

The Soviet Union and its World Influence

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Roughly speaking the economic, industrial, and technological might of the Soviet Union was equivalent to that of the US. But when we compare the overall economic strength of the US and its allies in Western Europe and Japan with that of the Soviet Union and its allies, the Soviet Union comes a distant second. Soviet block trade with the semi-developed and under-developed countries was much smaller than that of the US block. Within each block, economic and trade relationships were much stronger in the American one. The Soviet Union was struggling to improve its inferior economic position, but when we compare growth in the economic influence of the two blocks we see that the growth of Soviet influence was minimal. The withdrawal of China from the Soviet camp, the splits that this caused, as well as China's growing economic relationship with the US and the West were some of the factors that contributed to this situation. The military strength and strategy of the Soviet Union must be seen within this context. In strategic nuclear weapons as well as conventional forces, Soviet strength was comparable to that of the US, leaving aside the relative superiority in some types of weapons and inferiority in others. Yet even in the military field, Soviet influence was waning. Though, the Soviet Union was striven to increase its global military influence by basing its relationship with the many countries, especially in the Third World, on arms deals, the results have been limited or negative. Poland, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Angola and the Horn of Africa could be cited as examples.

The Soviet Union used to claim to stand for "Socialism", "Progress", "Self determination" and "Democracy". However, since its relations with other countries were based on considerations of world dominance and global competition with the US, it stood, in reality, against the forces of democracy and liberation. During the decolonization period, the people of the Third World, world democratic movements as well as national liberation movements especially in Africa and the Middle East were confident in the Soviet Union and its support. But when experience showed that, Soviet policy was not what it claimed to be, the prestige of the Soviet Union declined. Its relationship with the countries of the Far East, after the Vietnam War, and with countries and organizations in the Middle East, Africa and Europe could be cited as examples. So can its stand on the just struggle of the Eritrean people.

To win the support of the international community, it was imperative to win the support of the US and the USSR. In Eritrea's case, both super-powers had hostile stance and therefore, the just struggle of the Eritrean people did not found a just solution or received international recognition as it deserved.