

Soviet expansionism

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Although the improved relations between the two superpowers resulted in a strategic U-turn, the United States continued to defend their zones of influence throughout the world. Through the Camp David Agreements of 17 September 1978, which provided for Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula, US President Jimmy Carter was able to bring Egypt back into the American fold.

Meanwhile, the USSR was benefiting from the decolonisation process and gaining its own new spheres of influence. Since the time of James Monroe, President of the United States from 1817 to 1825, the Central American country of Nicaragua had been a zone of American influence. The Sandinista Liberation Front took advantage of President Carter's lack of interest in Nicaragua to overthrow the dictator Anastasio Somoza. Very rapidly, Cuba and the USSR became the Sandinista regime's new allies.

The USSR also profited from the settlement of the Vietnam conflict in 1975 to gain a foothold in Africa, particularly in Guinea, Mozambique and Angola. The fall of the Ethiopian imperial regime of Haile Selassie in September 1974 and the immediate establishment of a Communist dictatorship in the oldest African state only emphasised the Soviet hold over Africa, at China's expense. Initially, the United States' response to the Soviet advance in a series of Socialist-oriented states was restrained and sporadic. For example, the United States supported the anti-Communist guerrillas in Angola.

However, the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet army on 24 December 1979 provoked a much more vigorous reaction from the Western world. The USSR was seeking to support the ruling Communists against increasingly threatening counter-revolutionary guerrillas. President Carter ordered a boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow and an embargo on grain exports to the USSR. The UN adopted a resolution condemning this military invasion. The United States' response did not stop at diplomatic condemnation. During the ten years of the conflict, the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) offered assistance and financial support to the Afghan resistance, or Mujahideen.