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# Russians in Africa: How to Draw the Line?

What troubles everyone who thinks about the Russians roaming around Africa is how they can be checked, not just in Ethiopia but in all the other Third World places whose predictable turbulence opens a gate to them, without being met somewhere along the way by American force.

That is not to say the United States should have used, or should now use, force in Ethiopia, where a fragile prospect of satisfactory settlement has suddenly opened, or that it should make ready to intervene in Rhodesia, potentially a more inflammatory scene.

But the United States has a problem: How can it draw a line without its diplomacy being bolstered by an understanding that if diplomacy fails, the job will be done by covert action or by proxy or by military supply or by direct intervention? To mixed cheers and consternation, our use of those tools has been cut way back in recent years.

Part of the problem is that in particular situations the likely grounds for American intervention have substantial drawbacks, no lighter for being to a degree self-imposed. In Angola, for instance, the old administration could not answer the charge that it was intervening to no good purpose in a civil war. In Ethiopia the United States until now would have been on the side opposed to territorial integrity. In Rhodesia, we might be on the side opposed, or allegedly so, to "liberation."

Moreover, attempts to slow Moscow down by tentatively "linking" its access to, say, arms control or wheat to its policy in Third World areas invariably

cut across the high value that important interest groups (and, in truth, the linkers themselves) feel for the things the linkers would withhold.

It would be comforting if détente were so strong as to preclude Soviet adventures altogether or to constrain the Kremlin to limit their scale. Such thinking was behind promulgation of the "basic principles of relations" that Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev signed in 1972. The principles call for acting with restraint and avoiding the increase of international tensions. But, Moscow tells our people when they ask, they were not meant to limit support given a country for self-defense (Ethiopia) or liberation (Rhodesia).

Eager as it is to see Soviet restraint, the Carter administration tends to regard the 1972 statement of principles limply as the product of its predecessor's oversell of détente. The statement, two officials said to me this week, "may not mean much now."

But there is a detectable interest in exploring the notion of "rules of engagement," a term applied to a possible understanding, more tacit than negotiated, to restrict the resources and tactics used in great-power competition in Third World areas. Officials have complained strenuously, without evident success, that the Russian effort in Ethiopia is excessive and disproportionate. The Kremlin has been quietly told that a policy that hurt negotiations or stimulated major bloodshed in Rhodesia would be taken very seriously. But no claim is made that the Russians have yet gotten the point.

In fact, the point isn't very pointed.

Sometimes I feel the administration (and assorted liberals who make it) are relying rather more on history than policy to keep the Russians from exacerbating violence and spreading their influence in Africa. It is said confidently, for example, that African nationalism ensures that governments that invite the Russians in now will kick them out later. There is some basis in the record for that expectation, but it places a heavy burden—too much for many Americans—on the nerves.

The heaviest immediate burden, however, falls on American diplomacy, specially defined. Before Vietnam it meant exerting American influence in a context where others knew you could use dirty tricks or force if you chose. Now the emphasis is on harmonizing conflicting interests by political and economic jiggling.

The premise of this "new" diplomacy is that there is an adequate community of natural mutual interest between the United States and Third World countries, enough so as to make collaboration politically feasible or economically attractive on both sides. But not everybody, of course, accepts that premise.

A demanding test is coming right now in the Horn, where an international audience will watch to see if American diplomacy actually succeeds in mobilizing protection for Somalia and the Somali people in Ethiopia's Ogaden region, and in inducing Moscow to start reducing its forces and to forego a permanent base or other presence when all the fighting has died down. Ouch.