

The Challenge and Opportunity for the Superpowers

The US-Soviet relationship has now degenerated into a near-total impasse--fortified by national pride, belligerent rhetoric, vested bureaucratic interests, and an orientation toward short-term propaganda gains over genuine long-term progress.

To break this log-jam, particularly with a US-Soviet Summit, the superpowers may need an issue other than arms control on which they can agree to cooperate.

Helping the world's poor--a subject already high in the public consciousness because of recent "Live Aid" activities for Africa -- could be such an issue. (Even the Soviets participated in what became, by far, the biggest TV event in history -- 1.5 billion viewers.)

The advantage of a joint US-Soviet world immunization program is that it takes advantage of the superpowers' strength in technology and resources, while bypassing their innate geopolitical competitiveness. Unlike "development" activities, immunization efforts do not have an inherent geopolitical dimension: they involve no vested interest in any particular Third World Regime. Immunization requires only politically-neutral medical teams, backed by politically-neutral resources, to go in and do the job. A joint US-Soviet immunization effort would be as symbolically valuable as a joint space mission, vastly more productive in human terms, and a possible step toward ameliorating the East-West conflict at a time of entrenched and dangerous stalemate in superpower relations.

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