

Reagan Doctrine Is Not an All-Purpose Third World Policy

Daniel Drezner

The early 1980s has seen a quiet revolution in the Third World. In South America, Central America and Asia, duly elected democracies have replaced totalitarian states. Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Guatemala and other Latin American countries have peacefully transformed their power structure from military juntas to democracies.

Grenada has been liberated by U.S. troops and is rebuilding itself. India is starting to rebuild after the twin disasters of Bhopal and the Punjab. El Salvador seems to be turning back its armed opposition. Israel, for the first time, has arranged a coalition government that seems to be holding together. Both Haiti and the Philippines have peacefully overthrown corrupt dictators and are trying to construct stable democracies.

The United States, in particular the Reagan administration, has a unique opportunity to help to create stable, growing democracies. Strangely, however, the administration seems to be taking these fledgling democracies for granted. Instead it is concentrating on the Reagan Doctrine, which is to fund indigenous "freedom fighters" of communist and socialist nations in order to destabilize their regimes. The U.S. government is currently using

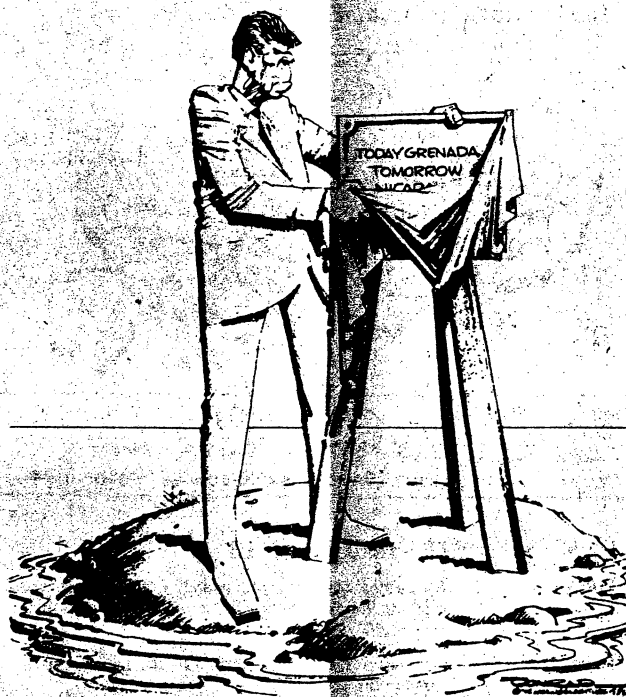
this policy in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Nicaragua and Angola.

Whether the Reagan Doctrine works is debatable. What is more puzzling is the way the Reagan administration seems to be treating peacefully created Third World democracies with benign neglect. If Ronald Reagan is to be remembered as a great president, he should concentrate his Third World foreign policy on supporting and aiding existing democracies, instead of trying to violently overthrow communist regimes with rebels who have about as much in common with democracy as the governments that they are trying to overthrow.

While the Third World seems to be moving toward democracy again, it is a very precarious movement. Latin America faces an astronomical debt problem. The democratic nations' militaries are tolerating the movement, even in Argentina where President Raúl Alfonsín risked his future by putting military leaders on trial. The Third World is increasing its export revenue, but most of it is being siphoned off for interest payments on the debt.

The United States has the potential to help these nations. Yet, neither the Reagan administration nor Congress has authorized substantial aid to these nations. Just recently, the Reagan administration said that it would withhold aid for Haiti until it saw im-

provements in human rights. While this is a reasonable position, it appears extraordinarily suspicious when compared with aid that the United States has given to the contras, who have been cited for human rights violations, or the Khmer Rouge, which exterminated half of Cam-



bodia when it was in power.

What's more, the Reagan administration does not seem to care about the philosophy of the "freedom fighters" it supports. When Ferdinand E. Marcos was still in power in the Philippines, Reagan praised him for fighting communism. The Reagan admin-

istration, however, is funding a communist-dominated rebel coalition in Cambodia. It is funding Jonas Savimbi, a rebel in Angola who was at one time supported by Maoist China, and is now supported by South Africa. The U.S. is also funding Afghan rebels who have as much Islamic fervor as the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's followers.

What has the Reagan Doctrine achieved? In Afghanistan, there has been at least a partial success in turning the Soviet invasion into a military quagmire. However, it is the Reagan Doctrine's only success. The Vietnamese are as determined as ever to keep their stranglehold on Cambodia. The Marxist Angolans are relying more on Cuban and Soviet advisers to counteract U.S. aid to Savimbi's rebels.

The contras' southern front in Nicaragua has collapsed, and there has been no popular revolution as predicted. Yet the Reagan administration has asked for an increase in aid to the contras amounting to \$100 million. Reagan also wants a \$5 million package for Savimbi's rebels in Angola. Wouldn't this money be better spent supporting the delicate democracies of Guatemala, Argentina or Brazil?

It has been argued that with the exception of the Philippines, most newly created democracies have little strategic value to the United States, and thus should be ignored. These people are look-

ing at the short run only.

While communist guerrillas in South America (with the exception of Colombia) have kept a low profile recently, if these democracies do not succeed, and the military takes control again, it is possible that the Soviets will encourage armed oppositions. This forces the United States to fund military juntas to stop the rebels. Morally and economically, doesn't it make more sense to strengthen democracies now than juntas later? Even more important, wouldn't a democracy be more willing to repay a debt than a military autocracy?

The Reagan Doctrine, under certain circumstances, can be an appropriate and effective method of deterring communism and supporting democracy. This administration, however, is using the method indiscriminately. The United States will get more for its money if it helps to strengthen democratic states. It could prevent destabilization of these nations in the future by helping them to repay their staggering debts. It is simply more cost-effective.

The world is witnessing a shift in the Third World toward democracy. The Reagan administration must take advantage of the situation, before this fragile movement collapses.

Daniel Drezner is a senior at Avon High School.