Chapter II

SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA IN SOVIET

GLOBAL REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY - A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW
The objective of this chapter is to examine the principal goals and policies in South and Central America in the light of her Third World Policy. This chapter also seeks to examine the policy instruments available to and utilized by the Soviet leadership. Efforts have been made to analyse various dimensions of the Soviet policy towards the South and Central American countries. Finally, the dynamics of the superpower relationship, specially in the light of geographical fatalism and Monroe Doctrine is to be analysed.

The post-second World War international politics was characterized by bipolarity and ideological antipathy between the two super powers, the USSR and the USA. During the same period the Third World had emerged as the major area of active East-West competition. This shift was due to two major developments in international politics. First, the evolution of Soviet military power, which by early 1970s provided her with a global reach comparable to that of the United States; and second, the political and military stabilization of inter-bloc relations in Europe, which facilitated the extension of Soviet-American rivalry to the Third World. This competition had contributed to the demise of detente and further deterioration in Soviet-American relations.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Soviet political and military involvement in the Third World was most
conspicuous. Perhaps the evolution of the Soviet military capabilities along with political developments of the regions had provided the necessary opportunities for interventions. The most glaring example was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December, 1979.

In contrast to the 1970s, the Soviet activism in the Third World in 1980s had been substantially slowed down. Obviously, this sudden change was due to the resurgence of American power under the Presidentship of Ronald Reagan. The declining Soviet activism in the Third World was probably influenced by the lack of tangible opportunities in those areas which she initially had. Finally the domestic preoccupation, the problems related to the post-Brezhnev leadership succession issues and bad economic condition might also have put a brake on the intensity of the Soviet activism.

After a couple of years the post-Brezhnev transitory leadership, Mikhail Gorbachev finally came to power in 1985. The new leadership within no time initiated a number of political and economic changes to improve the deteriorating situation. Hitherto, continuing Soviet role in international politics had been diluted further to accelerate the domestic changes in the country. The first sign of such change was initiated by Gorbachev’s political report to the Twenty-
seventh Party Congress in February-March, 1986\(^1\).

Latin America had been a major configuration in the World affairs, yet it attracted Soviet attention much later than the October Revolution. Its close proximity to the United States and thus geopolitically within its sphere of influence, had placed clear limitations on the Soviet interests and activities in this region.

The post-war developments, however, had substantially changed the physical status of the Soviet Union and her role in Latin America. It also altered Latin American's perception towards the Soviet Union and "its own role in international relations\(^2\). The bipolarity of World power and detente in East-West relations had provided Latin American countries an opportunity to expand their relations with Moscow as well as to play a meaningful, larger and more independent role in the World affairs. This was indeed a significant development which made definitive contribution to the evolution of the Soviet Policy towards Latin America.

The Soviet interests in Latin America had been shaped by various components. The anticolonial tradition in their history and their feeling of resentment toward the United

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States hemispheric "hegemony" was one among many such components\(^3\). The Soviet Union was able to exploit this anti-U.S. feeling to their own political advantage. Cuban revolution in 1959 had not only opened a new chapter in the U.S. - hemispheric relations, rather it had enhanced the Soviet interests in the region and abroad, such as Africa and within the non-alignment countries\(^4\). The ideology of the Marxism-Leninism was another element which in fact made the Soviet Union to understand the region's revolutionary potentials. Moreover, political and social fabric of the Caribbean Basin and the Central America had also attracted Soviet attention. All such components had determined the Soviet policy toward the region\(^5\).

**Soviet Goals in South And Central America :**

The goals which the Soviet Union sought to achieve were fundamentally guided by its broad perspective with respect to the Third World. The peculiarities inherent in the region had produced a few distinctive advantages to the Soviet

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5 In first chapter of my thesis I have broadly discussed about the determining factors which had shaped the Soviet foreign policy interests in the region.
Union in order to pursue its general aims to the region⁶. The main purpose of the Soviet Union was to attain operational goals by using its set of instrumentalities in the region. The Soviet leadership had clear in its mind that to pursue more ambitious aims in Third World, the Soviet Union had to utilize all possible instruments. The Soviet influences in South and Central America might well be focussed to achieve various purposes such as establishing a lasting presence throughout the Third World; gaining a voice in the affairs of every Third World region; and weakening Western and Chinese influences in the Third World.

Creating an Enduring Presence:

Since late 1950s, the USSR had maintained its status as a global power in World politics. Though for the time being Cuban-Missile Crisis of 1962 had softpedalled its claim as global actor but it did not forsake it. Contrary to this, Brezhnev made a substantial military buildup in the 1960s, which gave them a new prominence in 1970s. It soon became a common feature of the Soviet policy pronouncements.⁷


Global power status, however, needed some sense of qualification. It did not mean that self professed, and automatic military buildup, rather it must be self-asserted, self achieved, and self-sustained, global actor with large stocks of nuclear weapons and means to deliver them. This, in turn, usually required not only intermittent forays into distant regions, but also a sustained presence in these regions\(^8\). Thus, the USSR had clearly shown a determination to attain all such prerequisite conditions which enabled her permanent place in the Third World and also gave her credibility as a global power. In the case of Latin America, the number of states with which the USSR carried on formal diplomatic relations rose from three in 1959 to Sixteen in the mid 1980s\(^9\).

To enhance her global status, the Soviet economic strength had also provided a long term relationship with Latin America. Over the years the region had been witnessing a dramatic increase in the Soviet economic involvement in Cuba. The region had minimal economic ties with the Island but by mid 1980s Moscow was helping Cuba economically ($ 4

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billion a year) and also technically (7,000 Soviet economic advisors)\textsuperscript{10}.

The Soviet economic ties were not limited only to Cuba rather it had entrenched substantially in other parts of the region. In South American region, economically Brazil and Argentina were the most powerful countries. These countries accounted for the bulk of the sum of Soviet Union. Apart from these two countries, Moscow had economic ties with many other countries in the region such as Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, and Mexico\textsuperscript{11}. In Central American region, the Soviet economic recipient was Nicaragua. The Soviet economic credits and grants to Latin American countries other than Cuba rose from $30 million in 1955-64 to nearly $1.1 billion in 1980-84.

The USSR had also demonstrated a desire to establish militarily, a lasting presence in the region. It had expanded its ties with Cuba in a big way. From 1960s to mid 1980s, Cuba became a Soviet tool to enhance her global objectives. During 1981-84 alone, Moscow provided nearly 4.3 billion dollars to the Cuban government in the form of military aid. Till 1985, Moscow was instrumental in shipping

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.

arms to the new Sandinista government worth 2,40 million dollars\textsuperscript{12}. During 1975-79, however, Peru too received $ 650 million worth of Soviet weapons and equipments,\textsuperscript{13} and after the Nicaraguan revolution in 1979.\textsuperscript{14} Additionally, Moscow had extended military help to many countries, where revolutionary insurgents were involved, such as Grenada, El Salvador, Guatemala and Chile in the 1980.

Winning a Say in Regional Affairs:

The Soviet leadership was convinced that an extensive presence abroad alone did not entitle her to global power status. Consequently, Moscow had sought to influence events in all corners of the World.

The actualisation of a Soviet wish to influence the affairs of Latin America had begun in 1960s; and was a result of its political and military status. Moscow tried to persuade the countries of the region not to cut their economic and diplomatic ties with Cuba. After the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965 the USSR instigated Latin American countries against Washington for violating the provision of the Charter of the Organisation

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  \item \textsuperscript{14} \textit{International Herald Tribune}, 13 November 1979.
\end{itemize}
of American states. After Sandinista victory in 1979, Moscow endorsed armed struggle by insurgents in such states as El Salvador and Guatemala and extended military aid to them. During the Falklands/Malvinas War in 1982, the USSR had supported Argentina\textsuperscript{15}. In fulledged war against Contras (anti-Sandinista-U.S. supported forces) during the 1980s, Moscow had not only provided weapons, equipments and expertise to them\textsuperscript{16} but also backed the attempts of the Contadora group of Latin American countries (Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, and Panama) and Arias peace proposal (Arias was president of Costa Rica), to resolve interstate tensions peacefully in Central America.

Undermining Western Influence

The Soviet Union considered its involvement in the Third World as a facet of The East-West competition. It also viewed such competition as basically being a zero-sum game, in which advances for one side represent losses for the other\textsuperscript{17}. Thus, a growth of USSR's role in the region would

\textsuperscript{15} Prizel, n.2, pp. 175-76.


inextricably be linked to a decrease in Western influence there.

Soviet leaders wanted to reduce Western role in the Third World, especially in Southern states of Latin America. But, they had well understood that economically, the USSR was unable to reduce or fill the vacuum left by United States\(^\text{18}\). Therefore, the Soviet Union had followed the strategy of influencing South-American states through economic ties and offer investment advantages to them.

To the Soviet Union, weakening western sway in Latin America had largely meant restricting the U.S. role there. Fulfilling the said objectives, Moscow moved towards consolidating ties with self-proclaimed Marxist governments, whose policies were anti-US. Illustrations: Castro’s Cuba, Allende’s Chile during 1970-73, the Bishop’s Grenada during 1979-83, and Sandinista’s Nicaragua during 1979-87. They had also supported Marxist-dominated forces seeking to oust pro-American military regimes from power. For instance, the "liberation movements" in El Salvador and Guatemala. Apart from this, in other cases where the revolutionary forces were not united and weak, the Soviet Union supported them

through economic aid. In addition, Moscow had sought to cooperate with a large number of South American states that had expressed unhappiness with the United States for one reason or another. For example, Brazil and Jamaica in 1970s, Argentina and Guyana in 1980s. In Central America, Moscow had generously helped Sandinista government in Nicaragua; but by 1985, it had left no room for misunderstanding about its unwillingness to accept the burden of "another Cuba" 19.

Furthermore, since, the Cuban-Missile crisis, the USSR had carefully avoided any military involvement in the region which might provoke the US. During the 1980s, the USSR's rejection of Managua's demand for supply of "offensive" MIG-21s was because of US resistance 20.

**Minimizing the Chinese Role:**

Since the open ideological rift between Moscow and Beijing in 1963, the Soviet Union had regarded China as a threat to its leadership of the national liberation movement in the Third World. China claimed that -

"Socialist China belongs to the Third World, it has experienced the same sufferings as most other Third World countries and ... is forced with


similar problems and tasks\textsuperscript{21}.

By 1980, Chinese influence had grown throughtout the Third World, including Latin American region. During 1960s, China strove to break hold over Latin America, Communist parties and also tried to check Castroites. The success of Chinese model of economy had also created another difficulties for the Soviet Union in 1980s\textsuperscript{22}. All these led to the revival of active Sino-Soviet rivalry in the region\textsuperscript{23}. The increased Chinese attention towards Latin America and the relative attractiveness of its economic model were seen by the Soviet Union as a threat, from a formidable adversary, in the region. Such attributes, Soviet leaders perceived, could give China a substantial influence in the region.

**Interrelationship of Goals**:

To pursue its objectives, Moscow had not followed a uniform policy. In some cases, Soviet leaders failed to act according to the emerging conditions. After the anti-communist, pro-U.S. military elements in Brazil ousted the

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{22} A. Doak Barnet, "Ten Years After Mao", *Foreign Affairs*, vol 65, no.1, Fall 1986, p.42.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Cecil Johnson, "China and Latin America : New Ties and Tactics", *Problems of Communism*, vol. 21, no. 4 (July-August 1972), pp. 53-66.
\end{enumerate}
leftleaning and incipiently, anti-U.S. government of Jobo Goulast in 1964, Moscow opted to merely maintain its presence in the country rather than try to reduce Washington's influence through promoting efforts to unseat the new rulers. In fact, Soviet-Brazilian ties expanded modestly, over the remainder of 1960s. The Soviet Union followed a similar course in Jamaica when "Capitalist-oriented" and pro-U.S. Edward Seaga had defeated "Socialist-oriented and pro-Cuban Michael Manley in general elections in 1980. However, Soviet behaviour in these instances contrasted sharply with the decision regarding Chile after the overthrow of the Marxist and anti-U.S. Allende government in 1973. In fact, the Soviet Union supported armed opposition to the new Pinochet regime.

Moscow believed that reduction of Western influence and curtailment of Chinese role in Latin America would result in a major Soviet presence in the region. Perhaps it would give the USSR a big voice in the affairs of the various regions. By the onset of 1980s, the Soviet Union came to understand that "the growing contacts between the Latin American countries and the socialist community states" as "an important factor reducing region's dependency on the U.S.A. In addition to expanding trade, economic and political, the Latin American states began strengthening these international positions and acquiring greater opportunities for conducting a more equal dialogue with Washington, thus, in turn, creating the conditions for
greater independence in World affairs as a whole.  

Moscow even appeared to foresee that the predominant linkage among the objectives might prove to be a success. Because "the origination and consolidation of the World socialist system deprived the imperialist states of their monopoly position as the sole source" of weapons and military materials as well as "loans, credits, ... scientific and technical know-how and expert advice for the young independent countries."²⁵

Instrumentalities of the Soviet Goals:

To pursue its goals, Soviet leaders had used a mixture of political, economic, and military tools. Throughout its active involvement in the Third World, Moscow applied these tools according to the situation to achieve her objectives. Notwithstanding all these, to achieve desired objectives, the Soviet Union occasionally to reshaped her instruments, particularly during 1970s and 1980s.

During late 1950s and early 1960s, Moscow was chiefly committed to local communist parties and envisioned to get benefited from them in its revolutionary transformations in the Third World countries. In addition, economic instrument


was also considered by Soviet leaders as the principal tools at their disposal. Perhaps, during the early years they also furnished economic aid to Third World countries to help them in consolidating their political independence from the west\footnote{Soviet aid to the Third World during 1956-64 (including Cuba) had totaled about $6 billion, while Moscow's economic commitments to these states were only amounted to roughly $5 billion. In Mujal-Leon, n.6, p. 25.}

In contrast to the other regions of the Third World in Latin America, there was no predominance of Soviet economic aid. Except Cuba, the countries of South American and Caribbean region, received only small amount of Soviet economic credit\footnote{During 1950-63, except Cuba, other countries of Soviet American and Caribbean region had received only $30 million in economic credits, no supplies of arms and equipment from the Soviet Union. While Cuba obtained $2 billion Soviet economic help during 1961-67 and also received about $750 military deliveries. Ibid.}

The late 1960s and 1970s witnessed several consequential changes in the mix of tools on which the Soviet Union relied upon to achieve its goals in the Third World. The Communist parties and the ideology of Marxist-Leninist transformation had not helped the Soviets in realizing their goals. Obviously, Moscow was left with no option but to go for other alternatives such as targeting non-communist, countries of the Third World. Despite
Moscow's decreased reliance on Third World communist parties as instruments, it still invested substantial time and energy in attempting to ensure their allegiance\textsuperscript{28}.

By mid-1970s, Cuba, as a Soviet instrument in Latin America and Africa, was co-operating closely with the USSR in military interventions in Africa. First in the Angolan civil war and then in the conflict between Ethiopia and Uganda. Apart from Cuba's role in African conflicts, it was less useful in the South American setting, where fewer opportunities existed for the Soviet Union. Yet, it proved to be a potential asset for links with ultra-left and guerrilla groups in the region\textsuperscript{29}.

During this period, Soviet instruments shifted from economic to military. Throughout the Third World and in Latin America, Soviet deliveries of weapons and equipment took precedence over economic credits, except in Cuba.

During the 1970s, however, Soviet outlook had altered severely and military instruments emerged as the main tool that Moscow used and relied upon. The USSR also employed its own military power more extensively in the Third World then

\textsuperscript{28} Kevin Devlin, The Interplay Drama", Problems of Communism, vol.24, no.4 (July-August, 1975), pp.18-34.

\textsuperscript{29} For Soviet Union, Cuba was not only treated as merely an Soviet instrument, but it monitored task of forging contacts with different guerrilla groups in the region, especially Sandinista National Liberation front of Nicaragua.
it had in preceding years\textsuperscript{30}. These changes had a limited impact in Latin America, for example, Cuba and Peru received Soviet supplies of weapons and other instruments. In courting the non-communist countries of the region the Soviet Union had primarily relied upon and applied economic instruments.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Soviet preference of revolutionary strategy in Latin America was guided by her peaceful road to socialism, i.e., the peacful way to power for Communist parties of the region. But after Allend’s overthrow in Chile in 1973, Moscow had endorsed Cuban initiatives to help the FSLN in Nicaragua and latter guerrillas in El Salvador. Nevertheless, the USSR continued to champion the "peaceful path" as a possible path for conservative, military-controlled states such as Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Venezuela etc. in South American region\textsuperscript{31}.

By 1980s, Soviet Union reviewed its goals in Latin America and categorically using its tools in changing the situation in the region. The success of revolution in Nicaragua and Grenada in late 1979 had also exerted pressure

\textsuperscript{30} Soviet direct involvement was more intense as compare with preceding years - for example, its involvement in the Angolan Civil War in 1974-76 in Uganda in 1977-78 and 1979 in Afghanistan.

\textsuperscript{31} Aldo C. Vacs, "Pragmatism and Rapprochement: Soviet Relations with Argentina and Brazil"; in Mujal-leon, n.6, p.322.
on her to assist broad "United Fronts" in those countries where the ground for change was ripe. Countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Chile pressed and forced local communist parties to become key participants in organizing these fronts. Obviously, local Communist parties and Cuba have essentially served Soviet interests in these fronts. Soviet efforts had helped them to cooperate with the self-proclaimed marxist-Leninist governments in Grenada and Nicaragua and consolidate their power. The military aid as an instrument had enjoyed top priority in the Soviet Union undertakings regarding United fronts engaged in armed struggle. It also helped to maintain "revolutionary democracies" like Grenada and Nicaragua.

But the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983 and the subsequent change in Soviet preference in the Third World in general had totally altered the revolutionary thinking of the Soviet Union.

Finally by 1985, Gorbachev had not only re-defined


33 The Soviet economic and military aid to Grenada was $10 million and $25 million respectively. By 1985, Moscow had delivered $240 million of weapons and equipments and economic credits amounted $575 million in 1980-84 to Managua -David E. Albright, "Soviet Third World Strategy", (ibid) in Mujal Laon n.6, p.49.
redefined Soviet objectives\textsuperscript{34}, but its instrument too. The Soviet Union was forced to prefer the objective of mutual benefit in its relationship with the region. The traditional pursuit of ideological division in the world took a back seat and economic pragmatism got precedence over it.

**Dimensions of the Soviet Policy:**

Soviet foreign policy towards the Latin American region had two dimensions: a formal one between governments based on state-to-state relations, and an extra-governmental one between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the non-ruling but pro-native Communist parties of various countries\textsuperscript{35}. Throughout Brezhnev's period, and especially in 1980s, Moscow was interested in expanding state-to-state relations with key South American countries. However, the Soviet Union did not and had never relied upon native Communist parties for their support, because they did not enjoy political clout in their own country and in some cases they were non-existent. Under the policy of 'revolutionary armed struggle', Moscow supported some of the parties which called for armed struggle (such as Chilian Communist party

\textsuperscript{34} New Party Program approved at the 27th CPSU Congress, Pravda, 12 March 1985, p. 18; reprint in CDSP, vol. 36, no. 10, p. 21.

in 1973) and also supported those parties that operated legally (i.e., the Peruvian Communist Party).

On the other hand, the presence of allies in all the major countries of South America was clearly advantageous to Moscow. The local Communist parties were treated as potential strategic assets that could be mobilised when need arose, or be used to pressurise governments in support of Soviet goals. The Communist parties of Latin America had always been treated by the Soviet Union as tools of influence in the region and in return the latter had always supported them financially, organisationally and ideologically.

The South America And the Soviet Union

The mutuality of interests between the Soviet Union and major South American countries stemmed from each sides need to do business. However, the growing dissatisfaction and disenchantment with Washington and a desire to conduct independent foreign policy somewhere encouraged many South American countries (e.g. Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Mexico and Venezuela) to search other possible international option36. They therefore began to look upon the Soviet Union as an

alternative. They were also not inclined to treat Soviet global presence as a threat to their security as America would have liked them to believe.

Soviet approach to South America was mainly influenced by pragmatism and expandiency. In real sense it was hardly driven by any ideological commitment though a lot of loud claims were made to that effect. Thus, trying to be pragmatic, the Soviet Union followed a conventional state-to-state relationship with these countries eventhough they presented a bewildering variety of social, cultural and political diversity. Such relationships, over a period of time, gained a reasonable degree of maturity.

Soviet efforts to expand relations with South American countries benefited a great deal from the detente in East-West relations. The region's pursuit for self-assertion and search for new markets alongwith the improved Soviet economic and scientific-technological capabilities to develop trade and contacts with distant countries made it possible to have better understanding between the two. Initially, after the mid-1960s, the Soviet Union was largely successful in its efforts to forge or renew diplomatic relations with countries of the region. At the height of the Cold War, in late 1950s and early 1960s, Moscow enjoyed diplomatic relations only with Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Caribbean Cuba. Nevertheless, 1960s marked the
turning point in Soviet ties with South American countries. Castro established diplomatic relations with USSR in 1960 as an important means to counter US actions to overthrow him. The Goulart government in Brazil established relations with the USSR in 1961. Eduardo Frei of Chile exchanged diplomatic representation with Moscow in 1964. Despite their continuing distrust of Soviet motivations and intentions, and persistent fear of Communist subversion, the majority of South American countries established relationship with the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{37} In the 1970s relations were also established in and around the Caribbeans\textsuperscript{38}. Meanwhile, in response to the overthrow of the Allende regime the Soviet Union broke diplomatic relationship with Chile in 1973\textsuperscript{39}.

There was always an element of caution between such relationship. The Latin American countries were aware of the possible impact of crossing certain thresholds - especially in the security area - which could complicate relations with Washington\textsuperscript{40}. Soviet leader Brezhnev had also acknowledged:

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\item[38] Ibid.
\item[39] Ibid.
\item[40] Aguila, n.36, p.122.
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"The question of establishing relations with the Soviet Union is a politically sensitive issue for many Less Developed Countries, but he argued that they learn from experience that friendship with the Soviet Union facilitates, their successful struggle against imperialism and for genuine independence."\textsuperscript{41}

No doubt, Latin America's (only South and Caribbean America) willingness to establish relations with the Soviet Union were partly motivated by its general nationalistic feelings and at times, leftist-trends in the region. As a result, their suspicious attitudes towards the Soviet Union gradually declined\textsuperscript{42}. They had also broadened their approach to see native Communist parties as non-threatening to their national politics. In contrast with the radical left and Castro-inspired guerilla movements, the pro-Soviet Communist parties - with their "peaceful road to power" programmes and United front strategy, appeared "conservative" and non-revolutionary. Anti-Communism was no longer the driving force behind their foreign policy. However, the Communist parties remained either banned or in a semi-legal status in many countries of South America and the Caribbean.

Above all, however, the principal and immediate

\textsuperscript{41} Speech on the 50th anniversary of the USSR; Pravda, 22 December, 1972; reprint in CDSP, vol. 24, no. 48, 1972, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{42} Moscow was not seen (by Argentina and Brazil) as the source of domestic agitation, and infact its ideological influence over the insurrections and leftist forces was marginal. In Aguila n. 36, p.122.
interest of both the Soviet Union and the countries of the region was trade. They were in search of new source of technology, investment and aid from the latter for their development\(^43\). Both these were also looking for alternative destinations for their surplus agricultural products and manufactured items\(^44\). For the Soviet Union, Argentina was the prime market, because it had so much of what the USSR needed and also had the capacity to absorb Soviet-manufactured goods. Brazil and Uruguay were other favoured nations; but political tensions with these countries had sometimes hampered their economic ties. In some cases, such as Chile and Peru, disputes with the United States over nationalization policies had encouraged them to look towards the Soviet Union.

These countries perceived the latter to be less of an ideological actor and more of a conventional great power. Their policies towards Moscow aimed to reduce the weight of US hegemony in each case, and increase each actor's bargaining power. These countries were not looking for comfortable kind of clientalism, but for a relationship with Moscow which would improve their economic and political


\(^{44}\) Blasier, n. 37, p. 21.
standing in the international system without jeopardizing their integrity or national security. On the contrary, Moscow was interested in expanding normal inter-state relations with these (Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, Columbia etc.) countries and did so pragmatically, showing scant regard for regime’s political orientation. At the same time, the Soviet Union also pursued a convenient military relationship with military regimes in Peru that sought to change the traditional norm of Peruvian foreign policy in order to expand their ties with several Western countries and those of the Socialist bloc. Interestingly, the countries of South and Caribbean America, and Andean nations had not only established their ties with the Soviet Union, but also established their diplomatic relations with the members of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA).

In short, throughout its relationship with the countries of Latin America (except Central America), Moscow had been committed to a state-to-state model of relations and to particularistic rather than a uniform assessment of

45 Despite the anti-communist and repressive regime of Brazil and Bolivia a Lich came to power in 1964 and 1971 respectively, Moscow had not broken her relationship with them. In Blasier, n. 37, p. 20.

those relations. Such an approach had permitted Moscow to cope with possible rapid shifts and minimise potential losses. Even during Gorbachev's leadership, the Soviet Union approach remained the same. But this time Soviet pragmatism was more speedy and based on mutual and open economic interests.

Central America And The Soviet Union:

Central America had never been an area of great importance to the Soviet policy-makers. Any Soviet policy towards the region was much in common with its general third World policy and the one generally pursued towards Latin America as a whole. The region had been placed at a very low level in the Soviet global strategic priority. The other discouraging factor was the geographical proximity of Central America to the United States and the latter's continued predominence in the region.

In post-World War II international politics the United States had seen the Soviet Union as a rival and the spread of communism as the major threat to its global interests and began forming alliance structures to contain the latter.


48 Millar, n.4, p.59.
The Cuban revolution in 1959 posed an another challenge to US interest in the Caribbean region, whereas it had left a profound impact on the Soviet perception. In an action-reaction cycle, Cuba, over a period of time, felt compelled to be dependent on the Soviet Union. Ironically, this was not the option which Cuba, in normal circumstances, would liked to have. The major beneficiary of the whole development was the post-Stalin Soviet leadership which had embarked upon a deliberate strategy of gaining allies in the Third World by offering economic inducements to anti-American governments.

During the first two decades after the Cuban triumph, the Soviet Union did not have a coherent policy towards the region. Temperament and personality also played a vital role in Soviet policy-making. Khrushchev's passion influenced Soviet policy as much as Brezhnev's apathy, and many of "our octogenarians demonstrated obvious reluctance to get involvement in the region at all.\textsuperscript{49} Soviet leaders were conscious of historical affinity with the region.

Thus the Soviet Union paid virtually no attention to this area until 1978. Even after the victory of the

Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1979, the Soviet government took little interest in it. In the early 1960s:

"Central America influenced us primarily because we wanted to limit Chinese and Cuban expansion in the region. The Soviet policy in this area was marked by extreme aversion to armed struggle supported for peaceful solutions to regional problems, and improving relations with Costa Rica."

The Nicaraguan success brought Central America into a distinct regional framework of the Soviet policy-makers. Soviet leaders moved rapidly to establish formal relations with Nicaragua, more swiftly than they had done in the case of Cuba, though it was Cuba, not the Soviet Union, which took the lead in helping Sandinista guerilla forces. Earlier, the Soviet Union had been rather sceptical in its perception of these revolutionaries and considered them as romantic, unreliable, petty-bourgeois with little chance of success. Although the Soviet Union gave some verbal support to the revolution in its last phase, up to that point she had paid almost no attention to Nicaragua or the Sandinistas.

Soviet objectives in the region were a mix of superpower ambitions, to pursue traditional national interests through power politics and to promote socialist mode of economic and political change at as low cost as

50 Ibid. p. 91.
possible. However, minimum costs were measured both in terms of finance (no commitment like in Cuba) and politics (preserving revolutionary regimes in Nicaragua), and discreetly, bolstering other revolutionary movements without provoking a direct confrontation with the U.S.

In dealing with the events caution was central to both the Soviet-policy calculations as well as central America. This was because of U.S. political, economic and military sway over the region as well as the great geographical distance between the USSR and Central America.\(^{51}\)

Any assessment of Soviet policy towards Central America needs an analysis of the Soviet-Cuban relations. There were two different but interesting aspects of this relationship. Soviet-Cuban co-operation promoted radical movements in Third World countries in general, e.g. Angola, Mozambique etc., and the Soviet policy extended through Cuba in Central America, particularly to its neighbours. Except in Nicaragua, however, Castro's support for armed struggles had failed to produce similar results elsewhere in the region.

Cuba played an instrumental role in Soviet calculations with respect to Central America. Beyond building Cuba's military strength and improving its military capabilities,

\(^{51}\) The US support to anti-Sandinista, Contras groups and US invasion in Grenada in October 1983 demonstrated her mighty hegemonic control over Central America.
the Soviets had no direct role in the region.

Nevertheless, this unperceived Marxist victory had galvanized Soviet attention and greatly altered her approach from a position of indifference to one of deep and latters measured involvement in Central America. The Soviet Union had also seen other opportunities for revolution in the region, especially in El Salvador and Guatemala. Adhering to the Krushchevian principle of "peaceful transition to socialism" that had been reinforced by Allende's shortlived success in Chile (1970-73), the Soviet Union had rejected guerrilla warfare, though they had always regarded it as a possible tactics, but never as necessary as priori. Following the Sandinista victory, a Soviet observer concluded that the Cuban model for political change (exploiting armed struggle and guerrilla warfare) could be translated into a formula for "political-military fronts" offering a viable alternative to Moscow's traditional policy of peaceful change through non-violent leftist fronts. The shift in Soviet policy formulation was possibly a byproduct of the prevailing conditions in a specific country which was ripe for revolution and the potential political benefits which were yet to be gained.

Since 1981, the Soviet Union backed a wide range of military and political activities in Central America. After "final offensive" episode in El Salvador, the Soviet Union
was not as optimistic about immediate prospects for revolutionary change through armed struggle. But, it nevertheless continued its support to front policy throughout the region (in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras). As per the CPSU's instructions, the Communist parties of these countries were also one of the member of these umbrella organization.

Interestingly, to deal with the prevailing crisis (after Sandinistas' success in Nicaragua, the entire region, especially in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, had erupted by leftist insurgency activities) in these countries. The Soviet Union followed a two-track policy of pursuing "front" for armed struggle activities, and seeking leftist participation and power-sharing. The front indigenous pro-Soviet Communist party had also followed a traditional policy to penetrate in labour and student organisations. Tactically, to involve the orthodox Communist parties in the armed struggle and putting them into guerrilla groups was the multifaceted Soviet approaches to the region.

The pro-Soviet Communist parties were the other significant instruments, next to Cuba, to facilitate Soviet revolutionary goals in the region. However, the status of these parties differed from country to country. "The Communist parties of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras

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were illegal, while that of Costa Rica had enjoyed electoral opportunity and, was debating in the National Assembly, unlike the Communist guerrillas fighting in the streets. It was these parties which, along with other like-minded forces, joined the Soviet-led political-military umbrella organizations dedicated to a combination of armed struggle and legitimately organized political activities. In contrast, the Communist Party of Costa Rica and other Marxist groups were working within the country's constitutional framework and followed what may be termed traditional moderate Communist tactics.

The Sandinista triumph altered Soviet thinking about the region. Previously, the low profile Soviet activity in the region was often attributed to its backwardness and to the concomitant lack of proper conditions for revolutionary change. The fragmentation of leftist forces was another Soviet assessment about the region. This explains why the Soviet Union maintained contacts with the Nicaraguan Socialist party, and not the Sandinista revolutionaries. In

52 Among the illegal communist parties of the region, part of "Front" were El Salvador's Communist Party (PCES), the Guatemalan Party of Labour (PGT), the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Alliance (URNG), the Honduran Communist Party (PCH) and the Honduran Revolutionary Movement (MHR). These parties broadly followed the Soviet advice and promoted the Soviet interest in the region. In Mujal Leon, n. 6, p. 288.
official Soviet documents, the Nicaraguan Socialist were considered "class relatives" of the CPSU, but the Sandinista were viewed as petty-bourgeois revolutionaries".

Furthermore, even after the Sandinistas victory in 1979, although the Soviet-Union recognized the FSLN as the "Vanguard and leading force of the Nicaraguan revolution", it was unwilling to respond to their needs. The Moscow's lack of response was based on several factors: a low profile mind-set, reluctance to get involved in the imbroglio, scarcity of resources and the priority of accommodation with the United States over yet-to-be proven allies. In any case, the Soviet Union did not want another Cuba in Central American - an economic burden.

Soviet policy toward Nicaragua in the 1980s was mainly guided by the previous "lessons" learnt during the development of the Soviet-Cuban relationship. Moscow did not want to involve herself in Nicaragua, by providing high-profile military assistance to the latter. Eventhough Moscow had extended one-third of the estimated $ 580 million direct military aid to Managua between 1980 and 1985 most of these military hardware assistance was actually delivered by the East-European countries.

This, however, does not mean that Soviet help to Nicaragua was negligible. The Soviet Union, with Cuba and her other socialist allies, had helped Nicaragua to build
its air base, trained its pilots and other military personnel. The Soviet Union had sent thousands of military and technical advisors to Nicaragua, apart from supplying MIG aircrafts, so much so that in spite of its own economic difficulties, in 1985 under the new leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, the USSR agreed to provide more economic aid to Nicaragua.

Besides, the Soviet Union had played quite a significant role in the economic development of Nicaragua. For example, Nicaragua was helplessly dependent upon the Soviet Union for its petroleum requirements. Though the Soviet Union had catered upto 80 to 90 percent of Nicaragua’s oil needs in 1985-86, the latter was unable to repay in terms of Soviet requirements. In addition to oil, Soviet export to Managua tripled between 1983-84, but Nicaraguan export was virtually nothing to the USSR.

However, against possible Nicaraguan dependency over the Soviet Union, Cuba had warned the Sandinista regime not to repeat her economic experience with the Soviet Union. But Managua wilfully ignored the Cuban advice, and as a result progressively isolated itself from the West. On the contrary, Nicaraguan sought membership of the CMEA.

With the election of Ronald Reagan as the U.S. president in 1980 a determined and vigorous campaign was launched by Washington to counter all kinds of left-wing
movement in Central and South America. Particularly, US Policy now concentrated on funding anti-Sandinistas groups (Contra groups) in Nicaragua. Between 1982-87, the Contra groups fought with the Sandinistas military. This policy finally culminated in the US invasion of Grenada. It was obvious that the Sandinistas in Nicaragua proved themselves unequal to the U.S. aided anti-communist onslaught. They were also handicapped by the absence of a comparable degree of Soviet economic and military assistance.

**Soviet Activity Elsewhere in Central America**: The most important event of 1970s, after the failure of the Chilean experience, was the Sandinistas' triumph in Nicaragua. For the Soviet Union this event came as unexpected, for it had not attached any significance to their revolutionary potential. Further, the success of Sandinistas had once again proved the validity of the Cuban model to attain power. As a result, it had forced the reversal of Soviet tactics of "peaceful road to power" to the acceptance of armed struggle in Central America. Significantly, then "the Soviet Union admitted that Sandinista revolution constituted a vindication of the old Castroism of Che Guevara"53.

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In this backdrop, the Soviet Union conducted its policy on two lines. On the one hand, it extended help and assistance to the Communist parties and leftist movements in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica etc., on the other hand the Soviets took all possible care to maintain state-to-state relations with the non-communist governments in these countries. Cuba always acted as the principal instrument in the spread of the Soviet revolutionary activities.

What was particularly important was that the Sandinista success gave a signal to the region's other leftist forces to revise their strategy relating to radical revolutionary lines and to translate their goal accordingly. On what would be a better and correct path for their revolution, a leader of the Salvadoran Communist party said, "A proletarian revolution could succeed in El Salvador only through guerrilla warfare". The mood of the time was articulated succinctly by a Honduran leftist, who had fought with the Sandinistas, in 1985: "for the first time young Communists could see a revolution triumph, a revolution that spoke Spanish".

As far as Cuba was concerned, it had played a signal

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55 By 1982, the Soviet also concluded that not El Salvador and Guatemala but Chile, Uruguay, Colombia, Costa-Rica, and Bolivia were also "ripe for revolution". - Ibid.
role, either unilaterally or in association with the Soviet Union, in promoting Central American revolutionary movements. It was also the major conduit for the Soviet military supply to the left-wing movements. However, after the defeat of the "final offensive" in El Salvador in 1981 and the US invasion of Grenada, the Cubans were compelled to moderate their radicalism. Consequently, Cuba shifted her policy towards rebuilding its image as a responsible regional actor, less bent upon destabilizing Central America.

However, by 1982-83, Soviet optimism about revolutionary opportunities in Central America through armed struggle had distinctly waved. With the failure of El Salvador's "final offensive" in January 1981, followed by the US invasion of Grenada in 1983, Moscow's perceived "New Nicaragua" came to a fullstop. Since then Moscow's policy of backing armed struggles outside Nicaragua reshifted to broad United fronts of various leftist groups in the region.

Significantly, by 1985 the Soviet Union came to oppose any sort of armed struggle and now supported the regional Contadora\textsuperscript{56} peace negotiation to solve the Central American

\textsuperscript{56} Contadora peace initiatives began by Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela to get a independent solution of Central American crisis in conterdora Island in January 1983. The very effort was without get influenced by the U.S. vis-a-vis the USSR. - Bruce Michael, and et. al. eds., \textit{Contadora and the Central American Peace Process: Central American and Caribbean Program - Selected Document}, SAIS Papers in International Affairs, no. 8 (Boulder & London : Westview Press, 1985) p. 13.
crisis\textsuperscript{57}. At that time tactics of the Soviet Union in Central America was aimed at, though in a different way, asserting itself as an equal political weight with the United States, while at the same time reinforcing her moderate image\textsuperscript{58}. The key factor behind this policy shift was possibly, the realization that growing U.S. pressure on Nicaragua might pose a potential threat to Cuba, Moscow's most important strategic ally in Central America.

Moreover, the wave of democracy and the later half of 1980s and later the general elections in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Costa Rica also forced Havana to make necessary adaptation in its policy towards the region. Cuban policy was now directed at improving state-to-state relations with the newly elected governments of the region.

The Contadora peace process provided an interesting example of Moscow's tactical flexibility in the content of U.S. policy in Central America. Initially, Moscow was ambivalent regarding the independent peace initiatives of this group, perceiving that the U.S. influences over the group would be exploited so as to transform this regional initiative into a multilateral instrument aimed at imposing U.S. demands upon the Sandinistas. But when it became

\textsuperscript{57} Peter Clement and W.R. Duncan, The Soviet Union and Central America", in Mujal-Leon, n.6, p. 276.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
evident that the group had a life of its own, and, more importantly, as the United States became some what disenchanted with the prospects for and viability of a Contadora-sponsored solution to the Central American crisis, the Soviet Union became an out spoken advocate of the initiatives\textsuperscript{59}. It was an indication of diminishing Soviet enthusiasm toward the region, as compared with her activism in 1970s\textsuperscript{60}. Soviet foreign Minister Shevardnadze, for example, underscored Moscow's positive view of the Contadora peace process during October 1986 visit to Mexico city\textsuperscript{61}.

\textbf{Dynamics of the Superpower Relationship in Central America:}

Both the superpowers, i.e., the United States and the Soviet Union were convinced about the fact that after the Guatemalan episode of 1950s Latin America in general was being influenced by the philosophy of communism. It was generally believed by the U.S.A. that the Soviet Union was in an advantageous position due to the fact that it infused its philosophy into the region. In 1954, an attempt by the Arbenz government, which had been under a U.S. arms embargo since 1949, to secure arms from Eastern Europe provided Washington with what was seen as conclusive evidence of

\textsuperscript{59} Mujail-Leon, n.6, p. 279.

\textsuperscript{60} Prizel, n.2, p. 134.k

\textsuperscript{61} Pravda, October 5, 1986, p.6; Reprint in the CDSP, vol. 38. no. 39, 1986 p.11.
Soviet influence in Guatemala. U.S. Secretary of State Dulles declared that "the intrusion of Soviet despotism was, of course, a direct challenge to our Monroe Doctrine"\(^{62}\). With the fall of the Arbenz regime, the US official concern about Soviet activities in Latin America receded, because the US concerns during the late 1950s were shifted to the race for outer space, where the Soviet Union got embarrassing success\(^{63}\).

The United States, however, still perceived the region as vital to its own national security. The Caribbean basin is one of the principal supply routes between America and Europe, while the Panama Canal links the US East and West coast. In the event of war in Europe any military bases of a foreign power in the area would be a direct challenge to American power at its own doorstep, apart from threatening its supply lines. There was also a strong psychological feeling that if the U.S. could not control even the small states in its own 'backyard', it would erode its prestige and cause a chain repurcussion on the other states. It could also undermine the global perceptions and self-expressed

\(^{62}\) John Foster Dulles, "International Communism in Guatemala", Department of state Bulletin, no. 31 (July 12, 1953), p. 43; quoted in Richard L. Millet, U.S. Perceptions of Soviet strategy in Latin America", in Mujal-Leon, n.6, p. 95.

\(^{63}\) Ibid.
security interests of the United States. Till 1960s Soviet global interests in Central America and the Caribbean were minimal, but now Soviet prestige was tied up with fate of Cuba, the only socialist state in the Western Hemisphere.

The 1959 victory of Fidel Castro in Cuba renewed US concern over Soviet influence in Latin America, though, for the Soviet Union the event demonstrated the bankruptcy of "geographical fatalism" and "the Monroe Doctrine". The United States, in order to overthrow Castro, tried using tactics similar to those used in Guatemala with a CIA financed, organized and led invasion of Cuban exiles at the Bay of Pigs in 1961. Ultimately, the failure of this operation had shattered the comfortable assumptions about the ubiquity of the United States to maintain its unchallenged hegemony in the region\textsuperscript{64}. It was a major blow to US interests in the Caribbean, while a handsome gain for the Soviet Union.

By mid 1960s, the Cuban issue had become a direct point of conflict between the USSR and the USA with Nikita Khrushchev declaring the "Monroe Doctrine" dead. The confrontation among the two superpowers culminated in the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. The Kennedy Administration believed that the principal Soviet objective

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
in placing missiles in Cuba was to alter the global balance of power, rather than to advance Soviet objectives in the Western Hemisphere specifically\(^65\). Although it had fulfilled the Soviet goal to protect Cuba vis-a-vis advancing her global objectives, the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis was a humiliation to the USSR, which was unbearable for Soviet leadership.

The missile crisis strained Cuban-Soviet relations and encouraged Castro to promote revolution throughout the hemisphere in defiance of Soviet efforts to establish "peaceful coexistence". "The Soviet Union undoubtedly regarded Latin America as an area offering unusual revolutionary possibilities, but they themselves had been cautious in their strategy, except where special opportunities had arisen, as in the case of Cuba\(^66\). Events in the region during the 1970s and 1980s reinforced American fears about the threat of communism and the expansion of Soviet influences. Revolution in Grenada and Nicaragua in 1979, civil wars in El Salvador (1980 onwards), and the growth of various leftist insurgencies in

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\(^{66}\) Assistant Secretary of State Edwin M. Mastrin, "Communist Subversion in the Western Hemisphere", *Foreign Affair Outline* (March, 1963), pp. 1-2; quoted in Millet, n. 63, p. 97.
Guatemala and Honduras had prompted Washington to focus attention on the geostrategic significance of Central America. Moreover, the regions' sea routes, which were vital to U.S. as they were her trade routes, e.g., the Gulf coast or the Panama Canal, might now fall within the area of increased Soviet activities in Central America. Soon this region acquired top priority in American foreign policy. In the Soviet calculation, her activities in the region might divert U.S. attention and resources from Soviet security concerns in Europe and Asia, and might fuel political turmoil in the United States over the appropriate policies to pursue in Central America. On the other Hand, these chain of political events were seen in a positive light in Moscow, because without any confrontation the Soviet Union was gaining stronger foothold in the region.

The Sandinista victory in Nicaragua occurred in an international context marked by the breakdown of detente. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the fall of the Shah of Iran’s pro-American government set the tone for the general debate on the US-Soviet relations.

As conditions in Central America deteriorated, the US policy in Latin America emerged as an issue in the 1980 presidential election. When Reagan became president of the

67 Mujal-Leon, p. 102.
United States it became clear that the statements on Latin America were not simply campaign rhetoric. Increased Soviet-Cuban influence in the region was perceived as a threat to the security of the United States. The same tone was paralleled in January 1981 by the future US Ambassador to U.N., Jeane Kirkpatrick, who blamed the Carter Administration for the fall of Somoza and installation of Cuban-Soviet backed Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.68

The Reagan administration had pursued a neo-globalist crusade against Cuban-Soviet communism and all winds of left-wing movement in the region. Reagan’s foreign policy was globalist in nature and it was aimed directly against the Soviet Union. As Halliday has written:

For all its vagueness and incoherence, this (Reagan Administration) attack on the Third World revolutionary states formed fast of a much more comprehensive challenge to the USSR. The road to Moscow lay, it appeared, through Kabul, Pnom Penh, Adis Ababa, Luanda, St. George, and Managua. 69

This aggressive policy provoked a natural reaction from the Soviet Union. Despite the fact that she wanted to avoid

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confrontation with the United States in its backyard circumstances forced them to get involved in region. There were quite a few risks associated with such a Soviet involvement in Central America. The greatest of them was the possibility of a direct US - Soviet confrontation accompanied by military intervention in Nicaragua itself. The situation was polarized from the very beginning when former US secretary of state Alexander Haig said (in his theme of the white paper regarding Soviet-Cuban and Nicaraguan axis helping to leftist insurgencies in El Salvador etc.) that "the United States should 'go to the source' (i.e. take action against Cuba)\textsuperscript{70}. Tensions were further heightened by October 1983, the US invasion of Grenada. The US administration, as it appeared now, was out of "Vietnam Syndrome" was ready to go to any extent to defend what it called American interests.

Meanwhile, Soviet commitments were triggered not only by Reagan's crusade, but also, by a greater part, the World community's adverse reaction to it. From the very beginning "the Soviet Union was supporting the right to a small nation to choose its own way, and the majority of Western European public opinion backed Soviet involvement in the area, at the

very least, did not oppose it".

Throughout his two terms in U.S. Presidency, Reagan had consistently followed a broad policy of 'rolling back communism from U.S. backyards' and furthering its goals to ensure the overthrow of the Sandinista government and to defeat other leftist insurgencies in neighbouring countries.\(^71\)

Conclusion:

In sum, the post-second World War period witnessed the emergence of the Soviet Union as one of the two superpowers. The emergence of most of the colonial under-developed countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America as independent nations was yet another significant development of this period. The contemporary Soviet leaderships lost no opportunity to provide their whole-hearted support to these newly independent Third World countries and tried to entice, allure or cajole them to be the part of the Soviet bloc in one way or the other. The revolution in Cuba and later in Nicaragua right in the backyard of the US had given yet another opening to Moscow in the Latin American region. Some of the moderately advanced countries like Argentina,

Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Venenzuela etc. provided a much needed ground for the Soviet Union presence in the region. But the Sandinistas' revolutionary success and its impacts on other revolutionary groups in the region had zeroed the Soviet optimism of having grips over the countries of the Central American region. The United States under the leadership of Ronald Reagan combined with the growing domestic dissatisfaction in the Soviet Union had virtually made the Soviet global activism quite disfunctional particularly in the Central American region.