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Author(s): Paul Keal
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Contemporary understanding about spheres of influence

PAUL KEAL

A decade ago it was possible to argue with some confidence not only that the Soviet Union and the United States had spheres of influence but also that they had a tacit understanding about them. The existence of a tacit understanding seemed to be confirmed, for instance, at the time of the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, in that while the United States denounced the Soviet action it nevertheless acquiesced in it. At that time it could be claimed that the Soviet Union had merely acted in eastern Europe in the same way as the United States had on various occasions in Latin America, the most recent being the intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965. Further, the doctrines each power used to justify intervention were alike. The Brezhnev Doctrine justifying the intervention in Czechoslovakia seemed similar to the Johnson Doctrine legitimizing intervention in the Dominican Republic in that both claimed hegemonic rights within a sphere of influence.[1] And from this a reciprocal understanding was inferred about what each would allow the other to do in its respective sphere. Both superpowers denied it. The United States did so because spheres of influence transgress the doctrine of the sovereign equality of states and because the practices associated with them violate the norms of interstate behaviour. The Soviet Union did so because it counterposed the Soviet Union to other socialist States and it would have followed that the Soviet Union would not have been acting, as it claimed, in the interests of socialism.[2]

Despite these theoretical denials, Czechoslovakia seemed to confirm that the superpowers each understood what was permissible with regard to spheres of influence and so each was able to act accordingly. In contrast with the rules embodied in this understanding the more recent events in Afghanistan, Poland and central America are believed to have transformed the situation. Understanding is now thought to be ended. Shortly after the invasion of Afghanistan William Pfaff wrote that there had been rules for the Soviet—United States conflict but that they had been broken. 'They were rules of expedience and survival, not of morality, whatever they were, they now have been abandoned.'[3] Similarly Dr Brzezinski has pronounced that the events in Poland herald the end of the post-war mode of superpower coexistence. In his view 'the foreign consequences of the events in Poland are revealing that . . . the prevailing conditions in Europe are beginning to outlive the post-Second World War arrangements'.[4] In essence the guidelines for permissible conduct have either faded or gone.

The events in Afghanistan, Poland, El Salvador and other parts of central America are thought to have eroded what each superpower understands about its respective role and about spheres of influence to such an extent that steps are needed to recover the situation which has been lost. In this connection former Secretary of State Haig was portrayed as wanting to restore the earlier pattern of

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superpower relations in which

> the Americans and the Russians thought they understood their respective roles in the world and their respective spheres of influence. . . . Under such a regime it would possibly be recognized that the Soviet Union has no right to disrupt the status quo in, for instance, the Caribbean. In turn the U.S., in practice would not expend its resources propping up essentially spent movements in Eastern Europe.[5]

This implies that the former situation has indeed been lost and that Pfaff and Brzezinski are correct. But has it been lost? Are they correct? Have the rules been broken and what can be inferred about the expectations that the superpowers now have about each other with regard to spheres of influence? Is there a need to regain the situation lost and what should be done?

This paper has three purposes. First, to outline what was understood, and to indicate what purpose was served, by both spheres of influence and by an understanding about them. Second, to raise some questions about Afghanistan, Poland and central America in terms of such understanding. Third, to speculate about what sort of understanding, if any, remains and to consider whether it has a place in the practice of contemporary international politics.

Spheres of influence and tacit understanding

A sphere of influence is a definite region within which a single external power exerts a predominant influence, which limits the independence or freedom of action of states within it.

In contemporary international politics such a region can be either a single state, a group of adjacent states or an ocean and the island states in it together with the littoral states around it. The two examples of particular interest to this paper are 'the Caribbean' and the socialist states of eastern Europe. But there are others such as Australia in the United States Pacific sphere and Bhutan in the Indian sphere. The perimeter of such a region lies where the predominance of one power ends, though this may not always be clearly defined as is illustrated by the doubts which persist about the status of Yugoslavia. States not in a sphere of influence may be either free of the influence associated with spheres or otherwise be in grey areas where there is competition between rival powers for influence but in which none has a clear predominance. In terms of spheres of influence, states are one of two obvious kinds: powers which do the influencing, and the states which are influenced by them. Since the Second World War the relationship between influenced states and powers which influence them has been described as one of 'hegemony'. What is meant by this is that the influencing power 'resort[s] to force and the threat of force, but this is not habitual and uninhibited but occasional and reluctant'. An influencing power prefers 'to rely upon instruments other than the direct use or threat of force; and will employ the latter only in situations of extremity and with a sense that in doing so it is incurring a political cost'. Such a power is 'ready to violate the rights of sovereignty, equality and independence enjoyed by lesser states, but it does not disregard them; it recognizes that these might exist, and justifies violation of them by appeal to some specific overriding principle'.[6] Such a principle might be the requirements of 'Socialist internationalism' or of 'the security of the western hemisphere'.[7]

The relationship between influencing powers and the states they influence is not the central concern of this paper, which focuses instead on the relationship

between influencing powers, in this case the two superpowers, resulting from their having spheres of influence and an understanding about them. The importance of the nature of the relationship between influencing powers and the states they influence to this theme lies in the fact that relations between influencing powers as such cannot be understood without an understanding of some aspects of it. In other words, what the Soviet Union does in its sphere of influence impinges, in varying degrees, on relations between it and the United States and vice versa. It has been what an influencing power sometimes does in its sphere of influence, together with what its rival does when it does it, that leads to the suggestion that there is a tacit understanding.

The idea of a sphere of influence can perhaps be most easily portrayed by reference to relations between the Soviet Union and eastern Europe and between the United States and central America during the post Second World War period. But there are other spheres of influence, and states other than the superpowers have them. Further, spheres of influence are not symmetrical. The Soviet Union cannot, for instance, project the same degree of power along the borders of central America that the United States can project along the borders of eastern Europe. What is, however, common to these and to other spheres of influence is the limitation of freedom and independence of the states inside them. It should also be noted that spheres of influence involve a degree of exclusion that is rarely ever absolute. A great deal of western investment and financial aid has, for instance, penetrated Poland and conversely the Soviet Union has a presence in central America. Nevertheless in each case there are limits to what may be done with respect to the sphere of an adversary.

Spheres of influence can exist without there being extra-regional understandings about them; but their significance in contemporary international politics lies largely in the Soviet Union and the United States having both behaved as though they do recognize each other's sphere. It is because of the way they have behaved that it may be inferred they have a tacit and reciprocal understanding about the range of behaviour each will tolerate of the other with regard to their respective spheres. A does not obstruct B from acting in B's sphere and vice-versa and this is mutually understood. Furthermore, it may be argued that by way of such an understanding, spheres of influence have contributed to international order.

The latter effect, it may be argued, is achieved by establishing guidelines by which powers may conduct their relations so as to advance perceived common interests. (One such interest, of overriding importance, is that of avoiding nuclear war.) The achievement of international order requires the realization of norms or rules (and agreement on them). Such rules need not be formal or explicit but may simply be operating procedures or unwritten rules of the game. The tacit understandings which have evolved from spheres of influence provide just such guidelines or rules. If the general principles of conduct embodied in them are observed then orderly relations between the powers which have spheres of influence may be achieved in some degree.

A tacit understanding is one which causes or sanctions particular actions or inactions on the part of states which cannot, or will not, communicate directly about what is understood. Tacit understanding requires each party to understand, and understand that the other understands, that what each does depends on what each perceives the other as being likely to do, and accordingly make choices which are consciously contingent. When the choices of each, in particular circumstances, fulfil the expectations of the other it appears that there is a tacit understanding about how to behave in order to achieve a common end.

Tacit understanding rests on precedents and expectations. Precedent is a source of expectations when the past actions of a state, in certain circumstances, are thought by another state to be a guide to its likely behaviour in present or future similar circumstances. Thus when state A wants to ascertain what state B's course of action is likely to be, A takes into account the past actions of B in similar circumstances. The expectations so formed are A's and they derive from A's observations of B. However, precisely because the action a state chooses often depends on the probable reaction of other states, B's likely course of action might depend upon its estimation of the reaction it will provoke, or has either provoked or failed to provoke, from A in past instances. In other words, the precedent A draws on in forming its judgement *may* be one to which it has contributed.

When a state chooses one course of action rather than another, such as abstaining from activities in the sphere of influence of another power, it sets a precedent from which that other power may form the expectation that it will continue to abstain. Conversely, when a power takes action in 'its own' sphere of influence it sets or perpetuates a precedent. The Soviet experience with regard to Hungary in 1956, for instance, would have contributed to the Soviet Union expecting, in 1968, that it could intervene without risking a conflict with the United States. In effect, the degree to which expectations are thought to be more probable than not depends upon the precedents there are for having them. Each new action which conforms to previous experience adds to the impression of there being a coherent pattern.

Expectations are derived not only from acts such as armed intervention and other acts of force, but also from verbal acts or pronouncements and from non-verbal symbolic acts. All such behaviour, which may include not taking action at all, can be divided into that undertaken before an event and that following an event. Before the invasion of Czechoslovakia the United States said it would remain on the sidelines.[8] After the invasion it did nothing to suggest it would on future occasions seek to challenge or prevent the Soviet Union taking similar action. In this way the Soviet Union would have formed expectations about what it could do and about what the United States would tolerate. Expectations which prove correct on a number of occasions constitute 'stable expectations' and these provide the guidelines by which states can act. '[S]table expectations tend to fix a norm for the behaviour of individual states. The violation of these expectations leads to a destabilizing response, and so these expectations provide a measure by which to assess and guide behaviour.'[9]

To sum up, it is certain acts or the conspicuous absence of certain acts together with the response or lack of response to these acts which make up a tacit understanding. Further, these acts or the lack of them are *unilateral acts* which are consciously contingent on the expected behaviour of the other power. When two powers have a tacit understanding each understands independently of the other the consequences certain of their unilateral acts will have upon one another. Thus, when A will refrain from doing X if A expects B will also refrain from doing Y, and each recognizes that there is a common interest in both refraining, there is a tacit and mutual understanding of the situation impinging on each. Finally, it cannot be shown that there is such recognition; that can only be inferred from the way both parties behave.

Elsewhere I have argued, at some length, that the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, and United States naval blockade of Cuba in 1962 and its invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965 are examples which cohere into a pattern from which tacit understanding about spheres of influence

can be inferred.[10] The United States responded to Soviet intervention in Hungary and to the intervention of Warsaw Pact forces in Czechoslovakia by denouncing the actions taken and by rejecting the reasons given in each case. After the invasion of Czechoslovakia the United States took the additional step of postponing the commencement of SALT. The Soviet Union attempted to establish medium range ballistic missile bases in Cuba and the United States imposed a blockade which resulted in the Soviet Union withdrawing its missiles. In response to the Dominican intervention the Soviet Union condemned the actions of the United States but did nothing more. With the exception of Cuba, what is important about each of these cases is that the adversary power rejected alternative ways of opposing the influencing power. In point of fact we do not know what alternatives there were, or which were considered. Without the benefit of access to confidential archives we are obliged to speculate about the possible alternatives.

Five may be identified:

(i) the adversary power could have either used or threatened to use military force against its rival;
(ii) the adversary power in each case could have responded by breaking diplomatic relations with the influencing power in protest against what it had done;
(iii) the adversary in each case could have broken off all trade relations with the influencing power;
(iv) both the United States and the Soviet Union might have tried to put the idea of 'linkage' into practice; and
(v) rather than denouncing each other's actions at the same time as not attempting effective counter-actions, each might have openly and explicitly recognized the other's sphere of influence.

Instead of attempting any of these possible alternatives the United States acquiesced in the interventions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union acquiesced in the intervention in the Dominican Republic. When it attempted to establish missile sites in Cuba the Soviet Union was not acquiescing in United States policies toward Cuba. Nevertheless the outcome of the missile crisis amounted to the Soviet Union acquiescing in what the United States laid down as the upper limits of its tolerance with respect to Soviet involvement in Cuba; limits which were spelled out once more in 1970 and 1971. In each of these cases the influencing power was left with the expectation that it could act in a like manner in future cases without opposition from its rival. Acquiescence in the actions of an influencing power creates expectations about future cases and in this way influencing powers understand what to expect of each other.

Of the examples mentioned the circumstances which led up to the Cuban missile crisis and the manner in which it was resolved were different, but the outcome nevertheless resulted in understanding about acceptable conduct with regard to spheres of influence. The very act of attempting to place missiles in Cuba was not one of acquiescence. The presence of the missiles was in itself a threat of force as were the veiled references the Soviet Union made to its nuclear strength before the missile sites were discovered. By attempting to put missiles in Cuba, the Soviet Union raised the risk of war. When confronted with the blockade it had either to accept the demands of the United States or raise the risk of war even higher. That it withdrew the missiles meant that it wanted to avoid war and that it acquiesced in the limits the United States placed on its

involvement in Cuba. In sum, the outcome of the crisis was such as to add to what each superpower understood as appropriate behaviour with regard to each other's sphere of influence. This it had in common with the other three examples.

In the simplest of terms in the late 1960s and early 1970s what was understood was that the United States would not intervene militarily in eastern Europe and conversely that the Soviet Union would not intervene in the Americas. At one time it was also suggested that the Soviet Union would not intervene in South-east Asia or the Far East to counteract US action but would leave this area to China to act as it saw fit.[11] If this were ever true it is something which has clearly changed. The importance of all of this is that the areas understood to be spheres of influence were, in theory and it seemed in practice, areas concerning which the superpowers would not be drawn into conflict with each other. In contrast there are so-called grey areas, such as much of Africa, in which neither power has preponderance and which might therefore give rise to conflict. Thus the value of understanding about spheres of influence was thought to lie in its providing guidelines by which the superpowers might conduct their relations so as to advance perceived common interests, especially the common interest of avoiding conflict which might risk the outbreak of nuclear war. For spheres of influence included the regions in which the superpowers perceived themselves to have vital interests, that is to say, interests for which they would be prepared to go to war.

Central America, Afghanistan and Poland

As the 1970s progressed it seemed for a time as if United States influence in central America might be waning, or at least changing in nature. Criticism of the Central Intelligence Agency's involvement in Chile and other places led to the suspension of its covert operations. It seemed that this kind of activity would be less likely in future, whether in central America, South America or elsewhere. At the same time the prevailing mood in the United States following the Vietnam war suggested there would be much less tolerance of intervention. President Carter's human rights policy seemed as if it might mean a reordering of United States priorities in central America. In contrast to what US presidents had done in the past, President Carter appeared to stay on the sidelines while the Sandanistas overthrew Somoza and took control of Nicaragua. Instead of intervening to prevent this the United States injected $75 million in aid in an effort to encourage the Nicaraguans to believe they had an alternative to the Cuban path. Even when rebellion in El Salvador gathered pace the *Washington Post* proclaimed that 'the common thread of American policy in central America [was at that time] to accept the revolutionary context and try to pre-empt the elements and openings favourable to Cuba by supporting the forces of the non-communist centre-left'.[12] Had this been so it would have represented an historic change in United States foreign policy. As events turned out, the new direction, if there really had been one, was already being abandoned before President Carter finished his term and it came to a very definite end with President Reagan.

In October 1979 President Carter announced that United States intelligence had uncovered a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba. The Soviet Union denied that its troops were 'offensive' or that their presence was any new development. Possibly it saw the dispute which ensued as part of an attempt by the United States to delay ratification of the SALT II agreements. It is not unlikely that with the Presidential elections approaching the 'discovery' of these troops was part of an attempt by Carter to be seen as 'tougher' than he had so far appeared.

Whatever the reason the upshot was that he had a rationale for establishing a full-time Caribbean task force. One of its stated purposes was to ensure the safety of central American nations against the Soviet threat. It was a symbolic way of saying, once more, to the Soviet Union that its military presence in Cuba and the Caribbean was not to be used to exploit the situations developing in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. While it was directed at the Soviet Union it marked a reversal of whatever tolerance was being shown toward revolutionary movements.

Shortly after the furore over Cuba the seizure of the United States' Embassy in Teheran, on 4 November 1979, quickly affected the post-Vietnam qualms about foreign involvements. In June 1980 the Senate voted overwhelmingly that the CIA be allowed to resume carrying out covert operations without first seeking Congressional opinion. When the new president came to power there was an almost complete return to the policies of earlier years. Counter-insurgency as a way of dealing with subversion was once again not only in prospect but an increasing reality.

In the first month of his Presidency Mr Reagan shipped helicopters and M-16 rifles to El Salvador and since then the United States has become increasingly and extensively involved in aiding, with personnel and equipment, the suppression of revolutionary forces. It has resumed the practice of propping-up 'friendly' regimes which blatantly violate human rights. An indication of this, with implications for United States policy in both south and central America alike, was perhaps a remark attributed to Jeane Kirkpatrick, the United States' permanent representative to the United Nations. She was reported as having told an audience in Santiago, Chile, on 8 August 1981 'that General Pinochet's government and Washington were on the same wavelength'.[13] Clearly, central America is to remain a particular kind of United States sphere of influence, as it has long been; but what does all of this add up to with regard to the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States?

In its official pronouncements the Reagan administration has increasingly implicated Cuba in the activities of revolutionary movements in Nicaragua and El Salvador. In so doing it has portrayed Cuba as being the ideological and material source of these movements and so has threatened to deal with the trouble in Nicaragua and El Salvador by 'going to the source'. There has been discussion of a naval blockade to prevent Cuba from shipping supplies to revolutionary forces. According to the United States, Nicaragua has received about $28 million worth of military equipment from Cuba and through it from the Soviet Union and eastern Europe. This equipment includes tanks, light aircraft, helicopters, heavy artillery, SAM 7 missiles and possibly some aged MIG-21 aircraft.

The Sandanistas, it claims, use this equipment to support rebel forces in El Salvador and it was partly for this reason that in 1982 President Reagan authorized CIA covert operations in Nicaragua. By implication it is not just the influence of Cuba that it is opposing but also that of the Soviet Union. Equally as much as Cuba, the Soviet Union is seen as fomenting revolution in central America.

On some occasions there has been the suggestion that 'going to the source' might include not merely a blockade but also the invasion of Cuba. At the same time there has been the further suggestion that the Soviet Union has 'hinted' at putting nuclear weapons in Cuba. Either of these possibilities would throw into question the understanding which ended the Cuban missile crisis. The

understanding reached in 1962 was that if the Soviet Union agreed to withdraw its missile components and did not again introduce 'offensive' weapons the United States would not invade Cuba—then or in the future. This understanding was reaffirmed by President Nixon at the time of the so-called 'mini-crisis' of 1970–1.[14] There are three points about this which need to be clarified.

First, the idea that the Soviet Union has hinted at placing nuclear weapons in Cuba arose from President Brezhnev's speech to the 17th Congress of the Soviet Trade Union Movement on 16 March 1982. In that speech he said that if the United States went ahead with deploying Pershing II and cruise missiles in Europe,

> . . . a different strategic situation would arise in the world. There would arise a real additional threat from the USA to our country and its allies. This would compel us to take retaliatory steps that would put the other side, including the USA itself, its own territory, in an analogous position.[15]

From this it was inferred that putting the territory of the USA in an analogous position meant placing nuclear weapons adjacent to the United States. This appears, however, to have been an unfounded and incorrect inference. Commenting, in a Soviet television show, on how President Brezhnev's speech should be interpreted, Colonel-General Nikolay Chervov, head of a directorate of the General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces said that Pershing II and cruise missiles would challenge the USSR to take 'adequate retaliatory measures'. But to do this, he added, 'there is no need to bring other territories into play'.[16] In other words President Brezhnev meant simply that deployment of Pershing II and cruise missiles would cause the Soviet Union to increase the number of missiles it has to direct at the United States and not that it would put missiles in Cuba.

Second, the 1962 understanding did not preclude Cuba from supporting revolutionary movements. At that time the United States recognized that this was something which would have to be thwarted by means other than invasion. Apart from probing the United States sphere in 1962 the Soviet Union has, for its part, not sought to block US actions in central America. It did not help Cuba during the Bay of Pigs invasion and took no action during the campaign to destabilize Chile and so depose Allende. There is little evidence of it having wanted to be involved in either El Salvador or Nicaragua. 'All the indications are that the Soviet Union has been deliberately backing away from any close identification with Central America.'[17]

Third, against the two preceding points, there have been reports that there are now new MIG-23 aircraft in Cuba. The Director of the CIA regards these as a violation of the 1962 agreement.[18] This is a misrepresentation of that agreement. The MIG-23 or 'flogger' aircraft is an interceptor and short range tactical support weapon. It cannot be regarded, as the backfire bomber can, as a theatre nuclear weapon. It cannot be seriously regarded as an offensive weapon in the sense of the 1962 agreement. If the Soviet Union did again seek to place offensive weapons in Cuba, apart from the nuclear attack submarines which visit Cuban waters, it would be provoking the United States equally as much as the Soviet Union would be provoked by an invasion of Cuba. There is no evidence of the Soviet Union wanting to do this at present. Some further and final comments about Cuba will be made in conclusion after first discussing Afghanistan and Poland.

The invasion of Afghanistan was presented by a number of observers as a new

departure in Soviet foreign policy. It was seen as being the first time since the Second World War that the Soviet Union had committed its troops outside its sphere of influence. Previously the superpowers had used their forces only to protect spheres of influence they perceived to be recognized by each other. Certainly the invasion was the first time that the Soviet Union had committed its troops, in this manner, outside eastern Europe, but the question is whether the Soviet Union perhaps did not see Afghanistan as being outside its sphere of influence. Was it perhaps already regarded as a Soviet sphere of influence at the time of the invasion? Is it clear that the Soviet Union was intentionally 'upsetting the unwritten rules of the game' or that United States' officials thought that it was? This is not to suggest the Soviet action should be condoned but rather to examine it from a particular perspective.

Jonathan Steele is one among others who have pointed out that

> . . . Soviet influence in Afghanistan's recent history goes back to the fifties when the Russians first offered arms to the government after the Americans rejected the request. Soviet economic aid exceeded that of any other country throughout the last 20 years—long before the pro-Soviet group under Noor Mohammed Taraki ousted President Daoud in 1978.[19]

Similarly Jiri Valenta has argued:

> Afghanistan did not join CENTO, mainly because the United States did not view her within the realm of Western security. Rather in the 1950s and 1960s, the USSR became Afghanistan's principal trading partner. The Soviets were able to further their influence by supplying economic and military aid, which has included training the Afghan officer corps and building an impressive road system from the Russian border to major Afghan towns. Afghanistan, while it remained officially non-aligned, beyond the boundaries of Western security, was slipping into the Soviet sphere of influence.[20]

It may well be that in somewhat the same manner as United States officials privately conceded much of eastern Europe to be a Soviet sphere of influence before the end of the Second World War, Afghanistan had for some time been regarded, by American officials, as having fallen within the Soviet sphere of influence. Just how far back the dawn of such a recognition might be traced is hard to guess. It might perhaps go back to the 1921 Treaty of Friendship between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union. At the very least it would go back to 1978. Until the invasion of 27 December 1979, 'the US appeared to be resigned to Soviet control of Kabul; it did not protest against the assassination of . . . Daoud in April 1978 and his replacement by men owing allegiance to Moscow and backed up by thousands of Russian advisers'.[21] Neither did it publicly warn off the Soviet Union immediately prior to the invasion, at which time it must have formed some opinion of what might happen.

By the same kind of process the invasion itself may have been indirectly and unwittingly encouraged by the United States. Andre Fontaine, for instance, objected to the idea that it was a new departure.

> The Russian invasion of Afghanistan did not mark what is generally understood to be a 'change of policy' on the Soviet Union's part. Afghanistan is simply the latest addition to a list of countries which has

> included, over the last few years, Vietnam, Kampuchea, Laos, South Yemen and Ethiopia . . .[22]

To this would have to be added the support of Cuban troops in Angola and the seizure of power in Afghanistan itself by pro-Soviet communists in 1978. The point is that the level and form of response by the United States and its allies to these 'advances' of Soviet influence might have encouraged the Soviet Union to invade. 'Both US government officials and academic analysts believe that Moscow was emboldened to invade Afghanistan, in part, because the West—especially the United States—mounted no effective counteraction to these gains.'[23] Moreover,

> [p]revious US vacillation during the Cuban 'mini-crisis' of September 1979—when an 'unacceptable' Soviet combat brigade suddenly became acceptable—and American hesitancy and preoccupation with Iran probably served as powerful arguments for Soviet decision-makers who favoured intervention.[24]

In short the Soviet action might have been one to which the United States, by its own action and inaction, contributed. If this was the case it would follow that the Soviet Union might well have expected to do what it did without seriously upsetting its relations with the United States. It may well have been thought there was already an understanding about Afghanistan.

Following on from what might or might not have been expected prior to the invasion is the important question of the reaction it met. This was qualitatively different from previous cases involving clearly established spheres of influence. The measures taken by the United States included the decision not to grant permits for Soviet trawlers to fish in United States' waters; curtailment of Aeroflot flights; an embargo on the export to the Soviet Union of oil and gas drilling equipment and high level technology; a grain embargo; the suspension of cultural and scientific exchanges; more limited commerce; the boycott of the 1980 Olympics held in Moscow; increasing military and economic aid to Pakistan; the decision to provide China with military equipment; sending a small Marine Corps unit to the Arabian Sea; and finally, requests to Japan and Western European countries to halve official and government guaranteed credits to Moscow and an end to preferential export credit terms. On top of all this the invasion had an adverse effect on the debate in Congress about whether the SALT II treaty should be ratified.

If the Soviet Union had perceived the United States to have either conceded or been willing to concede Afghanistan to it, the reaction to the invasion would have represented a sharp turn in United States policy. In previous cases of Soviet intervention in the Soviet sphere of influence, the United States has condemned the action taken but without seriously upsetting its relations with the Soviet Union. Condemnation and symbolic acts which register disapproval in accord with international norms are a necessity which does not affect the underlying reality of tacit understanding. The response to the invasion of Afghanistan was of a different kind and it is possible that the Soviet Union perceived the United States to be revising the rules of the game great powers play. This suggestion that the Soviet Union might now think some rules of the game to have been revised is closely related to the question of the extent to which it might have thought Afghanistan was already acknowledged as part of its sphere of influence.

Also part of the reaction was the so-called Carter Doctrine of 23 January 1980. President Carter announced to the Congress that

> [a]n attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.[25]

This doctrine, provoked by the invasion, provided a rationale to speed the process, already set in train by the situation in Iran and concern about oil supplies, of deploying and building up United States forces in the Gulf region. More ambitiously it signalled an intent to draw a line around the Persian Gulf against further advances of Soviet influence. For this reason it was quickly compared with the Truman Doctrine and spoken of as an opening move in 'the Second Cold War'.

In so far as the Carter Doctrine was a response to an invasion it is not analogous to the Truman Doctrine. But just as the Truman Doctrine tacitly accepted that eastern Europe was a Soviet sphere, the Carter Doctrine implies tacit acceptance of Afghanistan's presence in the Soviet sphere of influence. Just as the Truman Doctrine proclaimed that the United States would not allow Greece and Turkey to slip into the Soviet sphere, the Carter Doctrine was a warning that any extension of Soviet influence beyond what had already been achieved would carry with it the risk of a major conflict with the United States. The invasion and the response to it, together with the situation in Iran and the problem of oil, can be said to have commenced a new phase in the process of redefining frontiers and consolidating areas of influence. If this is indeed what has been happening it is more probable than not that a tacit understanding about what the United States and Soviet Union will tolerate of each other in the Persian Gulf area has also been forming.

At the root of any such understanding will be the same common interest which has impelled previous understanding—the common interest of avoiding nuclear war. With the presence of United States forces in various bases and the existence of a rapid deployment force in the Middle East, it will be increasingly important for the United States and the Soviet Union to avoid conflicts which could jump to the nuclear level. A tacit understanding about spheres of influence is one way in which they might achieve this goal. Where the boundaries of the respective spheres will ultimately lie depends largely on the strength of the influence already established and on the adversaries' perceptions of the risk involved in bettering that influence.

Unlike Afghanistan before the invasion, Poland was clearly in the Soviet sphere of influence. From the very outset the demand of those who went on strike in the summer of 1980, in Gdansk and other cities, for an independent trade union movement, raised the question of what, if anything, the Soviet Union would do in response. At the same time it posed the related question of what the United States would do, either to inhibit any Soviet action or as a consequence of it. The accord reached between the striking workers and the Polish government was promptly condemned by the Soviet Union. As in past instances it claimed that forces hostile to socialism were trying to subvert the sovereignty of Poland and through it the Socialist Commonwealth. Quite clearly, independent trade unions were contrary to the Communist Party's claim to be the sole authentic representative of the working class. From its inception the Solidarity movement was viewed by both Polish Communist Party officials and the Soviet Union as a

political opposition and as something which would create anarchy. *Pravda* described Solidarity leaders as the creatures of anti-Soviet forces which were aiming to 'bring down the government through the use of strikes and install the political opposition in its place'. Thus shortly before the imposition of martial law the Soviet Union described a Solidarity Congress 'as an "anti-Socialist and anti-Soviet orgy" that had adopted the course of "open struggle" against the Socialist system in all Soviet bloc countries . . .'.[26] On previous occasions, statements such as these presaged Soviet intervention to preserve 'Socialist sovereignty'. Indeed for many people the question was not so much whether the Soviet Union would invade, but when.

There are at least four good reasons why the Soviet Union was loath to intervene directly in Poland. First, it was frequently pointed out that the Poles were different from the Czechs and Slovaks of 1968. The Polish people have a long tradition of armed resistance to foreign, and often formidable, invaders. It was widely believed that the Poles would strongly resist Soviet occupation. In this sense Czechoslovakia was not a precedent. Second, and related to the first reason, was the fear that the Soviet military could not rely on the loyalty of the Polish forces and security personnel. As it turned out Polish forces enforced the martial law crackdown, but had the Soviets intervened directly, they might well have been unreliable. Third, armed intervention would have incurred a high economic cost for the Soviet Union. Not only would it have been saddled with the cost of maintaining a large occupation force, it would also have been faced with the entire burden of the Polish economy without Western economic aid.[27] Fourth, the magnitude of the response to the invasion of Afghanistan probably made the Soviet Union wary of the political and economic costs direct intervention might incur. The Soviet Union would have feared a serious setback in its relations not only with the United States but also Western Europe. This would have been seen as risking access to Western technology, grain supplies and other commodities sought by the Soviet Union.

Notwithstanding these factors it can be argued that had General Jaruzelski not imposed martial law or had the Soviet Union decided that its vital security interests were under threat it would have nevertheless intervened in Poland with force. As a result of the invasion of Afghanistan the international political stock of the Soviet Union was already low and, arguably, overt intervention in Poland would not have significantly worsened it. In sum, while it seems clear that the Soviet Union was anxious to avoid direct intervention with armed force it probably would have resorted to armed intervention if it had decided there was a need for it. As George Kennan put it

> [i]t was not the unending series of high-level warnings from Washington that motivated this restraint.

Were the situation in Poland to degenerate

> to a point where they saw their entire military and political hegemony in Eastern and Central Europe, including eastern Germany, being undermined, to the great detriment of their prestige and possibly of the internal stability of the Soviet Union itself . . . there is no telling what they would do.[28]

In spite of the response to Afghanistan, the precedents of the past, together with the special situation of eastern Europe, would have led the Soviet Union to expect that it could intervene in Poland without coming into conflict or seriously

upsetting its relations with the United States. With regard to Poland the United States did little to dispel such expectations. As the strikes which led to the establishment of Solidarity gathered force the United States described them as an internal problem for Poland to solve. It chose to say and to do nothing until the middle of September 1980 when President Carter issued what was described as 'a veiled warning' that the Soviet Union should not interfere in Poland's internal affairs. Three months later President Carter issued a more explicit warning and said 'the attitude and future policies of the US towards the Soviet Union would be directly and very adversely affected by any Soviet use of force in Poland.'[29] It is unlikely that the Soviet Union would have expected any serious challenge such as counter-intervention to result from this warning. Such warnings are understood to be addressed to a mixed audience and are not necessarily intended solely for the ears of the power to which they are seemingly directed. Except for whatever new precedents the response to Afghanistan had created, the Soviet Union would not have expected much to come from warnings. What counts is not warnings alone but other actions which make them more or less credible. Concerning eastern Europe there were no such other actions.

Before actual overt Soviet intervention there were sound reasons for inaction on the part of the United States. It wanted to avoid doing anything which might provoke the Soviet Union to intervene. Also it might have wanted to avoid anything which might encourage the Polish people to think it would materially support them. The rebels in Hungary in 1956 did have some such hope and for them the consequences were tragic. At the same time as pointing out these reasons for inaction it should also be recognized that inaction might equally have had the effect of sending tanks into Poland. Combined with the precedent of previous cases, inaction would have encouraged the Soviet Union to think the United States would not block or effectively retaliate against a Soviet intervention.

In the event the United States ascribed 'direct responsibility' for martial law to the Soviet Union. As President Carter had after the invasion of Afghanistan, President Reagan similarly announced a number of sanctions. These included the suspension of Aeroflot services to the United States; closure of the Soviet Purchasing Commission in New York; curtailment of access to US ports; the blocking of exports of electronic equipment, computers and other high-technology materials; barring American firms from selling oil and gas equipment to the Soviet Union; and refusing to renew eleven US-Soviet exchange agreements on energy, space, science and technology. It did not, however, cancel arrangements for strategic arms reduction talks which were resumed in the middle of January 1982. In taking these steps the United States did not receive undivided support from its NATO allies. Instead the American response created disagreement and tension between it and its allies. The United States itself achieved the objective of being seen to vigorously disapprove of whatever part the Soviet Union had in the events in Poland. It does not, however, follow from this that the United States does not accept the underlying reality of spheres of influence and the need for an understanding about them.

In the light of what has been said so far it now remains to assess the current status and role of spheres of influence and understanding about them.

Present understanding

First, it is clear that the United States continues to regard central America as its

sphere of influence and will attempt to prevent the imposition of any more Cubas. The understanding which ended the 1962 crisis explicitly precluded the invasion of Cuba as a means of stopping Cuban aid to revolutionary movements in neighbouring states. Were the United States to act on its threats of 'going to the source' by striking at Cuba it would certainly be breaking the rules. Threats, however, are not, in this case, the kind of acts which count. In the absence of any expectation that they will lead to other kinds of acts they are of no special significance. It seems very unlikely that the United States would actually invade Cuba. If it did, it would risk an adverse and possibly dangerous response from the Soviet Union. For this very reason it is unlikely that the Soviet Union sets much store on US threats. In the event of conflict breaking out between the superpowers elsewhere, the situation would be different. An invasion might well then be a serious contingency.

On the other side of the Cuban coin, if the Soviet Union again attempted to lodge offensive weapons in Cuba this would provoke the United States in a dangerous manner. The presence of backfire bombers, for instance, would constitute such a threat, but the MIG-23s which the United States has recently expressed concern over do not. They cannot be properly regarded as offensive weapons in the sense meant by the 1962 agreement. The United States knows this and so does the Soviet Union. Thus in spite of what the United States says and what the Soviet Union sometimes appears to be doing, understanding about central America appears to be intact and so far it cannot be said that the rules have been broken in any fundamental sense.

Second Afghanistan is a less straightforward case. The crucial factor concerning the invasion of Afghanistan is the degree to which it was perceived by both superpowers to be a Soviet sphere of influence. It is more probable than not that the Soviet Union did think of it in these terms and perhaps thought that this was already understood by the United States. Whether the United States thought of it as a Soviet sphere is difficult to say. It did very little to suggest otherwise. It had been ineffective in opposing Soviet involvement in Africa and other places which were clearly not in a Soviet sphere of influence. The scale of its reaction, however, suggests that the United States had not in fact regarded Afghanistan as in a Soviet sphere. Nevertheless, the reaction does not in itself exclude the possibility that the United States had thought of Afghanistan as part of the Soviet sphere. What the reaction did was to alert the Soviet Union to the fact that while the United States could not do much about the *fait accompli* in Afghanistan, further advances in the Gulf region would involve much higher risks. In sum, it is not clear what expectations each power had prior to the invasion but as a result of it there should now be some firm expectations on both sides. This does not mean that the Soviet Union will accept that the rest of the region is an American sphere of influence. It will probe the strength of United States will and influence in the region but it is likely to do so cautiously.

Third, with regard to Poland it was argued that the scale of the response to Afghanistan probably had a restraining influence on the Soviet Union but was not the determining factor. Had the Soviet Union felt the need, it would have resorted to armed intervention in Poland and it would have expected to do so without the United States opposing it in ways which would have led to armed conflict. Further it is very doubtful that the United States would have opposed it. Had the Soviet Union intervened Soviet-US relations would have been drastically retarded and infused with a very high level of tension for some time, but the intervention would have been accommodated as part of what is

understood about spheres of influence. Despite appearances to the contrary, the actions of the superpowers with regard to events in central America, Afghanistan and Poland have left the nature of understanding about spheres of influence largely unchanged. If there has been any change at all, it has been to suggest to the Soviet Union that the United States is less comfortable with the arrangement and might on future occasions seek to impose greater penalties for Soviet actions.

What this leaves in question is whether or not the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan represented an expansion. It is suggested above that the Soviet Union may have thought that Afghanistan was, prior to the invasion, conceded as being part of its sphere. Further, the United States may have covertly acknowledged it as such. If this is true then the invasion and the reaction to it would represent the gratification of established expectations embodied in an already existing understanding. If on the other hand Afghanistan was not so recognized and the invasion was an expansion of the Soviet sphere in which the United States acquiesced after the event, any understanding about Afghanistan which resulted is new and something to be added to understanding about other areas. Either way, the invasion and the response to it did not have the consequence of changing the nature of US-Soviet understanding about other spheres of influence already existing at the time of the invasion. It did not lead to the superpowers attempting to undo their mutual understanding about other areas.

This is not to say that with respect to areas which are not in clearly defined spheres of influence there has not been any change in the mutual perceptions and attitudes of the United States and the Soviet Union. Dr Brzezinski has argued that there has been such a change and there can be no doubt that the invasion of Afghanistan and the events in Poland have galvanized the United States into an attitude of opposing the further expansion of Soviet influence. But in terms of existing spheres of influence there is little that can be done to reverse the dominance of the superpowers without the one challenging the other. It is difficult to know precisely what Brzezinski had in mind when he wrote, as mentioned earlier, that 'the foreign consequences of the events in Poland are revealing that . . . the prevailing conditions in Europe are beginning to outlive the post-Second World War arrangements'. Does he mean that countries outside the Socialist Commonwealth condemn the consequences of Soviet influence and that a majority of Poles would like to throw off the Soviet yoke? If so what does this imply? The United States has always publicly objected to the nature of Soviet influence but what has it been willing to do about it?

Although the United States has always, in its official pronouncements, refused to accept the post-war division of Europe, the underlying reality is that it has done so since the close of the war. The Helsinki Security Conference and the principles which issued from it marked the official acceptance of the division. It was 'the culmination of a diplomatic process that formally accepted the post-war division of most of Europe into two rival spheres'.[30] This did not, however, mean an acceptance of the violation of human rights and the loss of political freedom for influenced states which are part of spheres of influence. As Henry Kissinger put it, 'Yalta did consign Poland to the Soviet sphere of influence, but it also provided for free elections in Poland'.[31]

There is an inconsistency in this which has never been satisfactorily resolved and nor can it be. The nature of spheres of influence is such that it is very difficult both to accept them and to seek to change what they entail for influenced states.

If the situation of influenced states is seen as unacceptable then spheres of influence ought to be rejected, but in practice it is of course nowhere near so simple.

What is to be done?

Three different approaches to the problem of spheres of influence may be identified. First, at one extreme, is the simple acceptance of spheres of influence and what they entail. Second, at the other extreme, is the renunciation of spheres of influence and all that goes with them. (Dr Brzezinski, when he was President Carter's National Security Advisor, thought the US and its European allies should no longer accept the existence of the Communist bloc in eastern Europe.) Third, occupying an intermediate position between these two extremes, is the view that the security interests of influencing powers should be accepted but not the kind of influence they exercise. Those who hold this view argue that the Soviet Union will never peacefully allow the loss of its western glacis and that the Soviet Union has legitimate security concerns in eastern Europe. They further argue that American attempts to prise the Soviet sphere away would entail grave risks and would drive the states of western Europe toward neutralism. From these premises it is argued that the best way to achieve changes in the Soviet sphere is by finding ways of assuring the Soviet Union that greater freedom in its sphere 'would not be taken advantage of by NATO powers to the detriment of the Soviet strategic position'.[32] In this vein Kissinger has recently written that

> [t]he United States can be forthcoming on Soviet strategic concerns; . . . [but] resist Moscow's claim to a constant right of intervention . . . In the long run, America serves the cause of peace by precision, strict insistence on reciprocity and a view of the world respectful of legitimate Soviet concerns.[33]

Difficulties attach to each one of the approaches just identified. Openly accepting spheres of influence and what goes with them is not an option. It would mean accepting practices which are unacceptable in terms of international norms, domestic politics, and other considerations including human rights. Equally, rejecting and seeking to overturn spheres of influence is not practicable so long as they are linked to what the superpowers perceive as vital interests. To upset in any radical way the expectations which attach to them would be to engage in a form of brinkmanship reaching to, and possibly demolishing, the very foundations of post-war order. The middle path is more hopeful but it is littered with obstacles. One is that there could be no certainty that reassuring the Soviet Union about its strategic concerns would, in practice, achieve the desired result. In any case what would it require to reassure the Soviet Union? A second obstacle is the reciprocity mentioned by Kissinger. Is it reasonable for the United States to castigate the Soviet Union about Afghanistan and Poland at the same time as supporting regimes in central America which incarcerate and torture political opponents? In other words can either superpower reasonably claim for itself something it is not prepared to allow the other? A further obstacle is that there is a constant tension between what is said to be legitimate and what is accepted as such.

As a device for limiting the danger of armed conflict between the superpowers, understanding about spheres of influence has had a positive role in international politics. Detracting from this is the relationship between influencing powers and

the states they influence. With respect to the norms of international society, spheres of influence entail practices which are unacceptable and for that reason are rightly condemned. The only way these practices can be ended is by fundamentally upsetting the expectations the superpowers have of each other with respect to spheres of influence. The dilemma is that if spheres of influence really are inseparable from perceived vital interests the implications of upsetting expectations cannot be taken lightly and might be very dangerous. It might be possible gradually to alter these expectations in a way calculated to sow doubt sufficient to dissuade undesirable actions out of concern for unpredictable consequences. This might be equally dangerous for it involves a lack of clarity about what each will allow the other which hardly seems what is required in a time of heightened tension between the superpowers. Far from being a time when spheres of influence might be eroded, the present low point in their relations is perhaps when the superpowers will most feel the need to respect their mutual understanding. It might also be a time when they will seek to establish new spheres in an effort to stabilize their relations. In the long run the invasion of Afghanistan might well lead to attempts to define spheres of influence in an effort to pre-empt misperceptions.

Finally, it might be objected that the foregoing account is nothing but an elaborate sanctioning of the status quo and of whatever happens to revise but not upset it. The answer to this is that understanding and elucidation of the nature of the status quo must be distinguished from condoning it. Spheres of influence are, to reiterate, rightly condemned for the practices they entail for influenced states. But this is not a reason for failing to recognize and analyse the place understanding about them has had in relations between influencing powers. It is from this starting point that any attempt to bring about a more desirable form of order must begin. The problem presented by spheres of influence is that of whether they can be eliminated without creating a regime which is even less desirable. It could be that only a breakdown of the international system as we know it will achieve this and what then?

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