleasant situations-KMT's split after Sun Yat-Sen's death in 1925 and Chiang Kai-Shek's taking over of that part of KMT which defeated "left KMT" and Communists and their ouster from the movement. Even then, under instructions from Soviets, the CCP supported the KMT for two years (1925-1927) at the cost of terrible losses. But, finally, the united front collapsed in the summer of 1927.

Though not fully successful in achieving their goal of a Communist led movement in China, this Soviet involvement can not be regarded as a failure of Soviet policy makers. In fact, it assisted them in formulating policies with greater clarity in dealing with the liberation movements in the future.

The Chinese experience made the Soviets wise and the active policy towards national liberation movements was moderated, if not stopped. As put by Bukharin, "The experience of the Chinese revolution has brought us into actual touch with a diversity of problems of colonial revolutions in general --- (it) shows very clearly how cautious one must be in deciding on concrete political tactics, how necessary it is to take into careful consideration the peculiarities of development in this or that country." Realisation of the fact that the Soviet Government was not able to determine the outcome of the revolutions in the areas beyond its immediate

control, the importance of the national liberation movements was played down temporarily. Instead, Soviets turned inward and began concentrating on the building of "socialism in one country". The Soviet involvement in the Third World revolutionary movement did slow down in early 1930's but not vanish completely. In fact, from 1931 to the Second World War, Soviets supplied military and financial aid to China and Spain. As one Western author puts it: the Soviets were first asked for direct military assistance against other Chinese warlords in 1934, and they forthwith provided two brigades of NKVD troops and combat air support to General Sheng. Again in 1937 Sheng turned to Soviets for aid, and again troops and air cover were sent ... arms and uniforms were also provided for a Sinkiang army of 10,000 men, a Soviet military air-craft factory was built at Urumchi ... and several hundred Soviet flyers trained at a clandestine aviation training school at Kuldzha in 1938-39.27 Realising the need of an intervention-free boarder for their own defence policy, the Soviets signed a mutual non-aggression pact with Nationalist China in 1937. The Soviets supplied the Chinese military equipments in exchange for raw material from China as per the terms of the pact.

Again, because of their own security interest, i.e. to offset the Fascist onslaught by Hitler's accession to power in 1933, the Soviets aided the Spanish Republicans in their Civil war from 1936 to 39. They offered the Spanish Republican Government not only military equipments but also financial help, to win trust and co-operation of France and Great Britain.28

Thus, since Lenin's commitment to national liberation movements in early 1920s till the


Second World War, Soviets made little attempt to interfere in the regional conflicts, except those, which were near to traditional Russian interests.

We have seen from the discussion above that the Soviet policy towards Third World was, initially, activist under Stalin as shown by events of KMT struggle in China, Sino-Japanese War, and the Spanish civil war. But once the "Chinese experiment" did not produce desired results, there was shift in Soviet attitude to the Third World. Though some commitments were honoured, great care was taken in executing them.

It was after World War-II, that the Soviet perceptions of the Third World changed, though the necessity of unity of a world revolutionary process stayed. There were many factors responsible for this changed attitude. The primary one, of course, was Soviet Union's preoccupation with the reconstruction of war-ravaged economy and the consolidation of control over the areas that had come under the domination of the Red Army in 1945. Other factors responsible for inattention to the colonial areas of the Third World were the onset of cold war and Soviet Union's own defense considerations. This semi-isolationist posture resulting from a hardline approach to the colonial and ex-colonial countries also contributed to Soviet Union's noninvolvement in Third World areas in the Stalin years. The importance given to the colonial countries was only because of the fact they could be used as important instruments in the Cold War struggle. As put by one Western scholar, "The Soviet attitude to national liberation in any given instance was... determined not by Communist strength in the movement seeking it or by the imminence of independence but by the irritation, the national liberation movement,
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Communist or non-Communist, was capable of producing in the metropolitan.  

This statement clearly spells out the compulsions faced by Stalin on the question of support to Third World countries during the last eight years of his rule. Stalin was reconstructing Soviet Union in a hostile atmosphere, and it was important at that time not to aggravate the hostilities with the West by virtue of unquestionable support to the Third World regimes. Stalin, while operating in the framework of a world revolutionary movement where support to the national liberation was must, has his own precepts of the character of these movements. Hence, non-encouragement to the leaders like Nehru, and others.

Stalinist period was also characterised by the division of world into two Camps - the war camp led by the United States and peace camp by the Soviet Union-joined by Indonesia, Vietnam and India and supported by Egypt and Syria. It was also backed by the fighters for national liberation in the colonies. Zhdanov, however, did not attribute the rise of colonial revolutions to the Soviet Union but, instead, maintained that it was because of the World War-II that the correlation of forces was changed in favour of Soviet Union. This changed correlation of forces was evident from the success of the Soviet supported Communist regimes in North Korea (1948) and China (1949). A selected help or support was thus given to those colonial countries which had leading Communist party or elements heading the struggle for national liberation.

Thus, in the period from 1945 to 1953, the Soviets while blaming the West for the backwardness of the developing countries, and re-affirming the progressive role of the Soviet

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Union in championing the role of national liberation movements and economic development by non-capitalist path, offered only a selective support to these countries.

With Stalin's death and Khrushev's accession to power the Soviet policy to Third World became more pragmatic and realist. It was this period when Soviet involvement in Third World affairs grew rapidly and the Soviets rationalised the shift in their ideological stance to adjust to the changing scenario in the Third World. It was this period which saw intense debates over the ideological permanence in support to the Third World revolutionary struggle. In this period only the Soviets enhanced their influence by participating, sometimes even directly, in various Third World conflicts. So this was the period of heightened Soviet activities in the Third World and established firmly its credentials as a 'super power'. Soviet 'super power' status was buttressed by a dramatic development of its conventional capabilities (late 1960s) as well as the attainment of strategic nuclear parity with the United States.

Before embarking upon the exercise of analysing the Soviet involvement in the Third World in post-Stalin era, we introduce the term 'regional-conflicts' in order to properly categorise Soviet involvement in such areas of operation, where 'national liberation movements' were going on.

In the Western literature on contemporary history and international politics, the use of the term national liberation movement is generally avoided except while referring to the Soviet view of developments in the former colonies of the West. Thus, what in essence constitutes the struggle of the Arab, Vietnamese and Cuban people for their national liberation, is referred to as the regional conflicts in West Asia, South East Asia and the Caribbean. In the present study
the use of the term regional conflict need not be interpreted as acceptance of the Western rejection of national liberation content of these issues and problems. The use of this term is more in the geographical sense since it relates to struggle of a people against foreign or local oppression in a particular geographic region. Because these movements were not predominant everywhere and were scattered all over the globe, they were regional in nature, and hence the application of the term 'regional conflicts' from hereon.

Moreover, the induction of the term 'regional-conflicts' is also necessitated by the fact that the areas undergoing 'national liberation movements' were precisely the same ones in which the Soviet interest and involvement grew over the years. The presence of Soviet and American interests turned these areas into "high risk zones" and the clash of interests triggered off events which carried on for years.

After Stalin's death, setting aside cold-war tensions, Soviets began to explore the opportunities to enhance the Soviet global status, by initiating changes in the overall policy of the Soviet state towards the outside world. This change in attitude was reflected in Khrushchev's enthusiastic appraisal of the meeting of Asian and African leaders at Bandung in April 1955. This was followed by exchange of state visits by Soviet and Third World leaders. For example, Nehru visited Moscow in June 1955 and Khrushchev and Bulganin reciprocated by visiting India, Burma and Afganistan later that year. Stalin's policy of non-cooperation with the bourgeoisie of these countries was abandoned and a conciliatory approach to them, as a means of weakening the Western influence in these states was favoured. Khrushchev codified the official Soviet position towards the developing countries in his report to the 20th Congress of the CPSU in
1956. It marked the enunciation of the doctrine of "peaceful-coexistence" and designated the nonaligned Third World countries as part of a Socialist led "peace zone". The underlying assumption of these efforts was the belief that the nonaligned nations would abandon the imperialist camp and follow a socialist path of development. As argued by Porter, "The shift in Soviet thinking and foreign policy, which became increasingly evident over the period from 1953 to 1956, amounted to a restortion of Lenin’s vision of forging a united front between the nationalist aspirations of the developing world and the revolutionary, anti-Western objectives of the Soviet regime."30

The cornerstone of Soviet foreign policy, the doctrine of "peaceful-coexistence" regarded socialism as becoming the ascendent historical force. It was asserted, that the process of building socialism was being executed in the face of hostility from the capitalist world, and it was important that the Soviets remained increasingly sensitive and responsive to external and internal trends and conditions of the developing countries. This was reflected in the positive assessment of the internal development of those countries where the concept of "national-democracy" was endorsed. This meant lending of credence to the national-bourgeoisie of the developing countries. At the same time, however, it was asserted that the working class in the developing countries be led by its vanguard in their transition to socialism. The theoretical underpinnings of this policy line were elaborated at the World Conference of Eighty One Communist Parties in Moscow in November 1960. The advocacy of the concept of national democracy represented a practical adjustment of ideology in response to the conditions that the Soviet Union

30. Porter, n.28,p.16.
encountered in the Third World during the late 1950s and early 1960s. The policy constituted a Soviet recognition that the prerequisites for a rapid transition to socialism were not present in the former colonial areas and that the USSR had no effective alternative but to work through the national-bourgeois elites in the newly independent states. The local Communists of these countries were asked to cooperate with nonproletarian national elites. The countries falling in such a category were Guinea, Ghana, Cuba, Egypt, Mali, Indonesia and India.

But the policy of peaceful coexistence did not mean a reconciliation with capitalism. The Soviets maintained that under peaceful coexistence, competitions also existed with the Western world. Only the forms of competition between the two systems changed. As put by a Soviet author, "The main thing is to divert the historically inevitable class struggle between socialism and capitalism into a channel that is not fraught with wars, dangerous conflicts, or an arms race."32

As a result of these important shifts in the Soviet perceptions of the Third World, a stage was set for highly active Soviet policy in these countries. Diplomatic offences coupled with economic aid and trade programmes were launched to establish closer links with the newly independent states in the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

Early examples of a new attitude towards the Third World regional conflicts were the pressurising of the Vietnamese Communists into the Indo China accords of 1954 and moving


rapidly towards winding down the Korean War. This was done to project the image of a non-aggressor nation and allaying the fears of non-communist Third World regimes that Soviet Union aids and abets the Communist uprising everywhere. Further, in order to establish itself as a friendly and reliable partner, Soviet Union helped in the formation of Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO), in 1957, at Cairo. At the 1961 meeting of AAPSO in Bandung, the Soviets first came across the representatives of MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and went on to develop relations with them. Again, to reinforce its commitment to developing nation, Soviet Union signed a 250 million Dollar arms agreement with Egypt in 1955. "Under the terms of this agreement, Cairo was to obtain Soviet Mig-15 and 17 jet fighters, Ilyushin-20 jet bombers, medium and heavy tanks, artillery, submarines, torpedo boats, two destroyers and ammunition." After the arms deal with Egypt, Soviet Union supplied weapons to Syria and Yemen also. In fact, the arms supply increased dramatically after 1955.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute,

The pattern, and the values, of Soviet arms supplies to the Third World countries clearly show the change in policy after 1955 ... Until 1955, arms supplies to the Third World were small, and were exclusively directed to socialist countries-particularly North Korea. The big increase in the flow of weapons to nonaligned countries began after 1955. 

34. Oles M. Smolansky, as cited in Porter, n.28, p.17
In addition to a continuing flow of arms into Egypt, Syria and Yemen, Soviet weapons were delivered for the first time to Afghanistan in 1956, Iraq and Indonesia in 1958, and Guinea in 1959. Between 1960 and 1964, 11 additional nations became recipients of Soviet military aid. Although estimates vary, the total amount of Soviet weapon exports to nonaligned countries from 1954 to 1964 exceeds $2.7 billion.

Soviet Union, while giving arms to the Third World countries, always distanced itself from directly getting involved in any regional conflict. But the most prominent military associations, under Khrushchev, were the Indonesia and Cuba. In Cuba, especially after the missile crisis of October 1962, Soviet interests expanded at a much faster pace and the two countries became more and more close thus forwarding Soviet Union’s gains in the Western Hemisphere. Though in 1960-61 Soviet Union intervened in Congo and Laos, yet the scale and scope of their intervention was quite modest.

Thus under Khrushchev, Soviet involvement in the Third World regional conflicts was small and limited one but, nevertheless, important enough to establish Soviet Union’s credentials as a global power—from a regional one.

5. Post Stalin Era-II (Brezhnev Period)

Khrushchev’s ouster from power and Brezhnev’s accession to it in October 1964 saw a reorientation of Soviet policies to the Third World regional conflicts. No more was a timid and unconfident line adopted toward these conflicts. Brezhnev himself, while making a fervent call


37. Source: SIPRI, Yearbook of Armaments and Disarmaments, Ibid.
to aid the newly free countries (decolonized) in general and their liberation movements in particular, spoke;

Our party and the Soviet state will continue to: render the utmost support to the peoples fighting for their liberation and work for the immediate granting of independence to all colonial countries and peoples; promote all sided co-operation with countries that have won national independence and help them to develop their economy, train national cadres and oppose neo-colonialism; strengthen the fraternal links of the CPSU with the Communist Parties and revolutionary democratic organisations in Asian, African and Latin American countries. "38

As is evident from Brezhnev’s statement, the policy towards the Third World was marked by two main doctrinal adjustments over his predecessor. First, a high profile role in assisting the regional conflicts; second, a renewed emphasis on the role of Vanguard parties. Whereas the first one was conditioned by the coups against Ben-Bella, Sukarno and Nkrumah regimes during 1965-1966; the second one was because of weakness and unpredictability of the national-bourgeoisie in Third World regimes. No more was a policy of "working in tendem" with the bourgeoisie by the local communists advocated. Instead, attention was given towards maintaining closer ties with communist regimes for example, Cuba. Priority was accorded to remodel the Communist parties of the Third World on Soviet model so as to stabilize the state power and reduce the risk of back-sliding (reversibility).

Besides, there were other important factors behind Soviet doctrinal adjustments in the Third World. These were:

a) the attainment of strategic nuclear parity with the United States;

b) growing of Soviet power projection capabilities in the remote areas by amphibious military

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shipping, blue water navy, merchant marine, air transport etc.;
c) the limitations of the United States to act strongly in the Third World in the wake of Vietnam
and Watergate;
d) ‘detente’ which enhanced Soviet Union’s role as a leader in the revolutionary struggle in the
Third World;
e) eruption of a number of revolutionary activities in the Third World following their
decolonisation;
f) last, but not the least, the role of China as a strong contender in the global politics in
general, and Third World in particular.

The Soviets took full advantage of these changed "correlation of forces" and enhanced their
involvement significantly in the Third World regions. In the regional conflicts, the Soviets, thus
played an important role in either retention or acquisition of power by their clients. This is
clearly evidenced in the regional conflicts that ensued in the mid 1960s till Afghanistan in 1979.
Be it the case of Vietnamese War (1965-1972); Yemeni Civil War (1965-1969); Nigerian Civil
War (1967-70); Arab-Israel War of attrition (1969-70); Yom-Kippur War (1973); Angolan Civil
War (1975-76); Ogaden War (1977-78) or of any other local war, Soviet Union, under
Brezhnev, found itself ready and willing for help. And the reason behind the help is not difficult
to judge: wherever Soviet Union could undermine the presence of "imperialist" or their allies,
they would do so by all the means available to them. It has been alleged that care was taken by
Moscow to back only those forces which were not losing (the only exception being the one of
the Arab defeat in June 1967) in their liberation wars. But on the whole an intelligent
appreciation of the dynamics of regional conflicts, and also a commitment to an ideology which ensured the interests of the poor and developing countries with help from the Soviet Union, determined the latter’s stand.

It was against the backdrop of such policy formulations that Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan in 1979. The Soviets entered Afghanistan convinced that a fundamental restructuring of international relations was taking place. The ‘correlation of forces’ was favouring Soviet Union and that there was a ‘mighty progress’ of the national liberation movements. The Soviet leadership under Brezhnev opined that the Third World arena was of immense importance to them from where they could enhance their global role with comparatively lower risks and costs.

Thus the Soviet behaviour under Brezhnev can be summed up, as one Western scholar has put, "Soviet policy in the third world during the early and mid 1970s had three principal facets: the maintenance of, and the attempts to strengthen, ties with friendly regimes (eg., Egypt, Syria and India); the continuation of efforts to broaden relations with intrinsically important states, whatever their ideological coloration (e.g., Nigeria and Argentina); and mounting support for revolutionary movements and new regimes espousing or sympathetic to Marxism." ³⁹

The intervention in Afghanistan seems to be falling in the third category of the three facets of Soviet policy as described above. Soviet forces were used in order to ensure the survival of the PDPA (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan) regime that had come to power in a coup in 1978. An analysis of the factors responsible for Afghan intervention would form the subject matter of the next chapter, but here, it is important to note that Afghan intervention was an

instrument of serving Soviet Unions own security interests; (Afghanistan is a state contiguous to Soviet borders) as well as its fight against Western imperialism.

With Brezhnev's death in 1982, and subsequent accession of Andropov and Chernenko to power Soviet Union’s policy to Third World remained more or less the same as followed by Brezhnev, and, did not undergo any significant changes. It was only after Gorbachev came to power in mid 1980s, that radical departures from erstwhile policy lines were incorporated in Soviet Third World policy. Gorbachev's period was marked by less and less attention to Third World areas, in what is generally referred to as 'deideologisation' of Soviet Foreign Policy. How Gorbachev viewed Third World situations and what exactly were his priorities for "New Political Thinking" would be taken up in subsequent chapters.

Finally, in summing up, it can be argued that ever since the times of Lenin, and down to the ascent of Gorbachev, the Soviet Foreign Policy in general, and towards Third World in particular, was marked by a strong input of Marxist-Leninist ideology. Few adjustments or refinements were incorporated from time to time as per the needs and circumstances, but ideological approach, as such, was never abandoned. There is a general trend amongst the Western authors to portray these ideological refinements as abandonment, but, in fact, the changes in actual Soviet behaviour were always buttressed by ideological orientations. This was quite evident from the debates over the 'non-capitalist path of development' in the 1960s and 70s. Then there were specific conditions and 'objective realities' to which any nation or state has to adjust for its survival. For example, after the independence of Ghana in 1957, a wave of 'decolonisation' of the Third World countries set in whereby numerous opportunities to expand
and exert influence were provided to Soviet Union. This process was complemented by the
demise of imperialism and a break down of the Western dominated order. Most of the newly
free Third World countries found the Western powers as unreliable (and exploitative they had
been) and approached the Soviet Union for developing their economy and solidifying the
security. Soviet Union, as the natural antagonist of the imperialist powers was more than willing
to oblige these countries. So if the Soviet Union was offering help (both economic and military)
to these countries, then these countries were equally eager for it. Even the Western authors, as
MacFarlane, Bruce D. Porter, Mark N. Katz and many others agree that Soviet Union had
practically no role in starting or initiating any of the regional conflicts in which it was involved.
That Soviet Union’s help in these regional conflicts did play an important role in their final
outcomes, was because of the fact that the other super-power (United States) also had its stakes
involved.

Moreover, with the attainment of strategic nuclear parity with the United States, and
enhancement of its power-projection capabilities, the Soviet Union could afford to take risks in
the areas that were contiguous to its border, e.g., Turkey, Afghanistan. The advancement of
military capacities and the label of a ‘super power’ brought with them a certain amount of
prestige and authority which was to be continuously evaluated and safeguarded. All these factors
were clearly mirrored in the Soviet Union’s Third World policy, and were reflected in its active
role in the regional conflicts of these areas under Khrushchev and Brezhnev. It is important here
to note that though the regional conflict of Afghanistan arose much later, the primacy accorded
by the Soviet Union to this nation was immense ever since the time of Lenin. Khrushchev and
Brezhnev always regarded Afghanistan as extremely important and constantly evaluated their ideological and pragmatic approach in relations with Afghanistan. They were always aware of the strategic importance of Afghanistan but never tried to force any kind of relationship with it. Infact, Afghanistan's complete trust in the Soviet Union and its socialist policies was the primary reason behind the cordial relations between the two nations. As noted in the subsequent chapter, the Afghan experiment with Democracy in 1973 and later on, the Saur Revolution of 1978 were inspired by the socialist ideals and had complete Soviet support. But it would be improper to say that Afghanistan's importance to Soviet Union was responsible for the Saur Revolution. It was an indigenous Revolution and had no Soviet instigation whatsoever. Thus the phenomenon mutually beneficial Soviet-Afghan relations can be easily attributed to an overall Soviet policy of friendly relations with the Third World countries. It was the importance attached to these countries, and not the policy of geographic expansionism that was responsible for Soviet Union's involvement in the various regional conflicts.