

An End to Regional Conflicts?

The effects of the disarmament talks between the Soviet Union and the US are not confined to the northern hemisphere. Rather the new atmosphere of detente is making itself felt around the world, involving national liberation movements and newly independent countries to a crucial degree.

Less than one year after the signing of the INF treaty in Washington, the progress made in the US—USSR dialogue and disarmament process is having a positive impact on the resolution of regional conflicts. A prime example is the Geneva accords between Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Soviet Union and the US. A new element was introduced into the attempts to resolve the conflict in Central America with the ceasefire and talks between the revolutionary Sandinista government and the contras.

The latest advance towards peace has been made in Southern Africa, where negotiations between Angola, Cuba, South Africa and the US resulted in an agreement for South African withdrawal from Namibia, and Cuban withdrawal from Angola. SWAPO's president, Sam Nujoma, termed this the most important stage for Namibia's independence. However, subsequent talks have shown that South Africa is looking for excuses to delay its withdrawal, while the US refuses to stop funding UNITA's dirty war against Angola.

UN-sponsored peace processes are also underway concerning the Western

Sahara, Cambodia, Cyprus, and the Iraq-Iran war. Added to this are the Soviet-Chinese talks which, although they have a different character, are also related to this process, especially concerning Cambodia.

Each of these conflicts has its own character and specific features which must be taken into account if a truly just solution is to be found. However, there are also common features among a number of these conflicts. The commonality is most apparent in the cases of Angola, Nicaragua, Afghanistan and Cambodia, where US-imperialism and other reactionary powers have sponsored counterrevolutionary forces to fight new progressive governments. In each of these cases, it is the progressive government in question which initiated and sustained the peace drive. The other impetus for peace came from socialist countries offering to withdraw the troops they had sent to support new progressive governments. In the interest of peace, the Soviets are withdrawing from Afghanistan; Cuba has agreed to withdraw from Angola in line with the peace agreement; and Vietnam has offered to do likewise in relation to Cambodia.

In all these cases, it is US imperialism and its local allies who are blocking progress as seen in continued US military aid to the Afghani rebels, and US encouragement of the contras' sabotage of the first round of talks with the Sandinistas. Nonetheless, despite local differences, obstacles and setbacks, a new process is underway, primarily related to the new international atmosphere generated by the Soviet peace offensive. This has forced the Reagan Administration into a position of detente.

Since the Reagan-Gorbachev summit in Moscow, progress in the direction of negotiated settlement has been most obvious in places where the Soviet Union or one of its allies plays an important role. This confirms the impression that the USA's new and partial readiness to resolve regional conflicts is to a great extent related to the new atmosphere of detente prevailing on the international scene. Concerning regional conflicts, the Reagan Administration has behaved in basically the same way as it does on disarmament questions: The Soviet Union and other progressive forces take initiative, while the Reagan Administration has to be dragged along. The US has shown new readiness to agree on bilateral disengagement and stand as guarantor for agreements, but this applies to conflicts where the contra-war it is supporting cannot be expected to achieve decisive victory, and where it does not have to relinquish interests defined as vital. What the US administration has been forced to give up in those cases is the possibility of causing more harm to the other side.

In the Gulf, Middle East and Central America, where the USA has staked out so-called vital interests, the same

