

Equal Rights

To The Earth's Resources

SPECIAL ISSUE

THE STRUGGLE FOR NATURAL RIGHTS

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THE GLOBAL "CONCERN" OVER HUMAN RIGHTS

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SOVIET EXPANSION: FACT OR FICTION

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One of the cornerstones of American foreign policy is the assertion that the Soviet Union is an expansionist power, gradually extending its power and evil influence around the world -- especially in the Third World, for example, in Africa. On this cornerstone, in this assertion, we justify expansion of American military forces, at the cost of billions of dollars and a federal deficit that threatens our entire economy.

Is this assertion of Soviet power and influence accurate? Have we been told the truth about the Soviet threat in Africa and elsewhere? Or, are we on the receiving end of propaganda designed to increase the power and influence of Army generals and enrich the arms manufacturers, and, inadvertently, to increase tension between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. Let's take a look at Africa.

Ask a typical American on the street about Soviet influence in Africa and he (or she) would probably say that, yes, the Russians have a strong foothold there. He might even mention some specific countries -- like Ethiopia, Angola, and Mozambique, possibly even Congo and Zimbabwe.

The facts, as reported in reliable publications like THE NEW YORK TIMES, contradict this alarmist view. Developments in the last five years, we

are told, indicate that the U.S.S.R. is losing sway among Africans. This is the gist, for example, of an article in the November 22, 1983 NEW YORK TIMES, written by Michael Kaufmann from Nairobi, Kenya.

In the course of his report, Kaufmann describes how in country after country, Soviet influence has waned. "Considering their investment," he quotes a European diplomat as saying, "you would have to say that Moscow has done simply terribly in Africa."

In a litany of Soviet failures -- not successes -- in Africa, we need only recall, for example, how the Russians helped build Egypt's Aswan Dam, but subsequently, in 1972, had 50,000 technicians "thrown out". Russians were also expelled from the Sudan and Somalia, and in Uganda, the despotic Idi Amin, whom Moscow had armed, was deposed.

We could go on to recount how the U.S.S.R. has lost influence in other African countries. Even in Angola and Mozambique, where the Russians and Cubans supplied arms and men in the struggle for independence from Portugal -- even here -- we find Russian influence waning.

Why is this? Why has Russian influence declined rather than increased in most of Africa? According to Kaufmann

and other correspondents, the setback has had several causes. Among these are:

(1) WORLD RECESSION HAS MADE IT INCREASINGLY CLEAR TO AFRICAN NATIONS HOW HEAVILY THEY RELY ON WESTERN AID AND ON SUCH INSTITUTIONS AS THE WORLD BANK AND INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND.

(2) CONTINUED FIGHTING IN ANGOLA AND INSTABILITY IN ETHIOPIA HAVE LESSENERED THE PERCEPTION OF SOVIET MILITARY STRENGTH AS INVINCIBLE.

(3) THE RUSSIANS ARE PERCEIVED BY AFRICANS AS ALOOF AND RACIST.

Above all, Russian loss of influence among Africans is due to CHANGING NEEDS IN AFRICA. Over the years, following World War II, the need was for military assistance, and Moscow responded. Now, with almost all African countries free from colonial rule, the need is for development assistance and food, not arms and ammunition.

THE STANDARD, a Nairobi newspaper,

observed recently in an editorial that the real challenges to Africa today are "disease, poverty and ignorance," and it asked to what extent the Russians were prepared to assist with these.

The point I wish to make is simply this: allegations made by our government of expanded and threatening Russian influence, in Africa, as elsewhere, are grossly exaggerated or groundless. But, as usual, popular awareness in the United States has not kept pace with changed conditions.

True, as we are told, placards of Marx and Engels and Lenin still dominate Revolution Square in Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia; true, the rhetoric in Guinea may be pro-Soviet, but the underlying reality there, as in Chad, Gabon, Djibouti, and other former French colonies is pro-French, pro-European or pro-U.S.

In fact, despite outward appearances, there is every indication that we are in for a better, even normal, period of relations between Africa and the West.

Admittedly, the U.S.S.R. has played an expansionist, opportunistic game in international affairs, but the outcome of the game for the U.S.S.R. has been failure, not success. What does it matter then if the Soviet Union and Cuba helped Angola win independence if Soviet influence there has been so

short-lived?

Most importantly, how can we, i.e., the Administration in power, assert that an increased threat exists from a country whose policies have been a conspicuous failure? Of course, the U.S. has to take steps to protect its citizenry, but how can we build sound policy on unsound conclusions? We cannot.

A sound policy must be based on a sound appraisal of events and conditions. Let us, therefore, perceive Soviet influence for what it is, in this case, in Africa, as extremely limited and weakening, and not on the basis of a Communist bogeyman outlook.

Let us also proceed with the same honesty in our appraisal of Soviet influence and threat in Central America, where the root problem is economic injustice and political corruption, and not as we are lead to believe -- Communist subversion.

If we were more objective in our examination of the "Soviet threat" in foreign affairs, perhaps we might be able to persuade our leaders to develop an intelligent foreign policy. We need to move towards a change now, before it is too late.