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New Soviet Warfare: Non-Crisis Crisis

Moscow Fans Small Fires Faster Than U.S. Can Put Them Out

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There is little doubt about the validity of the following three propositions: First, an unspoken agreement exists between the United States and the Soviet Union to avoid a crisis that could lead to nuclear war; second, the Soviet drive for ideological and political world domination is unquenchable, and Mikhail S. Gorbachev's accession to power will change nothing in that drive; third, without American military power, and President Reagan's evident determination to use that power, the world future would belong to the Kremlin.

Both sides agree that toe-to-toe confrontations between America and the Soviet Union are dangerous and must be avoided. In the past the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization have gone to extraordinary lengths to signal the Soviet Union (during, for example, the 1956 Hungarian uprising, the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia and the 1981 Polish crisis) that neither Washington nor NATO would exploit Soviet troubles within its East European empire. Nor has Washington done as much about Afghanistan as it could, thanks to the unspoken agreement to avoid repetitions of events like Nikita S. Khrushchev's 1962 Cuban missile crisis, or Josef Stalin's Berlin blockade of 1948.

Faced with four more years of Reagan, Moscow has evolved a new form of quasi-warfare that, while minimizing the risk of superpower confrontation, may yet weaken U.S. power and resolve. I call it the "non-crisis crisis." By that I mean the creation of micro-crises in different parts of the world that—while threatening the stability, existence and alignment of the Western alliance—are events for which the Soviet Union cannot be held directly accountable.

The "non-crisis crisis" allows Moscow to occupy the high ground of statesmanship while restless and politically ambitious junior allies or surrogates can operate on the low ground of terrorism, hit-and-run border raids and even air battles over the Gulf of Sidra. How can it hurt the Soviets if 6th Fleet Tomcats shoot down Libyan jets in disputed international waters, and nothing else happens to affect Col. Moammar Kadafi's incumbency?

The best current example of a "non-crisis crisis" at work is Central America, where the United States is bogged down in El Salvador and Nicaragua, and there is no U.S.-Soviet confrontation—and no Soviet losses, only gains. Another scene is the Persian Gulf: President Jimmy Carter

warned the Soviets that any move to close the gulf to the West by use of Soviet military power would be met by U.S. counterforce. So what do we see? The gulf is closed by the Iraq-Iran war, and the Soviet Union can't be blamed for that catastrophe. No U.S. counterforce need apply.

The "non-crisis crisis" has become an institutionalized feature of contemporary international relations, as normal as a dynamite-packed Mercedes in Beirut. Five countries have been tagged as responsible for the spread of the "non-crisis crisis" syndrome. According to Avigdor Haselkorn, senior analyst at Analytical Assessments, a division of Eaton Corp. in Cleveland, they make up the Radical Entente: Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Libya and Syria—all dedicated, quite openly, to the overthrow of American power and allies in Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Pacific Rim. These five cannot be called satellites, yet their conspiracies and achievements in no way injure—in fact, they further—Soviet interests.

It could even be that the Soviet Union has no "need to know" what the Radical Entente is up to. After all, why should Politburo member Gorbachev have to have known about a probable Libyan-inspired Irish Republican Army plot to assassinate the British Cabinet at a seaside hotel, when he was to visit Margaret Thatcher in a few months' time? Or about a Libyan embassy shootout that killed a policewoman in London? Better he *shouldn't* know, and thereby enjoy the benefits of deniability.

The most urgent question before Reagan is this: How can state-of-the-art crisis management deal with the "non-crisis crisis," which is intended to stretch our military and intelligence resources? At present, we cannot deal with a micro-crisis, such as the wipeout of Marines in Lebanon. All we can do is withdraw, with all its awful consequences.

We are the fire brigade chasing fires set by a gang of arsonists who can set fires faster than they can be extinguished. The object of attack must be the arsonists, not the fires. We need a school of "non-crisis crisis" managers—interdepartmental and interservice in nature, with the power and imagination to deploy our military and

non-military assets. Above all, we need new thinking, with new technology and resources. However effectively we oppose the Soviet Bloc, we must overcome the ingenious scenario of the "non-crisis crisis" that the Radical Entente has prepared for us and that is working so well for them.

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