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Joel Dreyfuss

Perceptions Of the Third World

There is a willingness among our politicians and columnists to view a number of international events in recent years as great disaster for world order and democracy.

But to many people who consider themselves part of the so-called Third World, which includes the non-white non-European majority of nations and people, the emergence of oil power, the fall of South Vietnam and the recent events in Angola indicate the beginning of a long-awaited rebalancing of power.

The rantings of our own leaders, as demonstrated recently by President

The writer is a reporter for the Style section of The Post.

Ford, Secretary of State Kissinger and U.N. Ambassador Daniel Moynihan are complaints against the dissolution of the status quo.

Their resistance to change comes not so much from a revival of Cold War ideologies as it does from evaluations based on a very narrow European and non-European world view that is no longer accepted by many Third World nations.

Few non-white nations can avoid snickering at Kissinger's charges that the Soviet Union is trying to "colonize" Africa. Not if they remember America's 14-year, \$150 billion mistake in Southeast Asia that cost us the lives of 55,000 Americans and millions of Vietnamese.

Our politicians rail against the Arab oil monopoly, yet they are just exercising the lessons we taught them in our best schools on the basic of capitalism and the free enterprise system. Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, given the opportunity, would do no better.

The United Nations resolution declaring Zionism a form of racism was probably bad politics, especially for nations whose claims to sovereignty were based on arguments not much different from that of the Israelis.

But the political intemperance of the Third World countries was hardly different from the American refusal to admit the existence of China for 25 years.

Neither act was helpful in solving world problems but there was an assumed rationality behind each action: in the case of China, the American belief that Taiwan's forces would eventually overthrow the Communist regime and in the case of Israel, the perception of that country as a Western colonialist outpost in the heart of the Third World with close ties to South Africa.

Whether either of those perceptions has any validity is not the issue. What matters is that a different view of the world is emerging, one that has as much—or as little—internal rationality as the ones which have been in prominence over the last 400 years.

The new view is being promulgated by nations who see themselves as part of a different group, the have-nots and, in the case of oil-rich countries, the "had-nots."

What most Western countries refuse to understand is the basis for that world view. Instead, our politicians and our media continue to present the behavior of Third World countries as irrational and incompetent acts, attitudes that indicate a deep-seated racism.

In their new world view, Third World countries view the wealth of Western nations as having been acquired at their expense. The wealth of Western countries began with Europe's creation of the largest scale of slave trade in man's history and continues today with the removal of mineral and natural wealth without proper compensation.

The leaders of Western countries, whose interpretation of world events is based on a very narrow European-centered interpretation of history, need to remember that Europe and its surrogate, the United States, did not always dominate the world's events.

Throughout most of recorded history, the thoughts, philosophy and politics of the world were determined by the nations of Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

It is only in recent years that some historians are conceding that Egypt was a black African nation during its most important periods. The Arab conquest of southern Europe is still cast as a great cultural disaster in American history books, yet it left Europe a rich legacy ranging from algebra to flamenco music.

The acquisition of wealth and political power by the Third World forbodes a change in the balance of power and a change in the perception of world problems. Some Western nations, notably France and England, have taken steps to accept the fall from grace and concentrate their efforts on forming new relationships with their former colonies.

The American reaction to Angola indicates that we still have much to learn and a great deal of arrogance to overcome. The Soviets, no doubt pursuing their own objectives, have been careful in choosing sides.

The Russians did not colonize Cuba, although their financial support has upheld the Castro government. But many of our analysts conceded that our foreign policy drove Cuba to Russian arms.

In the case of Angola—willingly or not—we find ourselves in league with a nation abhorred by most of the world and against a genuine movement for self-determination.

No African nation believes that Russia is acting out of selflessness, but neither does anyone believe that it will use Angola as a beachhead to attack Brazil. Those kinds of charges by our leaders tell more about our perception of the political sophistication of Africans than it does about our foreign policy.

The United States was once a "have-not," a young potentially rich country with a burning belief in liberty, self-determination and the pursuit of happiness. In the last 30 years, we have continually aligned ourselves with despots, dictators and true colonialists.

In the bicentennial year, this nation could do no better than reassess its objectives and realign itself with young struggling nations whose ultimate objectives were inspired by our own example of 200 years ago.