CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSION
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The post second World War period witnessed several changes in the international political scenario. Prime among them was the emergence of the Soviet Union as a new global power. The acquisition of nuclear weapons and the possession of a large number of conventional forces, granted her military parity with the Western powers, especially the US. This significant change suddenly activated the Soviet policy from isolationism to global activism. Further, besides the Cold War, regional and local conflicts in the Third World largely paved the way for unparalleled growth of the Soviet military might. The nature of the so called liberation struggles in Asia, Africa and Latin America was another source of Soviet activism.

The Soviet perception of regional conflicts underwent dramatic shifts in the late 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Initially, they viewed regional war as something only the imperialists waged in order to make strategic gains in an era when World War would be catastrophic to one and all. By 1970s, however, the Soviet Union became increasingly convinced that great military strength could prevent regional wars from escalating into the World War. It also regarded local wars as another means by which soviet interests could be enhanced.
The last three decades witnessed a slow but gradual expansion in the Soviet Union's interests, presence, and influence in the developing countries. The political developments in Latin America suddenly brought into focus of the important countries to the revolutionary threshold, due largely to the success of "Cuban Revolution". The "Chilean way of Revolution" was another experiment in 1970s. But the significant role played by Sandinistas in Nicaragua (1979), which came to power through guerrilla warfare combined with other like minded leftist groups, had triggered off a wave of guerrilla warfare in other parts of Central America, particularly in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica. The political developments in the Latin American region as a whole and Central America, in particular were quite significant for the Soviet Union.

From the global perspective, the Soviet policy towards Central American region was aimed at having an enduring foothold in an area which was not only geographically contiguous with the United States but also dominated by it. It amounted to carving niche out of what was considered as vital to the security interests to America. The process had already been initiated with the victory of the Cuban Revolution. Other events, that of Chile, Grenada and Nicaragua were the links in the same
chain. Each facilitated an increasing Soviet involvement in Latin American affairs. Cuba, of course, maintained its pride of place among all these new revolutionary regimes.

Till the middle of the seventies, Central America was not a priority area for the Soviet Union, less still an area of vital security interest to her, nor was it much significant from an economic point of view. But in the late 1970s, this region had attracted increasing Soviet attention. Since then, it had emerged as one of those Third World regions which had so greatly contributed to the East-West tensions. The Soviet approach to Central America shared much in common with its general policy towards Latin America. Historically, neither Central nor South America attracted significant Soviet attention. This was largely because Moscow, subscribing to an assumption of "geographic fatalism", considered that national liberation movements had little hope of success, if only because of the historically dominant US role in the Western Hemisphere.

The Soviet interests in the region emanated from a combination of superpower ambitions, pursuit of traditional national interest through power politics, and the Marxist-Leninist imperative of promoting socialist models of economic and political change at as low a cost as possible. In political terms, it was proposed to be
done by a diplomacy aimed at preserving revolutionary regimes and discreetly bolstering leftist movements without provoking direct confrontation with the United States.

In these Soviet calculations, with respect to Central America, Cuba played a pivotal role. Moscow benefited greatly from Havana's experience in assisting revolutionary groups. Caution was central to Soviet policy calculation vis-a-vis Central America. The Soviet Union had followed a two-track policy of pursuing state-to-state relations while also emphasizing its support for revolution and solidarity with native Communist parties. In the Post World War II, the Soviet Union relied increasingly on communist parties as its principal instruments in the region. In any case, there is no denying that the Soviet Union did emerge as a "distinct factor in the calculus of Central American politics in the 1980s".

The Soviet policy was influenced by the differing political status of Communist parties in the region: in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, they were illegal; while in Costa Rica's it was legal. These illegal Communist parties had followed Soviet advice and joined forces with leftist-Marxist guerrilla groups in a political-military umbrella organization dedicated to a
combination of arms struggle, and political organization.

Although the Soviets were not so optimistic about the prospects for revolutionary change through armed struggle, they continued to support a number of "political-military fronts" throughout the region (in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras), including native Communist parties. They pursued armed struggle actions, and also sought negotiations to end fighting and to allow for leftist participation and power-sharing in government and also followed the traditional communist activities.

Since 1981, the Soviet Union had backed a wide range of military and political activities in Central America. Though the Soviet Union supported insurgency, it was not always constant in her foreign policy. It was one of the several variables in a group of policy tools.

As pointed out earlier, Nicaragua first came under Soviet attention after the fall of dictator Somoza in July 1979. Moscow's attention, like that of so much of the world, turned to the victorious revolution in Nicaragua. This brought Central America into a distinct regional focus for Soviet policy makers and analysts. Soviet leaders moved more rapidly to establish ties with the revolutionary government in Nicaragua than they had with Cuba. Moscow recognized the new Sandinista government, their leaders
were warmly received in Moscow in March 1980. The consolidation of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua had become another major element of Moscow's Central American strategy. The Soviet willingness to increasingly cater to Managua's economic needs pointed to the USSR's interest in cultivating a major client on the Central American mainland and positioning itself to exploit potential opportunities that were yet to emerge there. In pursuing this objective, however, the Soviets followed a rather consistent low-profile approach, themselves providing essential material goods and limited military advice.

However, as the Sandinistas began to consolidate their power, Moscow began to adopt a more positive attitude towards them. Leading Soviet ideologue Pol;omarev in October 1980, and Brezhnev in 1981, described the Nicaraguan revolution as "a major success" and "new victories" respectively. Despite this warmth, Moscow had proved no keener to grant Nicaragua the socialist status, which Cuba and Chile had earlier.

Probably for the same reason Moscow had eschewed a high profile policy in providing military assistance to Nicaragua during the 1980s. She had provided much needed aid, estimated at $ 580 million, as military assistance to Managua between 1980-85. But all these help came indirectly through East Europe. Clearly Moscow wanted to
maintain its public distance from Managua due to the fear of U.S. reaction.

The Nicaraguan event galvanized Soviet attention and greatly altered her views on other revolutionary opportunities in Central America. The victory of Sandinistas bolstered communist spirits and gave a new hope of victories of armed struggle as well as electoral politics in other countries of the region. This success emboldened Salvadoran communists, who had broken commitment to constitutional tactics and came to lose the battle as well as legal status in the country.

The Soviet Union had little contact with El Salvador, perhaps only through Cuba and the pro-Soviet native Communist party, because the country was being ruled by a pro-US dictatorial regime, which served its economic purposes. The CPEL forged an alliance with other like minded revolutionary groups, known as the FMLN. The FMLN launched a guerrilla war with the help of Soviet and Cuban support, against the existing military regimes, though they tasted initial success in their "final offensive" in 1981, later had to face defeat because they were crushed by government forces. Since then the guerrilla revolutionary movement led by the FMLN became fragmented.

Guatemala and Honduras, had never been recognized by the Soviet Union, and representatives between them had not
been exchanged. Nevertheless, Moscow supported a number of "political-military fronts" called the Guatemala National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) in Guatemala and the Honduran Revolutionary Movement (MRH) in Honduras, which included the Guatemalan Labour Party (PGT) and the Communist Party of Honduras (PCH) respectively.

In spite of Soviet Union's support to the pursuance armed struggle, by guerrilla activities had almost vanished from Guatemala. This was due to the positive democratic changes in 1984 within and outside the country. Similarly in 1979 and 1980, the Honduran guerrillas, supported and backed by the Soviet Union and Cuba, successfully intimidated the military regimes in Honduras to give free passage for military supplies and guerrilla activities in El Salvador and Guatemala. The Soviet Union used Honduras as a free passage for implementing her policy in El Salvador and Guatemala. In 1982 the new democratic Suajo government had refused to cooperate and since then guerrilla operations continued to fail in Honduras. The failure of revolutionary activities against the military regimes in both the countries marked the end of the Soviet and other support for such activities.

During 1980s, the arrival of a new Soviet leadership on the scene introduced a qualitative change of far-reaching significance in the Soviet foreign policy. Among
other things, the concrete implication of this new approach involved Soviet Union withdrawing from its involvement and support to Third World revolutionary regimes. It also involved dilution of ideological commitment. In the name of universal human approach to international politics, it laid greater emphasis on cooperation between the Soviet Union and developed western countries, specially the U.S.A. In the light of a new era of Superpower cooperation and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, there were clear indications that Moscow could be prepared to negotiate a solution to the conflict in Central America. The revolutionary forces of Central America suffered a blow as a result of such a vital change in the Soviet foreign policy.

This changing mood of Soviet policy first came when Gorbachev addressed the 27th CPSU Congress in 1986 and clearly admitted that the Soviet economic and social crisis was so acute that it could no longer afford 'even a pretence of being of a great power. Under such circumstances the Soviet Union could no longer afford to render assistance to any new revolutionary activities in Central America. At the same time, Moscow reitriated her pragmatic economic commitment in the region, particularly in Nicaragua. The Soviet Union demonstrated its commitment in 1988 when it agreed an economic plan involving $294...
million worth of Soviet aid per annum through 1990s.

By mid-1980s, however, Soviet optimism about revolutionary opportunities through armed struggle had distinctly started waning. With the failure of Salvadoran Communist supported January 1981 "final offensive" followed by declining guerrilla fortunes in Grenada, Moscow downscaled the "Nicaraguans", avoided conspicuous backing of armed struggle movement outside Managua, and began to re-emphasize broad united fronts of various leftist groups in the region, a tactics which offered the Soviet Union additional opportunities to assert itself as a political equal with the United States.

The revolutionaries of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras were forced to adapt themselves to global and regional changes. Costa Rica, however, remained stable in a corner. By early 1990s all these countries were governed by the elected representatives of the people.

In 1991, Sandinistas had lost electoral battle to pro-US opposition forces and became a loyal opposition in Nicaraguan government. The Soviet Union accepted the defeat of Sandinista and expressed her willingness to continue bilateral and economic relations with the new government.

In El Salvador, under the observation of the United

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Nations, the FNLM and the military regime concluded a peace accord in late 1991. But many socio-political obstacles remained uncleared. Learning from the problem that plagued Nicaragua after the Sandinista lost state power, the FMLN and other revolutionaries, however, adapted themselves to the changing times.

In Guatemala, the UN observers began to play a greater role in the talks between the URNG and the government. But no clear settlement was visible. The government had defeated the guerrillas in the 1960s and again during the 1980s. Each time the revolutionaries re-emerged on the scene, as they did throughout history when injustice reached intolerable levels.

Honduras gradually became an army base because it served as 'iron triangles' to the United States'. The over-dominant role of the military in governance provided safe place to the Contras who became involved in anti-Sandinista brigades. Free flow of US military aid shook the foundations of Honduran society. The paralyzed political-economic condition led her to increasingly depend on the United States. The Contadora peace process, along with Aries plan, virtually gripped the conscience of the nation to behave neutrally. The guerrilla forces were fragmented, ill-coordinated and later disillusioned with their goal.
The one time 'rich coast' Costa Rica remained neutral and possessed peace-loving democracy. The very conflict of the region received some sobering impact by the peace of the country. When the battle between the revolutionaries and government forces intensified in neighbouring countries, San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica, became a safe home for the refugees and those in exile. Its economy was modest, though gripped in debt crisis in 1980s, the solution to the Central American crisis, proposed by President Aries, known as Aries peace plan, somehow, brought the region nearer to peace.

However, the guerrillas were fighting with a mission to bring about sovereignty, independence and social justice. The military oligarchy partnership in all three countries had parallel objectives to retain or increase their already lion-sized share of the national wealth. The common masses continued to endure the daily assaults, by the 'partnership', on basic human sensibilities.

In course of their fight, the Latin American revolutionaries encountered the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism in 1920s. Later with the Cuban and Nicaraguan victories, the other revolutionary forces in the region were greatly encouraged. Moreover, Cuba became an idol and a model for revolutionary activities in their struggle against totalitarian military regimes. The Soviet Union
was, obviously, there to help these struggles indirectly through Cuba. The Soviet caution in its policy towards the region was a product of US invasion in Grenada and President Reagan’s counter-insurgency policy toward Nicaragua.

America also could not maintain the global empire it had amassed during the Cold War years. The United States ensured its military hegemony through display of its forces in Panama in 1989 and Iraq in 1991, but lacked the economic means to convert victory into economic gains. On the other hand, in 1991, the United Brand (a company which controlled all means of economy of the Central American region) was no longer able to monopolise and dictate terms to Central American governments and take advantage of cheap land, natural resources and labour.

A fact worth emphasizing is that the entire revolutionary activism in Central America began to suffer reverses and setbacks from mid-nineteen eighties onwards. This was the primary factor being the scaling down of Soviet commitments to the Third World states, particularly those of Central America.

To sum up, the Soviet Union pushed by its policy of globalism, initially secured success in Cuba. But, the maintainence of Cuba later became a burden on the soviet economy. Although Sandinista victory, and potential
revolutionary activities elsewhere in the region, obviously attracted Moscow's attention, these were moderated by the Soviet policy makers who were not ready to place more burden on their national economy. Finally, chaos in the political and economic life of the country, forced the Soviet Union to retreat from its global commitment. The Soviet Union had drifted off from its policy of 'hand shaking to hands off' in Central America.