THE UNITED STATES AND REVOLUTIONS: PATTERNS OF RESPONSE

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Revolutions are rare in human history. This study details and evaluates American policy toward five truly revolutionary situations in the post-World War II era: China, Cuba, Vietnam, Iran, and Nicaragua. American policy in these cases progressed through four relatively distinct phases: (1) American officials failed to recognize the seriousness of the threat to the incumbent, pro-American regime. (2) Once policymakers became aware of the threatening situation, they encouraged the leader in the target state to initiate reforms. (3) Failure of the reform effort and a successful opposition movement led the U.S. to seek to guide the transition to a new regime. (4) While opposed to the regime which was eventually established, the U.S. still hoped to establish productive relations with it. The prevailing pattern in these cases is attributed to a misunderstanding of Third World realities and the processes of change there, and to exaggerated notions of American influence. The concluding portion of the article recommends ways to improve American perceptions and policy in such situations.

Revolutions are rare in modern history. Truly successful revolutions are even more rare (Hagopian, 1974, pp. 1-40; Sick, 1985, p. 158). The United States has had to deal with only a handful of true revolutions in the post-World War II period: in China, Cuba, Vietnam, Iran, and Nicaragua. In none of these cases did the U.S. attain its goals. This study reviews and assesses the flawed U.S. policy toward revolutionary settings, suggests reasons for the flawed policy, and recommends a modified approach toward revolutions and political instability in the Third World.

For analytic purposes, American policy in these situations can be divided into four relatively distinct phases. In the first, United States officials did not recognize the seriousness of the threat to the incumbent, pro-

American regime. A second stage was initiated once policymakers became aware of the threatening situation. An effort was made to promote reforms and liberalization in the target country. The suggested reforms did not have the desired effect (or were initiated too late), which led the U.S. to seek to guide the transition to a successor regime. In this third phase, American officials encouraged the use of the mechanisms and behavior patterns common to democratic societies. Neither the transition process which did occur nor its result was favored by the U.S. Nonetheless, in the fourth phase, U.S. officials hoped to establish productive relations with the new government.

Each of these phases will be illustrated by concentrating upon one of the most conspicuous cases. However, brief mention will also be made of other cases to demonstrate that U.S. policy toward most revolutionary situations has followed this pattern. The extent to which certain cases deviate from the pattern will also be noted.

The persistence of such a pattern through these cases, which occurred over a thirty year period, illustrates the persistence of the global containment mentality in official American thinking. In each case the U.S. supported the incumbent regime primarily because it was pro-American and promised to maintain stability. U.S. support was vigorous until it was apparent that there was widespread opposition to the incumbent regime. The U.S. then sought first to encourage reforms, and later to guide the transition to a moderate successor regime when the proposed reforms either did not occur or did not have the desired impact. These extensive, though belated, efforts also illustrate the global containment mentality and a perceived need to prevent radical groups from attaining power.

Phase I: Belated Recognition

In response to most post-World War II revolutionary situations, American officials failed to recognize that the incumbent, pro-American regime was seriously threatened by domestic unrest. The best-known recent example of this problem is the Iranian revolution. Not until October-November 1978 (i.e., less than four months prior to the Shah's departure) did American officials realize that his regime was in serious trouble. An August 1978 CIA report concluded that "Iran is not in a revolutionary or even a 'prerevolutionary' situation." The Defense Intelligence Agency asserted in late September that "the Shah is expected to remain actively in power over the next 10 years" (Ledeen and Lewis, 1980, pp. 11-12; Sick, 1985, pp. 89-93).

The intelligence community has been criticized for its failures in the Iranian case, but similar errors were also made by analysts in a number of other revolutionary situations. In the Cuban case, the State Department did report in August 1958 that the Batista government might be overthrown, but argued that the "majority of the Cuban population...is not willing to take up arms against him, is apathetic to his rule, and only desires a return to stable political conditions." Not until late in 1958 did the Department conclude that "any solution in Cuba requires that Batista must relinquish power" (U.S. State Department, 1958a, 1958b). Regarding the Nicaraguan revolution, it was not until August-September 1978 that Carter administration officials warned that an anti-Somoza government might come to power. Prior to that time the U.S. had expected Somoza to continue as President until the expiration of his term in 1981 (Riding, 1978a, p. 84; Riding, 1978b, p. 32).

A slightly different pattern prevailed in the Chinese and Vietnamese cases. Events in those countries forced American officials to recognize that the regimes there were threatened. In the Chinese case, there had been an ongoing civil war for over a decade. South Vietnam had only recently been created and its government faced a number of problems. Nonetheless, in these cases as well, American officials were very optimistic. In the South Vietnamese case, for instance, an October 1955 National Intelligence Estimate contended that "[p]rovided the Communists do not exercise their capabilities to attack across the 17th Parallel or to initiate large-scale guerilla warfare in South Vietnam, [President] Diem will probably make further progress in developing a more effective government." The government's position would "probably be strengthened as a result of increased popular support, the continued loyalty of the VNA, and a deterioration in the strength and cohesiveness of his non-Communist opposition" (*Pentagon Papers*, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 297-298).

Miscalculating the seriousness of the challenge to these leaders constituted a significant intelligence failure, though perhaps not a surprising one. Gary Sick, a participant in the Iranian case, has argued that a failure to perceive the onset of revolutions is "a common experience of all revolutions" (Sick, 1985, p. 157). Each of the incumbent leaders had long been in power. Each survived earlier political challenges, and there was little reason to expect that they would not overcome the current one. Thus, U.S. officials probably saw little reason to be unduly alarmed about the early manifestations of unrest. In addition, seemingly more important foreign policy concerns diverted the attention of upper-level officials. For instance, during the period of growing opposition to Batista in the late 1950s,

American attention was focused upon Berlin and a response to the Soviet launch of Sputnik. Zbigniew Brzezinski has noted that in the late 1970s, when the Shah and Somoza were facing the instability which would eventually overthrow them, American "decision-making circuits were heavily overloaded" as the Carter administration focused on the Middle East peace process and arms talks with the Soviets (Brzezinski, 1983, p. 358). Finally, the American foreign policy-making structure--with its emphasis upon continuing, day-to-day relations with established governments--may not be equipped to deal with such atypical events as revolutions (Sick, 1985, pp. 38-42).

Whatever the reasons for the failure to comprehend the seriousness of the challenge to these governments, that failure had important, negative consequences upon subsequent American efforts to promote change. Policymakers attached little significance to any instability until a very late date. As a result, U.S. policy remained constant while the situation in each of these countries changed. Moreover, prevailing policies, indicating American support for the incumbent government, continued. Once the urgency of the situation was recognized, the United States became more interested and involved. However, this increased involvement came at such a late date that U.S. influence and credibility with all participants were significantly reduced. The passage of time also allowed the domestic situation in each country to become polarized, greatly undermining the influence of those moderate pro-American elements which the U.S. hoped to encourage (W. Smith, 1987, pp. 13-41; LeoGrande, 1982, p. 64; Brzezinski, 1983, p. 355).

Phase II: Mitigating Efforts at Reform

When American officials realized that these governments faced substantial challenges, they became much more interested in the situation. Typically, they encouraged the threatened regime to initiate significant reforms as a means of alleviating discontent. However, American rhetoric and actions prior to and concurrent with the instability inhibited both U.S. leverage and the likelihood of major reforms. In each instance the United States pursued two somewhat contradictory goals: encourage the incumbent government to reform, yet support that government so that it would not be overthrown by radical forces. As Secretary of State Dean Acheson noted when detailing the aims of U.S. policy toward China in the late 1940's, the U.S. sought to bring peace "which would permit stable government and progress along democratic lines" (which would necessitate radical changes in

the policies of the incumbent regime) and to "[assist] the National Government to establish its authority over as wide an area of China as possible" (U.S. State Department, 1949, p. xi).

One way in which U.S. influence was often undermined was the extensive (and, it could be argued, excessive) American praise of the incumbent regime. For instance, President Carter praised the "great leadership of the Shah" of Iran in December 1977 and cited this as the reason that country was "an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world" (Carter, 1978, p. 2222). In addition to lauding the Shah, American officials often cited the importance of good relations with Iran. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance pointed to the "long and close relationships" between the U.S. and Iran; such ties were "demonstrably in the [American] national interest" and "among our most important ties abroad" (Vance, 1977a, p. 613; Vance, 1977b, p. 245).

It was not simply American rhetoric, however, which reassured these leaders about continued American support and, consequently, undermined U.S. efforts to promote reform. The U.S. often acted in ways which had the same effect. Again, the Iranian case provides a useful example. The Shah visited the U.S. prior to the outbreak of domestic instability. Carter visited Iran in December 1977. The administration also continued arms sales to Iran despite congressional opposition and the administration's stated goal of restricting such sales (Sick, 1985, pp. 43-46).

American relations with the Diem regime in South Vietnam also provide an excellent illustration of this pattern. Walter Robertson, an Assistant Secretary of State, asserted in mid-1956 that "Asia has given us in President Diem another great figure," and that "the entire free world has become richer for his example of determination and fortitude" (*Pentagon Papers*, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 611-612). Vice President Johnson described the South Vietnamese leader as the "Churchill of today" after a 1961 visit (Trumbell, 1961, p. 1). It was during the Diem years that the U.S. began to provide extensive aid to South Vietnam. Between 1955 and 1961 U.S. military aid averaged $200 million per year, making South Vietnam the second largest recipient of U.S. military aid. By 1963, it was the largest recipient of U.S. military aid and the third largest recipient of economic aid (Gelb, 1971, p. 143).

Similar patterns of rhetoric and behavior were also present in other cases. The United States provided over $2 billion in aid to China from 1945 to 1949, including close to $1.6 billion in grants (U.S. State Department, 1949, p. 1042). In the Cuban case, Ambassadors Arthur Gardner and Earl

Smith were effusive in their praise of President Batista. Vice President Nixon visited the island in 1955 (Bonsal, 1971, pp. 13-14; E. Smith, 1962).

The effect of such American rhetoric and actions was to undermine American efforts to promote reforms in these countries, reforms which were believed necessary to ameliorate discontent. Statements and actions in support of these leaders had occurred prior to the initiation of any reforms. Chiang, Somoza, and other entrenched leaders could assume that American support would continue, even if American-proposed reforms were not initiated. Such an assumption was especially likely in light of the repeated American statements about the importance of U.S. ties with these countries. American support would continue because it was in American interests, regardless of whether or not significant reforms were initiated (Sick, 1985, pp. 20-21).

The U.S. did criticize several of these regimes and impose sanctions against them, e.g., Cuba in 1958 and Nicaragua in 1977. Nonetheless, the basic point remains valid. The criticisms came very late, after years of American support. In addition, the sanctions themselves were relatively modest, e.g., temporarily withholding economic and military aid to Nicaragua in 1977. Such sanctions may have encouraged the regimes' opponents--and, consequently, had an impact upon the evolving situation--but did little to induce the incumbent government to initiate reforms.

U.S. leverage was also undermined by the tendency in several cases to praise excessively any "reforms" which had been initiated, while at the same time calling for additional changes. American officials argued in mid-1978, for example, that the situation in Iran was improving and pointed to the cessation of torture, the curtailed use of military courts, and improved prison conditions. Later, Carter asserted that the Shah had "moved aggressively to establish democratic principles in Iran and to have a progressive attitude towards social questions [and] social problems." William Sullivan, the American ambassador to Iran, claimed in October 1978 that the Shah had shown "surprising flexibility" and was "prepared to accept a truly democratic regime" in Iran (Carter, 1979, p. 1750; Brzezinski, 1983, p. 359). Of Nicaragua, the State Department asserted in February 1978 that "[a]lthough problems remain, it is our opinion that marked progress has been manifested since early 1977" (*New York Times,* 1978, p. 4). Carter went so far as to send a personal letter to Somoza in June 1978 praising recent improvements. The President wrote that the "steps toward respecting human rights," including cooperation with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, allowing moderate opposition elements to return, and reforms in the

electoral system, were "important and heartening signs." Once enacted, they would "mark a major advance for [Nicaragua] in answering some of the criticisms recently aimed at the Nicaraguan government" (Somoza, 1980, pp. 144-145).

Such praise had an adverse impact upon the evolving situation in these countries. One problem was that U.S. officials exaggerated the progress which had been made. Whatever improvements had been made in Iran, for example, they could hardly be interpreted as progress toward the establishment of a democratic regime, as Carter suggested. And Carter's letter to Somoza was written after the Nicaraguan leader had decided merely to permit the leading moderate opposition figures to return to the country and to allow an independent human rights group to visit. Such exaggerated praise coming from Washington likely reassured these leaders that they would continue to receive American support, while the opposition was led to question American credibility. Thus, the exaggerated American praise probably tended to persuade the incumbent leader that he did not have to respond to American calls for change and to convince the opposition that it could not depend upon the U.S. to insist upon truly significant reforms. U.S. praise thus had a polarizing impact upon the domestic situation which, ironically, made more remote the likelihood of truly meaningful reform.

Phase III: Transition Proposals

American officials eventually came to recognize that the incumbent regime in each of these countries confronted a serious challenge which might topple it. The perceived importance of each of these countries and the desire to prevent a radical opposition from attaining power (or total power) led the U.S. to seek to promote and guide the transition to a new regime. Most American-proposed transition plans had common elements: hope for a non-violent solution and calls for behavior patterns common in democratic societies. Often, the U.S. sought to preserve existing institutions as a means to these goals. This phase is also characterized by exaggerated notions of the American role, especially in light of the belated American recognition of the gravity of the crisis and U.S. partisanship in earlier phases.

American efforts to guide the transition were most extensive, and convoluted (LeoGrande, 1982, p. 70), in the Nicaraguan case. The first proposals came during the October 1978 OAS mediation effort. Additional suggestions were advanced in June and July 1979 during the opposition FSLN's (Sandinista National Liberation Front) final offensive. The initial

plan called for Somoza to resign and cede power to a junta which would include two bulwarks of Somoza's power: the National Guard and the Liberal Party. When this proposal was rejected by each of the contending parties, the OAS mediators proposed scheduling an internationally-supervised plebiscite on whether Somoza should finish his term (LeoGrande, 1982, pp. 67-68). Throughout the mediation effort, U.S. officials encouraged the Nicaraguan parties to behave as if they were resolving a dispute in a democratic society. The parties were urged to "engage in discussions" to reach a settlement and to make "appropriate concessions and compromises" to resolve the outstanding issues (Binder, 1978, p. 13).

When this initial attempt to resolve the conflict failed, fighting resumed. The destruction caused by the fighting as well as the success of the FSLN-dominated opposition forces led the United States to try a second time to resolve the crisis peacefully. During the Spring of 1979 the U.S. sought a short-term solution which would include the resignation of Somoza but would avoid handing power directly to the FSLN. The U.S. proposed that Somoza be replaced by a junta chosen by the Nicaraguan Congress. That junta would then name a five member provisional government which would include representatives of several existing pro-American institutions (National Guard, Liberal Party) as well as more moderate opposition elements (Broad Opposition Front, Superior Council of the Private Sector). Only after the provisional government had been formed would it approach the FSLN and ask it to appoint two additional members to establish a government of national unity.

Not unexpectedly, the Sandinistas--who were winning on the ground--rejected this proposal. American officials then encouraged the FSLN to enlarge the size of its provisional government in order to increase moderate influence. As one U.S. official noted, "Three of the five [members of the FSLN provisional government] are leftists. We'd like to see a balance or preferably a majority of moderates" (Riding, 1979, p. 12; LeoGrande, 1982, pp. 67-71).

American officials were also involved in efforts to guide the transition to a new regime in several of the other cases. The means and ends of these efforts were often similar to those of the Carter administration in the Nicaraguan case. For instance, in an effort to resolve the Chinese civil war, General George Marshall was sent to the country in late 1945. His goal was to encourage the contending parties to "adjust their internal differences promptly by means of peaceful negotiation" (U.S. State Department, 1949, pp. 127-229, 607).

In the Cuban case a private emissary, William Pawley, was sent in December 1958 to encourage President Batista to leave the country and to appoint a military junta which would then appoint a provisional government pending national elections. Such an effort was necessary, in Ambassador Smith's view, to avoid bloodshed and chaos which would work "for the sole benefit of the Communists." President Eisenhower believed that "our only hope...lay with some kind of non-dictatorial 'third force', neither Castro nor Batistiano [sic]" (E. Smith, 1962, pp. 164-187; Eisenhower, 1965, p. 521).

U.S. efforts to preserve existing institutions were most apparent in the Iranian case. American policy, according to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, aimed at "assur[ing] the maximum of stability in a time of change by preserving the institutional framework of Iran under its constitution..." The U.S. had initially hoped the Shah would retain a role in a government of national unity. Once he decided to leave Iran, the Shah appointed a civilian government headed by Shapour Bakhtiar. Vance noted that this had been done in the "way prescribed by the Iranian Constitution," and asserted that the "new government should be given every chance to reconcile the differences in Iran and find a peaceful political solution" (Vance, 1979a, p. 7). Carter publicly urged the Ayatollah Khomeini to "permit the government that has now been established by the legal authorities in Iran, and under the Constitution, to have a chance to succeed" (Carter, 1980, p. 151). If the new government was to survive, it needed the support of the military. General Robert Huyser was sent to consult with the Iranian military. He later described his mission: "In general terms I was sent [to Iran] by the Government of the United State to stabilize the Iranian military to support their legal government" (U.S. Congress, 1981).

As one reviews these various transition proposals, their impracticality is apparent. The goals sought by the United States--non-violent transitions, negotiated settlements, and the establishment of democratic regimes--were desirable. However, one must question whether they could be attained in the cases detailed here. To begin to understand why such proposals would be advanced so consistently, it is first necessary to note the traditional American penchant for wishful thinking (R. Jervis, 1976, pp. 356-381). Non-violent solutions, negotiated settlements, and democratic procedures may be preferred ways to solve domestic crises, but they were unlikely to occur in China, Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, or Iran.

Could one expect a democratic society to develop in Iran, for instance, which had known only autocracy for centuries? The domestic situation had polarized to such an extent that negotiated solutions were

unlikely, especially since the U.S. urged the incumbent leader to resign (a prerequisite for a negotiated solution) at a very late date, when the opposition was on the threshold of total victory. To take another case, could one expect the FSLN to agree to a negotiated settlement in July 1979? American wishful thinking is also manifested in the exaggerated beliefs about the impact of the United States upon each situation. Thus, it was presumed that the U.S. could persuade the incumbent leader to resign, even though he had been in power for many years and had often disregarded earlier American suggestions.

The American inability to understand the nature of the crisis in each of these countries also helps clarify the persistent use of such unworkable transition proposals. Rarely did U.S. officials recognize that the opposition was opposed not simply to the person of the incumbent leader, but also to the entire system which he represented. Thus, Carter urged the Iranian opposition to give the provisional government, designated by but not including the Shah, an opportunity to succeed. The American transition proposals often sought to preserve some of the existing political institutions--for example, the Liberal Party in Nicaragua or the Cuban and Iranian militaries--while the opposition aimed at destroying existing institutions and replacing them with new ones. Finally, the opposition condemned what it perceived to be excessive American involvement in its society. American-proposed transition plans were thus questioned by one of the contenders for power, greatly limiting the possibility that those plans would be accepted.

These transition proposals also illustrate the traditional American desire to restrict the influence of radical political groups and enhance that of moderates. If compromises between the contending parties would be concluded, then the radical opposition's program and influence would be moderated. Preserving some of the existing institutions would guarantee continued influence for moderate pro-American groups and restrict that of radical elements.

A realistic assessment of these transition proposals at the time they were enunciated would have predicted their rejection (W. Smith, 1987, p. 36; Sick, 1985, p. 172; LeoGrande, 1982, pp. 70-71). Consequently, they can be considered failures for American policy. Furthermore, the proposals and their rejection had other adverse consequences for the United States. One effect was to heighten the existing distrust between the U.S. and the opposition elements before and after they came to power. Added to the opposition's traditional complaint of U.S. support for Chiang, Batista, and the others were those relating to subsequent American efforts to help

maintain the influence of the incumbent's supporters and thus to prevent the opposition from attaining total victory. The opposition's rejection of these proposals, in turn, exacerbated existing American suspicions about the opposition and its goals. Thus, proposals aimed partially at maintaining some pro-U.S. influence had the effect of reducing that influence both upon the opposition and the successor government which it would soon lead.

Phase IV: Relations With the Successor Regime

American policy toward the newly-established revolutionary governments was also similar in these cases. The U.S. often praised the new government and hoped that bilateral relations would continue to be productive. Typically, it was expected that economic factors would induce the new regime to maintain positive ties with the United States. American officials expected that the U.S. would have significant influence upon the new leaders, as the newly-established regimes had tremendous economic needs, which the U.S. could provide for. However, a variety of factors mitigated against close ties between the U.S. and the new government despite the economic needs of the latter. The United States had long supported the now-deposed regime, actively seeking to prevent the new government from coming to power. In addition, the new governments were dedicated to revolutionizing society, which often meant attacking the interests of private American citizens. In light of these factors, relations between the U.S. and the revolutionary government soon soured despite the initial American optimism.

In the immediate aftermath of Mao's victory in China, for instance, the U.S. sought to distance itself from the Nationalists and contemplated recognizing the new regime. As a gesture of friendship, the U.S. announced that it would no longer give military aid or advice to the Nationalists (Gaddis, 1982, p. 68; Spanier, 1980, pp. 58-59).

The Cuban case provides another useful example of these themes. The United States recognized the Castro government soon after it came to power. A new ambassador, Philip Bonsal, was sent to replace Earl Smith, who was considered too close to Batista. Bonsal has been described by one of his subordinates as having "credentials which might enable him to establish rapport with the new Cuban government," who "did what he could to develop a cordial relationship with the new government" (W. Smith, 1987, p. 42). Bonsal has written of his "optimism" that productive relations could be established between the two countries. After his initial meeting with Castro,

the new ambassador "was encouraged to believe that we could establish a working relationship that would be advantageous to both our countries." In part, his optimism was based on the "reciprocal economic interests of Cuba and the United States" which would "exercise a stabilizing and moderating influence on developments in Cuba" (Bonsal, 1971, pp. 25-61; W. Smith, 1987, pp. 42-54). The Cubans, however, had no interest in accepting any sort of aid from the United States (W. Smith, 1987, p. 47).

The fall of the Shah in Iran did not prevent the U.S. from expecting that productive U.S.-Iranian relations could be maintained. President Carter contended in February 1979 that it was "obvious" that the new Iranian (Bazargan) government "would like to have good relations with us" (Carter, 1980, p. 352). Secretary Vance, more realistically, recognized that U.S.-Iranian relations would be "less intimate," but he expected that "over time U.S. and Iranian interests in a strong, stable, non-Communist Iran should permit a cooperative relationship to emerge" (Vance, 1983, p. 343). American officials hoped to develop a working relationship with Iranian moderates throughout the summer of 1979 (Sick, 1985, pp. 186-194). Among the actions of the new regime praised by the U.S. was its handling of the attempt by radicals to seize the American embassy in February 1979 (Gwertzman, 1979, pp. 1, 16).

American officials expressed similar sentiments about the new FSLN-dominated regime in Nicaragua. The American ambassador, Lawrence Pezzulo, claimed in August 1979 that "relations are as cordial and as easy as any I've ever witnessed" (Meislin, 1979, p.8). Secretary Vance acknowledged that it "may take time for us...to develop a relationship of mutual trust," but claimed that "so long as pluralism flourishe[d] in Nicaragua," relations would "prosper" (Vance, 1979b, p. 15). American officials cited a number of positive developments: the absence of retaliation against followers of Somoza, the retention of a mixed economy, and a new press law. To encourage and foster such developments, the U.S. provided emergency aid and pledged to send an additional $75 million in economic aid (U.S. Congress, 1979; LeoGrande, 1982, pp. 73-76). American involvement was viewed as crucial to the development of democratic Nicaragua. Vance claimed that, "[b]y extending our friendship and economic assistance, we enhance the prospects for democracy in Nicaragua." If the U.S. failed to provide such assistance, "we can almost guarantee that democracy will fail" (Vance, 1979b, p. 15).

The expectation that economic aid could moderate revolutionary animosity also existed in the Vietnamese case. The U.S. proposed a variety

of economic measures to the North Vietnamese, beginning with President Johnson's billion dollar Mekong River development project in 1965, in an effort to induce moderation (Johnson, 1965, pp. 606-613).

The expectation that relations between the United States and these successor regimes could be productive is another example of American wishful thinking. In two of these countries, Nicaragua and Iran, the United States had helped establish the former regime. In all of the cases the U.S. had strongly supported the now-deposed government. More recently in each case, the U.S. had sought to prevent its client's fall from power or, minimally, to retain some support for his followers in the new government. Furthermore, the United States had actively sought to prevent the opposition forces from coming to power. When they did gain power, one would expect the new leaders to oppose all groups--foreign and domestic--which had supported the former regime. That desire, alone, would work against good relations with the United States, at least in the short run. The U.S. also tended to overestimate its influence upon the new regime, especially in light of prior American policy.

The expectation that economic ties would link the U.S. with each new government also reflects a poor understanding of revolutions and revolutionary leaders. While the new governments did have great economic needs, these were often subordinated to other concerns. As Henry Kissinger has noted with respect to the Vietnamese revolutionaries, the United States has had difficulty "coming to grips...with implacable revolutionary zeal, with men who prefer victory to economic progress and who remain determined to prevail regardless of material cost" (Kissinger, 1982, p. 38). This difficulty is certainly reflected in each of these cases, where the United States expected that material incentives would overcome or moderate the political differences between the United States and the new revolutionary government.

A final reason why it was unlikely that positive relations would be established between the United States and the new regime was the very nature of the new government. In each case the oppostion forces, now governing, had vowed to reduce perceived American domination of their societies. To do so, they would have to attack those American interests present in the country, increasing the likelihood of conflict with the United States. American officials recognized that these opposition forces were radical--this was one of the reasons why the U.S. had actively sought to prevent them from attaining total power--but seemed unable (or unwilling) to understand that these groups, once in power, would initiate foreign and domestic policies opposed by the United States.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Clearly, the United States made a number of mistakes in these cases, repeating earlier mistakes in subsequent situations. Given that pattern and the rarity of revolutions, one might argue that the U.S. cannot or should not attempt to alter its policy in cases such as these (Sick, 1985, pp. 40-42). Such a conclusion is unwarranted for several reasons. The tremendously adverse consequences of these revolutions for the United States necessitate changes in the traditional American approach. In addition, although revolutions are rare in the Third World, political instability is not. Changes in the American approach toward such extreme manifestations of political instability would better enable the U.S. to deal with instability more generally.

As a first step toward improving American policy, several changes in the prevailing mind-set, i.e., global containment, are necessary. First, the United States must begin to view Third World societies on their own terms, not from the perspective of the Soviet-American competition. The U.S. needs to develop a greater understanding of foreign societies, the grievances against incumbent regimes, and the nature of opposition forces. With increased understanding, the likelihood of belated recognition of the seriousness of political instability should be reduced. A related requirement is for the United States to adopt a more sophisticated view of Third World change and to realize that American values and institutions cannot be replicated in most Third World settings (Wiarda, 1984, 1985).

Furthermore, the assumption that the crisis could be resolved much as political differences in the United States are resolved indicates a serious misunderstanding of both the process of change in the Third World and the nature of revolutionary movements. Democratic societies are not likely to emerge from conflicts between implacable enemies operating in an environment which has rarely known democracy. Similarly, negotiated settlements are unlikely when the two contending parties are engaged in what is essentially a zero-sum game, i.e., the preservation or elimination of existing institutions. The inablility of U.S. officials to understand these realities led them to promote transition proposals which were totally unworkable. Also, the failure to comprehend the nature of the opposition movement caused American officials to be unduly optimistic about ties with the successor regime.

The United States must also recognize that its impact in situations such as these is limited. The various incumbent governments, upon which

the U.S. presumably had some influence, often resisted American appeals for change. U.S. influence upon the opposition was likely to be much more limited, especially after the United States began to work actively to prevent it from coming to power. In such circumstances, and in light of the belated American recognition of the extent of the crisis, American officials should realize that the opportunity for the U.S. to exert a positive influence on the evolving situation is limited. American influence upon the successor regime is also likely to be limited.

Such changes in official thinking would suggest changed policies. American officials should seek to avoid embracing non-democratic leaders. Excessive rhetoric and substantive actions by the United States can make such leaders resistant to American prodding to initiate reforms. The U.S. should also avoid giving any leader the impression that his personal survival is essential to the United States. The American desire for reform should be articulated more prominently and consistently. Sanctions could be imposed against those regimes which fail to introduce reforms. Changes such as these in American policy might also serve to improve the image of the U.S. in the eyes of the opposition forces. The United States might also consider substantive actions to reassure the opposition, e.g., dealing with it as a significant political force, not proposing transition plans aiming primarily at preventing it from attaining total power.

These changes in American perceptions and policy will not prevent political instability from occurring in the Third World. They may, however, enable American officials to better deal with such challenges in the future (Feinberg, 1983; Wiarda, 1984).

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