



# **Soviet Policy in West Africa, 1957-64**

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## *Abstract*

Between 1957 and 1964 the Soviet Union sought to export to West Africa a model of socialist economic and social development. Moscow's policy was driven by the conviction that socialism was a superior economic system, and could be replicated in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali. However, Soviet confidence in the project was undermined by the unreliability of local leaders, and then by the Congo crisis. The setback in West Africa taught the Soviet leadership crucial lessons, including the importance of supporting ideologically reliable leaders, and the necessity of building military strength to bolster intervention. Combining Soviet and Ghanaian sources with those more readily available in the UK and the US, this thesis shows the importance of modernisation of the Third World for Moscow's foreign policy during the Khrushchev era, and contributes to the new sets of literature on the cold war in the third world, and on the Soviet Union's foreign policy.



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Alessandro Iandolo,  
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## List of Abbreviations

ANS	<i>Akademiya Nauk SSSR</i> (Academy of Sciences of the USSR)
AVP RF	<i>Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii</i> (Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation)
CPP	Convention People's Party
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DDF	<i>Documents Diplomatiques Français</i> (French Diplomatic Documents)
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
GKES	<i>Gosudarstvennyi Komitet po Vneshnim Ekonomicheskim Sviaziam</i> (State Committee for Foreign Economic Contacts)
IMEMO	<i>Institut Mirovoi Ekonomiki i Mezhdunarodnykh Otnoshenii</i> (Institute of World Economy and International Relations)
KGB	<i>Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti</i> (State Security Committee)
MID	<i>Ministertstvo Inostrannykh Del</i> (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
MNC	<i>Mouvement National Congolais</i> (Congolese National Movement)
MO	<i>Mezhdunarodny Otdel</i> (International Department)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ONUC	<i>Operation des Nations Unies au Congo</i> (United Nations Operation in Congo)
PCF	<i>Parti Communiste Français</i> (French Communist Party)
PDG	<i>Parti Democratique de Guinee</i> (Democratic Party of Guinea)
PGU	<i>Pervoe Glavnoe Upravlenie</i> (First Chief Directorate)
PRAAD	Public Records and Archive Administration
RGAE	<i>Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Ekonomiki</i> (Russian State Archive of the Economy)
RGANI	<i>Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii</i> (Russian State Archive of Contemporary History)
SovKhoz	<i>Sovetskoe Khozyaistvo</i> (State Farm)

SSSR	<i>Soyuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik</i> (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics)
TsK	<i>Tsentrálny Komitet</i> (Central Committee)
TsKhSD	<i>Tsentr Khraneniya Sovremennoi Dokumentatsii</i> (Centre for the Preservation of Contemporary Documents)
UAR	United Arab Republic
UKNA	United Kingdom National Archives
UN	United Nations
UP	United Party
US-RDA	<i>Union Soudanaise – Rassemblement Democratique Africain</i> (Soudanese Union – African Democratic Rally)
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics



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Je commence a croire qu'on ne peut jamais rien prouver. Ce sont des hypotheses honnetes et qui rendent compte des faits: mais je sens bien qu'elles viennent de moi, qu'elles sont tout simplement une maniere d'unifier mes connoissances.

*Antoine Roquentin*





## **Introduction**

This thesis examines and seeks to explain Soviet policy towards Ghana, Guinea and Mali during the Khrushchev era.<sup>1</sup> I will argue that these three states represent important cases to study to better understand Soviet policy in the third world.<sup>2</sup> Between 1957 and 1964 the Soviet Union aspired to export a model of economic and social development to Ghana, Guinea and Mali, through extensive programmes of economic and technical cooperation, loans, and trade agreements with advantageous terms for the African countries.<sup>3</sup> Although less substantial in absolute terms than aid provided to other countries such as Egypt, India, or Ethiopia, Soviet economic cooperation with Ghana, Guinea, and Mali had a significant impact because of the small size of these economies: their entire development strategies were in fact critically dependent on Soviet aid. This was not the case for other major recipients of

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<sup>1</sup> Ghana, Guinea and Mali are part of 'West Africa', according to the definition of the region given by the United Nations. Guinea and Mali were French colonies, whereas Ghana was a British colony, under the name of Gold Coast.

<sup>2</sup> In this thesis the term "third world" refers to the Soviet definition in use at the time. According to the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (third edition, 1968-79), 'third world' (Третий Мир, *Tretii Mir*) is used as a synonym for 'developing countries' (Развивающиеся страны, *Razvivayushchiesya strany*), meaning 'countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania, in the past in their majority colonies and protectorates of the imperialist powers or countries dependent from them, that enjoy political sovereignty, but, entering the orbit of the world capitalist economy, remain to a certain extent 'unequal' (i.e. 'not enjoying equal rights' – *neravnopravniy*) partners of the highly-developed capitalist states. All the countries of the aforementioned regions belong to [the definition] 'developing countries', with the exception of the countries of the socialist system and of the countries that have not yet got out of the political domination of imperialism and also of the African countries with racist regimes (SAR, Southern Rhodesia), or Japan, New Zealand and Israel.' See G. I. Mirskii, "Razvivayushchiesya strany," in *Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya [Great Soviet Encyclopedia]*, ed. Aleksandr M. Prokhorov (Moscow 1968-1979).

<sup>3</sup> To have an idea of the magnitude of Soviet aid programmes in West Africa see "Communist Aid Activities in Non-Communist Less Developed Countries, 1979 and 1954-79," ed. Central Intelligence Agency (National Foreign Assessment Center) (Washington, DC 1980), 39.

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Soviet aid in the third world, where Moscow's assistance was important but not as dominant. Ghana, Guinea, and Mali's reliance on the USSR created favourable conditions for the export to West Africa of a model of development, which in this thesis will be called a "socialist model of development", directly derived from the experience of economic growth in the Soviet Union – a possibility that at the time did not exist to the same extent anywhere else in the third world.

The initial optimism that surrounded the establishment of relations in the later 1950s and the growing Soviet influence with the newly independent states of West Africa turned by the mid-sixties to disillusionment. This was caused by a combination of internal and external factors, such as the rising cost of economic cooperation with Ghana, Guinea and Mali, and the impact of the 1960-61 Congo crisis. By the time of Khrushchev's fall in 1964, the Soviet Union had largely pulled back from the region. From 1957 until 1964 Moscow devised an ambitious plan of development and modernisation for West Africa, and committed large resources to realise it, making Soviet engagement with Ghana, Guinea and Mali a crucial experience for the evolution of the USSR's policy on the Third World. The puzzle that lies behind this thesis is why this policy was undertaken and the goals of Soviet policy in the region, and then the reasons behind Moscow's withdrawal.

This introduction will first show the importance of the topic for the study of international relations and international history. It will then discuss the thesis' research questions and provide a short literature review. Next, it will present in detail the research approach and the hypotheses of the thesis. Finally, it will discuss the methods and the sources used, and the importance of relying on recently released archival documents.

*Importance of the topic*

This topic is important for a number of reasons. First of all, there is a revived debate on the “global” nature of the cold war. Several scholars now stress that the third world had a crucial place in shaping superpower rivalry, and that the scope of cold war study should be expanded so to give more attention to Africa, Asia and Latin America. Some of the existing literature argues that the competition for influence in the third world, a “dream” of expanding one’s model of economic development and society at large, was really what the cold war was about. This opens up West Africa to the promise of fruitful analysis from the Soviet, as well as a Western, perspective. A study of Soviet policy in the region, the first case of Moscow’s involvement in Sub-Saharan Africa and one of the first in the third world in general, will then contribute to shed light on the very nature of the cold war itself, and how to interpret it.

Moreover, this thesis will seek to make a contribution to our general understanding of the USSR’s foreign policy in the third world, and thus to the study of the cold war more generally. Explaining Soviet foreign policy is made particularly challenging by the need to reconcile strategic or security factors with purely ideological factors. Assessing the relative weight of each set of factors in determining Soviet decisions is a long-standing puzzle for cold war scholars. This thesis analyses and explains Moscow’s policy in terms of the attempt to export a development model, combining by necessity ideational with strategic factors, and thus providing a possible “solution” to the puzzle.

*Research Questions*

This section will present the research questions of the thesis. They can be divided into two “clusters”, a first one about how Soviet policy was created and how it evolved,

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and a second cluster about why policy changed and what factors influenced it. There is naturally overlap between the two clusters of questions.

### Q1 cluster: aim and evolution of Soviet policy

There are two key research questions in this group: (Q1a) what was the aim of Soviet policy towards Ghana, Guinea and Mali between 1957 and 1964? (Q1b) How did Soviet policy vary among the three states and over time? This group of questions focus on explaining what the goals of Moscow's policy were, what actions were taken to reach these aims, and how goals and policies changed.

### Q2 cluster: factors that influenced Soviet policy

The second cluster of questions is related to understanding the major factors that influenced policy and explaining their specific impact in modifying it. These questions are therefore also naturally connected to the development of Soviet policy towards Ghana, Guinea and Mali. The research questions are: (Q2a) what role was played by ideological factors in driving Soviet policy? (Q2b) What caused the decline in Soviet involvement in the region? (Q2c) To what extent did the evolution of Soviet policy reflect changes in local conditions? (Q2d) How did the activities of external actors affect Moscow's policy in West Africa?

### *Literature Review*

This section will show how existing scholarship has dealt with the research questions I presented above, and what the major problems and gaps in knowledge are. This thesis draws upon several strands of academic literature: general literature on the cold

war; literature on the cold war and decolonisation; literature on Soviet foreign policy towards the third world in general; and literature on Soviet policy in West Africa.

#### General literature on the cold war

The study of the cold war in recent years has undergone several important changes. According to John Lewis Gaddis, “classic” (or “old”, as he writes) historiography of the cold war period ‘emphasized *interests*, which is mostly defined in material terms – what people possessed, or wanted to possess. It tended to overlook *ideas* – what people believed, or wanted to believe.’<sup>4</sup> Gaddis argues that “new” cold war history would have to take into account many elements, among which the fact that both superpowers built empires around them – even though of very different kinds –; that ‘many people saw the Cold War as a contest between good versus evil’; and that ‘Marxism-Leninism fostered authoritarian romanticism’.<sup>5</sup> Gaddis thus points out that the role of ideas and beliefs needs to be further explored in cold war literature, also with reference to the USSR.

More recent research points towards the same direction. In particular, Odd Arne Westad crucially challenged the power-based approach to the study of the cold war in the third world. Westad sees the cold war era as a global ideological competition between two empires: the American ‘empire of freedom’, and the Soviet ‘empire of justice’. In *The Global Cold War*, he claims that the most important aspects of the cold war were precisely ‘connected to political and social development in the Third World.’<sup>6</sup> According to his interpretative framework, the ideological

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<sup>4</sup>John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 282.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 286-91.

<sup>6</sup>Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War. Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 396.

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convictions on which the social systems of both the United States and the Soviet Union were founded drew the superpowers towards involvement in third world countries. Both systems claimed to have the 'betterment of humanity' as a final objective and, as a consequence, the whole cold war was a global confrontation between two opposite types of modernity. The expansion of the socialist or capitalist model of development was the most important characteristic of the period. The decolonisation process, which opened up political space, offered the greatest opportunity to shape the future of whole areas of the planet through the export of capitalist or socialist modernisation. Westad sees the cold war in the third world as a continuation of colonialism in many ways, especially as the attempt to establish supposedly superior systems of social and economic organisation among societies regarded by the "colonisers" as backward or "pre-modern". This thesis is strongly linked to Westad's framework, both in stressing the importance of ideas about development and modernisation in guiding the superpowers' policies, and also in highlighting the importance of the third world for the cold war.

The publication of *The Global Cold War* meant that both the third world and the ideological dimension of the confrontation between the USA and the USSR now feature prominently in modern studies of the cold war. In his latest book, Melvyn Leffler presents the period as a competition for 'the very soul of mankind', quoting former American president George H.W. Bush.<sup>7</sup> 'Leaders in Moscow sincerely believed their government possessed the formula for the good life, and so did American leaders'. Rejecting Westad's claim that the third world was the main focus of the cold war, Leffler highlights the importance that the idea of exporting one specific type of modernity to the third world nevertheless had for cold war leaders.

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<sup>7</sup>Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind. The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 3.

Leffler shows how Khrushchev in particular was convinced that the newly liberated peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America would choose socialism as a way of life, attracted by the spectacular economic success of the Soviet Union. Even while maintaining peaceful relations with the United States, it was thought necessary “to attack, to affirm communist ideas”<sup>8</sup>.

#### Literature on the cold war and decolonisation in West Africa

The importance of the emerging third world, including Africa, for the cold war has also been recently stressed in recent works that focus on decolonisation. The existing literature stresses the role that both superpowers played in the post-war era to accelerate the end of colonialism. Both the Soviet Union and the United States were in principle against the European colonial empires, and – for different reasons – both were convinced that the break up of the empires after World War II would favour them. US policy had a direct impact on decolonisation in West Africa, because of Washington’s influence in London and Paris. The Soviet Union, instead, played an indirect but important role as several West African nationalist leaders were inspired by socialist ideas, including in the Gold Coast/Ghana.<sup>9</sup> In Guinea, socialism was even more important in the struggle for independence. In her path breaking work, Elizabeth Schmidt highlighted how strong leftist ideas were amongst the rank and file of those in African political organisations. In the case of Guinea, this led the leadership of the

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<sup>8</sup> Khrushchev interview, 23 April 1963. Quoted in *ibid.*, 170.

<sup>9</sup> Olajide Aluko, "Politics of Decolonisation in British West Africa, 1945-1960," in *History of West Africa*, ed. J.F.A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder (London: Longman, 1974), 623-24, 28-29.

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independence movement to break with France and assume a radical stance that would draw the country closer to Moscow.<sup>10</sup>

The situation in West Africa, however, was in part different from that in other colonised areas. Due to the lack of strong and well-organised liberation movements on the continent, Britain and France hoped to maintain a strong partnership with their colonies even after independence. To obtain this, the governments of the colonial powers seemed ready to strike deals with “moderate” African elites, who would obtain more power in exchange for the promise of safeguarding European interests in some key areas, both economic and strategic. This strategy was at least partly successful in French West Africa, where the local elites were worried by the possible spreading of communist influence, and preferred to opt for integration and cooperation with France rather than full independence.<sup>11</sup>

The close link between colonial power and newly independent state was particularly evident in Ghana, where Britain kept a strong grip on Ghana’s economy and on its armed forces after independence.<sup>12</sup> In particular, British businesses had major interests in the Gold Coast/Ghana, which they wanted to defend after independence. The extent to which British policy towards Ghana was influenced by business lobbying remains debated, but commercial interests certainly played a role in London’s effort to preserve its influence in Accra.<sup>13</sup> Guinea, on the contrary, did not have particularly important strategic or economic interests for France, which made a

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<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Schmidt, "Cold War in Guinea: the Rassemblement Democratique Africain and the Struggle Over Communism, 1950-1958," *Journal of African History* 48, no. 1 (2007): 95-121.

<sup>11</sup> Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa: France's Successful Decolonization?* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 4-5, 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> Aluko, "Politics of Decolonisation in British West Africa, 1945-1960," 653-55.

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas J. White, "The business and the politics of decolonization: the British experience in the twentieth century," *The Economic History Review* 53, no. 3 (2000): 544-64.



complete rupture between newly independent state and colonial power more feasible.<sup>14</sup>

However, in all former colonies the economy had been long under the control of a foreign power that used the colonies primarily as a cheap source of raw materials, and sold them manufactured goods. This system was firmly established by the time decolonisation in Africa began after WWII, and persisted after independence. The newly independent countries were therefore dependent on their former colonial masters for economic survival. The African states needed to import industrial products and primary commodities that they were unable to produce at home, and generated revenues through the exports of primary products, such as minerals or fruit. A marked decrease in West European demand for “tropical products” in the late 1950s then caused serious economic problems for the newly independent African states, and convinced some of them to look for alternative models of economic development, such as those based on central planning and rapid industrialisation, as sponsored by the USSR.<sup>15</sup>

There was then an obvious conflict between European (and Western at large) and Soviet interests in Africa. With Khrushchev’s rise to power, Moscow looked with interest at “radical” leaders in the third world, with the hope of winning influence precisely where that of the colonial powers was waning, through the export of a development model ‘which did not lie through continued subservience to the foreign

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Crowder and Donal Cruise O'Brien, "French West Africa, 1945-1960," in *History of West Africa*, ed. Michael Crowder and J.F.A. Ajayi (London: Longman, 1974), 695.

<sup>15</sup> Adebayo Adedeji, "The Economic Evolution of Developing Africa," in *The Cambridge History of Africa*, ed. Michael Crowder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 196-203.

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business interests that had ruled the roost in the colonial (or semi-colonial) era.<sup>16</sup> In spite of the ideas of “neutrality” and “non-alignment” as guiding principles of the newly independent countries’ foreign policy, the cold war – defined as the rivalry between Western capitalism and Soviet socialism – was therefore destined to come to Africa.

The Congo crisis of 1960-61 was the single event that signalled the expansion of the Soviet-Western bipolar rivalry into Africa most strongly. The crisis *de facto* changed the nature of decolonisation in Africa, and represented a crucial event for both Soviet and Western policy. It was the first instance where the consequences of foreign intervention by both the Western and the Eastern bloc in Africa became evident. The continent was not any longer considered sheltered from cold war tensions because of its relative lack of economic or strategic resources, and the risk associated with pursuing an active policy towards Africa grew as a consequence. In Darwin’s words, the Congo crisis ‘revealed the unexpected hazard of a Cold War competition between East and West for African allegiance’.<sup>17</sup>

In broad terms, this thesis agrees with the literature that emphasises Britain and France’s interest to maintain a foothold in West Africa, especially for the sake of the activities of their businesses in the region, and with the literature that assesses the Congo crisis as a key event for the development of both Soviet and Western policy towards Africa.

### Literature on Soviet foreign policy towards the third world

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<sup>16</sup> John Darwin, *After Tamerlane. The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000* (London: Penguin, 2008), 473-74.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 467.

The literature on Soviet foreign policy is generally split into works that try to explain it in terms of ideas and beliefs, and others that instead give more focus to traditional considerations of strategy and opportunity. Literature on the USSR's policy in the third world follows the same division. Broadly speaking, the first group of analytical studies of Soviet foreign policy towards the third world tended to lay emphasis on strategic or security considerations to explain Moscow's actions. One of the main representatives of this stream of literature is Alvin Rubinstein's classic account of *Moscow's Third World Strategy*, which adopts the view that in Soviet foreign policy practice always preceded ideology. Maintaining that Khrushchev initiated important changes in the Soviet way of approaching the third world, Rubinstein believes that the Soviet decision to become involved in Africa and Asia was motivated by the desire to acquire a 'comparative advantage' over the West, and that the ideology of modernisation and superiority of socialism was necessary only to convince the more sceptical among the Kremlin leaders (i.e. for domestic reasons).<sup>18</sup> According to this interpretation, ideas and beliefs accounted for relatively little in determining Moscow's choices. In another pioneering account of the USSR's activities in the third world, Bruce Porter writes that in the late 1950s Moscow opportunistically began to court 'previously maligned "national-bourgeois" leaders' to obtain political gains in an area where it felt it had an advantage over the West.<sup>19</sup>

On the contrary, in more recent years a tendency has emerged to call attention to the role of ideas and personality in Soviet foreign policy and decision-making. In particular, with reference to policy towards the third world, it is difficult not to highlight the role played by Stalin in shaping the Soviet Union's policy. Stalin had

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<sup>18</sup> Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Moscow's Third World Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 19-31.

<sup>19</sup> Bruce D. Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts. Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in local wars, 1945-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 16.

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very strong ideas about the expansion of socialism abroad. He was firmly convinced that the necessary conditions for the successful establishment of a socialist system did not exist anywhere outside of the USSR and its satellites, and therefore he looked with suspicion at newly independent countries and at national liberation movements.<sup>20</sup> Leaders like the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Indonesia's President Sukarno, and other third world elites in general, were considered expressions of the local bourgeoisie, therefore on the other side of the class struggle by definition and not worthy of the USSR's support. Moreover, according to Leninist principles, "wars of national liberation" were fought exclusively by national bourgeoisies against their colonial masters in order to establish independence and democracy, but not socialism. The "dictatorship of the proletariat" came only as a consequence of a "civil war", which could happen uniquely in the developed world.<sup>21</sup> Thus, significant Soviet support for revolutionary movements in the third world was ruled out under Stalin.

On the other hand, most of the existing literature also stresses Khrushchev's contribution to changing the course of Soviet policy towards the third world. Margot Light writes that 'although Soviet policy began to change in the last year of Stalin's life, it was really only after his death that an active Third World policy was launched. It was under Khrushchev, therefore, that Soviet relations were established with African countries.'<sup>22</sup> There were several reasons for the "rediscovery" of the third world under Khrushchev. First of all, the 1950s and 1960s represented the height of decolonisation, when a growing number of African and Asian countries emerged from colonial domination and looked at the East or the West as sources of political

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<sup>20</sup>Westad, *The Global Cold War*: 66.

<sup>21</sup>Mark N. Katz, *The Third World in Soviet Military Thought* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 14.

<sup>22</sup>Margot Light, "Moscow's retreat from Africa," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 8, no. 2 (1992): 24.

inspiration and economic support. Therefore, structural changes made it possible for the USSR to adopt a new approach towards these countries. Moreover, Khrushchev had very different opinions from Stalin's about the possibilities of exporting the socialist model abroad. Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov write that the second wave of decolonisation in Asia and Africa 'enchanted and mesmerized Khrushchev, stirring old memories of the revolutionary passions of the Civil War and the Soviet "Comintern 1920s".'<sup>23</sup> As Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali argue, Khrushchev personally was convinced that he could "convert" the first generation of third world leaders to Marxism-Leninism because of the economic advantages of the Soviet model of development, in spite of the large geographical, political and religious differences between the newly independent countries.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, William Taubman highlights how Khrushchev, even when faced by opposition from other top Soviet leaders, held firm to the conviction that the Soviet Union needed an 'active diplomacy' as 'the struggle between us and the capitalists was taking new forms.'<sup>25</sup> Zubok identifies the outline of the USSR's global third world strategy in Khrushchev's ideas: 'a Soviet expert on the Third World, Georgy Mirsky, recalled that at a time "when the revolutionary process in the Western countries was frozen," Khrushchev's leadership expected "to use post-colonialist momentum, break into the soft underbelly of imperialism and win sympathies of the millions of people who woke up to the new life."<sup>26</sup> Margot Light concludes that

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<sup>23</sup>Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 206.

<sup>24</sup>Aleksandr A Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).

<sup>25</sup>William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (London: Free Press, 2003), 354.

<sup>26</sup>Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 139.

## Introduction

‘Khrushchev’s foreign policy aimed, above all, to end the isolation that characterized Stalin’s post-war policy.’<sup>27</sup> This thesis shows how Khrushchev’s confidence in the economic prowess of the Soviet Union and his belief in the possibility to replicate abroad the Soviet experience of modernisation through the application of a model of development led him to decide in favour of engagement with Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, even at high costs for the USSR.

### Literature on Soviet policy in West Africa

The existing literature on Soviet policy towards the African continent is rather small because of the relative scarcity of available sources and because of the fall in interest about Soviet policy in the third world that followed the collapse of the USSR (when more sources became available). In particular, there are only two works that deal directly with the USSR’s involvement in West Africa during the Khrushchev era.

Robert Legvold produced a pioneering study of the topic in 1970.<sup>28</sup> He adopts a structural approach, stressing the importance of opportunity and material factors over ideology. According to Legvold’s reconstruction, the Soviet Union was attracted to West Africa by the political isolation and economic backwardness of some of the countries in the region. Thus, the main reason for involvement was, in Legvold’s view, the opportunity to ‘fill the void’ left by the former colonial powers. Moscow had indeed to wait for a void: Legvold shows very well how it was impossible to build stronger relations with Ghana straight after independence, as the British were still controlling key areas of policy-making in the country. On the contrary, Guinea in 1958 was a completely different situation, because the country rejected French

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<sup>27</sup> Light, "Moscow's retreat from Africa," 24.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Legvold, *Soviet Policy in West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

President Charles de Gaulle's project of a "commonwealth", chose to sever all links with France and therefore was diplomatically isolated and desperate to find a major economic partner. It then offered better prospects from Moscow's point of view.

Legvold insists that ideology played only a secondary role for Soviet policy in West Africa. Soviet "Africanists", such as Ivan Potekhin, Dmitrii Olderogge and Alexandr Zusmanovich, were twisting and changing official views about West African countries in order to provide ideological justification for the Soviet presence in the area. Ghana was criticised as long as the British still occupied a dominant position there, whereas Guinea was praised as truly independent. However, in the early sixties the judgment was reversed. Because of contrasts between the Soviet and Guinean leadership, Guinea fell out of favour with Moscow, whereas Ghana was now considered "more socialist". According to Legvold, this shows how Soviet policy reacted to events and developments in West Africa rather than being determined by well-established ideas in Moscow.

What is particularly problematic in Legvold's book is his explanation of Moscow's declining influence in West Africa in the early 1960s. Legvold argues in favour of a "periphery-centred" explanation. He believes that the fundamental difficulty that Moscow faced was that West African leaders were interested in principle in socialism, but they were certainly not convinced Marxist-Leninists. So, Moscow could not 'institutionalize' a socialist system anywhere in West Africa and its influence was inevitably destined to wane.<sup>29</sup>

Legvold's approach is to look at the periphery, and argue that since the West African elites did not fully "convert" to Marxism-Leninism, Soviet influence was too weak. West African countries used Soviet support as long as it was useful to

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

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overcome political isolation and economic backwardness, but then preferred (or were forced by regime changes) to adopt a more favourable attitude towards the West. The problem with this explanation is that new findings from the African side – such as the Ghanaian documents used in this thesis – seem to suggest, on the contrary, that West African elites had not lost interest in cooperating with the USSR, but, on the contrary, it was Moscow that became much less responsive. Explaining this problem will be one of the key contributions of this thesis to the existing literature.

Sergey Mazov recently proposed an alternative interpretative framework to explain Soviet policy in West Africa.<sup>30</sup> Mazov, whose work is based on Russian and American archival sources, gives more importance to the ideas and beliefs of the Soviet leadership. He maintains that the overarching goal of Moscow's policy, not just limited to Africa, was the 'popularization of the Soviet Union' in the world – thus suggesting "soft-power" goals. However, this strategy was hampered by the clumsy execution of Moscow's policies.

Mazov focuses on the poor quality of Soviet economic aid programmes and on the inefficiency of Moscow's propaganda to explain the USSR's failure to establish lasting influence in West Africa. According to this framework, the Soviet push for influence in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali was condemned to failure from the very beginning, due to bad policy-making and lack of experience in dealing with Africa, especially compared to more effective Western policies. Mazov does a very good job in revealing how bad the implementation of the economic aid programmes was, which

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<sup>30</sup>Sergey Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War. The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956-1964*, ed. James H. Hershberg, Cold War International History Project (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010). Russian version: ———, *Politika SSSR v Zapadnoi Afrike, 1956-1964: Neizvestnye Stranizy Kholodnoy Voiny*, ed. Apollon Davidson (Moscow: Nauka, 2008). For a more concise English version, see: ———, "Soviet policy in West Africa: an episode of the Cold War, 1956-1964," in *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: three centuries of encounters*, ed. Maxim Matusevich (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007).



very often led to the realisation of useless but expensive projects, and the ineffectiveness of Soviet propaganda, which was too abstract, and too complex to be of any use for the socialist cause. He also stresses how American reaction to the threat of Soviet “penetration” in Africa was rapid and effective. Counter-propaganda operations were quickly set up, and they matched, and often overcame, Soviet efforts. In Mazov’s opinion this shows that Moscow did not expect strong opposition from the West in Africa and in the end it was easily squeezed out of the area by Western policies.

The main problems with Mazov’s book are that he overestimates the importance of propaganda for Moscow, and tends to overlook the general context of Soviet policy in the third world. Mazov shows very well how Soviet propaganda failed to win the “hearts and minds” of the West African populations. However, it is difficult to argue that Moscow’s aim was to turn the African masses to socialism, since the USSR in this period showed very little interest in supporting revolutionaries anywhere in the third world. In fact, contacts with the few existing communist parties and movements were extremely limited. The Soviet leadership, on the other hand, seemed much more committed to establishing relations with third world nationalist ruling elites, in order to influence the way in which they decided to pursue modernisation and economic development after independence. The contribution of propaganda to Soviet aims, then, appears rather limited. This thesis will argue that propaganda always had a secondary role when compared to economic policy.

Moreover, the Soviet programmes of economic aid in West Africa were certainly far from perfect, but they still represented a crucial form of assistance for Ghana, Guinea, and Mali. Arguing that they decided to switch to another donor because of the poor result of economic cooperation with the USSR is problematic.

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First of all, no alternative donor was particularly forthcoming in taking over the role played by the Soviet Union in any of the countries. As a result, Ghana, Guinea, and Mali received fewer funds, and faced similar difficulties as cooperation with the US, France or China proved to be no less troublesome than with Moscow. Furthermore, as mentioned above, available African primary sources show that the local leaderships were certainly not interested in cutting all links to the USSR, but that instead Moscow became less receptive to their requests – thus suggesting that a “metro centric” explanation to the end of Soviet engagement with West Africa is in the end more valid. Although the high costs of economic cooperation certainly are a crucial factor to explain the evolution of policy, the ineffectiveness of the USSR’s development aid alone is therefore not sufficient to explain the Soviet failure in West Africa.

### *Analytical Framework*

This thesis proposes a new framework for the study of Soviet policy towards Ghana, Guinea and Mali. The analysis is focused on the policies towards these countries from 1957 to 1964, but within the context of the “global” cold war and of Soviet foreign policy towards the third world in general, as discussed in the more recent literature. Rather than treating structural factors and ideas as alternative, mutually exclusive explanatory variables, this thesis will treat them as complementary, and useful to understand the evolution of policy at different stages of the time span that is taken into consideration. The general aim of this research work is to maintain the focus on Soviet policy towards a specific region of the world, as in Legvold and Mazov’s works, but without losing sight of the general context of the cold war in the 1950s and 1960s, which increasingly looked like a global competition between two alternative ways of life and systems of values. Therefore, this thesis will stress the importance of

material factors connected to the local context, as well as the role of ideology and beliefs in shaping Moscow's policies.

In particular, this thesis will argue that Soviet policy towards Ghana, Guinea and Mali underwent significant changes between 1957 and 1964. The initial engagement can be explained through the Soviet conviction that socialism was a superior system to organise society and production, and that it could be replicated with success in the developing world. However, since the early 1960s, different sets of material difficulties, both connected to the local context and to external intervention, complicated and hindered Soviet policy. Confronted by the necessity to step up the level of support for its allies in both economic and military terms, Moscow realised that it did not have the means to overcome the objective difficulties of economic cooperation in the region and to counter a strong Western response. This eventually determined a withdrawal from West Africa.

### *Research Approach*

The thesis is historical and does not seek, as its main contribution, to “prove” or “disprove” one particular international relations (IR) theory. The thesis' principal objective is to analyse Soviet foreign policy towards a specific group of countries, in terms of aims, policies and outcomes, in order to verify the propositions outlined above, and in the context of the new literature on the global dimension of the cold war. However, some basic concepts drawn from leading theoretical frameworks may be useful to define the objectives and methods of the research better, and situate it in current debates.

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### Neoclassical Realism<sup>31</sup>

As far as the analysis of foreign policy is concerned, this thesis broadly fits into the framework of “neoclassical realism”, which provides the most useful set of tools of analysis. Neoclassical realists fundamentally believe that ‘a country’s foreign policy is primarily formed by its place in the international system and in particular by its relative material power capabilities’, but at the same time argue that both ‘independent (systemic)’ and ‘intervening (domestic)’ variables shape policy.<sup>32</sup> This means that “preference formation” is taken into account, and therefore ideas are taken seriously as what initially determines aims and expectations. The view that policy stems from a combination of both internal and external factors, but is dependent on material capabilities for outcomes, informs the thesis’ argument of an initial ideas-driven Soviet engagement with West Africa that gradually turns into a security-based disengagement, as the main consequence of rising economic costs and an increased level of foreign involvement. The ideas and beliefs of the Soviet leadership (a domestic, “cognitive” variable) influenced their understanding of the balance of power through the conviction that the Soviet socialist economy was stronger than the Western capitalist system, thus causing the decision in favour of engagement with Ghana, Guinea and Mali. However, the USSR could not afford the large expenses

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<sup>31</sup> This short section is not intended as a thorough discussion of neoclassical realism, which is one of the most important strands in the field of IR theory, with an enormously rich literature. Some of the key texts, which by no means all expound views similar to those of this thesis, are: Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Randall L. Schweller, "Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing," *International Security* 29, no. 2 (2004); William Wholforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Walter Carlsnaes, "Foreign Policy," in *Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons (London: Sage, 2002), 336-37.

necessary to achieve modernisation in West Africa. Furthermore, the actual distribution of power capabilities (a systemic variable) was clearly in favour of the West. When this became manifest through American intervention in Congo, Moscow chose to avoid confrontation by removing resources from the area.

This certainly fits the neoclassical realists' view that a state's foreign policy in the long term is determined both by systemic and "domestic" variables, but that outcomes are heavily dependent on the relative position of a state in the international system.

The central empirical prediction of neoclassical realism is thus that over the long term the relative amount of material power resources countries possess will shape the magnitude and ambition – the envelope, as it were – of their foreign policies: as their relative power rises states will seek more influence abroad, and as it falls their actions and ambitions will be scaled back accordingly.<sup>33</sup>

The neoclassical realist approach will be especially useful to explain the long-term trends of Soviet policy in West Africa.

### Interpretative approach

Neoclassical realism is a useful framework of reference, as many of its tenets are useful analytical tools for the thesis. However, this thesis also supports the view that ideas did play a very important role in guiding Soviet policy, and therefore this particular dimension needs to be further explored, by employing a different approach. In particular, one of the principal aims of this thesis is showing the way in which socialist ideas influenced the decisions taken by the Soviet leadership, through

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<sup>33</sup>Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 151-52.

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determining their perception of the world. Therefore, the study of the decision making process is conducted through an “interpretative” approach that attempts to reconstruct the reasoning behind Soviet actions in West Africa. As Carlsnaes writes, ‘the focal point in studies of this kind are the *reasoned* – rather than rational – choices made by decision-makers.’<sup>34</sup> Following Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane, the aim of the thesis is not to explain the sources of the beliefs held by the Soviet leadership and whether or not they accurately described reality, but rather to study the effects that these beliefs had on decisions.<sup>35</sup> The existing literature and the evidence gathered suggest that the Soviet leadership held the strong belief that the USSR had created a superior model of economic development that could be replicated in other countries. One of the main aims of the thesis is to show how in the short and medium term this belief was the main drive behind Moscow’s policy towards Ghana, Guinea, and Mali.

The confidence in the socialist economic organisation was part of Soviet “ideology”. Thus, the notion of “ideology” is one of the key words of the thesis, which it is necessary to define more fully. The term itself refers to a system of ideas and beliefs held by individuals. In the case of this thesis, ideology refers to a core set of ideas held by the Soviet leadership collectively – obviously, with some degree of variation according to different personalities and experiences. In their seminal work on the impact of ideas in foreign policy, Goldstein and Keohane distinguish between three types of beliefs: ‘world views’, which ‘define the universe of possibilities for actions’, and include normative as well as cosmological, ontological and ethical views; ‘principled beliefs’, which consist of ‘normative ideas that specify criteria for distinguishing right from wrong and just from unjust’; and ‘causal beliefs’, which

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<sup>34</sup>Carlsnaes, "Foreign Policy," 341.

<sup>35</sup>Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, "Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework," in *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, ed. Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 7.

concern ‘the cause-effect relationships which derive authority from the shared consensus of recognized elites’. Crucially, causal beliefs ‘provide guides for individuals on how to achieve their objectives.’ Goldstein and Keohane write that ‘causal beliefs imply strategies for the attainment of goals, themselves valued because of shared principled beliefs, and understandable only within the context of broader world views.’<sup>36</sup> All three types were important for Soviet policy in general, but causal beliefs assumed a particular relevance with regard to the third world in the Khrushchev era.

Broadly speaking, Marxist-Leninists in the Soviet Union were convinced that socialism would prove to be the best possible system not only in the USSR, but also everywhere in the world. In principle, it was therefore “possible” and “just” to export socialism abroad: those were basic assumptions shared by the Soviet leadership, in terms of world view and principled beliefs as defined above. However, these ideas did not directly guide policy in the third world. In fact, during Stalin’s era it was believed that socialism had no chance of developing in “pre-industrial” societies, and therefore looking for possible allies in Africa, Asia or Latin America did not make any sense. When Khrushchev came to power this assumption was modified. Two elements contributed to this change. On one hand, the Soviet Union had transformed itself into an industrialised superpower from a backward agricultural society in the space of just one generation. On the other, many newly independent states looked at the USSR with admiration exactly for this reason: the USSR had succeeded in achieving rapid progress, which was what the majority of countries in the third world were looking for after independence. The Soviet planned economy gained widespread popularity because it was regarded as a successful model for quick modernization, as a positive

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 8-11.

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experience that could be repeated in Africa, Asia and Latin America.<sup>37</sup> It was precisely the discovery that the Soviet experience of modernisation was replicable abroad that changed the cause-effect relationship: during the Khrushchev era the application of the “socialist model of development” abroad was seen as a cause of “expansion” for the USSR, one of the key ideas of Marxism-Leninism. This “expansion”, however, differed from traditional territorial gains. Nigel Gould-Davis calls it ‘geoideological’<sup>38</sup> rather than geopolitical:

What distinguishes ideological states is the form that their expansion takes. Because their ultimate goal is not to increase their relative power in the international system but to transform its members, they do not seek primarily to expand their own territory – as traditional states do – but to replicate their domestic system.<sup>39</sup>

Soviet ideology was modified in order to ‘interpret the principles of Marxism-Leninism in the light of prevailing domestic and international conditions.’<sup>40</sup> The emergence of the third world was now a great opportunity for the Soviet Union to export its own economic model, and thus expand through a new means – the “socialist model of development”. The term “ideology” used in the thesis could then be defined as a specific “idea of modernity”, rooted in the confidence in the economic success of socialism.

### *Hypotheses*

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<sup>37</sup>David C. Engerman, "The Romance of Economic Development and New Histories of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 1 (2004): 31.

<sup>38</sup>Nigel Gould-Davies, "Rethinking the Role of Ideology in International Politics during the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, no. 1 (1999): 104.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 93.



The broad themes of research presented above can be divided in a number of specific “hypotheses” or “general propositions” that will be tested in the thesis. Hypotheses are grouped into two clusters, and each single hypothesis provides an “answer” to more than one research question.

H1 cluster: Ideology and the role of the “centre” in Soviet policy

This cluster of hypotheses concerns the way in which policy was formulated and the role of ideas. The first hypothesis (H1a) is that *ideological factors played a powerful role in shaping Soviet initial policy about West Africa*. The second hypothesis (H1b) is that *Soviet policy derived from a centre-focused approach*. That is to say that the initial stages of engagement were determined largely by beliefs and expectations at the centre – in Moscow – rather than conditions at the periphery – in West Africa. Hypotheses H1a and H1b provide an “answer” to research questions Q1a and Q2a.

This thesis will support the view that the “causal belief” in the “socialist model of development” had a primary importance in influencing policy (H1a). The relative strength of the USSR’s economy in the late 1950s meant that the Soviet model of development became attractive for the emerging countries of the third world. When some post-colonial regimes with a strong anti-Western connotation emerged in West Africa, this was enough to convince the Kremlin leadership of the opportunity to open up relations with them by proposing the socialist model of development and thus aiming to gain influence through socialist modernisation.

During the initial phase of Soviet engagement, the “periphery” (i.e. the West African states) came into play simply by offering the opportunity to “test” or apply the set of beliefs of the Soviet leadership, but local specificities were not relevant: the hypothesis is that *Moscow did not have a regional strategy for West Africa, but a*

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*global one* (H1c). According to the Soviet leaders, the same recipe for success in Ghana would have been equally effective in Indonesia or Iraq. This was not a regional strategy: involvement in West Africa was a consequence of the broader Soviet “expansion” in the third world, dictated by the conviction of possessing a superior model of economic development. What made Ghana, Guinea and Mali particularly attractive compared to other newly independent states that also received Soviet aid at the same time was the relative contribution that this aid could make to their economies. In West Africa the “socialist model of development” could be really fully exported, as Soviet aid rapidly became the prime (if not the only) source of funding and know-how for development projects in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali. West Africa, thus, represented a unique opportunity for Moscow because of the relative impact of Soviet aid.

### H2 cluster: A realist shift from “centre” to “periphery”

The second cluster of hypotheses is related to the evolution of Soviet policy. Hypothesis H2a is that *material factors gradually came to replace ideological ones as the main drivers of Soviet policy*. This meant that the Soviet focus on modernity and development in the third world was progressively substituted by more traditional considerations of security and cost-benefit – a “realist” shift. Hypothesis H2b is that *the “periphery” became progressively more important in shaping Moscow’s actions*. That is to say that events and developments in West Africa gradually became the cause of changes and shifts in Soviet thinking and actions. Finally, hypothesis H2c is that *the Soviet Union was less prone to take security risks when foreign involvement increased*. In other words, Western – and primarily American – policy played an important role in emboldening or restraining Soviet actions. All hypotheses in the H2

cluster contribute to providing an “answer” to Q1b and Q2b. H2b and H2c are also directly connected to Q2c and Q2d.

This thesis will argue that Moscow failed to complement its global strategy based on the attractiveness of the USSR’s development model with the complexity of economic cooperation and realities of “hard power” politics in Africa (H2a). By the early 1960s it became clear that modernising Ghana, Guinea, and Mali required heavy investments over a long period of time. This contradicted Moscow’s initial belief that the application of its model of development would quickly produce positive results, and therefore caused a reassessment of the costs and benefits of the current policy.

Furthermore, the Kremlin’s strategy was based on the idea that competition with the West in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali could be conducted as a clash between two models of development, which the USSR was destined to win given the superiority of the system of economic and social organisation that it was exporting. However, this belief was shattered by the development of the Congo crisis, when a radical African leadership, potentially receptive to adopt Moscow’s model, was swept away by the employment of traditional military means, in an intervention that Moscow saw as planned and executed with strong Western support. Faced by a stronger than expected Western “counteroffensive” in Africa, the USSR learned that the supposed superiority of its model of development was not enough to guarantee what they hoped to secure in terms of influence. The Congo crisis made painfully clear that the Soviet Union did not at the time possess sufficient capabilities to project power effectively in the region, and this power was a necessary pre-condition to spread the socialist model. If Moscow could not “defend” its allies in Africa from a Western-sponsored military offensive, then the vision of winning the newly independent countries to the socialist cause through a successful model of development lost most of its credibility. It was

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natural then that the Kremlin leadership decided to downsize significantly the amount of resources invested into West Africa, inevitably determining the loss of its existing clients.

The reduced readiness to expend resources in West Africa determined a structural change in Soviet policymaking, as the “periphery” became progressively more important in shaping Moscow’s actions (H2b). Whereas during the initial stage (1957-59) Soviet aims and actions stemmed directly from the leadership’s views, after 1960 the local context became progressively more important in guiding Moscow’s policies. Thus, from an initial “proactive” phase – when the USSR actively tried to establish diplomatic relations and economic cooperation with newly independent West African states – Soviet policies became increasingly more “reactive”, based on reactions to local developments outside of Moscow’s control.

This progressive shift to a security-focused Soviet policy, guided by local events rather than core beliefs was directly connected to external factors, i.e. foreign intervention (H2c). In general, Soviet policy always followed a restrained approach in relation to the activities of rival international actors. Moscow was willing to invest from the very beginning in Guinea and Mali – which had cut virtually all links to the West – but was more careful in Ghana, where there was strong British influence until the first half of 1960. Moreover, when the Americans intervened in Congo, Moscow – being aware of its relative strategic inferiority – rapidly reduced the commitment to its local allies, eventually determining their ultimate loss, which was however judged preferable to an open confrontation with the West with few chances of success. The Soviet Union was therefore a cautious actor, which reacted to opportunities because of ideas and beliefs, but backed off from possible risks because of security considerations – in short, the USSR wanted competition without conflict.

### *Sources*

One of the main limits of the existing literature on the relations between the Soviet Union and the third world is that, given that most accounts were written in the 1970s and 1980s, they are mostly based on published sources and the general press. The lack of primary sources meant that the assessment of several key events is not entirely consistent with the latest available documents, limited in number, but of significant nature.

The strong conviction that informs this thesis is that it is not possible to write international history without using international sources. For this reason, several different sets of primary sources from several different countries have been accessed and analysed, and constitute the “analytical backbone” of the thesis. Documents from Russian, Ghanaian, and British archives have been combined with published sources from the United States and from France to form the first truly transnational history of Soviet engagement with West Africa.

### Published documents

In recent years, several collections of documents from the Soviet era have appeared. The most important of them is the one edited by Prof Aleksandr Fursenko, of the Russian Academy of Sciences.<sup>41</sup> It contains the minutes of the highest decision-making organ in the Soviet Union, the Presidium (which would later be renamed Politburo) from 1954 up to 1964, basically covering the whole Khrushchev era. The importance of being able to access sources from the very top of Soviet decision-making is self-evident, and constitutes one of the main advantages of the present-day

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<sup>41</sup>Aleksandr A. Fursenko, ed. *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964: Chernovye Protokolnye Zapisi Zasedanii Stenogrammy Postanovleniya*, 3 vols., vol. 1, Arkhivy Kremlya (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004).

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researcher over older research works. Even though the collection edited by Fursenko contains very few documents directly connected to policy in West Africa, it remains a crucial resource to study the evolution over time of Moscow's policy towards the third world in general, which was instead often discussed at Presidium level.

Moreover, Apollon Davidson and Sergey Mazov edited in 2002 a collection of documents on the relations between the USSR and Africa, until 1960.<sup>42</sup> This is extremely useful as a first resource to obtain diplomatic documents (such as reports from embassies, consulates, and other agencies "on the ground") with regard to West Africa for the period up to the crisis in Congo. This collection provides a useful solution to the gaps in the availability of documents from the Russian archives.

Besides Soviet documents this thesis makes extensive use of published collections of American and French diplomatic documents, since there was no time or financial resources to visit archives in the US and in France. The use of the documents contained in the relevant volumes of *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) was especially useful to analyse the growing influence of the USA in guiding and coordinating Western responses to Soviet policy in West Africa. In particular, several documents in FRUS reveal how much the US was involved in the Congo crisis.

The *Documents Diplomatiques Francais* (DDF) is a collection of sources from different French agencies that dealt with foreign policy that was useful to analyse France's reaction to Soviet penetration in West Africa much in the same way as FRUS was used for the US. In particular, DDF contains important documents

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<sup>42</sup>Apollon B. Davidson, Sergey Mazov, and Georgiy Tsypkin, eds., *SSSR i Afrika, 1918-1960: dokumentirovannaia istoriia vzaimootnoshenii* (Moscow: IVI RAN, 2002).

concerning Paris' response to Soviet policy towards Guinea and Mali, which were French colonies before independence.

### Russian archives

Since the fall of the USSR in 1991 a large number of Soviet documents were declassified for scholarly research in several Russian archives. Unfortunately, many of the top-level sources have been successively re-classified, but archives in the Russian Federation remain the best source of material to research Soviet foreign policy.

Different actors participated to policy-making in the USSR, both from the Soviet Communist Party and from the Soviet state. Therefore, it was necessary to conduct research in more than one archive in order to obtain a complete overview on Soviet aims, expectations, policies and assessments. The *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii* (RGANI – Russian State Archive of Contemporary History; <http://www.rusarchives.ru/federal/rgani/>) ‘retains records created by the activities of the highest central organs of the CPSU [...] from 1952 to August 1991’. However, ‘a very large percentage of the files in RGANI are still classified, although the declassification procedure has been progressing’.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, this means that two of the most valuable collections – “fond 3”, which contains all the records from the CPSU Secretariat, and “fond 4”, which holds all the Presidium/Politburo files – are still classified and not open to researchers (they were open for a few years during the 1990s, and some of the documents have been published in the abovementioned collections). However, “fond 5”, which gathers all the materials produced by the

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<sup>43</sup>Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, "Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (RGANI)," International Institute of Social History. URL: <http://www.iisg.nl/~abb/rep/B-13.tab1.php?b=B.php%23B-13>

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CPSU Apparatus, is very vast and open for research. In this collections it is possible to access many documents produced by the CPSU Ideology Commission, which very often dealt with managing the relations with foreign parties and movements; some reports by the CPSU International Department; and also reports and communication sent to the CPSU central apparatus by several State agencies (including, for example, the KGB and the Ministry of Defence). Analysing the sources at RGANI was extremely useful to understand the importance of ideas and beliefs for Soviet African policy, as well as studying how the higher echelons of the Soviet Communist Party took decisions.

The other Russian archive used is the *Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (AVP RF – *Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*; <http://www.mid.ru/ns-arch.nsf/>). It retains all records produced by the Soviet Foreign Ministry (MID), and by its embassies and consulates around the world. As a rule, ‘researchers normally do not have access to any documents less than thirty years old. As of spring 2003, apparently declassification is not proceeding, and MID does not intend to open research in what authorities view as a relatively closed agency archive’.<sup>44</sup> For this thesis the prime resource at AVP RF was the whole “fond 573”, which contains all the documents related to Soviet-Ghana relations since 1957. Most of the materials have been produced by the Soviet Embassy in Accra or by the Second African Department of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs (responsible for Sub-Saharan Africa) in Moscow. In the same “fond” there are also original documents produced by various Ghanaian state agencies, as well as reports and bulletins from different Soviet sources – for example the *Pravda* correspondent in Accra, the Soviet

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<sup>44</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, "Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (AVP RF)," International Institute of Social History. URL: <http://www.iisg.nl/~abb/rep/C-2.tab1.php?b=C.php%23C-2>



Ministry of Foreign Trade and the Soviet Academy of Sciences. All the materials in AVP RF were useful to study the evolution of Soviet policies, and their actual implementation “on the ground”. Moreover, analysing sources produced by the MID made it possible to take into account the perspective of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which often differed from the assessment of the same situation that came from the CPSU.

Unfortunately, other archives that are likely to contain important documents are still inaccessible, including the Presidential Archive and the former KGB archive, now under the responsibility of the FSB. Besides these two, the most useful other Russian archive would be the *Tsentralnyi Arkhiv Ministerstva Oborony RF (TsAMO – Central Archive of the Ministry of Defence; <http://old.mil.ru/articles/article6276.shtml>)*, which retains all records of the Soviet Army from 1941 onwards, and could be an incredibly useful resource to study Soviet military planning during the Congo crisis. However, ‘access remains highly restricted for most researchers, and especially foreigners, since the holdings are considered to contain political and military secrets, and many of them have not been adequately processed for public research.’<sup>45</sup>

#### British and Ghanaian archives

Both British and Ghanaian archives represent a crucial resource for the thesis. The United Kingdom National Archives ([www.nationalarchive.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchive.gov.uk)) hold a rich collection of documents about Soviet penetration in Africa, especially in the Western region, considering London’s colonial interest in the Gold Coast/Ghana. British

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<sup>45</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, "Tsentralnyi Arkhiv Ministerstva Oborony RF (TsAMO)," International Institute of Social History. URL: <http://www.iisg.nl/~abb/rep/C-4.tab1.php?b=C.php%23C-4>

## Introduction

documents offer an interesting perspective to analyse Soviet policies from the point of view of a rival power, and highlight the often-tight connection between British commercial interests and British policy in Ghana.

The Public Records and Archive Administration of Ghana ([www.praad.gov.gh](http://www.praad.gov.gh)), which has been recently re-organized and is now fully integrated with the international archival community managed by UNESCO, is an extremely useful and underused resource to study the cold war in Africa. The main collections of documents used are the private papers and correspondence (including diplomatic exchanges) of Kwame Nkrumah, the Cabinet papers and Cabinet agenda, and several documents prepared by the Ghanaian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ghanaian documents were especially important to explore local reactions to Soviet policy, to show the growing importance of local events in shaping Soviet policy, and to reveal the extent to which the Western powers were able to exercise pressure in Accra. In particular, Ghanaian documents do not corroborate the claim made by some of the existing literature that African elites rejected Soviet economic cooperation.

### Memoirs

In recent years a great number of memoirs from the cold war era have appeared, both by Soviet and Western scholars. Nonetheless, the amount of material directly connected to Soviet policy in West Africa is relatively limited. Khrushchev, Mikoyan, Molotov, Shepilov, and Gromyko all wrote memoirs about their years as top Soviet leaders, which have all been used in this thesis.<sup>46</sup> Although useful to shed light on the

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<sup>46</sup> Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, ed. Edward Crankshaw, trans. Strobe Talbott (London: Andre Deutsch, 1971); Anastas I. Mikoyan, *Tak bylo: razmyshleniia o minushem* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1999); Vyacheslav M. Molotov, *Molotov Remembers. Inside Kremlin Politics. Conversations with Felix Chuev*, ed. Albert Resis (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993); Dmitrii Shepilov, *The Kremlin's Scholar*.

internal dynamics of the higher echelons of Soviet powers, including internal rivalries, the scope of this work is too broad to contain anything too specific about policy towards West Africa.

Following Khrushchev's rise to power, the CPSU recruited in its ranks several promising young academics, such as Karen Brutents, Anatoly Chernyaev and Georgy Arbatov, who would go on to make an important career in the Party, and left memoirs with detailed recollections of their experiences.<sup>47</sup> However, none of them dealt with policy towards West Africa during the Khrushchev era. Brutents, whose memoir is one of the best sources of information about Soviet policy on the third world, began his work for the International Department of the CPSU only in 1961, and was initially not involved in policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa. His lucid recollections provide a very useful insight into the organisation and thinking of the CPSU, but unfortunately do not offer much information about Soviet policy in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali in the 1950s and 1960s.

Memoirs by Western officers involved in African affairs at the time represent at the same time a resource and a problem. The books by William Attwood, the first US Ambassador to Guinea, and Larry Devlin, a CIA operative who was in Leopoldville at the time of the Congo crisis, are widely quoted and provide colourful recollections of the authors' experiences in Africa.<sup>48</sup> However, their reliability is questionable. Attwood quickly grasped the difficulty of turning Guinea into a modern

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*A Memoir of Soviet Politics under Stalin and Khrushchev*, ed. Stephen V. Bittner, trans. Anthony Austin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Andrey A. Gromyko, *Memories*, trans. Harold Shukman (London: Hutchinson, 1989).

<sup>47</sup> Karen N. Brutents, *Tritsat Let na Staroi Ploshadi* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1998). Georgy Arbatov, *The System: An Insider's Life in Soviet Politics* (New York: Times Books, 1992); Anatoly S. Chernyaev, *Moia zhizn i moie vremia* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodniie otnosheniia, 1995).

<sup>48</sup> William Attwood, *The Reds and the Blacks: A Personal Adventure* (London: Hutchinson, 1967); Larry Devlin, *Chief of Station, Congo: A Memoir of 1960-67* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2007).

## Introduction

state and described with great detail the wastes and inefficiencies of Soviet economic cooperation with Guinea. However, he gives an anecdotal description without providing much information about the dynamics of Soviet-Guinean cooperation, or even of American responses. For this reason, declassified documents from the US archives seem to offer a preferable alternative to relying on Attwood's account.

The case of Devlin is more complex and controversial. He claims to have been entrusted by the CIA with murdering Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba – an order he apparently decided to disobey – and then stayed on in Congo as the most important CIA agent in the country. However, Devlin's recollections are not corroborated by primary evidence, which remains very scarce on the Congo crisis. As in the case of Attwood's book, a choice has been made to limit the use of Devlin's memoir and rely instead on declassified documents.

### *Structure of the thesis*

This section will present the structure of the thesis, which is organised in three "parts" dedicated to three different phases or stages of Soviet policy towards West Africa. Each phase was different from the other in relation to Soviet aims, the policies that were implemented, and the relative importance of external factors in determining the Soviet response to local events.

Chapter 1 will examine the domestic context of Soviet foreign policy during the Khrushchev era. Particular attention will be given to explaining the impact that the Khrushchev's rise to power had in changing Soviet ideas and beliefs about the third world. The chapter will also provide a brief overview of the main institutional actors that participated to the policy-making process.

Chapter 2 will look at the development of Soviet foreign policy towards the third world between 1953 and 1956. It will be useful to “set the scene” and understand the general context of Moscow’s policy before engagement with West Africa.

Chapters 3 to 5 (Part I) will analyse the period from Ghanaian independence in 1957 to the launch of the development assistance programme in Guinea in 1959. The chapters will show how the main drive of Soviet policy was the “ideological” conviction that the kind of modernisation the USSR could offer to Ghana and Guinea was superior to anything that the West could propose. The initiative was largely in Moscow’s hands: the USSR pushed for the establishment of formal diplomatic relations with the newly independent states, and aimed at developing economic cooperation with them. During this period, the Kremlin leadership acted with the goal of radically modernising West African societies to make them a concrete example of the advantages of socialist development, evident to other newly independent states with similar needs. The main instruments of Moscow’s policy were development aid and trade agreements, which carried unfavourable terms for the Soviet Union as they were designed to be attractive to countries deprived of strategic or material resources. In this phase, Western countries were seen by Moscow as the proponents of a rival, but less effective, development model.

Chapters 6 to 8 (Part II) will focus on the crucial 1960-61 period. During these years Soviet policy was complicated by the emergence of difficulties in managing the cooperation programmes in West Africa, and by the outbreak of the Congo crisis. West African elites perceived the clashes between a radical ruling elite and Western-sponsored separatists in Congo as revealing undesirable and dangerous foreign interference into African affairs, and turned to the Soviet Union for military support.

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The USSR was interested in Congo as a possible area of expansion for its development model, but did not possess the practical means to make a difference in the armed struggle: the crisis was a matter of projecting military power, which Moscow was unable to do. Neither the “socialist model of development” nor token gestures such as support in official declarations and at the UN could have any practical impact in favour of the side the Soviet Union was backing. From economic competitors, the Western powers had become military opponents, whose effort rapidly ended any Soviet hope of favourably influencing the development of the Congo crisis.

Chapters 9 and 10 will describe the Soviet withdrawal from West Africa following the negative conclusion of the Congo crisis and the rising costs of economic cooperation with Ghana, Guinea, and Mali. Once the Congo crisis was over, the conclusion in Moscow was that the West possessed sufficient capabilities and had the willingness to overthrow Soviet allies in Africa that were in principle interested in applying the “socialist model of development”. Therefore, the concrete possibilities of expanding the model beyond Ghana, Guinea, and Mali were extremely limited, and did not justify the high expenses the USSR was bearing in West Africa. As a consequence, confidence in the socialist model of development as the prime tool of policy was shattered, and the idea of modernisation disappeared from the Soviet discourse on West Africa. Hence, a long process of disengagement from Ghana, Guinea, and Mali began. By 1964, the region was completely marginal to Soviet policy.

## **Chapter 1 – The Domestic Context of Soviet Foreign Policy under Khrushchev**

This chapter is dedicated to the domestic context of Soviet foreign policy. In trying to understand why the Kremlin decided to become involved in the third world in general and specifically in West Africa, it is crucial to provide an introduction to the broader context of Soviet foreign policy making, and to the changes and innovations brought about in the mid-1950s by Khrushchev's leadership. This is useful to explain both the decision-making context, but also to address some of the implications of the contention that ideology and the centre-focused approaches explain Soviet behaviour.

This chapter will first briefly analyse Khrushchev's rise to power, and the impact that his ideas had on the developing of a policy towards the third world after Stalin. Then, it will focus on the contribution of the main institutions that participated in the policy-making process, providing a brief explanation of their tasks and their beliefs, together with some background information, where this exists, on their top officials. This section will deal with the main bodies that participated in the making of foreign policy: the Presidium, the International Department of the CPSU, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the KGB, and the economic agencies of the USSR.

### *Khrushchev's rise to power and the role of ideology*

#### Power struggle

Stalin died on 5 March 1953. Immediately after his death, a power struggle ensued between the top Soviet officials who aspired to the leadership of the country. Initially, the two leaders who seemed most likely to succeed Stalin were Lavrenty Beria, the

head of the NKVD who later became Minister of Internal Affairs, and Georgy Malenkov, Soviet Premier after Stalin's death. Both men were highly sceptical of the established Marxist-Leninist ideology that saw conflict with the capitalist countries as unavoidable. Beria despised Party ideologues and cadres, trusting only the rule of terror and his instinct for survival. Malenkov, on the other hand, was more prudent, a product of Soviet 'technocracy' who was, however, equally doubtful about the merits of following Soviet ideology and believed it was necessary to assume a less aggressive stance.<sup>49</sup> As soon as Stalin was buried, the two leaders began to send conciliatory signals to the West, and to the USA in particular, thus hoping to achieve a relaxation of tension and possibly a rapprochement. Even though the Western powers were uncertain about the value and meaning of these moves, they certainly did not go down well with part of the Soviet leadership.<sup>50</sup>

Beria's and Malenkov's principal opponent was at the time Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, who had been demoted by Stalin but regained control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after 1953. Molotov's vision of the cold war was diametrically opposite to the other leaders' ideas: he was a "true believer" in revolutionary ideology, fiercely in disagreement with any proposals that hinted at mutual understanding with the West.<sup>51</sup>

All Soviet leaders feared Beria's ruthless methods and thirst for power, and agreed to join forces in order to get rid of him. This coalition was largely inspired by Nikita Khrushchev, at the time scarcely known and whom the others had left heading

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<sup>49</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*: 142-43.

<sup>50</sup> United Kingdom National Archives (henceforth, UKNA), FO371/106524.

<sup>51</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*: 78-86.



the Party apparatus. Beria was thus arrested during a meeting of the Presidium and, after some time in prison, executed as an 'enemy of the people'.<sup>52</sup>

The end of Beria meant that three Presidium leaders – Malenkov, Molotov and Khrushchev – collectively inherited Stalin's role. Their alliance, however, did not last, as they disagreed on a wide range of positions and ideas. Theoretically, Malenkov should have been in a privileged position, being the leader with the most important responsibilities. In fact, his power was on the wane, to the advantage of Khrushchev. Between late 1953 and 1954 Malenkov again started to send conciliatory signals to the West, as he had already done before in collaboration with Beria. First he declared that 'there is no objective ground for a collision between the United States and the USSR'<sup>53</sup> and then he denounced the dangers of nuclear warfare, which 'would mean the destruction of world civilization.'<sup>54</sup>

Khrushchev, depicted by contemporary Western assessment as a dogmatic ideologue,<sup>55</sup> was quick to exploit these deviations from ideological orthodoxy to his advantage. With the support of the ultra-conservative Molotov, he accused Malenkov of incompetence and deviationism in economic matters (for preferring light to heavy industry, for example) and declared that Malenkov's 'assumption' on the danger of nuclear war 'was theoretically incorrect and it did not work to the benefit of our party.' Khrushchev told his Presidium colleagues that Malenkov 'lacks character and backbone' and that, when confronted by a skilled Western leader such as Churchill, 'Malenkov would get frightened and surrender'.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> For a detailed account see Taubman, *Khrushchev*: 244-55.

<sup>53</sup> , *Izvestiia*, 9 August 1953. Cited in Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*: 164.

<sup>54</sup> , *Pravda*, 13 March 1954.

<sup>55</sup> UKNA, FO371/111675 NS1018/14.

<sup>56</sup> TsKhSD (*Tsentr Khraneniya Sovremennoi Dokumentatsii*, Centre for the Preservation of Contemporary Documents. Renamed RGANI in 1999), fond 2, opis 1,

At a Presidium meeting on 8 February 1955, Malenkov was forced to resign, the decision being approved unanimously, and Khrushchev took the post of First Secretary of the TsK, while Marshal Nikolai Bulganin became premier.<sup>57</sup> Malenkov had underestimated Khrushchev's role as head of the CPSU apparatus, which constituted the base of support for his successful bid for power, and members of which Malenkov had alienated with his ideological tinkering. Western analysts reported that Malenkov's demise could be seen as the triumph of a more 'left-wing' ideology in the CPSU, meaning a return to exalting 'revolution', and the exploitation of contradictions in the imperialist camp.<sup>58</sup>

With Beria and Malenkov out of the game, Molotov represented the only remaining opposition for Khrushchev, especially as far as the future direction of foreign policy was concerned. Khrushchev had successfully countered the progressive overtures of Beria and Malenkov by siding with the conservative Molotov, but his ideas about the role of the Soviet Union were fundamentally different. Whereas Molotov believed in continuing the confrontation with the West and focusing on traditional Soviet priorities, Khrushchev in fact shared at least in part Beria's desire to adopt a more conciliatory stance towards the capitalist bloc and Malenkov's fear of nuclear catastrophe.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, Khrushchev started to consider the possibility of implementing a bolder foreign policy.

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delo 127. Available in Nikita S. Khrushchev and Vyacheslav M. Molotov, "Central Committee Plenum of the CPSU Ninth Session. 31 January 1955," in *Soviet Foreign Policy* (Cold War International History Project).

<sup>57</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*: 15-21. The minutes of the meeting are available on Nikita S. Khrushchev, Georgy M. Malenkov, and Kliment E. Voroshilov, "Transcript of a meeting of the Party group of the USSR Supreme Soviet on 8 February 1955," in *The Nikita Khrushchev Papers* (Cold War International History Project).

<sup>58</sup> UKNA, FO371/116642 NS1018/7.

<sup>59</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*: 182-88.

The notion of “peaceful coexistence”

Khrushchev was convinced that Stalin had badly mishandled foreign affairs, generating the standoff with the Western powers, and as a result the USSR was suffering politically and also economically, because of the huge amount of resources directed to the defence sector. He also believed that it was possible, and that indeed it was his duty, to change the direction of Soviet foreign policy, bringing about some sort of mutual understanding with the USA, so to guarantee peace and thence the possibility for the Socialist countries to seek economic prosperity.<sup>60</sup>

This new approach culminated in the XX Congress of the CPSU, in February 1956, with the introduction of the notion of “peaceful coexistence”. This meant ‘the rejection of the “inevitability of global war” and of the violent revolutionary transition between the opposite social systems capitalism and socialism.’<sup>61</sup> As Margot Light writes, Khrushchev could hardly claim originality for the development of peaceful coexistence, a concept formulated by Lenin himself. In his report to the congress, the new Soviet leader actually insisted that peaceful coexistence had always been the line of conduct of Soviet foreign policy, and that this continued to be a fundamental principle for the USSR.<sup>62</sup>

From its very inception the Soviet state proclaimed peaceful coexistence as the basic principle of its foreign policy. It was no accident that the very first act of the Soviet power was the decree on peace, the decree on the cessation of the bloody war.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*: 22-25; Zubok, *A Failed Empire*: 101-05.

<sup>61</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*: 184.

<sup>62</sup> Margot Light, *The Soviet Theory of International Relations* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1988), 47.

<sup>63</sup> Nikita S. Khrushchev, "On Peaceful Coexistence," *Foreign Affairs* 38, no. 1 (1959): 3.

Theoretically, peaceful coexistence meant respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and, finally, the rejection of war as a means of settling international disputes.<sup>64</sup> More practically, the search for a less confrontational stance vis-à-vis the United States was also a consequence of a sentiment of insecurity and inferiority towards the opponent. The British viewed the introduction of peaceful coexistence as a reaction to Moscow's knowledge of its being the only socialist state, 'weak and encircled by enemies'.<sup>65</sup>

However, renouncing war did not mean renouncing the ideological struggle with the West. Khrushchev expressed this point clearly:

We Communists, we Marxists-Leninists, believe that progress is on our side and victory will inevitably be ours. Yet the capitalists won't give an inch and still swear to fight to the bitter end. Therefore, how can we talk of peaceful coexistence with capitalist ideology? Peaceful coexistence among different systems of government is possible, but peaceful coexistence among different ideologies is not. It would be a betrayal of our Party's first principles to believe that there can be peaceful coexistence between Marxists-Leninist ideology on the one hand and bourgeois ideology on the other.<sup>66</sup>

As British Ambassador to Moscow William Hayter wrote to Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, 'neither of them [i.e. Khrushchev and Bulganin] are messianic or in hurry to establish world communism. They are intelligent enough to want international

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<sup>64</sup> These principles are often collectively referred to as *Pancha Shila*, a term borrowed from Buddhism. They were first associated to international relations during the Indian-Chinese talks in 1954, and later at the Bandung conference (1955) by Zhou Enlai.

<sup>65</sup> UKNA, FO371/106540.

<sup>66</sup> Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*: 512.

peace and to realise that a price must be paid for it. But fundamentally they remain convinced communists and believers in the necessity for world communism.<sup>67</sup>

### The role of the third world

Khrushchev hoped to expand socialism beyond the USSR and Eastern Europe, but using means other than war. The third world was going to be an integral part of this new approach. When in India on an official visit in 1955, Khrushchev made his intentions clear: “Let us verify in practice whose system is better, [...] We say to the leaders of the capitalist states: let us compete without war.”<sup>68</sup> What he meant was to ‘demonstrate that Soviet policy stemmed from the noble principles of “fraternal solidarity and internationalism”, in contrast with the colonial powers of the West.’<sup>69</sup>

Khrushchev believed that socialism was the best possible system to organise society and production, and that it was soon going to replace liberal capitalism. He had great trust in the achievements of the Soviet Union, and he was convinced that these could be repeated in other countries, and that Moscow could act as a model and inspiration for the rest of the world.

Over the years the Soviet Union has gained great prestige in the eyes of all people who fight for peace, progress, and liberation from colonialism. The goal of our foreign policy hasn't been to enrich our own state at the expense of other states; we have never believed in the exploitation of man by man, of state by state. On the contrary, both by our stated policies and by our deeds we have encouraged countries not only with our counsel and by the example we have set, but we have also given them gratuitous material aid or sold them goods and equipment at reduced prices. Our foreign policy is rooted in our

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<sup>67</sup> UKNA, FO371/116652 NS1021/38.

<sup>68</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*: 57.

<sup>69</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*: 172.

conviction that the way pointed out to us by Lenin is the way of the future not only for the Soviet Union, but for all countries and all peoples of the world.<sup>70</sup>

Khrushchev wanted to confront the West in terms of the kind of progress and modernity their respective social systems could bring about. The point was not to defeat the West on the battlefield, but instead to better it in terms of living standards and technological achievements. Khrushchev ‘counted on the ability of Soviet foreign policy to generate “soft power”:<sup>71</sup> a reputation as a peace-loving country, friendly to small nations, generous to friends, eager to set disputes with opponents.’<sup>72</sup>

Khrushchev’s “romanticism” was boosted by the atmosphere of the mid-1950s, when a growing number of countries in Africa and Asia were becoming independent and were eager to achieve modernity and economic development. He thought that the Soviet experience of rapid modernisation would constitute a perfect example that the newly independent countries would want to imitate. In Pleshakov and Zubok’s judgement, Khrushchev suffered from a ‘leftist disease’ that caused an emotional attachment towards third world nationalists.<sup>73</sup> However, there is no reason to assume that others in the Soviet leadership did not share Khrushchev’s feelings. After all, during the second wave of decolonisation after WWII, Africa and Asia seemed to offer the best opportunities for the expansion of socialism abroad.

The Soviet Union was thus ready to launch a policy of major opening towards the third world. Moscow’s engagement with West Africa between 1957 and 1964 would represent a prime example of this policy. Before turning to the analysis of

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<sup>70</sup> Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*: 507.

<sup>71</sup> ‘Soft power’ is the ability to obtain what you want through co-option and attraction rather than the ‘hard power’ of coercion or payment. The concept was introduced in Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: the Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

<sup>72</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*: 185.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 206-09.

Soviet foreign policy in chapter 2, the next sections will provide a brief overview of the policy-making process in the USSR, as well as developing the role of ideas and beliefs.

### *Ideology and Policy Making in the USSR*

#### Bureaucratic politics and the Soviet system

Although the Soviet Union was a highly centralized authoritarian state, the making of foreign policy was not one-dimensional, for different agencies and institutions participated in it as important players. Mark Kramer writes that ‘ultimately, the top Soviet leader and his closest aides decide the course of Soviet foreign policy. Before decisions reach the highest level, however, a number of party and state organisations have a crucial role in gathering information, framing the terms of the debate, influencing top officials, and running day to day affairs.’<sup>74</sup>

Seweryn Bialer argues that ‘the domestic factors shaping Soviet foreign policy can be summarized succinctly as capabilities, politics, and beliefs.’<sup>75</sup> This section deals primarily with the last two factors, whereas capabilities (economic and technical development, military strength, etc.) will be treated more thoroughly in the empirical chapters – although reference will be made to the economic situation of the USSR. According to Bialer,

The second group of factors (politics) is concerned with the institutions and process of Soviet foreign policymaking; with the nature and quality of the information inputs that go into the process; with the

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<sup>74</sup> Mark Kramer, "The Role of the CPSU International Department in Soviet Foreign Relations and National Security Policy," *Soviet Studies* 42, no. 3 (1990): 429.

<sup>75</sup> Seweryn Bialer, "Soviet Foreign Policy: Sources, Perceptions, Trends," in *The Domestic Context of Soviet Foreign Policy*, ed. Seweryn Bialer, *Studies of the Research Institute on the International Change, Columbia University* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 409-10.

power and personality of the key actors who participate into this process; [...] with the identification of the agenda of foreign policymaking and the changing orders of priority on the agenda; and with the more or less pronounced divisions within the Soviet leadership and elites regarding the main foreign policy line as well as separate foreign policy issues.<sup>76</sup>

Following Bialer's classification, this section will analyse Soviet foreign policy, and in particular the birth of a "strategy" for the third world. This section emphasises the importance of domestic structures as explanatory variables which help to explain foreign policy outcomes.

The Soviet system was centred on the CPSU, not simply as party, but the supreme authority in Soviet political life and the official "keeper" of Soviet ideology. The 'formulation' of foreign policy (and policy in general) belonged to the Party and its bodies, whereas only the 'execution' of the same policy rested with the state apparatus (the Council of Ministers, and more specifically every single Ministry).<sup>77</sup> The CPSU's leading body was its Central Committee (TsK – *Tsentralny Komitet*), whose executive sub-group, the Presidium, gathered together all the top Soviet leaders and took the most important decisions in all spheres of Soviet life. The Party itself was equipped with various specialized agencies ("departments" and "commissions") whose tasks often overlapped with the established government-level actors.<sup>78</sup>

It has been suggested that the study of the relationships between these agencies, which often resembled a "struggle for power", was the key to an explanation of Soviet decision-making. In particular, Graham Allison and Morton

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 410.

<sup>77</sup> Vernon V. Aspaturian, "The Administration and Execution of Soviet Foreign Policy," in *Process and Power in Soviet Foreign Policy*, ed. Vernon V. Aspaturian (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 589.

<sup>78</sup> For a more general discussion of the CPSU's organisation and role in Soviet politics and society, see Richard Sakwa, *Soviet Politics in Perspective*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1998), 89-119, 49-69.



Alperin introduced a model to explain the behaviour of 'modern governments in industrialized states' (including the Soviet Union) that focused on the role of organisations in the decision-making process. Different organisations (or 'bureaucracies', as the authors call them) participate in the process and can heavily influence outcomes (for example, foreign policy decision) through determining what information is available to the 'key players' (the Presidium in the case of the USSR).<sup>79</sup> Rather than tracing back every outcome to the decision of a rational single agent, Allison and Halperin believe that the process is more complex and dominated by the interaction between different "bureaucracies", each with a specific task (from gathering information to technical consultation and the actual carrying out of the policies). These 'junior player', although they usually do not have as much decisional power as the 'key players', will try to exercise pressure in order to shape the final decision to their own advantage.

The role of bureaucratic clashes as the single most important variable for the definition of Soviet policy has been criticised. Karen Dawisha questions the utility of the 'Bureaucratic Politics Model', arguing instead that CPSU membership was transversal across agencies and therefore counted more than organisational affiliation. According to her reconstruction, the struggles inside the Soviet system were due to ideological differences and personal resentments, rather than the desire of distinct institutions to improve their position in Soviet political life and increase their resources. However, Dawisha still maintains that 'there have certainly been many cases when Soviet foreign policy has been the result of "conflict, compromise and

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<sup>79</sup> Graham T. Allison and Morton H. Halperin, "Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications," in *Theory and Policy in International Relations*, ed. Raymond Tanter and Richard H. Ullman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 40-80.

confusion” between top officials with diverse interests and unequal influence.<sup>80</sup> Crucially, she identifies one of these cases with ‘the dispute between Khrushchev and Foreign Minister Molotov over Soviet policy towards the growing group of non-aligned states.’<sup>81</sup> In Vernon Aspaturian’s words, ‘these factional conflicts arise because a symbiotic relationship becomes established between the interests of certain individual leaders and the interests of certain elites.’<sup>82</sup> This was particularly evident during the early Khrushchev era, when some institutions or groups in mutual competition were tightly connected to a leader: Khrushchev’s Party apparatus, Vyacheslav Molotov’s – and later Andrei Gromyko’s – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Boris Ponomarev’s International Department, Aleksandr Shelepin’s KGB. Personal rivalries and diverse interpretations of Marxism-Leninism made agencies and institutions tools in a struggle between some Kremlin leaders.

#### A common ideological background

However, beyond their personal rivalries, Soviet leaders shared, at least in part, a common “ideological background” in general which largely coincided with Khrushchev’s ideas. After all, the other Presidium leaders were also products of the Soviet system of beliefs.

Following George Breslauer, it is possible to define the shared Soviet ideology in foreign policy as ‘four-dimensional’ because there were four basic ‘principles’ that defined the Soviet view of international relations. First of all, there was a

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<sup>80</sup> Karen Dawisha, "The Limits of the Bureaucratic Politics Model: Observations on the Soviet Case," *Studies in Comparative Communism* XIII, no. 4 (1980): 303.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>82</sup> Vernon V. Aspaturian, "Internal Politics and Foreign Policy in the Soviet System," in *Process and Power in Soviet Foreign Policy*, ed. Vernon V. Aspaturian (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 523.

(1) 'normative commitment' towards the realization of an end-state. This final goal was making the world safe for socialism, which meant maintaining Soviet power, as well as supporting anti-imperialist forces abroad.

(2) Then, there was a set of 'philosophical assumptions' that influenced Soviet strategy. Given that 'history' was on the side of socialism, 'conflict, war and change would be the normal conditions of international politics' until the final, inevitable victory of the socialist system. Moreover, Soviet

(3) 'empirical beliefs' about the nature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century dictated that imperialism was in crisis, but still dangerous and confrontational; that the struggle with the Western world was a 'zero-sum' game; and that capitalism's inner contradictions would have prevented the West from securing the support of third world countries, therefore preventing them from 'turning back the clock of history'. Finally,

(4) 'strategic prescriptions' were extremely ambiguous. In order to advance socialism, Soviet leaders should have seized every possible opportunity, but, at the same time, it was necessary to keep away from adventurism and calculate risks, so to avoid putting the whole socialist system in danger.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, the idea of exporting the socialist system in the third world was, at least in theory, attractive for most of the Soviet leadership. However, this was valid as long as Soviet policies did not risk initiating a war with the Western powers that could have potentially threatened the very existence of the Soviet Union. The next section will examine how each single institutional actor contributed to shaping policy in the USSR.

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<sup>83</sup> George W. Breslauer, "Ideology and Learning in Soviet Third World Policy," *World Politics* 39, no. 3 (1987): 430-32.

*Institutional Actors, Leadership, and Foreign Policy*

The CPSU and the Soviet state both contributed to the definition of the USSR's foreign policy. In general, the Party traditionally had a leading role, and therefore determined the general line of foreign policy, in terms of core aims and interests. The state apparatus, therefore, largely executed what the Party decided. This section will give a brief overview of the main institutional actors in the CPSU (the Presidium and the TsK sub-committee that dealt with foreign policy) and in the Soviet state (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the KGB, and the economic agencies of the USSR that dealt with trade and foreign aid).

The Presidium

The Politburo of the Central Commission of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which between 1952 and 1966 was known as the "Presidium", was the highest policy-making committee and governing body of the CPSU, and therefore of the whole Soviet system.

The Presidium was the most important authority of Soviet political life. Every important question was discussed at Presidium level, which took the most crucial decisions in domestic as well as foreign policy. A CPSU Central Committee member became a Presidium member through a vote by the existing Presidium members. Since the Presidium was technically part of the Central Committee, its head was the First Secretary of the TsK. The First Secretary was since Stalin's times the most powerful Soviet leader. Khrushchev occupied the post of First Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee from September 1953 until October 1964.

The number of Soviet leaders who were members of the Presidium (or Politburo, as it would again be called after 1966) was never constant. However,

during the Khrushchev era there were always approximately 15 members, divided into “full” members – who enjoyed voting rights and were therefore directly involved in the decision-making process – and “candidate” members – who were allowed to participate in the discussions, but could not vote. Obviously, all the most prominent Soviet leaders were part of the Presidium.<sup>84</sup>

Between 1953 and 1964 the Presidium was formed by a varied group of members, who came from different backgrounds and consequently had diverging opinions over the conduct of Soviet foreign policy. Members such as Molotov, Kliment Voroshilov, and Lazar Kaganovich believed in principle in the opportunity to export socialism abroad, but disagreed with Khrushchev on the feasibility of “peaceful coexistence”. They thought that there could be no relaxation in the revolutionary struggle against the West, and therefore were not convinced by Khrushchev’s idea of competition in the economic sphere alone. In 1957, together with Malenkov and Dmitry Shepilov, they organised a plot to remove Khrushchev from power, but failed (the so-called “Anti-Party group”). As a consequence, they were expelled from the CPSU and their influence in Soviet politics waned, meaning that after 1957 none of them was able to hinder Khrushchev’s policy of opening towards the third world.<sup>85</sup>

Other Presidium leaders, however, shared Khrushchev’s enthusiasm for the third world. Anastas Mikoyan, in particular, was especially active in discussing

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<sup>84</sup> Jerry F. Hough and Merle Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union is Governed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 455-79.

<sup>85</sup> For more details on the “Anti-party” attempted coup and on the leaders who took part in it see: Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*: 191, 97; N.V. Kovaleva, ed. *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich. 1957: stenogramma iyun'skogo plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty*, Rossiya. XX Vek. Dokumenty (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1998). Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*: 191, 97; Zubok, *A Failed Empire*: 119-20. More information on Molotov and Shepilov will be presented in the next section.

foreign policy. He was a strong believer in supporting national liberation movements and radical regimes in the third world, and his opinion was generally highly regarded by Khrushchev.<sup>86</sup> Mikhail Suslov, instead, was considered the leading “ideologue” in the Presidium. He was a “rigid” believer in Marxism-Leninism and therefore he appreciated Khrushchev’s search for a more active foreign policy, and at the same time despised his deviations from orthodoxy. Suslov was initially favourable to an opening towards Asia and Africa, but successively grew weary of Khrushchev’s inconsistent and expensive policies.<sup>87</sup>

In spite of rivalries and differences, First Secretary Khrushchev enjoyed the support of the rest of the Presidium. Especially after the failed coup in 1957, he was unquestionably the leading figure behind the USSR’s foreign and domestic policy – although the opinions of other top Kremlin leaders were taken into account.

### The International Department

The International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU (*Mezhdunarodny Otdel TsK KPSS – MO*) was the direct heir of the *Comintern*. Its main task was to manage relations with Communist parties and revolutionary movements worldwide.<sup>88</sup>

However, as long as Stalin was alive, the International Department had relatively little power and influence over foreign policy. Stalin’s death in 1953 and Khrushchev’s advance to power changed the importance of the MO, as it emerges

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<sup>86</sup> Mikoyan, *Tak bylo: razmyshleniia o minushem*. M.Yu. Pavlov, *Mikoyan: Politicheski Portret na Fone Sovetskoi Epokhi* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya, 2010).

<sup>87</sup> Serge Petroff, *The Red Eminence: A Biography of Mikhail A. Suslov* (Clifton, NJ: Kingston Press, 1988).

<sup>88</sup> Kramer, "The Role of the CPSU International Department in Soviet Foreign Relations and National Security Policy," 430.

clearly from the Soviet documents declassified after 1991. Khrushchev was much more open to the possibility of working with foreign parties and movements, and therefore the International Department was reformed to take on new tasks.

Following the crises in Poland and Hungary in 1956, it became clear in Moscow that the International Department alone could not possibly manage Soviet relations with ruling Communist parties as well as non-ruling communist and fraternal movements. The Department for Liaison with the Communist and Workers' Parties of the Socialist Countries was thus created in order to take over some responsibilities from the MO. A young Yuri Andropov headed the new department, and its task was to maintain the CPSU's relations with the other communist parties of the Soviet bloc.

The International Department instead shifted its resources towards the third world, 'which was now becoming a new focus of Soviet foreign policy'.<sup>89</sup> In particular, foreign economic aid 'was largely to be supervised through the ID [MO], which was given responsibility for liaison with National Liberation Movements around the world.'<sup>90</sup> Therefore, 'the role of the ID [International Department] in the Third World gained particular importance from the late 1950s on, when the Soviet Union began to seek greater political and military influence among the developing countries and began offering active support to national liberation movements.'<sup>91</sup>

Boris Ponomarev, who had worked for *Comintern* beforehand and became a full member of the TsK in 1956, was the head of the Department. Ponomarev was a protégé of Suslov. 'Under the tutelage of his new mentor, Suslov, Ponomarev rose to prominence in the CPSU Central Committee and continued to benefit from Suslov's

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<sup>89</sup> Elizabeth Teague, "The Foreign Departments of the Central Committee of the CPSU," in *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin* (Munich: Radio Liberty, 1980), 14.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Kramer, "The Role of the CPSU International Department in Soviet Foreign Relations and National Security Policy," 430-31.

35-year reign as a dominant figure in the formulation of Soviet foreign and domestic policy.<sup>92</sup>

Both Ponomarev and Suslov were “orthodox” believers in Marxism-Leninism, and held as a core assumption the idea that socialism could and should indeed be exported outside the Soviet Union.<sup>93</sup> It was natural for them to look at the newly independent countries of Africa and Asia as an opportunity to expand socialism. In broad terms Suslov and Ponomarev accepted Khrushchev’s idea that an alliance with the ‘national-bourgeoisie’ of the third world could yield positive results for the USSR. In particular, Ponomarev believed that the newly independent countries could become truly socialist without the need of going through a ‘capitalist phase’ if they applied a set of economic policies aimed at rapid modernisation. Moscow’s development aid was going to be instrumental in this process.<sup>94</sup>

During the Khrushchev era the MO assumed a leading role in formulating policy on the third world. Leonard Schapiro writes that an ‘examination of the status of the officials of this department and of its prestigious equipment shows clearly that we are dealing with something much more important than a routine department for relations with non-ruling communist parties.’<sup>95</sup> The International Department in fact was one of the primary sources of information and policy recommendation for the top

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<sup>92</sup> Robert W. Kitrinis, "International Department of the CPSU," *Problems of Communism* 33, no. 5 (1984): 49.

<sup>93</sup> Teague, "The Foreign Departments of the Central Committee of the CPSU," 7-10.

<sup>94</sup> Boris N. Ponomarev, "O gosudarstve natsionalnoi demokratii," *Kommunist* 8, no. 33-48 (1961): 42. Cited in Light, *The Soviet Theory of International Relations*: 119-20.

Leonard Schapiro, "The International Department of the CPSU: Key to Soviet Policy," *International Journal* 32, no. 1 (1976-77): 43.

Light, *The Soviet Theory of International Relations*: 119.

Kitrinis, "International Department of the CPSU," 50.

<sup>95</sup> Schapiro, "The International Department of the CPSU: Key to Soviet Policy," 43.



Soviet leadership.<sup>96</sup> Being part of the CPSU, the MO had primarily political, rather than technical, responsibilities: it advised and informed the Presidium, but had no competence in questions directly related to the security of the USSR.<sup>97</sup> However, the MO had a more prominent role in shaping foreign policy than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, since Suslov acted as the “voice” of the International Department at Presidium meeting, whereas Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko was not a Presidium member until 1973.<sup>98</sup>

Moreover, the Department had a direct influence on what was discussed at the top level. The MO’s basic task was indeed to gather information from all possible sources (embassies and consulates worldwide, academic research institutes in Moscow, the Soviet intelligence community and the press) and then prepare background papers, speeches and policy recommendations for the leadership. In this way, the International Department could very easily influence the setting up of the Presidium agenda itself.<sup>99</sup> Finally, the personal status and prestige of Ponomarev cannot be ignored. He was said to have ‘wielded greater practical policy influence than some full Politburo members from outside Moscow.’<sup>100</sup>

Under Khrushchev the International Department had a staff of roughly 150, so was relatively small given the amount of material the analysts had to process.

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<sup>96</sup> Brutents, *Tridtsat Let na Staroi Ploshadi*. “Part III” of the book provides a complete and detailed description of the International Department and of some of its staff.

<sup>97</sup> Kitrinov, "International Department of the CPSU," 50.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

Teague, "The Foreign Departments of the Central Committee of the CPSU," 3-4.

Dawisha, "The Limits of the Bureaucratic Politics Model: Observations on the Soviet Case," 304.

<sup>99</sup> Kramer, "The Role of the CPSU International Department in Soviet Foreign Relations and National Security Policy," 432.

<sup>100</sup> Cited in Ned Temko, "Soviet Insiders: How Powers Flows in Moscow," in *The Soviet Policy in the Modern Era*, ed. Erik P. Hoffmann and Robbin F. Laird (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1984), 181.

However, everyone came from a highly professional background, mostly from academia or journalism, and had considerable experience of Soviet foreign policy.<sup>101</sup>

The organisation of the Department followed a vertical structure: below Ponomarev, there were several deputy chiefs, who had supervisory responsibilities for a specific geographical area; and also a “first deputy chief”, with general as well as specific geographical responsibilities. The deputy chief who supervised the Sub-African desk (“Black Africa”) was Rostislav Ulyanovsky.<sup>102</sup> He was a former academic who wrote extensively on the problems of socialism in the third world and on economic development. Ulyanovsky also agreed with the idea that socialism was a better system than capitalism, and that a ‘non-capitalist’ path to development was possible in the third world.<sup>103</sup>

Below the deputy chief level, each geographic sector was further divided into several “desks”, each one dealing with a single country or a small group of similar countries. The staff in every sector was also organised in chiefs and deputy chiefs, and so on. The International Department could also count on a very small group of representatives attached to embassies and consulates. Usually, there was no more than one MO representative per country, or even geographical area.<sup>104</sup> The International Department had a prime role in shaping Soviet foreign policy towards the third world, as the next chapters will show.

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<sup>101</sup> Jerry F. Hough, "Soviet Policymaking Toward Foreign Communists," *Studies in Comparative Communism* XV, no. 3 (1982): 174.

<sup>102</sup> Brutents, *Tritsats Let na Staroi Ploshadi*: 130-96.

<sup>103</sup> Rostislav Ulyanovsky, *National Bourgeoisie and the Development of State Capitalism* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1962); ———, *Socialism and the Newly Independent Nations* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974); ———, *National Liberation: Essays on Theory and Practice* (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1978); ———, *Nakapitalisticheskii Put Razvitiya Stran Afriki* (Moscow: Nauka, 1967).

<sup>104</sup> Kitrinov, "International Department of the CPSU," 66-67. Brutents, *Tritsats Let na Staroi Ploshadi*: 130-96.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Ministerstvo Innostrannykh Del* – MID) presented very few differences from any other ministry of foreign affairs. Its core task was maintaining diplomatic relations with other states, socialist and non-socialist. Compared to other ministries, the MID enjoyed a more direct relation with the Party Presidium/Politburo, given the particularly delicate tasks it had. However, the influence that the Ministry could have on decision making depended upon the status that the Minister of Foreign Affairs had inside the CPSU: if he was high up in the Party hierarchy, then he could make his voice heard at Politburo meetings or directly with the First/General Secretary, otherwise the MID simply had the role of a giant information-gathering and consultative organ. Since foreign policy was such an important part of the Soviet leadership's activities, the Party maintained a tight control over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. All MID diplomats had to be members of the CPSU, and the senior officials were often high Party bureaucrats.

The MID was divided in several “divisions”, some of which dealt with administrative and housekeeping issues, and others that instead were responsible for specific geographical areas (further divided into “western” and “eastern” divisions). Specifically, there were three African divisions, of which the Second and Third dealt with “black African” states, while the First was in charge of relations with North African countries. A Deputy Minister, who was usually a senior figure with relevant diplomatic experience in that particular area or field, supervised a group of geographically contiguous, or otherwise related, divisions. Above the level of Deputy Ministers there was a First Deputy, with broader coordination and supervising responsibilities. The Minister, the First Deputy, and several Deputy Ministers and senior officials formed together the “Collegium”, which was theoretically the leading

decision organ of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in accordance to the Bolshevik principle of collective responsibility. In fact, however, the Collegium had no decision power and could not overrule the Minister's decisions.<sup>105</sup>

The MID was also responsible for over one hundred Embassies&Consulates worldwide. Predictably, the organization of a Soviet mission abroad also closely resembled a Western one, with an Ambassador as the highest Soviet representative in the country, and several other lower ranking officials charged with analysing the political, social and economic situation and then reporting to the Ministry in Moscow. Usually, a Soviet Embassy also had a representative of the KGB, who was to report directly to the Lubyanka; a Military Intelligence officer, who reported to the GRU in Moscow, and occasionally a representative of the International Department of the CPSU. Beyond complying with specific requests that came from their respective headquarters, these officials had to watch over the activities of the other diplomats. The presence of so many agencies, with different agendas and often in competition with each other, made Soviet Embassies a particularly murky environment.

In the case of West Africa, the rank and personal prestige of the Soviet diplomats sent to Ghana, Guinea and Mali was to be relatively high during the Khrushchev era, reflecting the importance that these countries had in Moscow. For example, Danil Solod – one of the most experienced MID diplomats with considerable expertise on the third world – was chosen as Ambassador to Guinea, which would have normally been considered a small and peripheral country.<sup>106</sup>

During the Khrushchev era the MID was headed by three influential Soviet leaders: Vyachelslav Molotov, Dmitri Shepilov and Andrei Gromyko. Although the

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<sup>105</sup> Aspaturian, "The Administration and Execution of Soviet Foreign Policy," 598-609.

<sup>106</sup> More background information on Solod will be presented in Part II of the thesis.

general line in foreign policy was always dictated by the Presidium and its First Secretary, figures like Molotov, Shepilov and Gromyko certainly left an important mark on Moscow's foreign policy. Each Minister had very different ideas about the role of the Soviet Union in the world, and they also enjoyed different kind of relationships with Khrushchev, ranging from submissiveness to open hostility.

Khrushchev and Molotov had wide personal and political divergences, especially on the USSR's role in the world.<sup>107</sup> Speaking to the Presidium following the failed "Anti-party" coup, Khrushchev said that

After Stalin's death, Molotov once again became head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He kept trying to conduct his same policy, which could not but lead to the isolation of the Soviet Union and to the loss of many foreign-policy positions. (...) Essentially, the international policies of Stalin were Molotov's policies.<sup>108</sup>

Molotov resented Khrushchev's policy of "peaceful coexistence" and was sceptical of the opportunity of an alliance with nationalist third world leaders. However, Molotov lost the post of Foreign Minister in 1956 and his influence in the Kremlin waned.<sup>109</sup>

Molotov's successor, Shepilov, represented a major change for the MID. Shepilov used to be the chief editor of *Pravda* and he had some significant experience of foreign policy. Shepilov accompanied Khrushchev in delicate visits to China in 1954 and to Yugoslavia in 1955. Later on in 1955, he travelled to Cairo, met with Nasser and directly negotiated a crucial arms deal with Egypt. Khrushchev obviously trusted Shepilov, and entrusted him to implement his new policy of opening towards

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<sup>107</sup> Nikita S. Khrushchev, "Transcript of a CC CPSU Plenum, Evening 28 June 1957," in *Post Stalin Succession Struggle* (Cold War International History Project).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. Anatoly Dobrynin agreed with Khrushchev. See Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence* (New York, NY: Random House, 1995), 31.

<sup>109</sup> Molotov, *Molotov Remembers. Inside Kremlin Politics. Conversations with Felix Chuev*: 376.

the third world.<sup>110</sup> The new Foreign Minister shared Khrushchev's ideas on the third world. Referring to Moscow's policy towards Cairo, he said that 'we had a genuine interest. We really wanted to help Egypt. I proved to Khrushchev, and he had faith in this, that this help would be to our advantage. And Nasser, when he came to visit us, confirmed it.'<sup>111</sup>

However, Shepilov soon grew dissatisfied with Khrushchev's boisterous personality, and in 1957 decided to support the group that tried to oust him from the Presidium. When the plot failed, Shepilov was expelled from the TsK and lost all influence.

Gromyko succeeded Shepilov as Foreign Minister. He was a career diplomat, and would keep his post until the 1980s. Gromyko was 'dour and uncharismatic', and was chosen to be an interpreter of Khrushchev's own views in matters of foreign relations.<sup>112</sup> Soviet diplomat Anatoly Dobrynin remembers how once Khrushchev said that Gromyko would 'sit on a block of ice if I tell him to'.<sup>113</sup>

Dobrynin, however, maintained a more positive view of Gromyko as independent thinker. Gromyko was personally sceptical of the possibility of exporting socialism to the third world, which in his opinion was still too backward and economically dependent on the West.<sup>114</sup>

The Third World was not his [Gromyko's] prime domain. He believed that events there could not decisively influence our fundamental relations with the United States; [...] More than that, our Foreign Ministry traditionally was not really involved with the leaders of the liberation movements in the Third

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<sup>110</sup> Taubman, *Khrushchev*: 313.

<sup>111</sup> Shepilov conversing with Feliks Chuev in Feliks I. Chuev, *Kaganovich. Shepilov.*, Dose (Moscow: Izdatelstvo 'Olma-Press', 2001).

<sup>112</sup> Zubok, *A Failed Empire*: 121-22.

<sup>113</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*: 32.

<sup>114</sup> Gromyko, *Memories*: 263-65.

## *Soviet Policy in West Africa, 1957-64*

World, who were dealt with through the International Department of the party, headed by Secretary Ponomarev. He despised Gromyko; the feeling was mutual.<sup>115</sup>

However, Gromyko did not have nearly enough influence to go against Khrushchev's line, as he was not elected to the Presidium until 1973. Therefore, in spite of its head's reservations, the MID under Gromyko's direction limited itself to following Khrushchev's policy.

### The KGB

The KGB (*Komitet Gosudartvennoi Bezopasnosti* – State Security Committee) was a huge organisation. Its tasks ranged from counterespionage to censorship, from ideological surveillance of possible dissidents to guarding borders. It was basically a giant “umbrella” agency, which encompassed everything that had to do with the security of the Soviet state, either inside the Soviet Union and abroad.

The KGB was officially born in 1954, following the Khrushchev-inspired reform of the Ministry of Interior and the security organs (under Beria, the Interior Ministry had almost total control on the predecessor of the KGB), and its basic structure remained unaltered until 1991. At the head of the State Security Committee there was a Chairman, and several Deputy Chairmen, entrusted with a specific responsibility. During the Khrushchev era three Chairmen alternated at the head of the KGB. The reform of the Interior Ministry and the creation of the KGB following Beria's arrest and execution in 1954 was largely inspired by the willingness to affirm Party control over the security organs. Therefore, Ivan Serov was chosen as first Chairman of the KGB for he was considered a reliable ally by Khrushchev, who had already helped him to get rid of Beria. Serov would also provide vital support against

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<sup>115</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*: 404-05.

the “Anti-Party group” in 1957. The KGB role in shaping foreign policy was minimal between 1954 and 1958: Serov implemented the Presidium decisions, but did not assume an active role.<sup>116</sup>

His successor was Aleksander Shelepin, a youthful, dynamic Party *apparatchik*, with no experience in the security sector. The new KGB chairman did have a significant influence on Khrushchev’s thinking on several foreign policy issues, including policy towards the third world. Shelepin was a convinced supporter of the necessity to expand the cold war to the third world. Christopher Andrew writes that Shelepin ‘won Khrushchev’s support for the use of national liberation movements and the forces of anti imperialism in an aggressive new grand strategy against the “Main Adversary” (the United States) in the Third World.’<sup>117</sup> Shelepin organised a large deception campaign, aimed at convincing the Western powers that the USSR was actively supporting revolutionary movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and was ready to assume a more aggressive stance in the third world. ‘Faked documents, innuendo, and gossip were used to undercut U.S. positions and influence among delegations of Afro-Asian and Latin American countries in the United Nations’.<sup>118</sup> The ambitious Shelepin was promoted Central Committee Secretary in 1961 and left the KGB. In his place, Vladimir Semichastny was appointed as Chairman. Semichastny was not as career-driven and independently minded as his

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<sup>116</sup> Amy W. Knight, *The KGB. Police and Politics in the Soviet Union* (Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 47-78.

<sup>117</sup> Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive II. The KGB and the World* (London: Penguin, 2006), 9.

<sup>118</sup> Vladislav Zubok, "Spy vs. Spy: the KGB vs. the CIA, 1960-1962," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 4 (Fall 1994): 25.



predecessor, and the KGB became again mainly an instrument of the Presidium's will.<sup>119</sup>

The KGB was divided into "Directorates", sub-units responsible for one specific activity connected to the security of the USSR. The two most important Directorates were the First Chief Directorate, responsible for Foreign Intelligence, and the Second Chief Directorate, which took care of internal security and counter-intelligence. In total there were sixteen directorates, with very different functions and resources (including logistics, finance, the KGB higher school and internal investigations).<sup>120</sup> The First Chief Directorate (*Pervoe Glavnoe Upravlenie* - PGU) was further divided into sub-Directorates and Services, each responsible for a specific task or geographical area. In the case of Africa, department 9 was responsible for English-speaking countries, whereas Department 10 took care of the French-speaking ones.<sup>121</sup>

The PGU was in charge of large networks of operatives around the globe. The KGB abroad was organised in 'residencies' (*rezidentura*): a group of KGB personnel that worked in close collaboration with embassies, consulates and other Soviet bodies abroad. The structure of a residency followed the usual criteria: there was a Residency Chief, and then operational and support (i.e. administrative and technical) staff. Operational staff was organised in "Lines" (the equivalent abroad of small directorates and services). The main ones were Line PR, for political intelligence and active measures, Line KR, counter-intelligence, and Line N, which gave support to

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<sup>119</sup> Knight, *The KGB*: 47-78 and 277-304. Jeremy R. Azrael, "The KGB in Kremlin Politics," ed. RAND/UCLA Center for the Study of Soviet International Behavior (Los Angeles, CA: RAND/UCLA, 1989), 2-18.

<sup>120</sup> Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (London: Hodder&Stoughton, 1990), 549-51.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 552-53. Also in Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive. The KGB in Europe and the West* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 742.

illegal agents.<sup>122</sup> Unfortunately, no information is available about the KGB personnel in West Africa and their activities.

In spite of the popular belief about it, the KGB was not a perfect organisation, and it was no less of a player in Soviet bureaucratic politics than the MID or the International Department. Its power in Moscow largely depended on the status and prestige of the Chairman, and the competition for resources with other agencies could be severe. As a consequence the KGB's activity as provider and analyst of information could be inaccurate and biased. Vadim Kirpichenko, former Deputy Head of PGU, remembers how in order to conceal Soviet failures in the third world the KGB 'analysts knew they were on safe ground if they blamed imperialist machinations, particularly those of the United States, rather than failures of the Soviet system.'<sup>123</sup>

#### Economic cooperation agencies

There were two main bodies that dealt with foreign economic cooperation in the Soviet Union: the Ministry of Trade and the State Committee for Foreign Economic Contacts (*Gosudartsvenny Komitet po Vneshnim Ekonomicheskim Svyazyam* – GKES). 'The Ministry of Foreign Trade formulated draft import and export plans and regulated commodity trade. GKES supervised foreign aid programs and the export of complete plants.'<sup>124</sup> The GKES had been created in 1957 with the specific purpose of coordinating Soviet aid programmes abroad. It was therefore one of the main instruments of Khrushchev's policy of opening towards the third world.

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<sup>122</sup> ———, *The Mitrokhin Archive 2*: 501.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>124</sup> Malinda K. Goodrich, "Foreign Trade," in *Soviet Union: A Country Study*, ed. Raymond E. Zickel (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991).

The Ministry of Foreign Trade, instead, had been reformed in 1953, when foreign and internal trade were assigned to two different ministries. The Minister of Trade from 1953 to 1958 was Ivan Kabanov, who was substituted probably to leave space to younger and more dynamic Nikolai Patolichev. Patolichev, who kept his post until 1985, was rather active during the Khrushchev era in travelling to the third world and negotiating commercial agreements with the leaderships of the newly independent states.<sup>125</sup> However, neither the Ministry of Foreign Trade nor GKES was particularly powerful in the Soviet state, and mostly executed plans designed by the Kremlin leadership and by other Soviet agencies. Their role, in particular the GKES's, was nonetheless important in defining the general principles that guided Soviet economic policy towards the third world. This aspect will be further explored in Part I of the thesis.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has shown how by 1957 Khrushchev was in full control of the USSR's foreign policy. Even though several Soviet agencies participated in and to a certain degree influenced the policy making process, no rival leader in the Presidium enjoyed enough power or prestige to challenge Khrushchev's ideas. In general, Party institutions such as the International Department were in favour of adopting a more open policy towards the third world. This was largely a consequence of their natural tendency to interpret trends and events in terms of Marxism-Leninism. Decolonisation and the radicalism of many third world leaders, then, immediately attracted the

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<sup>125</sup> Vladimir I. Ivkin, *Gosudarstvennaya Vlast SSSR: vysshie organy vlasti i upravleniya i ikh rukovoditeli, 1923-1991 gg. Istoriko-biograficheskoi spravochnik* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1999).

attention of CPSU's leaders, who became convinced that it was possible to export socialism in Africa and Asia.

State bodies such as the MID, on the contrary, were generally more sceptical of the possibilities of socialism in the third world. This however came not from a better understanding of the local context or from better knowledge, but rather from the culture of an organisation that was very conscious of its secondary role compared to the Party and that as a consequence always preferred to adopt the safest, most "conservative" view. Although its analytical capabilities were probably greater due to the networks of agents and informers abroad, the KGB often tended to exaggerate the threat posed by the Western powers abroad, mainly to pre-emptively justify any failing of Soviet policy. However, state bodies could influence, but not change, Soviet policy: the CPSU retained a leading role.

This situation was conducive to a policy of opening towards the third world, of which Khrushchev was a convinced sponsor. The next chapter will explore more in detail Soviet policies towards the newly independent countries of Africa and Asia immediately before the beginning of Moscow's engagement in West Africa.

## **Chapter 2 – Soviet Foreign Policy towards the Third World, 1953-56**

This chapter will explore the economic situation of the USSR after Stalin's death, and the policies toward third world countries that the Soviet Union pursued from the earlier stages of Khrushchev's rise to power until 1956. It is crucial to provide a short analytical summary of the main trends of the Soviet economy because the favourable situation in which the USSR was in the 1950s deeply influenced the conviction of the Soviet leadership that the Soviet Union's economic success could be repeated abroad. In particular, this chapter will focus on the achievements and reforms of the early Khrushchev era that most influenced policy towards the third world, such as the "Virgin Lands" campaign.

The second part of this chapter will deal with Soviet policy towards the third world between 1955 and late 1956, highlighting in particular the birth of a global policy, of which engagement with West Africa was one of the most important components. The aim of this section is to show how Soviet policy derived directly from the innovations brought about by Khrushchev's rise, and how its focus was primarily on economic relations.

*The Soviet Union in the 1950s*Economic success

By the time of Khrushchev's rise to power, the Soviet Union was a developed, industrialised economy. Its GDP had been steadily growing since the end of World War II, and was actually outperforming many Western economies.<sup>126</sup>

TABLE 1: SOVIET GNP AND GNP PER CAPITA GROWTH RATES, 1950-70

	1950-1960	1960-1970
GNP	5.7	5.2
GNP per capita	3.9	3.9

SOURCE: Ofer, 1987<sup>127</sup>

TABLE 2: SOVIET, EUROPEAN, AND AMERICAN GROWTH RATES, 1950-80

	USSR	Euro-OECD	USA
GNP	4.7	4.2	3.3
GNP per capita	3.3	3.3	1.9

SOURCE: Ofer, 1987<sup>128</sup>

As economic historian Robert C. Allen puts it, notwithstanding all its political and technical shortcomings, the Soviet economy 'in certain respects and in certain times,

<sup>126</sup> James G. Richter, *Khrushchev's Double Bind. International Pressures and Domestic Coalition Politics*, ed. Richard Ned Lebow, Perspectives on security (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 103.

<sup>127</sup> Gur Ofer, "Soviet Economic Growth, 1928-1985," *Journal of Economic Literature* 25, no. 4 (1987): 1778.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 1780.

[...] performed well'.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, from 1928, the year of the first five-year plan, the Soviet Union kept growing at a rapid pace, turning from a largely rural, capital-scarce, labour-surplus economy into an industrialised superpower. Between 1928 and 1970, the Soviet economy was the most successful among non-OECD countries: 'the USSR did not grow as fast as Japan, but was arguably the second most successful economy in the world.'<sup>130</sup>

#### Modernisation and development

Moreover, by the late 1950s, the Soviet Union had made crucial progresses in science and technology. It had tested the first long-range ballistic missiles and, in 1957, the first artificial satellite (*Sputnik*) was to be launched, generating considerable concern in many Western capitals, but also awe and inspiration in the rest of the world. Khrushchev believed that Soviet technical progress had to be used to modernise and improve production in the country, in particular in the agricultural field, so to better living standards. He put a great personal effort to launch the so-called "Virgin lands" campaign. The idea was to start cultivating previously unused land in Eastern Siberia and in Central Asia, employing the most advanced techniques and machines so to boost agricultural production.<sup>131</sup> 'Using massive amounts of irrigation and chemical fertilisers to develop the barren plain, Khrushchev's leadership assumed that they had devised a new way of intensifying food production.'<sup>132</sup> In the long run, the "Virgin Lands Campaign" turned out to be a failure, as due to poor planning the soil of the

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<sup>129</sup> Robert C. Allen, "The Rise and Decline of the Soviet Economy," *The Canadian Journal of Economics / Revue canadienne d'Economique* 34, no. 4 (2001): 860.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 861.

<sup>131</sup> For a description of the Virgin Lands campaign and its meaning for the Soviet Union according to Khrushchev himself: Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Dva Tsveta Vremeni*, ed. A. N. Yakovlev, 2 vols., vol. 2, Rossiya. XX Vek Dokumenty (Moscow: Mezhdunarodniy Fond 'Demokratiya', 2009), 56.

<sup>132</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*: 71.

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“Virgin Lands” became unproductive. However, for the first few years the results were definitely positive.

TABLE 3: SOVIET GRAIN HARVEST IN MILLION TONS, 1953-58

	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958
Total grain harvest	82.5	85.6	103.7	125.0	102.6	134.7
“Virgin land” areas	26.9	37.2	27.7	63.3	38.1	58.4

SOURCE: Nove, 1992<sup>133</sup>

The feeling of attraction in the third world for the socialist way of development was undeniable. Leaders of different countries such as Nehru in India, Nasser in Egypt, Sukarno in Indonesia after independence chose to build relations with the USSR, adopting at least in part the combination of central state planning and collective enterprise that had allowed the Soviet Union to turn into an industrialised superpower. The Soviet economy appeared to the leaderships of the newly independent countries as a concrete, feasible alternative to liberal capitalism. Similarly to pre-revolutionary Russia, third world countries too were largely made up by peasants, capital-scarce, and in search of rapid industrialisation. Therefore, Moscow’s experience of economic development – centred on a “forced march” to modernisation through rapid industrialisation, import-substitution and rejection of Western political as well as economic imperialism – greatly appealed to third world countries.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>133</sup> Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917-1991*, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 343.

<sup>134</sup> Engerman, "The Romance of Economic Development and New Histories of the Cold War," 30.

Elizabeth K. Valkenier, *The Soviet Union and the Third World. An Economic Bind* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1983), 74.



*The “globalisation” of Soviet foreign policy*

Western fears

In Moscow, the fundamental assumption that socialism would gain at the expense of imperialism had not changed, notwithstanding the ideological shift brought about by the adoption of “peaceful coexistence”. The change of doctrine simply meant that socialism could not be imposed on the world after a war with the capitalists, but could certainly be exported as an economic and social model of life to the newly independent countries. This created a new optimism in the Soviet Union, due to the belief that the third world would be interested in following the path set by Moscow.<sup>135</sup>

The fear that Soviet communism could appeal more than Western values to third world countries was a great concern for contemporary analysts. George Kennan clearly addressed the problem during a conference on “Soviet imperialism” at Johns Hopkins University (August 1953). While writing off the chances of a possible Socialist expansion towards Western Europe, Kennan said, as the British diplomats who attended the conference immediately noticed,<sup>136</sup> that ‘the pattern is reversed’ in Asia and the rest of the third world.

I think we in the West must face the fact that for a great many of these people the repulsion that Soviet realities hold for us is not operable in anywhere near the same degree. Their accumulated resentment of Western patterns is apt to appear commendable in their eyes by that very fact. [...] The Western world, and our country in particular [the USA], must be extremely careful how it deals with this phenomenon of the Soviet appeal to the peoples of the underdeveloped areas of Asia and elsewhere.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Breslauer, "Ideology and Learning in Soviet Third World Policy," 434.

<sup>136</sup> British diplomat R.A. Sykes wrote that Kennan’s ‘analysis of Asian reactions to the impact of the Soviet Union is excellent.’ See UKNA, FO371/106527.

<sup>137</sup> Kennan in UKNA, FO371/106527. George F. Kennan was an American diplomat and an expert on Russia. He served as Deputy Chief of the US Mission in Moscow

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A British paper prepared as a “crash course” on the Soviet Union and its foreign policy for students at the Joint Services Staff College concluded that

Her [the USSR's] propaganda has found an inexhaustibly rich theme in the struggle for South-East Asia. Britain and France, in their efforts to restore order and protect their legitimate commercial interests in countries which were in any case guaranteed continually expanding self-government, have been made to appear, in the eyes of ill-informed Asians, brutal re-conquerors of peoples who had rejected their rule. The Soviet Union on the other hand can pose as the champion of national self determination [...].<sup>138</sup>

### The birth of a policy

While Kennan firmly believed that Soviet Communism could only bring misery and poverty to the third world, ideas in Moscow were quite different. Given that, in the nuclear age, a full-scale war between the West and the Soviet bloc would mean the annihilation of mankind itself, the competition against the capitalists had to change. Soviet economic success became one of the most valuable weapons in the early post-Stalin era and ‘Khrushchev found himself under the spell of a new wave of revolution and decided to use the immense opportunities of the Third World’.<sup>139</sup> At the XX Congress of the CPSU in February 1956, beyond denouncing Stalin and officially launching peaceful coexistence, Khrushchev also declared that

The new period in world history which Lenin predicted has arrived, and the peoples of the East are playing an active part in deciding the destinies of the whole world, [they] are becoming a new mighty factor in international relations. In contrast to the pre-war period, most Asian countries now act in the world arena as sovereign states which are resolutely upholding their right to an independent foreign

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from 1944 until 1946. His “long telegram” contributed to creating the American policy of “containment” of the USSR.

<sup>138</sup> UKNA, FO371/116654 NS1021/75.

<sup>139</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*: 186.

policy. International relations have spread beyond the bounds of relations between the countries inhabited chiefly by peoples of the white race and are beginning to acquire the character of genuinely world-wide relations.<sup>140</sup>

Khrushchev's attention to the third world needed a new Soviet approach, a new policy. In Stalin's times Soviet foreign policy paid very little attention to countries outside of Europe. Moscow's official view of the colonies and the anti-colonial struggle was very harsh after World War II. Stalin himself, together with the Kremlin's leading theorists and ideologues such as Andrei Zhdanov, believed that the former colonies were too backward and therefore 'the defined circumstances under which they themselves could carry out a successful social transformation were so narrow as to be almost nonexistent'.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, leaders of national liberation movements were considered 'bourgeois nationalists' and dubbed 'imperialist lackeys'.<sup>142</sup>

Khrushchev was to reverse this policy. Under his leadership the USSR started to give special attention towards some key third world countries. British observers reported to London how delegations from India and Indonesia now received special consideration in the USSR.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, the UK Foreign Office believed that

[...] there are signs that the Soviet Union is paying increasing attention to the needs of underdeveloped countries. Delegations of industrialists and agriculturalists from several South-East Asian countries are at present being feted in the Soviet Union. Selective Soviet aid on more generous terms than is the

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<sup>140</sup> Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the 20th Party Congress, February 14, 1956* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1956), 23, 26. Quoted in Rubinstein, *Moscow's Third World Strategy*: 20-21.

<sup>141</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*: 66; *ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Light, *The Soviet Theory of International Relations*: 99-106.

<sup>143</sup> UKNA, FO371/111682 NS1021/30, November 1954.

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usual Soviet practice could do much to further Communist aims in South-East Asia. The Soviet appeal for under-developed countries has not been confined to Asia. Soviet propaganda is also being carefully directed to trouble spots such as Brazil and Chile at the U.S.'s own backdoor.<sup>144</sup>

In France, the Quay d'Orsay took the same view. In the annual review for 1954 and the beginning of 1955, French analysts wrote that the search for consensus in Asia, Africa and Latin America and the willingness to detach third world countries from the West 'will remain one of the main weapons used by the Soviet government.'<sup>145</sup> The French Foreign Office came to the conclusion that the earlier Soviet 'discretion' in the field of 'colonial subversion' would be abandoned in favour of a more active stance.<sup>146</sup>

### *The evolution of Soviet policy in Asia, the Middle East and Africa*

#### Khrushchev's visits

In 1955 Khrushchev and Marshal Bulganin, at the time Premier of the Soviet Union, set off on a series of official diplomatic visits that included Nehru's India, Sukarno's Indonesia, Afghanistan and Burma, as well as Yugoslavia, in the attempt to normalise relations with Tito. It was obvious that Moscow looked at the third world and at the "non-aligned" movement as possible allies. Molotov himself had given special attention to the third world and the British Foreign Office recorded that the Soviet leader had made 'special complimentary references' to India and described the Bandung conference as 'important' in his speech to the Supreme Soviet in February 1955. Speaking straight after Malenkov's resignation, Molotov launched a 'special

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<sup>144</sup> UKNA, FO371/111683 NS1022/12.

<sup>145</sup> UKNA, FO371/116654 NS1021/67. The French paper was forwarded to the British Foreign Office, whose Northern Department thought it 'well balanced'.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

appeal to the uncommitted peoples of Asia and Africa.’<sup>147</sup> He made clear the impression that the ‘correlation of forces’ between the USSR and the USA was slowly but steadily changing in Moscow’s favour. Molotov cited the new support that the Soviet Union enjoyed in Asia and the possibilities of enhancing relations with countries in Africa and Latin America, once they managed to free themselves from colonialism and economic imperialism.<sup>148</sup>

Later in 1955, Khrushchev reported to the Presidium on his trip to India, Burma and Afghanistan in enthusiastic terms. He had discussed foreign policy with Nehru, and they agreed on their judgment of Western leaders. ‘It is evident – Khrushchev reported – that they [the Indians] appreciate our steps.’ The First Secretary even indulged himself, by describing manifestations of public acclaim when the Soviet delegation reached Calcutta. However, Khrushchev regarded India as still a bureaucratic, bourgeois system (he called it “*kerenshchina*”, referring to the regime that emerged in Russia after the February Revolution of 1917 under the leadership of Aleksandr Kerensky), where the class struggle was destined to increase and the Communist party to grow. At the same time, Khrushchev lamented the lack of understanding for India and its culture in the USSR, and the need to work on it.<sup>149</sup>

The same positive judgement was expressed about Burma, where the Soviet delegation offered to build a polytechnic institute, and possibly a stadium and a hospital. Regarding Afghanistan, Khrushchev even recommended providing military aid to Prime Minister Daud free of charge.<sup>150</sup> The Presidium decided to produce a declaration about the results of the visits that should ‘provide a positive evaluation of the actions of the [Soviet] delegation and practical measures on the further

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<sup>147</sup> UKNA, FO371/116650 NS1021/11.

<sup>148</sup> UKNA, FO371/116650 NS1021/12.

<sup>149</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 1*, 73-74.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

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development and enlargement of friendly relations with India, Burma and Afghanistan.’<sup>151</sup>

London was particularly distressed by Khrushchev’s visit to India and especially by his anti-colonial, anti-British remarks. According to the Foreign Office’s reconstruction of Khrushchev’s report to the Supreme Soviet, the First Secretary ‘opened with a fierce onslaught on our [British] colonial policy in India, accusing us of allowing some twenty-three million Indians to starve, and quoting at length from books by Nehru and other Indians.’ Khrushchev’s ‘disgraceful tirade’ was spoken with ‘arrogant self-confidence’, making the Foreign Office conclude that he was ‘dizzy with success after his Asian tour and may be now so confident of the effect he has made in Asia as to believe that he can afford to disregard Western susceptibilities.’<sup>152</sup> As the diplomatic row grew during the next few weeks, both Khrushchev and Bulganin kept speaking harshly against Western colonialism.<sup>153</sup>

The US response to the Soviet diplomatic offensive hardly gained them much sympathy among third world anti-colonialists. American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles produced a joint statement with Portuguese Foreign Minister Paulo Cunha denouncing Soviet statements and declaring that

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<sup>151</sup> Aleksandr A Fursenko, ed. *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Chernovye Protokolnye Zapisi Zacedanii Stenogrammy Postanovleniya*, 3 vols., vol. 2: *Postanovleniya 1954-1958*, Arkhivy Kremlya (Moscow: Rosspen, 2006), 150-51.

<sup>152</sup> UKNA, FO371/116655 NS1021/90 and 91.

<sup>153</sup> Khrushchev’s remarks were often typically careless. For example, he violently attacked British education policy in the colonies speaking in a British school in Burma, in front of a largely British-educated Burmese audience (UKNA, FO371/122776 NS1017/2).

### *Soviet Policy in West Africa, 1957-64*

The two Ministers whose countries embrace many peoples of many races deplored all efforts to foment hatred between the East and West and to divide peoples who need to feel a sense of unity and fellowship for peace and mutual welfare.<sup>154</sup>

Moreover, 'the interdependence of Africa and the Western World was also emphasized.'<sup>155</sup> George Evans, the correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* who had accompanied the Soviet delegation in its tour of Asia, later confirmed to Foreign Office officials that 'Khrushchev's success had been enhanced by Mr Dulles' statements on Goa.' The British journalist 'considered that this had been disastrous in that it had revived all the suspicions of America which were beginning to disappear.'<sup>156</sup>

#### China and Egypt

The USSR was starting to adopt a new strategy centred on fostering cooperation with third world countries. In a report dated July 1955, British analysts stressed how the setting up of a new organisation designed to manage and coordinate Moscow's technical aid to non-communist countries (*Tekhnopromeksport*, which would become GKES in 1957) provided 'further evidence of the seriousness which the Soviet government attaches to developing its programme of foreign economic aid.'<sup>157</sup>

Khrushchev had already launched a massive assistance programme towards the People's Republic of China, hoping to strengthen Soviet-Chinese cooperation. The PRC had been recognised in 1949 by the USSR, but the CPSU apparatus kept

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<sup>154</sup> UKNA, FO371/116694 NS10520/5. At the time, Portugal still held Goa.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. Portugal only gave up its colonies in Africa in the mid 1970s.

<sup>156</sup> UKNA, FO371/122782 NS1021/13.

<sup>157</sup> UKNA, FO371/116717 NS1225/3. The Americans were less concerned about Soviet economic assistance. See "Soviet Technical Assistance in Non-Communist Asia," ed. Subcommittee on Technical Assistance Programs (Committee on Foreign Relations - US Congress) (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1955).

considering it separated from the other Socialist states. The International Department dealt with China as with an Asian non-communist country until 1957.<sup>158</sup> Therefore, as Westad writes, the assistance programme was yet another sign of the Kremlin's growing interests towards non-European countries. 'Not just the First Secretary, but the whole party leadership was convinced that the socialist transformation of the most populous country on earth was a task that the Soviet Union had to engage in – it not only confirmed their Marxist worldview, but also highlighted the universal centrality of the Soviet experience in building socialism.'<sup>159</sup>

Furthermore, in the same year, an arms deal with Egypt (through Czechoslovakia) was signed. This deal represented an important change in Soviet approach towards the third world, linking together diplomatic, military and later economic aspect of Moscow's policy towards newly independent countries. In fact, Egypt had already tried to negotiate military assistance from the Soviet bloc, first in 1951 and then in 1953, after the coup that led Nasser to power. In both cases, however, Egyptian requests were refused by the USSR and Czechoslovakia on the basis that Egypt was considered to be still pro-Western and its requests deemed nothing but a way to exercise indirect pressure on Britain and the USA.<sup>160</sup>

Moscow's approach changed completely with Khrushchev's rise to power. Starting from 1954, top Soviet officials (including Solod, at the time Ambassador to

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<sup>158</sup> See Deborah A. Kaple, "Soviet Advisors in China in the 1950s," in *Brothers in Arms. The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963*, ed. Odd Arne Westad, *Cold War International History Project Series* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 119.

<sup>159</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*: 69.

<sup>160</sup> V.V. Naumkin et al., eds., *Blizhnevostochnyi Konflikt: iz dokumentov arkhiva vneshei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 2 vols., vol. 1. 1947-1956, Rossiia XX Bek Dokumenty (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond 'Demokratiia', 2003), 148-49, 80-82, 90-91. Guy Laron, "Cutting the Gordian Knot: The Egyptian Quest for Arms and the Czechoslovak Arms Deal," in *Cold War International History Project Working Paper 55* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2007), 8-16.



Cairo and who would later become a key figure in dealings with West Africa) began to stress the importance of establishing better relations with Egypt and with newly independent countries in general.<sup>161</sup> The "Russia Committee" of the British Foreign Office noticed, in May 1954, that

The Soviet Government have lately given increasing support for the Arab case in the United Nations, by use of the veto and by filibustering. This may be part of general Soviet policy for promoting their influence with the Arab-Asian "neutralist" bloc.<sup>162</sup>

Indeed, that was exactly what Soviet policy was trying to achieve. In a 1955 memorandum to Khrushchev and Bulganin, Soviet deputy minister and *Pravda* editor Ivan Mayevskii wrote:

The next stage of the struggle for the global hegemony of socialism will focus on the liberation of the colonial and semi-colonial peoples. In Africa, Asia and Latin America there are more prospects of winning the next stage than in Europe or America. Moreover, the loss of their colonies and semi-colonies should hasten the victory of socialism in Europe and eventually in the US as well.<sup>163</sup>

Thus, when Nasser needed to ask for arms again, he found in Moscow a much more receptive interlocutor: after months of negotiations, the arms deal was concluded in September 1955. When discussing Egyptian requests for weapons, Khrushchev himself defined them 'risky', but he also stressed to his colleagues in the Presidium that this line was the correct one and that it would eventually produce positive

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<sup>161</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, "Cutting the Gordian Knot: The Egyptian Quest for Arms and the Czechoslovak Arms Deal," 16-19.

<sup>162</sup> UKNA, FO371/111683 NS1022/7

<sup>163</sup> I. Mayevskii in Laurent Rucker, "L'URSS et la Crise de Suez," *Communisme*, no. 49-50 (1997): 154. Cited in Laron, "Cutting the Gordian Knot: The Egyptian Quest for Arms and the Czechoslovak Arms Deal," 18.

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results.<sup>164</sup> A memorandum prepared by the MID for a visit to Egypt by Dmitri Shepilov – chief editor of *Pravda*, Khrushchev's personal envoy, and future Foreign Minister – highlighted how

The Egyptian government's position regarding the aggressive blocs, and the criticism by several Egyptian representatives of the colonial policy of the imperialist countries, were the precondition for cooperation between Soviet and Egyptian representatives in international forums. More than once, the Soviet Union supported the rightful demands of Egypt to strengthen its government's sovereignty and its national independence.<sup>165</sup>

Moreover, 'our stance in regard to the imperialist blocs and the colonial policy of the Western powers has given rise to a great wave of sympathy towards the Soviet Union among very broad segments of the Egyptian public'.<sup>166</sup> Thus, the Soviet Press Agency TASS was eager to stress how the Egyptian newspaper *Al Ahram* had praised the Soviet people during Shepilov's visit for their being 'steadfast in the struggle against treacherous colonialism.'<sup>167</sup>

The Kremlin's relationship with Nasser was very important from the point of view of third world countries. The Egyptian leader was a key figure of the non-aligned movement and therefore regarded as an inspiration by many Arab and African governments.

Because of Nasser's long and diversified experience of dealing with the Russians many Third World leaders came to ask his advice before their first visit to Moscow. As well as Arabs, men like the

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<sup>164</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 1*, 63.

<sup>165</sup> AVPFR, fond 087, opis 18, papka 37, delo 10, listy 17-22. Cited in Laron, "Cutting the Gordian Knot: The Egyptian Quest for Arms and the Czechoslovak Arms Deal," 55.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> UKNA, FO371/116653 NS1021/59.

### *Soviet Policy in West Africa, 1957-64*

Sudan's Nimeiry and Algeria's Ben Bella, it was the heads of newly independent black African states, such as Ghana's Nkrumah, Congo's Lumumba and Mali's Modibo Keita who found what Nasser had to say on this subject particularly useful.<sup>168</sup>

After the signing of the arms deal in 1955, relations between Egypt and the Soviet Union continued on a better level. Nasser's main project at the time was to build the Aswan Dam, a gigantic enterprise to provide the country with a better control on flooding and a large amount of hydroelectric power. The Egyptian leader initially received a generous offer of credits to finance the dam from the USA and Britain, which later withdrew it because of Nasser's anti-Israel positions, and his supposed intention to align Egypt with the Soviet bloc.<sup>169</sup> Using his now improving relations with Moscow, Nasser then secured a loan from the USSR to help finance the construction of the dam. Moreover, he announced the nationalization of the British and French-controlled Suez canal.<sup>170</sup> When in the summer of 1956, the USA, Britain and France proposed holding a conference in London to settle the canal issue, the Soviet Union decided to participate and to support Egypt. Laurent Rucker explains Moscovs' decision in light of the willingness to 'take advantage of this crisis in order to weaken the Western powers and develop their [Soviet] policy of *rapprochement* with the decolonized countries.'<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Mohamed Heikal, *Sphinx and Commissar. The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Arab World*. (London: Collins, 1978), 19-20.

<sup>169</sup> Egypt recognized the People's Republic of China in the spring of 1956, which contributed to alienating Washington and London.

<sup>170</sup> Douglas Little, "The Cold War in the Middle East from the Suez Crisis to the Camp David Accords," in *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>171</sup> Laurent Rucker, "The Soviet Union and the Suez Crisis," in *The 1956 War. Collusion and Rivarly in the Middle East*, ed. David Tal, *The Cummings Center Series* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 70.

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During the discussions at the Presidium on whether the USSR should really participate to the London conference, Khrushchev reminded his colleagues that Suez was an international issue and that Soviet policy should be 'worked out in collaboration with India, Indonesia.'<sup>172</sup> The Foreign Ministry also addressed the situation as a way to draw the USSR closer to the third world:

Any peaceful resolution of the dispute over the Suez Canal which would address the main claims of Egypt's sovereignty, would have major significance not only for the Near and Middle East area but would represent a major blow to the plans of the imperialist powers in Africa and Asia.<sup>173</sup>

The Presidium thought of the conference as a way to use this 'international tribune' in order to denounce imperialism and the aggressive policy of the West, and thus explained its decision to take part in the discussions in London to Nasser.<sup>174</sup>

At the conference itself, the Soviet Union supported the resolution proposed by India, which defended Egypt's right to keep control of the canal. This was rejected in favour of the American resolution that proposed the establishment of an international commission to deal with Nasser. Only India, Indonesia, Ceylon and Iran voted with the USSR, a result judged however positively by the Presidium leaders, who believed – in Mikoyan's words – that the USA had 'suffered a moral damage' by siding with the imperialists against the non-aligned countries.<sup>175</sup>

After the conference, Moscow kept encouraging Egypt not to accept a compromise over the canal issue, although the USSR was probably wrong-footed by a

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<sup>172</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 1*, 156-57.

<sup>173</sup> AVPRF, fond 537, opis 1, papka 1, delo 4, listy 75. Cited in Rucker, "The Soviet Union and the Suez Crisis," 70-71.

<sup>174</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 2: Postanovleniya 1954-1958*, 385.(Volume 2)

<sup>175</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 1*, 162-63.

false assessment of the British-Franco-Israeli real plans.<sup>176</sup> When war eventually broke out, there was not much the Soviet Union could do. Moscow supported Nasser and threatened to intervene in Egypt if the “imperialist aggression” did not cease. Khrushchev also believed that Soviet policy in support of Egypt should be coordinated with leading non-aligned countries such as India.<sup>177</sup> Even though Soviet threats contributed very little to end the Suez crisis, the USSR still managed to acquire considerable prestige in the third world at the expenses of Britain and France, which emerged weakened and perceived as colonial countries that did not want to renounce their empires.<sup>178</sup> It was no poor result, and it meant that Moscow could look at the third world with more confidence. Between 1953 and 1956 the Soviet Union had thus become an important player in the third world, supporting radical regimes and launching ambitious programmes of economic cooperation.

### Africa

Soviet interests in Africa were not limited to Egypt alone. As early as July 1954, a regular service of broadcast in Arabic to French North Africa had been launched in Budapest. The Russia Committee of the Foreign Office dubbed this move ‘a sign of the continuing Soviet campaign to stimulate resistance movements in colonial areas’.<sup>179</sup>

Moscow, however, had no intention of becoming involved in Algeria’s bloody war of independence against France. As Russian historian Aleksandr Fursenko writes, ‘the war in Algeria put the Soviet leadership in a difficult situation: from an

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<sup>176</sup> Rucker, "The Soviet Union and the Suez Crisis," 72-78.

<sup>177</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 1*, 203. The text of the letter to the Indian Prime Minister is still inaccessible at RGANI.

<sup>178</sup> Rucker, "The Soviet Union and the Suez Crisis," 88-89.

<sup>179</sup> UKNA, FO371/111683 NS1022/10. The radio station was called ‘The Voice of National Independence and Peace’.

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ideological and political point of view, it should have supported Algeria and its Arab supporters (first of all Egypt) without at the same time ruining relations with France.’<sup>180</sup> The USSR, therefore, maintained an ambiguous position with regard to the Algerian independence movement. Moscow supported independent Algeria in terms of official statements, but provided only very limited concrete help to the FLN.<sup>181</sup>

The Soviet Union seemed interested in Sub-Saharan Africa more than North Africa. In June 1955, the British Foreign Office reported about a publication in the Soviet Union called ‘The Peoples of Africa’, an ethnographic and anthropological study of the African continent by Ivan Potekhin and Dmitrii Olderogge, two of the leading Soviet Africanists at the Academy of Sciences.<sup>182</sup> The book was judged a sign of ‘the present Soviet interest in “under-developed countries.”’<sup>183</sup>

Further evidence of rapidly growing Soviet interest in African questions is provided in the attached extract from the Herald of the Academy of Sciences No. 11/1955. The Academy is to improve its study of African peoples and is creating more research posts in the field. Evidently a long term project is afoot which will lay a solid foundation for eventually greater political activity on the continent.<sup>184</sup>

In the second half of 1955, it seemed that Moscow was intent on a major diplomatic offensive to gain influence in Sub-Saharan Africa. ‘A delegation of African trade unionists visited the USSR in July. Diplomatic and trade feelers have been extended, particularly in Libya and the Sudan. At least ten substantial articles and broadcasts

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<sup>180</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 1*, 946.

<sup>181</sup> Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution. Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>182</sup> UKNA, FO371/116668.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. NS1041/5. The Colonial Office was less worried. After receiving the translated summary, they wrote back to the Foreign Office minimising the impact of the book and of the ‘Soviet mythology of imperialism.’ See UKNA, FO371/116668 NS1041/6.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. NS1041/6.

have been issued during the year, chiefly with a colonial-liberation slant.’<sup>185</sup> Moreover, a Soviet delegation was sent to Liberia to attend the inauguration of President William Tubman, who had just been re-elected. It was the first visit of a delegation from the USSR to Sub-Saharan Africa. Liberia was firmly aligned with the West, and therefore a Soviet presence at Tubman’s inauguration did not achieve much in practical terms, but it was an important symbolic gesture.<sup>186</sup> As more countries in Africa were going to become independent in the next few years, Moscow was ready to initiate diplomatic and commercial relations with them.

### *Soviet modernity and the third world*

#### Focus on development

Mikoyan explained to his Presidium colleagues in December 1955 that ‘if we want to engage in a more serious competition with the USA it is necessary to help some states.’<sup>187</sup> “Peaceful coexistence” meant that the competition with the West had moved from the military field – where the USSR was unable or unwilling to compete, as shown by the cases of Suez and Algeria – to the economic field. As Westad writes, ‘it was Soviet modernity that would win people for Communism abroad, as socialism – freed from Stalin’s shackles – showed its full productive potential.’<sup>188</sup>

The newly independent countries in Asia and Africa began to show considerable interest in the USSR and its successful experience of modernisation. The British Foreign Office wrote that

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> John P. Glennon and Stanley Shaloff, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1955-1957 - Africa*, vol. XVIII (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1989), 389-97.

<sup>187</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 1*, 71-72.

<sup>188</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*: 71.

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[...] Propaganda, whether vigorously anti-communist or not, is certainly not the whole answer. The countries of Asia and particularly the uncommitted ones tend to judge us – and the Russians and the Chinese – by what we are and what we do and above all by what help we can afford them in the solution of their own pressing domestic problems on which their attention is concentrated. There is inevitably a feeling that the problems with which the Russians and the Chinese have to deal are rather more closely related to their own problems than there are the problems of Europe.<sup>189</sup>

The British analysts concluded that Moscow's current strategy was to encourage neutralism and detachment from the West, and to develop significant economic links with the third world.<sup>190</sup> The USSR had in fact started to extend financial and technical aid to a large number of countries in the third world.

TABLE 4: SOVIET ECONOMIC AID IN MILLION US\$, 1955-64

	Million US\$
Total	3,805
Middle East	1,450
Egypt	1000
Iran	65
Iraq	185
Syria	100
Other	100
North Africa	250

<sup>189</sup> UKNA, FO371/122782 NS1021/15.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.



*Soviet Policy in West Africa, 1957-64*

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Algeria	230
Other	20
South Asia	1,440
Afghanistan	530
India	810
Pakistan	40
Other	60
Sub-Saharan Africa	490
Latin America	30
East Asia	150

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SOURCE: CIA, 1980<sup>191</sup>

Soviet aid, although inferior in absolute terms when compared to aid from the West, was nonetheless effective, for it was concentrated towards a few “key” countries in each geographical area.

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<sup>191</sup> "Communist Aid Activities in Non-Communist Less Developed Countries, 1979 and 1954-79."; *ibid.*

TABLE 5: SOVIET AID TO SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA IN MILLION US\$, 1959-64

	Million US \$
Total	490
Ethiopia	100
<i>Ghana</i>	95
<i>Guinea</i>	75
<i>Mali</i>	60
Somalia	55
Other	105

SOURCE: CIA, 1980<sup>192</sup>

In addition, economic aid from the Soviet bloc was more generous than its Western counterpart, as it did not have “strings attached”. At the XX Congresses, Khrushchev declared that:

Although these countries [third world countries] do not belong to the Socialist world system they can draw on its achievements in building up their independent national economies and in raising the standard of living of their peoples. Today they have no need to go begging for modern equipment from their former oppressors. They can obtain this from the socialist countries, free from any conditions of a political or military nature.<sup>193</sup>

Khrushchev kept his promise. First of all, the loans from Moscow carried low interest rates and could be paid back over a long period of time, after the completion of the

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 39. Figures include only direct transfers, but not loans or barter. Including these, the total amount of Soviet aid to Ghana, Guinea and Mali would be double as much as the figures listed by the CIA.

<sup>193</sup> Khrushchev, *Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the 20th Party Congress, February 14, 1956*: 26.

project. Furthermore, the debts could be repaid in local currencies, or even using “traditional exports” (rice, cotton, cocoa, etc.), a real blessing for countries with lack of hard currency.

The Kremlin usually preferred not to give grants, judged patronising, but only loans. When discussing the arms deal with Egypt at a Presidium meeting, Khrushchev made this line clear, specifying that giving help free of charge ‘does not exist’, but it was possible through ‘favourable credit’.<sup>194</sup> Finally, Moscow let its clients decide what they wanted to do with Soviet help.

The selection of the specific projects was not dependent on Moscow’s views concerning the most efficient local allocation of resources; the final decision was left to the recipient. This feature was responsible not only for the notorious stadiums but also for the prestige-enhancing, though not always economically viable, projects in heavy industry. Finally, Moscow always emphasized that whatever was built with Socialist aid became the full property of the recipient nation; the Soviet Union never sought any equity or share of the profits or participation in the management of the project built with its assistance. Upon completion, Soviet-aided projects became the partner’s full property.<sup>195</sup>

This policy had a clear and immediate appeal for many hard-pressed radical regimes in the third world. The West was very worried by Soviet loans, which in late 1955 a British diplomat called ‘a sinister new phenomenon very attractive to small countries’. In the same despatch, the Foreign Office lamented the tendency in London to ‘underestimate what the USSR can do for underdeveloped countries’, concluding that ‘this financial industrial penetration [...] is gravely more menacing than the supply of armaments.’<sup>196</sup> Consequently, the House of Lords was informed that

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<sup>194</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 1*, 63.

<sup>195</sup> Valkenier, *The Soviet Union and the Third World. An Economic Bind*: 8.

<sup>196</sup> UKNA, FO371/116655 NS1021/76.

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[...] Soviet economic penetration through selected offers of capital equipment, technical assistance and armaments, is likely to play an increasingly important role out of all proportion to the volume of the trade involved. Present developments cannot be regarded as a flash in the pan. It seems probable that the Russians will be able to honour the commitments they have already undertaken and shoulder new ones as and when they think necessary.<sup>197</sup>

### A global policy

It is worth emphasising again that Soviet policy towards the third world was “global” in nature. There was no trace of specific, regional policies. The documents indicate that there was no African (or Asian, or Middle Eastern) strategy as such, but a global third world strategy, founded on the same ideas and beliefs. Khrushchev believed that Soviet modernity could be exported to the third world in the same way for each region, using similar sets of policies in Indonesia as well as in Iraq or in Ghana. Third world countries were seen in Moscow as homogeneous and characterised by the same problems and needs. ‘Although the peoples of such newly independent countries after World War II as India and Indonesia spoke dozens of different languages, prayed to different gods, and were shaped by different histories, Khrushchev saw them as a cohesive group that could be converted to Marxism-Leninism.’<sup>198</sup> Similar principles were applied everywhere: Soviet aid and advice aimed to expand the role of the state in the national economy through direct control over enterprise and the realisation of ambitious development projects. According to Khrushchev’s own ideas, the modernisation of agriculture was to play a prime role in Soviet development policy.

Where third world countries certainly differed was on the extent to which they still relied on the West. Several newly independent countries maintained close links with their former colonial masters, especially with regard to the economy. Where

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<sup>197</sup> UKNA, FO371/116655 NS1021/89

<sup>198</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*: 292-93.

Western political or economic dominance was already too consolidated, the USSR had no room for manoeuvre, since the policies it sponsored were either despised by the ruling elites or simply unfeasible. However, to Moscow's advantage, 'the global appeal of the Soviet planned economy, especially in India, Indonesia, Egypt, and other countries of the decolonizing world, was then enormous.'<sup>199</sup> Therefore, it was natural for newly independent countries that aspired to modernise quickly and to reduce their dependency on the former colonial powers to look with interest at the USSR and at its model of development.

Moscow's aim was thus not to turn the masses of Africa and Asia to communism, but rather to convince the elites of the newly independent countries to adopt socialism as a development model. West Africa represented a perfect opportunity to test the possibility of socialism in the third world. Compared to other newly independent countries in Asia or Africa Ghana, Guinea, and Mali were relatively smaller and therefore their development plans could be more easily influenced by economic cooperation with the USSR. That is why, as the next chapters will show, West Africa in the mid-1950s acquired a disproportionate importance in Soviet thinking about the third world, in spite of the small size of the countries in the region and of their lack of relevant strategic or economic resources.

As explained, the Soviet focus on economic policy as the main tool of interaction with the developing world makes the study of propaganda largely irrelevant to our understanding of Soviet foreign policy towards the third world during the Khrushchev era. The use of propaganda to support the positions of national liberation movements and newly independent states against Western colonialism, together with the promotion of the image of the Soviet Union as a "peace-loving"

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<sup>199</sup> Zubok, *A Failed Empire*: 131.

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nation”, was simply instrumental to a more important aim: the establishment of economic relations with the largest possible number of third world countries.

Moscow’s policy between 1953 and 1956 was successful in presenting the Soviet Union and its development model as a concrete possible alternative to Western liberal capitalism for newly independent states. Soviet economic and technical aid broadly conformed to the economic and political aspirations of third world countries, and therefore made the Soviet Union a feasible option for their ‘liberationist aspirations’.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Valkenier, *The Soviet Union and the Third World. An Economic Bind*: 5-11.

**PART I:**  
**ENGAGEMENT,**  
**1957-59**

## **Chapter 3 – 1957: First Contacts**

1957 did not witness a major change of policy in Moscow, or a breakthrough for the Soviet Union in the third world. However, it represented an important turning point in Soviet African policy: Moscow began to pay particular attention to the African continent, both in the definition and formulation of official policy and in the vociferous support for African independence in the Kremlin's official declarations. Policy became increasingly better defined, and dominated by ideological thinking. The main assumption was that the competition with the West would be of economic nature, a contest between two kinds of modernity and two kinds of society. The key Soviet asset was believed to be the not yet precisely defined "socialist model of development", which comprised rapid modernisation of both agriculture and industry. The Kremlin leadership believed that Moscow's success in modernising and developing Central Asia and the Caucasus had presented the same challenges and problems as the ones that the newly independent countries of the third world would now face. Therefore, the USSR could present itself as an ideal partner for third world countries in search of rapid modernisation after independence.

The key event of 1957 was Ghana's achievement of independence in March. This chapter will show how the USSR actively and persistently 'courted' Ghana's leaders, especially Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah, with the hope of establishing formal diplomatic relations as a prelude for aid and trade agreements. Moscow's behaviour was consistent with the conviction that a newly independent country would be interested in developing relations with the USSR in order to obtain economic and technical aid, provided that the new government was radical enough to maintain a certain distance from the West. Although as the chapter will show the Soviet strategy



was largely unsuccessful in 1957, the evidence supports the first hypothesis of this thesis: the USSR's engagement in West Africa was motivated primarily by ideological motivations, specifically the strong conviction of having achieved a superior kind of modernity, which could be replicated elsewhere and would eventually mean the expansion of the socialist model.

### *Policy-making in Moscow*

At the beginning of 1957 a new, more assertive Soviet policy with regard to the developing world was ready to be extended to Africa. As signalled by the evolution of policies during the previous few years, the Soviet Union was increasingly more convinced of the possibility, indeed the necessity, of assisting the cause of national liberation movements and supporting the newly independent states in the third world. Decolonization in sub-Saharan Africa offered a new opportunity for Moscow to win new allies and pursue Khrushchev's dream of "globalising" socialism by exporting it to new territories.

### The new policy on the third world

In a 1957 resolution the Presidium expressed certainty that the struggle of the people of Asia and Africa for independence from Western colonialism was destined to be successful, and imperialism would be defeated by history. This had important implications for the socialist camp: for, as the West would try to keep its colonial privileges for as long as possible, the USSR, together with the other socialist countries, had to support the struggle for independence. In recent years, the Presidium wrote, the West had shown its aggressive intentions in places such as Egypt, Indochina, Kenya, Malaya. However,

the mighty forces of modernity defend peace: the unshakable camp of the socialist states, headed by the Soviet Union; the nationalist states of Asia and Africa, which have assumed an anti-imperialist position and form together with the socialist countries a vast part of the world; the international working class and in the first place its vanguard – the communist parties; the mass movement of peoples for peace.<sup>201</sup>

The Kremlin's leadership had great confidence in the possibilities offered by decolonisation and national liberation movements, and hoped that they would become the first allies of the USSR, on the same level as the other socialist countries. The traditional ideological statement that only strictly Marxist-Leninist movements and parties had to be supported by the Soviet Union was no longer valid. A new policy was being created, shaped by the conviction that the forces of national liberation and anti-imperialism were the USSR's natural partners.

The new Soviet foreign policy had a clear economic outlook. Shepilov, a few days before stepping down as Foreign Minister, addressed the Supreme Soviet on 1 February 1957, speaking about the achievements of Moscow's foreign policy over the past twelve months and the line to adopt for the future. He immediately complimented Khrushchev and Bulganin on their visits to India, Burma and Afghanistan, the results of which were 'difficult to underestimate'. Shortly afterwards, the Foreign Minister stressed the importance of the

...increased friendly collaboration with a great power – India, and also with Indonesia, Egypt, Syria, Afghanistan and other countries of Asia and Africa. Our nation welcomed the establishing of diplomatic relations with Cambodia, Sudan, Ceylon. The Soviet people look with increased sympathy

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<sup>201</sup> Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii (Russian State Archive of Contemporary History – henceforth, RGANI), f. 3, op. 12, d. 296, l. 4-22. In Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 2: Postanovleniya 1954-1958*, 723.

and consideration at the nations' selfless struggle for the consolidation of their independence, until the end of imperialism's colonial system.<sup>202</sup>

From Shepilov's words, it is evident that he chose the economic and ideological levels to discuss the on-going competition with the West. Shepilov fully supported the idea of peaceful coexistence, but he stressed the importance of being aware that the West would not renounce its attempts at destabilising the socialist bloc, and its exploitation of the third world. The main point behind Shepilov's long discussion of the economy of the socialist bloc was that whereas the West needed to exploit and take advantage of other countries, socialist economic development was tightly connected to cooperation and mutual help. He went to great lengths to denounce American imperialism, seen as the heir, and at the same time potential rival of, European colonialism. 'American monopolists' already had large interests in the third world and, in Shepilov's opinion, would try to expand them further in the near future. Still advocating peaceful coexistence and, where possible, cooperation between the two blocs, Shepilov made it very clear that the path to development the newly independent countries chose to take was a very crucial question for the Soviet Union and its foreign policy.<sup>203</sup>

#### Focus on development

The Soviet leadership saw economic aid and technical cooperation as the prime tools of Soviet policy towards the third world. In particular, Moscow thought that it would be possible to replicate in Africa and Asia some of the development policies that had been applied with success in the USSR. For example, modernisation of agriculture in

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<sup>202</sup> RGANI, fond 3, opis 12, dela 175, list 7-49. In *ibid.*, 543-44.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 546-74.

Central Asia and the Caucasus, through initiatives such as the “Virgin Lands” campaign, was thought to be particularly relevant in the context of the third world, where the need to boost agricultural productivity was as important as in the more “backward” republics of the USSR. Khrushchev himself regarded the “Virgin Lands” campaign as a way to improve permanently the standard of living of Soviet citizens – the same challenge that awaited the governments of newly independent third world states.<sup>204</sup> In Westad’s words

Using massive amounts of irrigation and chemical fertilizers to develop the barren plain, Khrushchev’s leadership assumed that they had devised a new way of intensifying food production. [...] Together, Soviet know-how in agriculture and industry would revolutionize production at home and make it possible for countries moving towards socialism to move faster and with fewer concessions to the West.<sup>205</sup>

However, the Soviet leadership was also conscious that the West had important interests in the third world, and therefore that there was a very concrete risk that the third world ‘will become the centre of foreign capitalist and economic supremacy’.<sup>206</sup> The Soviet Union thus had to use every possible opportunity to establish cooperative relations with newly independent countries, before Western preponderance became too solid.

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<sup>204</sup> <sup>204</sup> RGANI f. 52, op. 1, d. 343, l. 27-30. In Khrushchev, *Dva Tsveta Vremeni*, 2:

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<sup>205</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*: 71.

<sup>206</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 28, d. 502, l. 68.

*The Soviet Union and Africa*

The USSR and decolonisation

Africa was part of Moscow's renewed interest for the third world in general. The first signals of a new Soviet assertiveness towards Africa could be felt at the United Nations. The XI session of the General Assembly, which had started in late 1956, had on its agenda several items of great interest and importance for the third world, such as development cooperation, the administration of 'non self-governing' territories and independence for 'trust territories'. Obviously, it was an ideal occasion to show off Soviet resolution in fighting against Western interests for the rights of the colonies to gain independence and of the already independent countries in obtaining technical cooperation and development aid.

Since late January 1957, the Soviet representative at the UN General Assembly had been speaking at length about national liberation movements and colonialism, with special reference to the African continent. The Soviet envoy argued that the end of the colonial system was unavoidable and near, he praised the effort of the 'colonial people' in trying to obtain independence, and he presented the Western colonial powers – in particular Britain and France – as exploitative and who would try to cling on to their privileges until the very last moment. The situation in the colonial world was described as extremely difficult from an economic point of view: those countries that were about to become independent would need development aid in several crucial fields, for example agriculture and education.<sup>207</sup>

The Soviet Union was trying to present itself as defender of the rights of the colonised, as opposed to the aggressive behaviour of the Western powers that had

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<sup>207</sup> V.A. Brykin, ed. *SSSR i Strany Afriki, 1946-1962 gg. Dokumenty i Materialy*, 2 vols., vol. 1: 1946 g. - Sentyabr 1960 g. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatelstvo Politicheskoi Literatury 1963), 327-37.

been made evident by episodes such as the Suez crisis and the independence war in Algeria. The Soviet delegation insisted on calling for the UN to assume a leading role in the colonies, in order to prepare the final transfer of power to the local populations. Soviet UN representative T.T. Tazhibaev harshly criticised colonialism and its ‘apologists’, denying its supposedly ‘civilising mission’. Tazhibaev accused the colonial powers of having ‘fabricated’ theories that depicted African societies as backward and primitive, so to justify their expansionist aims in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. ‘For Africa, this civilising action of the Europeans meant a colossal decline of the population, the collapse of agriculture, a prolonged delay in the development of the productive forces.’<sup>208</sup>

This Soviet rhetoric echoed the grievances of many African leaders of the time. Their speeches aimed precisely to destroy any myth that European colonialism had brought modernity and civilisation to African societies. Imperialism, instead, had swept away ancient African civilizations, whose level of development modern Africans should be proud of. The Gold Coast’s Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah explained that the name “Ghana”, which would soon replace “Gold Coast” once the country would become independent in March, was chosen specifically to capture the echoes of an old African empire.

The name Ghana is deeply rooted in ancient African history, especially in the history of the western portion of Africa known as the Western Sudan. It kindles in the imagination of modern African youth the grandeur and the achievement of a great medieval civilisation which our ancestors developed many centuries before European penetration and subsequent domination of African began.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 340-42.

<sup>209</sup> Extract from a 1956 speech by Nkrumah. In Kwame Nkrumah, *Axioms of Kwame Nkrumah* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1967), 47.

Nkrumah's view of colonialism was extremely negative. 'Imperialism knows no law beyond its own interest – he told the Gold Coast People Representative Assembly in 1949 – and it is natural that despite the pretensions of its agents to justice and fair play, they always seek their interest first.'<sup>210</sup>

The Soviet Union was trying to shape its official language in the same way by supporting African claims and attacking the Europeans for their colonial adventures. Moscow's hope was that the proximity of views between the Soviet and African leaderships would trigger a rapid building of relations between Moscow and the first independent African states south of the Sahara. Top Soviet leaders such as Shepilov and Molotov were firmly convinced of the importance to support national liberation movements in their struggle for independence. Moscow needed to establish contacts with the new emerging forces in Africa and Asia, and needed to improve Soviet propaganda on decolonisation by highlighting the dangers of colonialism and publishing materials in local languages.<sup>211</sup> Moreover, influential figures like Ponomarev insisted that Moscow's propaganda for the third world should focus on publicising the Soviet achievements in terms of economic and social modernisation and of improved living standards, in particular in the Central Asian republics of the USSR.<sup>212</sup> Ponomarev believed that the "central Asian model" was what the Soviet Union could successfully export to third world countries in search for a development strategy. This was particularly relevant for Africa, where Western economic domination appeared especially strong, and where consequently Moscow had to stress

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>211</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 2: Postanovleniya 1954-1958*, 578.

RGANI, f. 5, op. 28, d. 502, l. 18-22.

<sup>212</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 28, d. 502 l. 55-56. RGANI, f. 5, op. 28, d. 502, l. 63-64.

the advantages of its socialist alternative to capitalist development.<sup>213</sup> These notions would assume a crucial importance for Soviet policy in the next few years.

Communism in Tropical Africa: propaganda and counter-propaganda

The Western powers observed with concern the growing Soviet interest in Africa. In early 1957, the British Foreign Office reported that ‘there are definite signs of increased Sino-Soviet Bloc interest in Tropical Africa’. In particular, London believed that West Africa was the area in which Communism could be exceptionally attractive, because of the ‘comparatively advanced populations and the absence of large European settler communities’.<sup>214</sup> The Foreign Office was particularly worried about possible ‘Soviet economic penetration’ in the Gold Coast, which was due to become independent from Britain in March. The British were concerned by the fact that Moscow’s anti-colonial rhetoric, combined with the promise of rapid development following the USSR’s example, would find fertile ground in Africa’s ‘nationalistic’ regimes. This view was reinforced as the Foreign Office looked at what had already happened in India and Egypt, where Moscow had managed to obtain a remarkable degree of influence in a relatively short span of time in spite of the two countries’ existing political and economic ties to Britain.<sup>215</sup>

Since February 1957, when preparing for the upcoming Bermuda conference,<sup>216</sup> the Foreign Office was studying how to counter communism in Tropical Africa and, crucially, how to win full American support for this enterprise,

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<sup>213</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 28, d. 502, l. 68.

<sup>214</sup> UKNA, FO371/125292, G.L. MacDermott to J.H.A. Watson, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1957.

<sup>215</sup> UKNA, FO371/125321, A.H.F. Rumbold to F.E. Cumming-Bruce, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1957.

<sup>216</sup> From 20 to 24 March 1957, American President D.D. Eisenhower and British Prime Minister H. Macmillan met in Bermuda to discuss policy towards colonies and newly independent countries.



while at the same time changing the Americans' 'attitude about "colonialism"'.<sup>217</sup> The Foreign Office believed that 'the Communist object at this stage is not to sovietise Africa, but to weaken the position of the metropolitan powers and of the "West" generally'. London thought that Anglo-American cooperation would be crucial to prevent the Soviet Union from attaining this goal, but, at the same time, it feared that the Americans might jeopardise British African policy by criticising 'colonialism' openly and publicly. The best strategy to keep the USSR out of Tropical Africa was deemed to be by supporting democratic and stable local governments after independence, and providing generous development aid, a point, obviously, where American money would be particularly important.<sup>218</sup>

### *Ghana's independence*

#### Political relations

In spite of Western fears and Soviet hopes, an immediate strengthening of relations between the Soviet Union and Ghana (the first independent sub-Saharan state) did not in fact happen. The first contacts between Ghana and the USSR occurred in January 1957, two months before the West African state became independent. Nkrumah, as Prime Minister of the then Gold Coast, wrote to Soviet Premier Bulganin in order to invite a representative of the Soviet Union to the official celebrations for the

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<sup>217</sup> UKNA, FO371/125292, C.Y. Carstairs to J.H.A. Watson, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1957. At this stage the Soviet threat was seen by the British as a possibility to attract Washington's attention towards Communist expansion in Tropical Africa, so to obtain some degree of American support for their colonial policy. On the other hand, the risk of losing influence in Africa in favour of the 'anti-colonial' USA was very realistic.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 'Countering Communist Influence in Tropical Africa' paper attached to the letter.

'Means of Combating Communist Influence in Tropical Africa (Joint Paper prepared by the State Department and British Embassy, Washington).

declaration of independence, which would begin on 1 March 1957 in Accra.<sup>219</sup> After discussing the matter at the Presidium, Bulganin wrote back to Nkrumah on 23 January, announcing that a Soviet delegation would indeed be present at the ceremony.<sup>220</sup> In addition, on 6 March – the actual day of the proclamation of independence – Bulganin sent an official telegram to Nkrumah, congratulating him for ‘this meaningful date’ and wishing Ghana ‘independence and progress.’<sup>221</sup>

The head of the Soviet delegation in Accra was Sovkhoz Minister Ivan Benediktov. Both Legvold and Mazov write off the choice of Benediktov as a clear sign that Moscow was not particularly interested in Ghana. The State Farms Minister was not a prominent figure and he certainly did not occupy a leading role among the Soviet leadership. The contrast with the USA, whose head of delegation in Accra was Vice President Richard Nixon, was certainly striking.<sup>222</sup> Indeed, the American Department of State, which had been worrying about possible ‘Communist penetration’ in the Gold Coast/Ghana since early 1956, regarded Nixon’s presence in Accra as a way to show the degree of US dedication to Africa, in the face of growing Soviet interest for the continent.<sup>223</sup>

However, despite the lack of a top Kremlin leader in Accra, contemporary British observers were very concerned by the presence of a Soviet (and Chinese) delegation in Accra. They interpreted it as a sign of renewed Soviet interest in West Africa following the partial setback in Liberia two years before. Western observers

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<sup>219</sup> Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation – henceforth, AVP RF), fond 573, opis 1, papka 1, delo 3, list 1-2. In Apollon Davidson and Sergey Mazov, eds., *Rossiia i Afrika. Dokumenty i Materialy, XVIII v. - 1960 g.*, vol. II: 1918 - 1960 gg. (Moscow: IVI RAN, 1999), 179-80.

<sup>220</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 1, p. 1, d. 3, l. 3. In *ibid.*, 180-81.

<sup>221</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 1*, 355.

<sup>222</sup> Davidson, Mazov, and Tsytkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 162-63. Mazov, *Politika SSSR v Zapadnoi Afrike*: 46.

<sup>223</sup> Glennon and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1955-1957 - Africa*, 362-65, 72-74.

were eager to know what plans the delegation had, and If they carried concrete proposal of agreements to discuss with Nkrumah.<sup>224</sup>

As the British analysts understood it, Moscow really did have a plan about Ghana, however vague. The choice of Benediktov as head of the Soviet delegation in Accra was in fact not casual, and anticipated a constant trend of Soviet policy towards the third world in the late 1950s. Although not a top leader in the Kremlin, Benediktov had been the Minister of Agriculture when the “Virgin Lands” campaign was being elaborated and then launched. As previously mentioned, the Soviet leadership believed that the mechanisation of agriculture and the increase in production that followed the “Virgin Lands” campaign were the kind of modernisation that a state like Ghana was looking for. This was believed to be the key to win influence with the newly independent countries.

Nkrumah met Benediktov several times in Accra. The Soviet documents about these meetings have not yet been fully declassified, but it is possible to reconstruct at least some of what went on thanks to Western and Ghanaian sources. The British High Commissioner in Accra reported to London that the Soviet representative

asked the Ghana Government to agree to establishment of a Russian diplomatic mission in Accra. After vacillation the Ghana Government replied that they did not wish at present to extend the range of direct diplomatic relation so far agreed.<sup>225</sup>

Benediktov also proposed that a “goodwill” delegation visit the USSR in the near future, and directly invited the Ghanaian Minister of Agriculture to take part in the

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<sup>224</sup> UKNA, FO371/125294, ‘United Kingdom High Commissioner in Ghana to Commonwealth Relations Office’, 28 March 1957.

<sup>225</sup> UKNA, FO371/125294, ‘U.K. High Commission in Ghana, Fortnightly Report for the Period 6<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> March – Part II’, 26 March 1957.

visit – a first confirmation that Benediktov’s choice had been motivated exactly by the desire to show off Soviet progresses in agriculture.<sup>226</sup> Moreover, the Americans had ‘unverified intelligence to the effect that the Russians plan to make a major purchase of cocoa at the time of the ceremonies’.<sup>227</sup>

The Soviet aim was clear: Moscow wished to put forward a set of proposals to initiate economic cooperation with Accra, and thus gradually introduce its model of development in Ghana. The idea that Ghana could “go socialist” was after all not that remote. Nkrumah’s rhetoric was openly anti-colonial and seemingly pro-socialist. In his autobiography, published in 1957, he declared that ‘capitalism is too complicated a system for a newly independent nation. Hence the need for a socialistic society.’ Furthermore, the Ghanaian Prime Minister believed that ‘economic independence should follow and maintain political independence’ and that therefore the development of the newly independent territories should be extraordinarily rapid: a forced march towards progress, to be realized in just one generation.<sup>228</sup> Nkrumah belonged to the same generation of nationalist leaders as Nasser, Sukarno and Nehru who, without being communists, deeply resented colonialism and often followed left wing policies. They aspired to get rid of Western political and economic influence, and Moscow appeared to be offering an attractive alternative recipe for rapid development. Some British diplomats were even worried by ‘the fact that many of the coloured leaders against colonial domination have fallen under Communist (or, more precisely, in Dr. Nkrumah’s case Marxist) influence.’<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 1, p. 1, d. 3, l. 9.

Ghanaian Public Records and Archive Administration (PRAAD), ADM/13/2/44, 14 January 1958.

<sup>227</sup> Glennon and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1955-1957 - Africa*, 373.

<sup>228</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (Endinburgh: T. Nelson, 1957), x. Also in Westad, *The Global Cold War*: 91-92.

<sup>229</sup> UKNA, FO371/125292, H.F.T. Smith to L.T. Tomes, 4 April 1957.

However, despite all this, Benediktov's stay in Accra was not particularly successful. Ghana did not react positively to the initial Soviet openings. Indeed, Nkrumah seemed to be following an ambiguous policy regarding his country's diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. His position seemed to change according to the circumstances and the interlocutors: shortly after the official proclamation of independence, when meeting Nixon after the ceremony, Nkrumah confirmed that 'Ghana might find it necessary to establish some kind of representation with the Soviet bloc.'<sup>230</sup> A few months later, instead, probably due to the fact that Nkrumah had become fully convinced that the Americans were going to be indispensable partners for Ghana's economic development, the Prime Minister told a group of foreign diplomats, including US Ambassador Wilson C. Flake, that a definitive decision concerning Ghana's relations with the USSR had not yet been taken, that Moscow was exercising a lot of pressure for a prompt opening of official exchanges and that he 'saw little way to hold the USSR off much longer'.<sup>231</sup> It is reasonable to assume that Nkrumah was not opposed in principle to starting some sort of official exchange with the USSR, but Western reactions were more important to him than Moscow's openings.

Moreover, in June 1957, Nkrumah in person ruled out the possibility of a visit of Ghana's Minister of Agriculture B. Yeboa-Afari to the USSR. Nkrumah wrote to Moscow that his cabinet was now reviewing the whole economic policy for the future, and the Minister could not leave the country at such a crucial moment. However, the door was left open for 'a similar opportunity to see and learn from the

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<sup>230</sup> Glennon and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1955-1957 - Africa*, 378.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 382.

agriculture of the USSR in the future.<sup>232</sup> The timeframe was left unspecified. Of Benediktov's proposals, only the offer to buy cocoa was accepted in full by Accra.<sup>233</sup>

Obviously, Moscow was not pleased with Ghana's response to its initiatives, and identified the reason for Accra's minimal enthusiasm in initiating relations with the USSR in the only limited independence that Ghana had achieved. *Pravda* wrote that since the main economic resources of the country were still in the hands of foreign capital, real independence had not yet been obtained. Ghana was in fact largely dependent on Britain for the cocoa trade, which was easily the main economic activity of the country. As long as a Western power kept its powerful grip on Ghana, there was little hope of a post-colonial relationship developing between Moscow and Accra.<sup>234</sup> Furthermore, both London and Washington exercised a significant pressure on Nkrumah and his government to prevent Ghana from establishing closer links to the USSR. Ambassador Flake even thought that 'we might persuade Prime Minister [to] use [a] new formula to postpone indefinitely USSR exchange.' His idea was to convince Ghana that the USA was ready to provide financial aid, and therefore there was no need to look for alternative donors, such as the Soviet Union.<sup>235</sup>

The situation for the Soviet Union improved slightly by the end of 1957. In October, the Ghanaian High Commissioner in Britain wrote to Moscow proposing a 'trade and goodwill mission to the USSR, led by a Minister', thus partly reviving Soviet hopes. The proposed date for the official visit was July 1958, and its main

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<sup>232</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 1, p. 1, d. 3, l. 9-14.

<sup>233</sup> Further details will be presented in the next section.

<sup>234</sup> N. Pastukhov, *Pravda*, 4 March 1957. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsyarkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 163. Mazov, *Politika SSSR v Zapadnoi Afrike*: 46.

<sup>235</sup> Glennon and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1955-1957 - Africa*, 383.

purpose would be to discuss trade and development aid, and also to let Ghanaians see and study how small industries in rural areas were run in the Soviet Union.<sup>236</sup>

This was a positive signal for the Soviet leadership, which then sent Soviet Africanist and deputy director of the Ethnographic Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences Ivan Potekhin to Ghana, where he would spend the next three months in order to conduct academic research, as well as to meet leading figures in Ghanaian political and cultural life.<sup>237</sup> Soviet expertise on Africa was still very limited, and therefore working in close collaborations with the few African experts in higher education institutions was fundamental for the development of policy in the Kremlin. Although the first contact had been disappointing, Soviet attention for Ghana was still alive.

#### Economic relations

As mentioned above, Accra agreed to increase the quantity of cocoa it sold to the Soviet Union. Moscow had been purchasing cocoa beans from Ghana since 1955, but the cocoa trade was otherwise dominated by British businesses.<sup>238</sup> In 1956, the Soviet Union imported 12.2 thousand tonnes of Ghanaian cocoa, for a total value of roughly 33 million roubles. Following the acceptance of Benediktov's proposal in 1957, the amount trebled to 36.7 thousand tonnes, purchased at a lower price (the total Soviet

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<sup>236</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 1, p. 1, d. 4, l. 1-5.

<sup>237</sup> Potekhin's trip will be discussed in the next chapter. The Professor's visit in Ghana caused a certain degree of distress in London and Washington. See UKNA, FO371/125303, L.J.D. Wakely to M.E. Allen, 22 November 1957, and Glennon and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1955-1957 - Africa*, 387-88. Ghanaian authorities immediately decided to keep an eye on Potekhin, suspecting 'political reasons' behind the visit. See PRAAD, ADM/13/1/26, 30 August 1957; ADM/13/2/40, 30 August 1957.

<sup>238</sup> Roger E. Kanet and Boris Ipatov, "Soviet Aid and Trade in Africa," in *Soviet and Chinese Aid to African Nations*, ed. Warren Weinstein and Thomas H. Henriksen (New York, NY: Praeger, 1980), 18.

expenditure for Ghanaian cocoa beans in 1957 was 75.7 million roubles).<sup>239</sup> The remarkable increase in imports from Ghana was no doubt aimed at showing Ghana that it could reduce its dependency on Britain by relying on trade with the Eastern bloc. However, since formal diplomatic relations had not been established yet, there was no question of granting Ghana development aid. Any discussion of possible economic help could begin only when the political issue was settled.

### *Conclusion*

Moscow had shown the clear intention to “do business” with Ghana, hoping to initiate political relations and economic cooperation shortly after independence. The Ghanaians, however, responded by taking time and carefully avoiding showing too much interest in the USSR. Links to the Western world, and particularly to Britain, were still too important for Ghana to be jeopardised by openings to the socialist camp. Moscow’s hope to achieve a rapid breakthrough in Sub-Saharan Africa was frustrated, but the aspiration to build cooperative relations with Ghana was not forgotten, thus showing that the Kremlin leadership was truly committed to its idea of gaining influence in Africa.

This chapter has shown how Moscow’s primary interest was to transplant both practical and “ideological” concepts into Africa. Khrushchev and the other Kremlin leaders hoped to establish diplomatic and commercial relations with Ghana founded on mutually advantageous economic exchanges and the rejection of the imperialist and capitalist Western world. Socialist ideas were relevant as the economic and political common ground that Moscow hoped to find with Accra.

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<sup>239</sup> "Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR za 1957 god," ed. Ministerstvo Vneshnei Torgovli SSSR (Moscow: Vneshtorgizdat, 1958), 149.



Ghana's rejection of the USSR's openings was judged as a significant failure, but only a temporary one. In spite of the partial failure in Ghana, the year 1957 ended in high spirits concerning Moscow's relations with the third world. The Moscow Youth Festival (July-August), which brought together students from all over the world to visit the Soviet Union, was a success. As British observers reported, 'an examination of *Pravda* [...] indicates that the African delegations were given prominent coverage.' Moreover, the Soviet authorities went to great lengths to praise the courage and determination of African people who obtained independence, and to criticise Western imperialism.<sup>240</sup> Godfrey Meynell, a Cambridge undergraduate from a prominent British family who covered the Youth Festival for the magazine *Time and Tide*, wrote that 'the Russians were hugely successful' in their attempt at charming the African delegations. Meynell reported how his efforts at defending Britain's record in the colonies met with open hostility from some of the Africans present at the Festival.<sup>241</sup> It was precisely African anti-colonialism that made Moscow's policy more successful in 1958.

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<sup>240</sup> UKNA, FO371/125303, "'Black Africa at the Moscow Youth Festival'", 16 August 1957.

<sup>241</sup> Godfrey Meynell, "What have I done for you?," *Time and Tide*, 31 August 1957.

## **Chapter 4 – 1958: Consolidation**

During 1958 the principles that guided Soviet policy in Africa were formalised by the CPSU in a series of meetings and reports. Party leaders agreed that the post-colonial elites of the third world could represent important partners for Soviet policies, even if they were nationalists and not socialists. Moreover, economic development and modernisation were recognised as key areas in which the USSR could offer its assistance to the newly independent countries. In particular, the experience of modernisation in Central Asia and the Caucasus could be used to identify the right policies that would work equally well in Africa and Asia.

The realisation of this project became easier thanks to Guinea's independence in 1958. Whereas Ghana remained largely reluctant to establish deeper relations with the USSR, the newly independent Guinea proved to be a better testing ground for the socialist model. Guinea showed interest in the Soviet Union and was clearly hoping to receive economic aid from the socialist countries. Thus, Moscow found a partner in Sub-Saharan Africa willing to cooperate in terms of economic relations, and the relationship with Guinea would assume great importance for the USSR in the next few years. Guinea – and Ghana – did not possess any relevant strategic or economic resource that the USSR could exploit. This confirms the proposition that Moscow became interested in West Africa primarily because of ideational factors – i.e. the belief that the region represented a perfect occasion to prove the merits of Soviet modernisation.

In Moscow, the Soviet Communist Party assumed an increasingly more important role in defining policy. In February the Presidium created a new Central Committee commission, for 'Questions of Ideology, Culture and International Party

Contacts'. The new commission, headed by Suslov, dealt primarily with international propaganda and relations with international socialist movements. This included maintaining relations with progressive governments in the third world, and therefore the commission played an important role for Soviet relations with West Africa.<sup>242</sup> The creation of a new Party body specifically designed to deal with radical movements in the third world signalled the growing importance of this area for Soviet foreign policy.

### *Relations with Ghana*

#### The question of diplomatic relations

In January the Soviet government once more tried to settle the issue of diplomatic relations with Ghana, by communicating its willingness to “welcome” a delegation from the West African country in the USSR, as discussed at the end of 1957. The Soviet Ambassador to London, Yakov Malik, wrote to Ghana’s High Commissioner in Britain, Edward Asafu Adjaye, and they agreed on July 1958 as a provisional date for the visit.<sup>243</sup> It was also agreed that the delegation would be a high level one, possibly including some ministers, but the Ghanaians insisted on restricting the numbers of delegates to no more than three, whereas Moscow wished for a larger group.<sup>244</sup> The Soviet leadership also extended an official invite to Nkrumah himself to visit the USSR. Asafu Adjaye, however, replied that the Prime Minister would visit

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<sup>242</sup> RGANI, f. 3, op. 14, d. 175, l. 3-4. In Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 2: Postanovleniya 1954-1958*, 755-56, 1007-08.

RGANI, f. 3, op. 12, d. 1008, l. 43-45. In Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 1*, 291.

<sup>243</sup> In the end the Ghanaian delegation visited the USSR only in 1959. See next chapter for further details.

<sup>244</sup> PRAAD, ADM/13/1/27, 14 January 1958; ADM/12/2/44, 14 January 1958.

the Soviet Union when he ‘feels free’, meaning when his official obligations would allow him.<sup>245</sup>

Once again the Ghanaian side treated a Soviet opening with great caution. Nkrumah felt it necessary not to show great interest in the USSR, while he immediately accepted a personal invite from President Dwight D. Eisenhower to visit the USA. In addition, Accra was keeping London very well informed about its dealings with Moscow.<sup>246</sup> Moreover, the Accra cabinet decided that any cultural contact with Communist countries should be first authorised by the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs. Even though exchanges between single citizens or organisations and socialist countries were not prohibited, this meant that the Ghanaian government did not trust the USSR and its allies, and desired to keep an eye on all the activities that involved the socialist world.<sup>247</sup> Despite Moscow’s efforts, Britain and the US remained Ghana’s primary partners.

In spite of an article in *Pravda* that claimed that an official agreement on the exchange of diplomatic representatives had been reached,<sup>248</sup> and the fact that the MID was making enquiries on the technicalities of opening a Soviet embassy in Accra,<sup>249</sup> in concrete terms not much had changed in Soviet-Ghana relations since the previous year. Ghana was still too connected to the West economically to consider a major

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<sup>245</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 2, p. 1, d. 3, l. 1-10.

<sup>246</sup> UKNA, FO371/135273, M.E. Allen to P. Hayman, March 25<sup>th</sup> 1958.

<sup>247</sup> PRAAD, ADM/13/1/27, 14 January 1958; ADM/13/2/44, 14 January 1958.

<sup>248</sup> ‘Soobshchenie ob ustanovlenii diplomaticheskikh otnoshenii mezhdru SSSR I Ganoi, *Pravda* 15 January 1958. In Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 1*, 379.

<sup>249</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 2, p. 1, d. 6, l. 28-29. The person approached by the MID, *Pravda* local correspondent O. Orestov, particularly stressed the need for Soviet diplomatic personnel to respect local traditions and expectations. For instance, he insisted on the fact that drivers would be absolutely indispensable. According to Orestov, Ghanaian ‘intelligentsia’ did not find the use of public transport – let alone walking – respectable, making the employment of official vehicles a necessity if the Soviet diplomats wanted to be ‘taken seriously’. In Soviet eyes, Ghana was still a bourgeois nation.

opening to the socialist world, and Britain was exercising a considerable amount of pressure on Nkrumah to delay the official establishment of diplomatic relations with the USSR. Although the Foreign Office seemed resigned to the idea that sooner or later Moscow would obtain some sort of permanent representation in Ghana, British diplomacy still deemed advantageous to continue 'our efforts to bring home to the Ghanaians the danger this implies and, if possible, to offer them advice discreetly on how to deal with a Soviet mission once it is established.' In order to maximise the effect on the Ghanaian Prime Minister, the British thought of using African friendly 'contacts' to talk to Nkrumah and convince him of the risks connected to an official opening to Moscow, a strategy that had allegedly already been employed with success in 1957.<sup>250</sup>

Nonetheless, in spite of Western efforts, Soviet "courting" of Nkrumah did not show signs of decreasing. When Nkrumah visited Britain in August Soviet Ambassador to London Malik met with him, and reiterated the Soviet readiness to receive a Ghanaian delegation in the near future.<sup>251</sup> The US Embassy in Accra reported that Nkrumah had stated that 'he had had difficulty in countering Malik's pressure for exchange of diplomatic missions soon.' The Prime Minister confirmed that an exact date for the opening of official relations with Moscow had not been set yet, and that it would most likely take place after Ghana's goodwill visit to the USSR, which was intended for some time in 1959, although Nkrumah feared that they might have to anticipate its date.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> UKNA, FO371/131187, 'From Foreign Office to Khartoum', February 28<sup>th</sup> 1958. PRAAD, ADM/12/2/44, 14 January 1958

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., M.E. Allen to H.F.T. Smith, June 25<sup>th</sup> 1958. Also FO371/131188, J.R.A. Bottomley to J.H. Ellis, August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1958.

<sup>252</sup> Harriet D. Schwar and Stanley Shaloff, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1958-1960 - Africa*, vol. XIV (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1992), 652.

The domestic situation and foreign relations of Ghana as seen in Moscow

Nkrumah, a strong believer in neutrality, was trying to keep London and Washington happy, while at the same time reassuring Moscow that Ghana did want to establish relations with the Soviet Union. Soviet observers were obviously aware of Nkrumah's ambiguities and hesitations, and explained Ghana's reluctance to open up diplomatic and economic relations with Ghana as a consequence of Western influence.

Professor Potekhin, who visited Ghana from October to December 1957, met Nkrumah and several other Ghanaian leaders, and reported his impressions back to Moscow in early 1958. Potekhin described his meeting with Nkrumah as 'rather frank'. Although the Soviet academic had come to see the Prime Minister primarily as a scholar interested in the history of national liberation movements, he 'soon switched the conversation to contemporary themes.' The African leader complained about the current Ghanaian constitution, drafted by Britain, which, according to Nkrumah, did not in fact concede real independence. The constitution would need to be changed, but at a later stage, since Ghana was then still in a phase of 'political stabilisation'. Even though the Prime Minister himself did not specify 'in which direction the constitution will be changed', the Soviet historian was able to find out several proposed amendments from meetings with other Ghanaian political leaders, all aimed at reducing London's influence. The main point was that Ghana should become a republic, therefore severing the formal link with the British crown. Furthermore, an 'anti-feudal' reform was judged necessary in order to modernise the country's economy and get rid of old privileges. The desired reforms seemed promising from the Soviet point of view, but Nkrumah's personality and ambitions struck Potekhin. The Soviet academic agreed that Ghanaian society needed modernisation and

obviously any sign of willingness to decrease British influence in the country was regarded with favour from Moscow. However, Potekhin also reported that

it is possible that a constitutional review will also fall on the path of further limitation of democracy and the establishment of a dictatorship of Egyptian type. Nkrumah told me that the ways of bourgeois democracy limit him, tie his hands. He manifestly dreams about autocracy.

The Ghanaian leader also asked his guest's opinion on the suggested plan for economic development, largely designed by British economist Arthur Lewis (later Sir Arthur Lewis), which predictably left Potekhin very cold. Lewis was a radical economist, who would win the Nobel Prize for this work on development economics in 1979, but whose ideas on growth and development were still at odds with the convictions held in Moscow.<sup>253</sup> In accordance with the Soviet line on the issue, Potekhin suggested to Nkrumah the establishment of economic relations with the Socialist bloc, confirming that Moscow believed that trade and aid were the keys to winning influence in West Africa. Nkrumah was open to the possibility, and confidentially announced that he was interested in visiting the USSR, even as early as in 1958.<sup>254</sup>

However, Potekhin also stressed how Nkrumah relied heavily on his personal advisor George Padmore, 'a renegade, in the mood for anti-Communism' in Potekhin's words. Padmore was a Trinidadian-born radical thinker and leading Pan-Africanist, whom Nkrumah had met and befriended during his studies in the USA. Padmore's thinking was heavily influenced by Marxism, and he had lived for a few

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<sup>253</sup> Further details about Lewis' development plan for Ghana will be presented in the next section.

<sup>254</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 2, p. 1, d. 8, l. 3-8. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika, Tom II*, 182-83.

years in Moscow, working for the Communist International. However, Padmore became bitterly dissatisfied with Stalinism and with Moscow's lack of interest for decolonisation in the 1930s, and decided to quit the Communist International and abandon the Soviet Union. He remained very critical and sceptical of Moscow's policies throughout his life and he certainly reinforced the Prime Minister's conviction that, in order for Ghana to become the leading force of pan-Africanism, it had to maintain a distance from both blocs. Ghana could be friendly towards the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, but should by no means become entangled in the socialist camp itself.<sup>255</sup>

Potekhin's report was not the only source of information about Ghana in Moscow. Oleg Orestov, a *Pravda* correspondent and the only Soviet citizen resident in Ghana at the time, was asked by the Soviet Foreign Ministry to prepare a report on the political situation in Ghana. His June 1958 report largely confirmed Potekhin's views on Nkrumah and the domestic situation. Orestov added that Nkrumah was extremely popular after the achievement of independence, and his ruling Convention People's Party (CPP) was firmly in control of the country. Although part of Ghana's 'intelligentsia' was sceptical of some of Nkrumah's policies, especially the more 'socialist' ones, the opposition party (the United Party, UP) did not have a real political programme, apart from opposing everything Nkrumah did. The UP relied mostly on the discontent among the Ashanti population in the central region of the country, based more on ethnic consideration than on political differences, and for the time being did not constitute a serious threat for the CPP.<sup>256</sup> The MID analysts who commented on Orestov's report agreed in broad terms with him, but looked with more scepticism at Nkrumah's CPP, which was judged a 'bourgeois' movement, focused on

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 2, p. 1, d. 6, l. 2-29.



the achievement of independence first, and now on the consolidation of the new state.<sup>257</sup>

Orestov considered Ghana's foreign policy as akin to the one practised by Nehru's India: 'active neutralism' was the key concept, although 'Ghana was ready to accept help from any nation', as long as it was not politically charged. Nkrumah wanted Ghana to become a leading force for African, and specifically West African, emancipation. For this reason, Nkrumah and his advisor Padmore staunchly supported national liberation movements everywhere on the continent. They were also active in trying to 'co-opt' other countries in the region in a sort of Ghana-led West African federation, although this project was still at a very early stage.<sup>258</sup>

All Soviet observers agreed that Ghana's relations with the West were more than cordial. In particular, British influence in the country was still very strong, especially in key areas such as the armed forces and the cocoa trade. Ghana's army was commanded by a British general and, in addition, British officers still occupied prominent positions in it. Moreover, London's grip on the Ghanaian economy was very strong, given the dominant position that British businesses kept in the country after independence. The West African state was a 'typically colonial' economy – Orestov explained – based on the production and export of a single commodity (cocoa, in Ghana's case). Cocoa trade had been fully dominated by British 'monopolies' for a long time, and therefore the country's economic survival after independence rested on the British companies, which were able to buy the whole production of cocoa and thus provide Ghana with precious foreign currency. Any attempt at breaking the Western dominance on Ghana's economy would mean making

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<sup>257</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 2, p. 1, d. 6, l. 49-51. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika, Tom II*, 184-85.

<sup>258</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 2, p. 1, d. 6, l. 2-29.

sure to provide sufficient guarantees to be able to buy a significant part of the cocoa production.<sup>259</sup>

N.S. Makarov, an attaché to the Soviet embassy in London who also reported on Ghana, drew the obvious conclusions: as long as Ghana was economically dependent on Britain, the possibility of establishing a strong diplomatic link with Accra was very feeble. Makarov wrote that

Nkrumah's government followed and still follows a policy of reduced speed with regard to the establishment of Soviet-Ghanaian relations. Such a position of Ghana's government is explained, first of all, by the strong dependency of Ghana from Britain, and, secondly, by the fear of Nkrumah's government to 'spoil' its relations with Britain and the USA and most of all to diminish the chances of receiving economic help as a result of establishing normal diplomatic, trade and other relations with the Soviet Union.<sup>260</sup>

However, Nkrumah did not rule out the possibility of establishing relations with Moscow. The chance of developing contacts with the USSR depended primarily on questions of economic cooperation. If Ghana did not manage to receive enough aid from the Western powers in the future, then it would be in favour of the possibility of an opening towards the USSR. Furthermore, Nkrumah could use the 'Soviet card' as a possible threat during the forthcoming negotiations with the Americans, should they drag their feet on the funding of an hydroelectric complex on the river Volta, the main development project envisaged by Nkrumah's government. If the West was not ready to offer sufficient funds towards the realization of the project, then the government of

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 2, p. 1, d. 6, l. 49-51. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika, Tom II*, 184-85.

Ghana would look in 'another place', as Ghana's Finance Minister Gbedema declared.<sup>261</sup>

Orestov and the MID had different ideas on the strength of US influence in Ghana. The *Pravda* correspondent described 'American positions' in the country as 'very feeble', due to 'minimal economic penetration'. This was obviously going to increase in the longer run, if Washington was going to contribute the largest part of the financing for the construction of the hydroelectric plant on the River Volta, a project of crucial importance for Nkrumah.<sup>262</sup>

The Foreign Ministry, however, tended to amplify the role of the USA in Ghana. In its judgement, since independence the Americans had paid great attention to building good relations with Accra. A US embassy was fully operative, and the Americans were working towards substituting Britain as the main influence in Ghana, with the final aim of using Ghana as a base for further penetration in the region.<sup>263</sup> The MID judgment on US-Ghana relations seemed excessively pessimistic, as Britain at the time was a much stronger presence in Ghana, and the Volta project was still little more than a proposal. It is quite possible that the MID deliberately exaggerated the degree of influence achieved by the USA, possibly to pre-emptively justify the lack of success of Soviet diplomacy in obtaining a breakthrough with Nkrumah.

However, all the observers agreed on a set of facts: Nkrumah was not a socialist, but he was radical enough to be, in principle, interested in cooperation with the Soviet Union. This was made difficult at the present time by Ghana's strong political and economic ties to the West. The key to win influence in Accra was

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 2, p. 1, d. 6, l. 2-29.

<sup>263</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 2, p. 1, d. 6, l. 31-49.

breaking the British monopoly on the cocoa trade, and offering economic aid competitive with Western development assistance.

### Economic relations

The unsuccessful attempts at normalising diplomatic relations with Ghana had significant consequences in the economic sphere. Moscow's purchases of cocoa beans plummeted to 3.4 thousand tonnes, from 36.7 in 1957 and 12.2 in 1956.<sup>264</sup> Even if there was some genuine demand for Ghana's cocoa in the USSR, Moscow was willing to buy large quantities only if this was connected to long-term economic cooperation. The Soviet Union was not ready to step up its trade with Ghana as long as Nkrumah's government maintained an ambiguous position regarding official relations with Moscow.

At the same time, however, the Accra government was not entirely satisfied with the current development strategy for the country. Nkrumah's main economic advisor was Professor Lewis, whose recommended plan of action was granting unlimited access to foreign enterprises to Ghana for the next 5 to 10 years. Lewis' idea was to create in Ghana an industry aimed at exports, which would work in close collaboration with the businesses that already operated in Ghana in connection with the cocoa trade. Although certainly not a precursor of the "Washington consensus", Lewis' ideas were grounded in classical economics, and he saw both free trade and private enterprise as the main drivers of development.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> "Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR za 1959-1963 gody," ed. Ministerstvo Vneshnei Torgovli SSSR (Moscow: Vneshtorgnzdat, 1965), 432.

<sup>265</sup> See W. Arthur Lewis, "Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour," *Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies* 22(1954). For a synthesis of Lewis's ideas: Gustav Ranis, "Arthur Lewis' Contribution to Development Thinking and Policy," in *The Lewis Model after 50 years: Assessing Sir*

When Lewis presented the outline of his development plan to the Ghanaian government in June 1958, not everyone reacted with enthusiasm. Several members of the government were unhappy with Ghana's current dependency on a single export commodity – cocoa beans – which in their opinion was destined to grow even more if Ghana followed Lewis' recommendations. Nkrumah himself, who at the time held Lewis in high esteem, showed some scepticism for his development plan, and spoke in favour of reducing the role of private enterprise in favour of more state control. In the end it was agreed that the plan would be revised, and that some areas of the national economy would be developed without private enterprises.<sup>266</sup> It was precisely Nkrumah's belief in the need for state intervention, a national industry and public prominence over the private sector – all basic principles of socialist economic planning – that would in the end draw him closer to the Soviet Union in 1959.

### *Relations with Guinea*

On 2 October 1958 the Republic of Guinea became fully independent from France, following the referendum on 28 September in which 95% of the Guinean voters rejected De Gaulle's offer to join the French Commonwealth. Immediately after independence, on 3 October, newly elected President Ahmed Sekou Toure sent a telegram to Moscow announcing the result of the referendum, and signalling the Guinean interest in establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.<sup>267</sup>

The French Communist Party warmly recommended recognizing the new state, as Ghana and the United Arab Republic had already done. The MID, through

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*Arthur Lewis' Contribution to Development Economics and Policy* (Manchester School2004).

<sup>266</sup> PRAAD, 13/1/27, 27 June 1958.

<sup>267</sup> For the text of the telegrams, see Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 1*, 383.

deputy Director Kuznetsov's report to the Central Committee, supported the PCF position, writing that exchanging diplomatic representatives with Guinea would be consistent with the Soviet policy of friendship and support towards newly independent African states. However, the MID also suggested caution. Quick recognition of the new African republic – Kuznetsov wrote – could alienate the Arab states – because the Soviet Union had not yet recognized the 'new government of Algeria' – not to mention France and some other African countries. Finally, Kuznetsov anticipated that Guinea would soon try to obtain a seat at the United Nations, and expressed the view that the Soviet Union should support its request.<sup>268</sup>

The Presidium discussed the matter on 4 October, approving a resolution that followed the Foreign Ministry's recommendations. The party leadership, however, was less concerned than the MID about the possible reactions to the Soviet recognition of Guinea by other countries, choosing to send a positive reply to Sekou Toure's telegram on the same day.<sup>269</sup>

The United States, on the other hand, was not sure whether to recognise Guinea or not. On one hand, the French were pressing Washington not to give any sort of official legitimacy to the newly independent state, often playing the "communist card" and stressing Sekou Toure's proximity to socialist ideas and socialist countries. On the other hand, however, American officials were concerned by the fact that the Soviet Union had wasted no time in recognising the new African state, and that Moscow might really manage to bring Guinea closer to the socialist bloc.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> AVP RF, f. 0575, op. 1, p. 1, d. 2, l. 1-2. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiya i Afrika, Tom II*, 198-99.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid. The exchange was between Kliment Voroshilov and Sekou Toure, since the Guinean leader had addressed his initial message to 'the Soviet head of state'.

<sup>270</sup> Schwar and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1958-1960 - Africa*, 670-82.

The establishment of relations between Guinea and the USSR, nevertheless, was not as smooth as anticipated. On 8 November, Foreign Minister Gromyko wrote to the Central Commission signalling that the Soviet Union had not ‘managed to establish a direct contact with the government of the Guinean Republic’ yet. Moreover, the *Pravda* correspondent in Paris, who was planning to visit Guinea, had been prevented from reaching the country by the French authorities, which refused him permission to travel through the French territories in West Africa. Gromyko repeated that, in the MID’s opinion, establishing contacts with Sekou Toure’s government was a suitable policy, and suggested sending Pavel Gerasimov, a counsellor at the Soviet Embassy in the United Arab Republic, to Guinea in order to discuss ‘the perspectives of Soviet-Guinean relations and to probe the Guineans’ reaction to the possibility of setting up a Soviet embassy in Conakry.’ The Foreign Ministry proposed to send, along with Gerasimov, somebody from the State Committee for Foreign Economic Contacts (GKES), as well as a *Pravda* correspondent.<sup>271</sup>

The Presidium agreed with Gromyko’s proposal: it was decided that Gerasimov would reach Conakry via Accra in late 1958. For this reason, on 25 November the Soviet Ambassador to Cairo, E. Kisselev, made contact with the Ghanaian Embassy in the UAR in order to obtain the necessary clearance for the Soviet envoy to Guinea. Using the occasion, Kisselev also proposed that Gerasimov stay in Ghana for a few days, and meet with Nkrumah. The Ghanaian Ambassador replied positively, although a meeting with the Prime Minister could not be arranged

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<sup>271</sup> AVP RF, f. 0575, op. 1, p. 1, d. 2, l. 8. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika, Tom II*, 199-200.

at the time. In the end, the Soviet diplomat stopped in Accra for two days, and met Ghana's Foreign Minister Kojo Botsio.<sup>272</sup>

Gerasimov's visit to Conakry took place from 1 to 13 December 1958. 'The goal of this trip' – Gerasimov wrote back to the MID in his report – 'was the establishment of a direct contact with the government of the Guinean Republic, an exchange of opinions about the prospects of development of Soviet-Guinean political, economic and cultural relations and a study of the internal situation and the foreign policy of the country.'<sup>273</sup> The Soviet delegation met President Sekou Toure, as well as various government Ministers, and representatives of the leading Democratic Party of Guinea (*Parti Democratique de Guinee* – PDG).

The visit was, overall, a success: Sekou Toure and his ministers expressed interest in developing Guinea's relations with Moscow, and they seemed certain of the Soviet Union's friendly support in favour of the struggle for full independence and against colonialism. However, the exchange of diplomatic personnel between the two countries was still problematic: the Guinean Minister of Cooperation stated that 'at the moment, Guinea is forced to be tacked, not to join one bloc'. Apparently, Sekou Toure judged more convenient to establish formal diplomatic relations first with a capitalist country, and only then with the socialist world. In this way, Gerasimov reported, the Guinean president wanted to avoid irritating France, which otherwise would form a 'united front with Britain and the USA' and 'try to strangle the Guinean Republic.' The Guinean leader insisted that this was only a tactical expedient, and that Guinea would soon turn its attention towards the Soviet Union. Gerasimov reported that special attention had been given during the meetings to showing how building

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<sup>272</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 2, p. 1, d. 3, l. 1-10. Botsio was among the most pro-Soviet elements in Nkrumah's government.

<sup>273</sup> AVP RF, f. 0575, op. 1, p. 1, d. 2, l. 22-39. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika, Tom II*, 200-04.



diplomatic relations with the socialist camp would help Guinea in its struggle with the imperialists, pointing out as examples Soviet support for Egypt, Syria and Iraq.<sup>274</sup>

From a more practical point of view, several ministers stated that the newly formed Guinean army would need to be equipped. They were told that the Soviet Union did supply weapons to some countries, such as Egypt and Syria, and ‘should such a request arrive from the Guinean government, it will be examined with attention.’ Guinea also showed readiness to sell fruit to the Soviet Union, partly in exchange for Soviet industrial goods. Moreover, the Minister of National Education ‘expressed a wish about the concession of some scholarships for Guineans students in Soviet institutes of higher education (mainly technical).’<sup>275</sup>

On 12 December Gerasimov met Sekou Toure for the last time, and they agreed on a few crucial points. First of all, the Guinean president sought to establish commercial and cultural agreements with the Soviet Union. Therefore, a Soviet delegation was invited to travel to Conakry at any time to prepare such agreements. Second, the Guinean government would send to Moscow the Secretary of State for Foreign Contacts Diallo Abdulaye, with the main purpose of discussing Soviet economic aid to Guinea. Finally, Sekou Toure repeated that formal diplomatic relations between the two countries would be established in the near future. All talks of economic aid or bilateral trade were held off until the following year.<sup>276</sup>

Yet, Sekou Toure’s Guinea seemed to offer more promising prospects for the USSR than Ghana. Guinea had made the choice of severing its links with France, and now it faced political isolation and economic difficulties, due to the sanctions imposed on Guinea by the countries that accepted the French requests, and was

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

therefore in desperate need of political support and, most of all, economic aid. Moscow knew it could provide both, and by doing this establishing a real base from which to spread its ideas in Africa and promote its model of development. Sekou Toure was judged a reliable ally: ‘according to the French friends [French Communists] Sekou Toure’s political opinions are close to Marxism’.<sup>277</sup> From Moscow’s point of view, it was much more than Nkrumah’s fledgling pro-socialism, but firm Western sympathies, and therefore Guinea merited great hopes from the Kremlin, which in the next couple of years would turn into large investments.

### *The CPSU and the “socialist model of development”*

The year 1958 represented a key moment for the evolution of Soviet policies towards the third world in general. As the experience of the early diplomatic contacts with Ghana and Guinea shows, Moscow’s focus was on economic cooperation and development aid as the prime tools of Soviet policy in the third world. However, the USSR still did not have a systematic body of thought on political and economic strategies for development in Asia and Africa. For this reason, in late 1958, the CPSU began to look at the third world with the aim of producing analysis and policy recommendations to guide Moscow’s policy.

### Decolonisation and development: the approach from the Kremlin

In October 1958, the recently established CPSU Commission on Ideological Questions and Contacts with Foreign Movements prepared a long and detailed document on current Soviet policies in Africa and Asia, and practical suggestions for

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<sup>277</sup> AVP RF, f. 0575, op. 1, p. 1, d. 2, l. 19. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsympkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 200.

future policies. The Commission foresaw that in the near future a large number of countries would gain independence from their colonial masters, and this was a positive development from the Soviet point of view. The main trend of decolonisation was the growth of 'nationalism', interpreted in the Kremlin as the 'liquidation of the colonial structures' of the newly independent countries' economies, and the creation of national cultures. According to the report,

not one of these problems can be solved with the path of capitalist development. The peoples of the countries of Asia and Africa will therefore step by step turn to the socialist side and, after finding a complete understanding of their interests from the socialist camp, will all be more and more convinced that that their future is to be linked not with capitalism, but with socialism.

CPSU officials understood very well that the Soviet Union could become an attractive model that could inspire newly independent countries, and were convinced that the right kind of propaganda was essential to help them make the necessary switch towards the socialist camp. Soviet propaganda had therefore to stress the advantages of socialism over capitalism, by focusing on the historical achievements of the Soviet Union. The experience of transformation in the Soviet Republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus would play an important part in shaping Moscow's policy: in the Soviet narrative they had been conquered by Tsarist Russia, a colonial power, then set free by Soviet rule, and now rapidly progressing towards economic and social development thanks to Moscow's policies. The Soviet Union was ready to offer the same kind of assistance to third world countries looking for rapid modernisation after independence.

In contrast, they argued, Western economic help was 'exploitative' in nature: it served no other purpose than opening the way for the expansion into third world

markets of Western ‘monopolies’. Whereas socialism meant an economic ‘brotherhood’ among countries founded on principles of mutual help and friendly relations, capitalism was neo-colonialist, a form of ‘economic imperialism’.<sup>278</sup>

The Ideology Commission also specified that absolute non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries – a principle to which the Soviet Union claimed to stick to – was now a wrong strategy. Supporting the struggle against colonialism needed Moscow’s backing of national liberation movements and of progressive post-colonial leaderships, which could both become important allies for the USSR.<sup>279</sup>

Moscow’s policy should begin with highlighting the positive role that the USSR could play for economic and social development in the third world. Radio Moscow began to broadcast in the third world in English and French in order to ‘tell you about life in the Soviet Union and discuss the main international events.’ Moreover, its programmes presented the USSR as a ‘peace loving’ nation, ready to offer assistance and aid to young states in Africa and Asia.<sup>280</sup>

The Ideology Commission recommended an expansion of Soviet activities aimed at the third world. Moscow needed to make use of local ‘progressive’ publishers as well as Soviet embassies in order to make materials on life in the USSR and its ‘friendly’ foreign policy readily available to the newly liberated masses in Africa and Asia. The Commission believed that interest for the Soviet Union was great in the third world, and therefore the goal of convincing the newly independent countries of the advantages of the socialist system ‘could and must be reached.’<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> RGANI, fond 5, op. 30, d. 273, l. 38-45.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., l. 46-60.

<sup>280</sup> UKNA, FO371/131226, ‘Moscow Broadcasts in English and French to Africa’, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1958. The British Police Special Branch stationed in Kenya constantly monitored Radio Moscow’s transmissions to Africa.

<sup>281</sup> RGANI, fond 5, op. 30, d. 273, l. 67-93.

The CPSU was also critical of the work carried out by the Foreign Ministry. The deputy head of the Ideology Commission, Georgy A. Zhukov, lamented the fact that MID workers switched from posts in Europe to appointments in the third world, which prevented them from developing any genuine knowledge on the countries they were working in.<sup>282</sup> Zhukov referred directly to the situation in Ghana and Guinea, complaining that nothing specific had been planned for the newly independent African countries, as for example building 'a house of friendship [with African peoples] in Accra or Conakry.'<sup>283</sup>

Even though an African Department had been created in the Foreign Ministry in July 1958, part of the Kremlin leadership thought that this was not enough. Soviet knowledge on Africa was still too limited, and both the MID and the Party organs that dealt with Africa needed a large number of specialists to carry out successful policies. Scarce knowledge of local languages was a particularly severe problem and, as British observers noticed, during 1958 Soviet academic institutions considerably increased the number of African languages taught.<sup>284</sup>

The Ideology Commission also consulted Potekhin, as an expert on African matters. He confirmed that working in Sub-Saharan Africa was not easy, and that, in his opinion, the Soviet Union was not doing enough to seize the opportunity offered by the end of colonialism in the continent. Potekhin briefly recalled his recent trip to Ghana, stressing the fact that the local population was greatly interested in his lectures on the USSR's achievements over the last forty years, which were also broadcast via radio. Given the high level of interest in the Soviet Union in Ghana, Moscow should

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<sup>282</sup> RGANI, f. 4, op. 4, d. 469, l. 73-75 and f. 5, op. 35, d. 79, l. 202. In Mazov, *Politika SSSR v Zapadnoi Afrike*: 16.

<sup>283</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 273, l. 112-15.

<sup>284</sup> UKNA, FO371/131187, J.H.A. Watson to N.D. Watson, May 27<sup>th</sup> 1958.

send Soviet specialists to the country, so to help Ghana develop both socially and culturally, and thus build friendly relations with a possible important ally in Africa.<sup>285</sup>

The Ideology Commission elaborated a set of short recommendations to the Presidium for African policy. The central point was showing the socialist way as opposed to and better than the capitalist model of development. Western economic aid had to be revealed as exploitative, and Western policy as aggressive and militaristic, especially in reference to the formation of new ‘military blocs’ in the third world. Specifically about Africa, a radio centre was to be opened in Ghana, and press correspondents sent to both Ghana and Guinea. Moreover, helping local ‘progressive’ publishers could represent the quickest way to build a network of supporters in West Africa, and thus increase Soviet influence.<sup>286</sup>

As a consequence of the CPSU’s effort to develop a set of policies for Africa, Western observers noticed with preoccupation a significant growth of Soviet attention towards Africa, aimed in particular at establishing diplomatic relations with the newly independent states and subsequently presenting the USSR as a reliable force for the liberation and modernisation of Africa.<sup>287</sup>

#### The ‘nationalist bourgeoisie’ as a partner in the third world

The generic recommendations elaborated by the Ideology Commission were further developed during a large conference on the current situation of countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America (31 October to 1 November 1958). The conference was jointly organised by the Ideology Commission and by the Soviet Academy of Sciences (*Akademiya Nauk SSSR – ANS*), and it gathered together all Soviet experts

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., l. 121-26.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., l. 177-84.

<sup>287</sup> UKNA, FO371/131188, ‘The Communist Drive Into Africa’, July 1958.

on the third world, together with CPSU leaders who dealt with foreign relations. The goal of the conference was to analyse the situation, and provide Soviet decision makers with a coherent set of recommendations for policy.<sup>288</sup>

The three main topics discussed during the conference were the role of the national bourgeoisie, the lack of a real proletarian class in the developing world, and the Western powers' active policies. The first two problems were tightly connected: in the late 1950s there was no proper socialist leader in the third world: several important figures in the newly independent states or among national liberation movements, such as Nasser, Sukarno and Nkrumah, professed socialist ideas and were in principle interested in having friendly relations with the socialist camp, but they remained nationalists. The first priority of the national bourgeoisie was obtaining independence. Once having achieved this goal, the national leaders were preoccupied with the modernisation and the economic development of their countries. Although several speakers were worried by the idea of supporting the national bourgeoisie, because once in power it tended to follow 'anti-democratic' policies and thus hindrance the natural development of the working class, the general consensus was that an alliance between the USSR and the national bourgeoisie could be a useful 'tactical compromise' motivated by 'strategic considerations'. Academic E.M. Zhukov declared that 'Lenin indicated that when the national bourgeoisie fights with imperialism, we are firmly and resolutely for it. But only as long as [it fights imperialism].' The most important task for the Soviet Union, together with the other socialist countries, was to show that socialism was the only way to economic development, and in this way to unleash 'the revolutionary energy of the masses'.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 35, d. 79, l. 31.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., l. 79, 107, 137, 139.

Specifically on the subject of Africa, professor Potekhin underlined the importance of the recent referendum in Guinea. Whereas the majority of African leaders had chosen to remain connected with France (or Britain), therefore revealing their bourgeois nature, Guinea had chosen to be fully independent and separated from the imperialists. This obviously represented an important chance for the Soviet Union, not to be overlooked. Potekhin spoke at length about the new strategy of the colonial powers: Britain and France now did not rely on military occupation in Africa any longer, but instead tried to retain influence by conceding limited autonomy on one side, but on the other they ruled the countries' economy through their 'monopolies', together with maintaining close control on key state sectors (such as defence, for example). The Soviet Union had to offer a concrete alternative to the capitalist path to development, if it wanted to break the West's domination of Africa.<sup>290</sup>

Finally, Africa was increasingly perceived as one of the main stages of confrontation with the West, and mainly with the USA. During the conference, it was noted how the African continent was particularly important for its material resources, greatly needed for the American military and civilian industry. Moscow was concerned about the growing network of military alliances that the Americans were creating, possibly in preparation for a 'global war'.<sup>291</sup>

#### The Soviet 'near abroad' and the third world

One of the key concepts discussed at the conference was the Soviet 'Near Abroad' and its role for guiding future policy. Numerous speakers were invited from Central Asia and the Caucasus, and the parallel between development in these regions and development in the third world was often drawn. More practically, several speakers

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid., l. 244-255.

<sup>291</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 35, d. 80, l. 123.



suggested sending Soviet specialist from Central Asia and the Caucasus to developing countries: this would help to show what the socialist path of development can achieve, as well as demonstrating how the ‘nationality question’ was solved in the Soviet Union. During the Khrushchev era, the ‘nationality question’ underwent important changes since Stalin’s times. It was now directly linked with economic development.

Nationalities policy was linked to improving the socio-economic development of the non-Russian republics, with a commitment to bringing the least developed up to the level of the more advanced. In 1957, in an attempt to improve economic management, a degree of autonomy was granted to the regions through the setting up of regional economic councils (or *sovnarkhozy*), resulting in granting of substantial powers to various regions within the larger republics and to the smaller nationality republics.<sup>292</sup>

When the conference participants referred to a ‘solution’ to the ‘nationality question’, they were referring to the USSR’s successful export of modernity to the Caucasian and the Central Asian republics of the USSR. The modernisation of agriculture, the “Virgin Lands” campaign and steady economic growth were all part of the “solution”, which seemed perfectly exportable to Africa and Asia, which the Soviet leadership saw as affected by the same problems and needs as the Soviet ‘near abroad’. This idea would become the blueprint of Soviet policy in West Africa during 1959 and 1960.

The importance of the Ideology Commission report and of the Academy of Sciences conference was that they institutionalised the basic principles that would guide Soviet policy towards the third world, and specifically towards West Africa, during the Khrushchev era. An alliance with nationalistic leaders was now judged

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<sup>292</sup> Graham Smith, ed. *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union* (London: Longman, 1996), 7.

positively, officially breaking the rigidities of the Stalin's era. Moreover, the Soviet advantage in the third world was identified in the attractiveness of its development model, thus making economic policy the fulcrum of Moscow's strategy. Finally, the example of modernisation in Central Asia and the Caucasus was singled out as the source from which to design policies that would have the same aim in the third world. The outline of Soviet strategy in the third world, which would be applied to West Africa in the near future, was thus completed.

### *Conclusion*

Walter Lippman, who visited the USSR in 1958, wrote in the *New York Times* on 12 November that he had 'come home convinced that the issue is the Russian and Chinese challenge for domination in Africa and Asia'.<sup>293</sup> Decolonisation had clearly captured Moscow's attention and the idea of expanding Soviet influence and alliances outside of Europe received great consideration in the Kremlin. Africa, traditionally overlooked by Moscow during Stalin's times, became interesting for the USSR thanks to the emergence of radical, anti-colonial regimes interested in economic cooperation with the USSR.

The Soviet strategy for the third world was based on the necessity of a "tactical" alliance with anti-Western elites in Africa and Asia, followed by generous offers of economic and technical cooperation. In particular, the Soviet leadership believed that the experience of rapid modernisation in Central Asia and the Caucasus could be repeated with success in the third world. The Soviet Union aimed to establish its model of development based on state planning and collective enterprise as a concrete alternative to capitalism for African and Asian leaders in search of a

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<sup>293</sup> Walter Lippman, *The New York Times*, 12 November 1958.

“quick fix” for their countries’ still weak economies. Over the course of 1959, the specific economic policies to be employed would be defined with more precision, and an ambitious cooperation and aid programme would be started in Guinea.

Soviet policy was more successful in Guinea than in Ghana because the former French colony was left politically and economically isolated as a consequence of its complete break with the West. Sekou Toure was therefore anxious to secure aid for his country, and looked with interest at the USSR. Ghana, instead, remained too linked to Britain and the US to consider the Soviet Union as a partner for economic cooperation. However, Nkrumah and his government maintained generally radical ideas with regard to the dangers of imperialism and the need for rapid economic development. Thus, Moscow never completely lost interest in Ghana, in the hope that internal developments would finally allow the establishment of diplomatic and economic relations. 1959 would prove to be a more successful year from this point of view.

## **Chapter 5 – 1959: The “socialist model of development” and the birth of the Guinean dream**

This chapter will show how by the end of 1959 the idea of exporting a “socialist model of development” was the main driver of Soviet policy in West Africa. During 1959, the basic principles of the “socialist model” were applied to Guinea through an extensive framework of aid initiatives and trade. The “socialist model” was nothing but a set of basic economic policies to foster growth and modernisation, based on closed markets, central planning, and significant financial support from the socialist bloc. These were hardly revolutionary ideas, but they still constituted a potentially effective alternative to free trade and private enterprise, which third world elites looked at with suspicion.

The “socialist model” was very costly for the Soviet Union, which invested heavily in Guinea, though obtaining no concrete political or economic gains. Such a policy made sense only as long as the central assumption held: if the “socialist model” was successful in rapidly modernising Guinea’s economy and society, other countries in the third world would follow the same example, and choose socialist rather than capitalist development. On the contrary, progress in Ghana was much slower, even though Moscow was to obtain some degree of success over the course of 1959.

The primacy of economic thought in Soviet policy towards West Africa was evident. Economic aid and trade agreements were the prime tools of Soviet action, and the transformation of society was its final goal. During this phase economic thinking prevailed over politics in defining Moscow’s ideology. Khrushchev’s conviction that Soviet modernity would win over the third world to socialism appeared to be paying off: by the end of 1959 the Soviet Union had established itself

as an important donor and commercial partner for parts of the third world, and was directly challenging Western hegemony in West Africa, a region of the world where Moscow had no previous links to and where the European colonial legacy was particularly strong. For the first time in its history, the USSR appeared like a global power, able to influence the polities of distant regions and change their way of life.

### *Relations with Guinea*

#### Diplomatic relations

The Soviet leadership was convinced that establishing relations with Guinea constituted a crucial step for Soviet policy in the third world. Economic cooperation was to be the prime instrument of policy. In mid-January 1959, the Central Committee authorised a Soviet delegation to visit Guinea at the end of the month with the task of discussing a commercial agreement with the government. Every other topic, the TsK specified, would be discussed once a Soviet embassy was operative in Conakry.<sup>294</sup>

The Kremlin leaders understood very well that Guinea was in a difficult situation from the economic point of view, and Sekou Toure could probably be convinced to abandon his initial doubts over leaning too much towards one bloc, in the face of economic aid and prospects for trade, both of which the newly independent West African state urgently needed. Guinea was severely hit by the economic sanctions imposed by France and by several of its allies in West Africa, which prevented Guinea from receiving economic aid from Paris, and from trading with its

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<sup>294</sup> RGANI, f. 4, op. 16, d. 583, l. 91. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsyarkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 205.

neighbours. Cooperation with the Soviet Union was a possible way out of economic isolation, and was therefore welcomed by the Guinean leadership.

However, Guinea's need was not the only reason to seek Soviet assistance. Sekou Toure and his government were fascinated by the Soviet Union as a model of society and were interested in the idea of imitating it in Guinea. As the head of the Soviet delegation, vice-head of the African countries department of the Ministry of Foreign Trade L. Ezhov, wrote in his final report on the meetings in Conakry, the Guineans were interested in studying the Soviet experience in the most disparate fields, from the mechanisation of agriculture to the eradication of illiteracy, and from the formation of cooperatives to the organization of the Party and of the army. In particular, Sekou Toure wished to make use of the Soviet experience in order to 'organize the economy', with the declared aim of limiting the influence of foreign companies and foreign capital.<sup>295</sup> Sekou Toure's plans conformed perfectly to Khrushchev's hopes for the third world: Guinea needed a model to follow, and the USSR was ready to provide the kind of modernity the African country was looking for. Crucially, Guinea had rejected the Western model, and could therefore become a concrete example of what socialism could achieve in Africa.

Sekou Toure appeared to share Moscow's hopes, and he presented Guinea as the only reliable ally for the USSR in West Africa. In Ezhov's words,

Sekou Toure believes that Guinea and Ghana are two completely different states. Ghana received independence only nominally: there as before the British hold complete sway, the feudal elite and the government are bought and bribed by the British, corruption thrives in the country, the 'comprador

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<sup>295</sup> AVP RF, f. 575, op. 2, p. 1, d. 10, l. 1-3. In *ibid.*, 205-06.

bourgeoisie' propagates itself.<sup>296</sup> Guinea entered the union with Ghana, but this union, in Toure's words, is symbolic. The Guineans show before the outside world the firmness of the Guinean-Ghanaian union with the purpose of propagandising the idea of a future united state of Black Africa's free peoples.<sup>297</sup>

Both the Soviet and Guinean leaderships did not fully trust Ghana because of Nkrumah's compromise with old colonial Europe. Guinea, instead, had cut all links to France, and was therefore ready for socialist modernity. Moreover, its President seemed eager to study and learn from the Soviet experience, which broadly conformed with Moscow's expectations.

The visit of the Soviet delegation was a success. In February, Ezhov signed a commercial treaty with agriculture Minister Diallo, which constituted the framework for all future agreements. Moreover, on 16 April a Soviet Embassy was officially inaugurated in Conakry. Gerasimov, the same diplomat who had visited Guinea the year before, became the first ambassador of the USSR to Guinea. Gerasimov's arrival in Conakry was a major event for the Guinean leadership: the Soviet ambassador was met at the airport by an official delegation headed by Secretary of State Cisse Fonde, complete with an orchestra and military escort. Gerasimov's inaugural speech was broadcast on the national radio, and then published on the local press. It was clear that Sekou Toure wanted to convey the message that,

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<sup>296</sup> 'Comprador' is a Portuguese term that literally means 'buyer'. It denotes 'a person within a country who acts as an agent for foreign organizations engaged in investment, trade, or economic or political exploitation.' It derives from the 17<sup>th</sup> term to define 'a local person employed in a European household in Southeast Asia or India to make small purchases and keep the household accounts'. From the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Ezhov most likely meant the Ghanaians who worked in the British-dominated cocoa trade.

<sup>297</sup> AVP RF, f. 575, op. 2, p. 1, d. 10, l. 6. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsympkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 206-07. The union of Ghana and Guinea had been officially formed in late 1958, during Toure's visit in Ghana, and was publicly praised in both countries as a first step towards the formation of the "United States of Africa". Reality, however, was quite different, for the union never became any more than an abstract project.

for his government, the establishment of formal links with the Soviet Union was an important step.<sup>298</sup>

On 20 April, a few days after having taken official residence as Soviet ambassador in Conakry, Gerasimov met Sekou Toure in person. The two exchanged congratulatory speeches – which were again broadcast via radio – renewing their pledge to strengthen the friendly relations between the Soviet Union and Guinea. Second Secretary of the Soviet Embassy S. Kirsanov reported to Moscow that Gerasimov ‘spoke about life in the Soviet Union, about the fact that the whole Soviet people is occupied with the realization of the great tasks of the seven-year plan.’ The Soviet Ambassador also informed Sekou Toure that a parliamentary delegation from Guinea was officially invited to the Soviet Union for the summer of 1959, as guests of the Supreme Soviet, and that several Soviet higher education institutions were ready to accept and sponsor financially 25 Guinean students.<sup>299</sup> Gerasimov aimed to present the USSR as the successful result of rapid modernisation, and to convince Toure of Moscow’s readiness to help Guinea achieve the same.

#### Economic relations

The Guinean delegation visited the Soviet Union from 14 to 25 August 1959. It was headed by one of Toure’s closest aides – Saifoulaye Diallo, President of the National Assembly and secretary of the PDG, and composed of several high-profile figures. During their stay, the Guinean statesmen discussed the terms of an economic agreement with a group of Soviet dignitaries headed by Anastas Mikoyan, at the time chairman of the Council of Ministers and an influential figure for Soviet policy on the

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<sup>298</sup> AVP RF, f. 575, op. 2, p. 1, d. 6, l. 3-5. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika, Tom II*, 204-06.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.



third world. The African delegation visited several cities in the USSR, and met with Khrushchev in the Crimea, where the First Secretary was staying for his holidays.

On 24 August the economic agreement was signed in Moscow. The agreement comprised development aid, technical cooperation and trade, and it would become the blueprint of Soviet economic policy in West Africa. The Soviet Union would grant the Republic of Guinea a loan of 140 million roubles, repayable in 12 years at a 2.5% interest rate. The credits would be used 'in the construction of several industrial enterprises, in the development of agriculture and the building of roads, geological surveys for useful materials, and also in the field of healthcare and the preparation of national engineering-technical cadres.'<sup>300</sup> Trade was directly connected to aid: Conakry could use the loan to buy Soviet technology and machinery, which could be paid back using Guineans goods, such as fruit and coffee. It was basically a barter agreement, and it was onerous for the Soviet Union: trade basically meant exchanging Soviet relatively expensive technology for overpriced Guinean agricultural products. As a contemporary British intelligence report on the situation in Guinea highlighted, Guinea's agricultural exports were uncompetitive, and any form of trade did not make economic sense, but was uniquely useful as a 'political premium'. Buying Guinea's bananas and pineapples at prices above the market average was after all what France was doing beforehand, and the Joint Intelligence Committee in London understood very well that there lay the key to gain influence in Conakry, as the newly independent state was dependent on foreign trade to obtain the primary goods the country did not produce.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Article 2. The full text of the agreement is in Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 1*, 460-62.

<sup>301</sup> UKNA, CAB179/6, 'Annex II to Review of Current Intelligence Review as at 24<sup>th</sup> February 1959'.

As usual, Central Asia was at the centre of the Soviet idea of modernisation. A trip to Azerbaijan, whose population was largely Muslim – as in Guinea –, was organised with the purpose of impressing the Guinean delegates with Soviet modernity. So, the visit had the declared aim of showing the Africans how Guinea could look like in a few years' time, if it chose the socialist way. The idea was a success, since Diallo himself declared that there were similarities between his country and Soviet Azerbaijan.<sup>302</sup> According to the reports to Mikoyan, the Guineans were hugely impressed with the successes of Soviet development, to the point that Ismael Toure, brother of the President, declared that 'in this way I imagine the Republic of Guinea, when she firmly stands on her feet.' Throughout the duration of the visit, the delegates praised the 'abundance and prosperity' they saw in the USSR and warmly congratulated Khrushchev for his leadership.<sup>303</sup> During the speeches that followed the signing of the agreement, Mikoyan reinforced the same concepts, by describing, as Ezhov had done in Guinea a few months before, the Soviet Union as a modern, developed nation, whose people was occupied in the 'grandiose' seven-year plan, and that was at the same time ready to offer an helping hand to the peoples of Africa.<sup>304</sup> Diallo, during the same ceremony, reciprocated by praising the 'great achievements' of the USSR.<sup>305</sup>

The exact terms of technical cooperation between the USSR and Guinea were left deliberately vague. In fact, the GKES reported to the Central Committee that the Guinean delegation was not able to come up with a 'list of objectives' to achieve with Soviet help, and at the end of the negotiations it was agreed by both sides that a

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<sup>302</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 309, l. 86-90. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika, Tom II*, 208-11.

<sup>303</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 309, l. 86-89 and d. 305, l. 290-91. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsyarkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 208-09.

<sup>304</sup> Anastas I. Mikoyan, *Pravda*, 25 August 1959.

<sup>305</sup> Saifoulaye Diallo, *Pravda*, 25 August 1959.

precise list would be drawn only when a group of Soviet specialists had visited the country to study the situation and establish priorities.<sup>306</sup> Moscow was pleased. The lack of preparation from the Guinean side meant that, at least in theory, the USSR could now shape Guinea's development strategy, thus for the first time having the opportunity to test the "socialist model of development". Guinea was a small, poor country, and the Soviet loan was large enough to represent easily the most important source of funds for development projects in the country. The Soviet Union was thus in charge of Guinea's three-year development plan.<sup>307</sup>

The "honeymoon" between Guinea and the Soviet Union continued for the rest of 1959. The Conakry government signed other commercial agreements with several socialist states in Eastern Europe as well as the treaty with Moscow, and specialists from the USSR and from the rest of the Soviet bloc started arriving in Guinea in order to occupy key positions as advisors and experts in government administration, industry, media, and defence.<sup>308</sup> As a consequence of its growing cooperation with the Soviet bloc, Guinea's society was changing. A CPSU delegation invited to attend the fifth congress of Toure's party in October reported that the administrative and economic life of the country was being re-organised according to socialist principles. Cooperatives and collective farms were spreading, the ruling Democratic Party of Guinea's structure reminded them very closely of a Soviet-sponsored communist party, and the 'remains of colonialism are being successfully removed'. Rather than tribal chiefs, a traditional institution encouraged by the French colonizers to keep control over local affairs, the Guinean government was appointing local administrators with the task of representing the authority of the central state in

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<sup>306</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 305, l. 289. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsyppkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 208.

<sup>307</sup> UKNA, FO371/138824, W.N. Hugh Jones to Foreign Office, 28 August 1959.

<sup>308</sup> UKNA, FO371/138811, W.N. Hugh Jones to J.H.A. Watson, 27 July 1959.

the various districts. The Soviet delegates noticed with pleasure that PDG members as well as government officials showed a considerable degree of interests for the ideas and principles of Marxism.<sup>309</sup> In the words of a PDG officer to the First Secretary of the Soviet embassy in Conakry, ‘we are glad of the fact that your country [the USSR] now occupies the most prominent place in the economic life of Guinea.’<sup>310</sup>

Moscow was already sponsoring the construction of several projects in Conakry, following Toure’s requests, including a polytechnic, an airport, and a large stadium. These “prestige” projects were regarded in the USSR as extravagant and not particularly useful, but Moscow at the time did not raise any major objections against their realisation. The situation was destined to change radically in the future, but for the time being the Soviet leadership was still enthusiastic about cooperation with Guinea. Plans for the building of several factories and industrial facilities had already been approved by the TsK, and Moscow’s experts were advising the Guineans on the priorities for future development projects.<sup>311</sup> In addition, in 1958 the USSR exported 0.8 million roubles to Guinea (mainly machines and industrial intermediate products), and imported 0.7 million (mainly fruit and coffee) – small sums, but still relatively large for the size of Guinea’s economy.<sup>312</sup> At the end of 1959 it was undeniable that the Soviet Union had successfully moved into Guinea, and was determining its economic strategy.

As a further sign of the proximity between the two countries, Sekou Toure was the first sub-Saharan African head of state to visit the Soviet Union in late November, with the official purpose of signing a cultural agreement between the two

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<sup>309</sup> AVP RF, f. 575, op. 2, p. 2, d. 18, l. 2-11. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiya i Afrika, Tom II*, 213-20.

<sup>310</sup> AVP RF, f. 575, op 2, p. 1, d. 8, l. 88-90.

<sup>311</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 305, l. 289-293. Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiya i Afrika, Tom II*, 222-25.

<sup>312</sup> "Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR za 1959-1963 gody," 432-35.

countries. Toure's visit showed how much importance the Soviet leadership gave to building solid relations with Guinea.

The reception accorded to M. Sekou Toure was out of all proportion to the size and present importance of Guinea. With the exception of Mr Khrushchev, who was on holiday, and Mr Mikoyan, who was in Mexico, nearly all the members of the Party Presidium, a large number of ministers and a galaxy of Marshals attended the various social functions and ceremonies. In spite of the cold, the inhabitants of Moscow were turned out in force to welcome and see off M. Sekou Toure, and his activities were reported at length in the Soviet press, usually in the front page.<sup>313</sup>

After having visited Moscow, the Guinean leader was taken to the Black Sea, where Khrushchev himself received him. There was no doubt that Toure was being treated as a close and important ally, although he was as usual very careful in the official speeches to specify that Guinea did not belong to any bloc. The progress achieved in Guinea after independence was warmly praised by the Soviet leadership, who also made promises to keep supporting the African state. Deputy Secretary of the Council of Ministers F.R. Kozlov officially declared that the Soviet Union was glad to 'share with them our versatile experience in economic and cultural organization.' 'The development of the young Republic of Guinea – the Deputy Secretary continued – confirms once more that the nations that freed themselves from colonialism have true friends in the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries.'<sup>314</sup> It was an official endorsement of the "socialist model of development". The dream to turn Guinea into a successful example of socialist modernisation in Africa was thus born in the USSR.

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<sup>313</sup> UKNA, FO371/138825, P. Reilly to Selwyn Lloyd, 1 December 1959.

<sup>314</sup> F.R. Kozlov, *Pravda*, 26 November 1959. All other speeches and official communiques produced during Sekou Toure's visit to the Soviet Union are available in Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 1*, 488-507.

Military relations and Western reactions

Economic cooperation was not the only field in which the Soviet-Guinean relationship made significant progress over 1959. When Gerasimov had visited Guinea for the first time in late 1958, some government members had asked him about the possibility of receiving arms from the Soviet Union. In March 1959 Guinea received small arms from Czechoslovakia, free of charge, together with a group of military advisors. As British intelligence noticed, the amount of weapons was well in excess of the limited needs of Guinea's small army; it was clear that the Soviet bloc was going to great lengths to make sure that its assistance carried a "political premium" and thus was more attractive to the Guineans.<sup>315</sup>

Predictably, the Czech weapons worried the Western powers, who interpreted it as a dangerous sign of growing Soviet influence in the region. In late April 1959, when representatives of the US, British and French governments met in Washington to discuss the situation in Africa, Guinea was high on the agenda. The French representative, Ambassador Herve Alphand, was particularly worried by these recent deliveries of weapons and pressed the others to assume a harsh line towards Guinea. The French proposal was to try to figure out a legal way to prevent future arms deliveries, and at the same time lobby President Taubman of Liberia and Nkrumah to issue public statements condemning Sekou Toure's arms policy. Moreover, Alphand insisted that France would not send diplomatic representatives to Guinea, and exhorted the others to do the same. However, Robert Murphy, US Deputy Under Secretary of State, and Harold Caccia, British Ambassador to Washington, had different ideas: they were both very sceptical about the feasibility of legally blocking arms deliveries to Guinea, and doubted that pushing Liberia and Ghana to make a

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<sup>315</sup> UKNA, CAB179/6, JIC(59)65, 'Guinea', 7 April 1959.

public outcry was a good idea. The Americans, in particular, felt that the strategy followed so far towards Guinea had proved to be a failure, and needed to be changed. Murphy said that keeping Toure's government diplomatically isolated would accomplish nothing but to 'leave Guinea to the Soviets.' The American proposal, shared by Caccia, was to engage Sekou Toure, by sending competent diplomatic representatives, so to challenge the USSR at its own game: economic cooperation and development aid.<sup>316</sup>

In fact, the US had already started to modify its policy. In April, the recently appointed Guinean Ambassador to Washington Telli Diallo had been asked to explain Guinea's stance, and Secretary of State Christian A. Herter had personally recommended to President Eisenhower to invite Sekou Toure for a visit to Washington, so to counter 'the rapidly developing communist influence in Guinea.'<sup>317</sup>

As announced at the Washington talks, the Americans were planning to compete with the Soviet Union in terms of economic aid. The State Department drafted an ambitious programme of possible aid projects, to be discussed with President Toure during his visit to the US, which took place in late October 1959. Although during the meetings with Eisenhower the Guinean leader predictably repeated that Guinea was not linked to any bloc, and that it was ready to cooperate with all friendly nations, on the whole the Americans achieved relatively little. The Guineans insisted on basing trade on barter agreements, something that posed several problems for the strict American legislation on economic exchanges. US aid programmes were obviously welcomed, although the exact terms needed to be

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<sup>316</sup> Schwar and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1958-1960 - Africa*, 689-91.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 687-89.

negotiated, but Western assistance was still limited when compared to the ambitious projects carried out by the USSR and by their East European allies.<sup>318</sup>

In conclusion, 1959 was a thoroughly positive year for Soviet-Guinean relations. Thanks to the attractiveness of their economic model and their quick opening to Conakry, as opposed to the obstinate French policy that had slowed down American reactions to Moscow's "offensive", the Soviet Union had undoubtedly gained an edge in Guinea, which, in the Kremlin leadership's plans, was ready to become the showcase of what was possible to achieve in Africa with Soviet help. In the Foreign Office's words, the economic agreement with Guinea was 'deliberately intended to make a splash'.

Soviet strategy in Africa is not so much to concentrate on direct subversion and the spread of Communism, but rather to offer the independent states of Africa an alternative to the West in the vital field of economic and technical aid – in particular alternative markets, capital, training. It now looks as though large offers of capital at low rates of interest will play an especially important part.<sup>319</sup>

The British diplomats understood well what was going on. Soviet-Guinean cooperation would continue along the same lines for at least one more year.

### *Relations with Ghana*

#### Political relations

Compared to the progress made in Guinea over 1959, Ghana was a different story. Nonetheless, Moscow did achieve some successes. On 10 April, Mikhail Sytenko obtained the official authorisation from Nkrumah's government to become the first

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 693-706.

<sup>319</sup> UKNA, FO371/137989, J.H.A. Watson 'Soviet Bloc Economic Offensive in Africa', 15 September 1959.



Soviet Ambassador to Ghana. The following August, a Soviet Embassy finally opened in Accra. It was hardly a breakthrough: Moscow had been pressing for the establishment of official relations for nearly two years, and when the Ghanaians finally accepted they imposed a strict quantitative limit on Soviet personnel (no more than 18 people could work at the Embassy), as strongly desired by Britain and the USA.<sup>320</sup> Moreover, the Special Branch of the Ghanaian police, with the active collaboration of the British Security Service, was already planning to keep a special eye on any activities of the Soviet Embassy, and was even considering tapping telephone lines and intercepting correspondence.<sup>321</sup>

The following month Orestov, the *Pravda* correspondent who was still the prime Soviet source of information in Ghana since the Embassy was not fully operative yet, drafted a second long report on the situation in the country, similar to the one he had prepared in 1958. Once again, Orestov described Ghana's relationship with Britain as the main obstacle for the successful establishment of relations with the socialist world. Even though the economy was the sector in which London's dominance was most obvious, Ghana after independence found itself in a 'spiritual, cultural and psychological dependency from Britain.' Ghanaian institutions were modelled on their UK equivalents, and the Ghanaian ruling class had been largely trained by the British. Combined with London's strong grip on the cocoa trade, this made Ghana's independence still virtually theoretical, for in Soviet eyes complete independence would be achieved only when the Accra government managed to rule the country without relying on Western advisors and foreign investments. Orestov's

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<sup>320</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 336, l. 69. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsytkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 176.

UKNA, CAB179/6, JIC(59)69, 'Establishment of Soviet Embassy in Accra', 5 May 1959.

<sup>321</sup> PRAAD, SC/BAA/317, 'Foreign Embassies C.E. Section Special Branch', 27 May 1959.

report, however, was not completely negative, but included several positive remarks. The Soviet journalist wrote that Ghana's leadership was in fact hostile to British colonialism. Nkrumah's government had to be formally pro-London in order not to 'risk economic chaos in the country', given Ghana's current state of dependency. Nonetheless, Nkrumah since independence had been slowly, but constantly, working to curtail the influence of British advisors and councillors in the state apparatus. Recently the government had been critical of London's policies, and there were several 'progressive elements' in the CPP and in the trade unions that were putting pressure on Nkrumah to be even more decidedly anti-British. Orestov approved the Prime Minister's struggle against the political opposition, as, in his judgement, the United Party was simply London's puppet, and he praised the fact that Nkrumah's personal power was growing for the same reason. The creation of the Ghana-Guinea union was praised as another positive development. Although at the time only a symbolic gesture, the *Pravda* correspondent believed that the influence of more radical Guinea would significantly help Ghana to move away from its pro-Western stance in the near future.<sup>322</sup>

As Orestov reported, Ghana often followed an ambiguous foreign policy, trying to receive support from both blocs. This made the task of assessing the evolution of policies in the country particularly difficult for the recently established Soviet embassy. On one hand, Ghana sent encouraging signals. Nkrumah kept criticising Western colonialism in his speeches at the radio and in parliament, and the proposed political union with Guinea seemed to offer interesting perspectives for the future. Furthermore, in October 1959 Padmore died. He had always been opposed to Ghana's tightening of relations with the Eastern bloc and his death was seen in

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<sup>322</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 3, p. 2, d. 5, l. 2-41.

Moscow as the removal of an obstacle for reaching Nkrumah. Now, Lewis, whose personal relationship with Nkrumah had become increasingly difficult, decided to quit his job as chief economic advisor and leave Ghana. Lewis' departure signified that the Accra government was now likely to look more at economic models based on central planning, as Moscow hoped. More important, Ghana was going to vote to approve or reject a new constitution in 1960. The main change contained in the new document was that the country would be transformed into a republic, thus severing the formal link of subjection to the British crown. This was obviously regarded as a very promising possibility from Moscow's point of view. However, Soviet observers still remained conscious of British economic penetration in Ghana, and they looked with suspicion at Nkrumah's pan-Africanist and neutralist convictions.<sup>323</sup>

#### Commercial relations

Building up economic relations with Ghana was judged by the Soviet analysts as a policy to strengthen the faltering political relationship and at the same time to break up London's monopoly. Nevertheless, in spite of Moscow's efforts, 1959 proved to be a wholly disappointing year from this point of view.

Immediately after the agreement on the opening of a Soviet embassy in April, a Soviet delegation travelled to Accra to finalise the negotiations on a trade agreement, which had been discussed since Ghana's independence two years before. However, as Ghanaian documents have now shown, the Accra government was not in fact expecting to receive any Soviet official delegation at that time. The Ghanaian Minister of Trade reported to Cabinet how he had been surprised by the arrival of the

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<sup>323</sup> This paragraph is a synthesis of several reports from the Soviet embassy in Accra: AVP RF, f. 573, op. 3, p. 2, d. 5, l. 100-03; f. 573, op. 3, p. 2, d. 3, l. 1-16; f. 573, op. 3, p. 2, d. 4, l. 1-6; f. 573, op. 3-a, p. 3, d. 6, l. 4-6; f. 573, op. 3-a, p. 3, d. 7, l. 1-7; f. 573, op. 3-a, p. 3, d. 4, l. 1-46.

delegates from the USSR, and that a programme of meetings and visits for the Soviet visitors had been put together in a rush.<sup>324</sup> This episode shows with clarity that the Soviet leadership was pushing as hard as possible to establish economic cooperation with Ghana – to the point of authorising the trip of a delegation without having received a formal invitation from Nkrumah’s government.

The delegation advanced the usual offers to the Ghanaian government: the exchange of Soviet machinery and technology for cocoa beans. Moscow’s delegation also declared that the USSR was ready to buy Ghanaian cocoa paying in part in hard currency.<sup>325</sup> This was fairly unusual for the USSR, which as a rule always preferred barter agreements, and shows once again how much Moscow was still interested in Ghana. The Soviet leadership now knew that breaking the West’s monopoly on the trade of Ghana’s cocoa was the only way to win influence in Accra. But this was easier said than done. The Cabinet in Accra discussed the possibility of selling cocoa beans to Moscow, although any definitive decision would need approval from the London-based Cocoa Marketing Company, which managed the sales of Ghana’s cocoa. Sir Eric Tansley – General Manager of the Company – had no objection to the possibility of selling to the USSR, ‘provided that the Government of Ghana was in no way committed in advance to the price of any quantity of Ghana cocoa to be purchased by the USSR’. In this way, London could set the price of the cocoa beans, effectively making sure that Moscow could never supplant the Western companies as Accra’s main commercial partner, let alone making barter agreements virtually

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<sup>324</sup> PRAAD, ADM/13/2/59, 14 April 1959; ADM/13/1/28, 14 April 1959.

<sup>325</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 3, p. 1, d. 10, l. 1-7. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsyarkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 176-77.

PRAAD, ADM/13/2/61, 5 June 1959.

impossible given that they depended on establishing fixed prices for the goods to exchange.<sup>326</sup>

As a consequence, economic cooperation between the two countries was still far from satisfactory from the USSR's point of view. In 1959 the Soviet Union imported 7.5 million roubles of cocoa from Ghana, paid largely in currency, and exported only 600 thousand roubles worth of machinery.<sup>327</sup> Furthermore, the Embassy in Accra reported that there had been 'visible insufficiencies and difficulties in our work'. The management of Soviet exports to Ghana was clumsy and slow: goods arrived late and payments were received even later. Moreover, Moscow was prepared to sell only large quantities, which Ghana either did not need or could not afford. On the contrary, Western companies showed a considerable degree of flexibility and organisation, meaning that exports from the USSR were relegated to the margins of the Ghanaian economy.<sup>328</sup>

Over 1959 relatively little progress had been made in Ghana, apart from the opening of the Embassy. The USSR was ready to invest more resources into Ghana, but the Accra government was still too dependent on the West. Moscow had offered to Accra a commercial treaty similar to the ones that were already in place in Guinea and in other third world countries, but given the difficulties of applying the same terms in Ghana, Moscow saw no advantage in stepping up its trade with the West African state, which on its part was unimpressed with Soviet efforts. It was a vicious circle that only domestic developments in Ghana could break.

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<sup>326</sup> PRAAD, ADM/13/1/28, 9 June 1959.

<sup>327</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 336, l. 69. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsyarkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 177. Statistics in "Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR za 1959-1963 gody," 430-33.

<sup>328</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 3, p. 1, d. 10, l. 6-11. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika, Tom II*, 186-89.

*Policy making in Moscow*

Ideology and economic development: the “socialist model of development”

As the previous sections have shown, economic policy was the most important dimension of Soviet policy in West Africa. The USSR’s actions were aimed at supplying aid and technical expertise to newly independent countries in order to shape their development strategies towards the adoption of socialist principles such as central planning and collective enterprise. So far, the CPSU had defined the policies that constituted the “socialist model of development” in broad generic terms. In 1959, the State Committee for Foreign Economic Contacts came up with a more precise outline of what the socialist model was, and what policies it required to be adopted by third world countries. The GKES reported directly to Khrushchev, showing how concerned the First Secretary was with the issue of economic development.

In its report, the GKES summarised the current Soviet doctrine in matter of development and growth theory. First of all, for developing countries the achievement of independence was only a first step: the real challenge was to obtain economic independence from the West. This could be achieved only by employing three key basic policies, which together constituted the “socialist model of development”.<sup>329</sup> First, 1) rapid modernisation of the agricultural sector through the employment of advanced technology and modern techniques of irrigation and cultivation. Agriculture was the main sector of the economy in virtually the whole third world, and its development was considered an absolute priority in order to obtain the primary goods the country needed without the need to rely on imports. “Monocultures” – as in the case of Ghana that grew almost only cocoa – had to be abandoned in favour of a

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<sup>329</sup> In this as well as in another documents it was referred to variously as “socialist model of development”, “socialist path of development”, “non-capitalist path of development”, and so forth.

differentiated production. It goes without saying that such a prominent role for agriculture echoed Khrushchev's own convictions on economics, and mirrored recent Moscow's policies in the USSR – the “Virgin Lands” campaign being the prime example. As an immediate application of the GKES' recommendations, a few months later Moscow financed a series of seminars aimed at instructing representatives from third world governments and movements on how to form and manage agricultural cooperatives. Delegates from Ghana also participated.<sup>330</sup> Agricultural modernisation, however, was not enough. Second, 2) it was necessary to develop several branches of the national industry, in order to reduce the country's dependency on foreign imports for capital goods. The Soviet experience in rapid industrialisation would be a priceless help to guarantee a positive outcome. Both agricultural and industrial goods could be used as barter currency to obtain advanced technology and machines from the socialist bloc, thus formalising the notion of “mutually advantageous trade” that Shepilov had presented to the Presidium in 1957 as opposed to Western “exploitative” trade. The recent agreements between the USSR and Guinea were cited as a good example of this economic policy. Finally, 3) Western investments and access to national resources for Western business had to be limited as much as possible, if not completely halted. The GKES highlighted that the West aimed only to exploit the natural resources of newly independent countries, and to defend their ‘monopolies’ interests. In particular, the document focused on the fact that the Western powers wanted the newly independent states to expand and develop their export sector alone, in order to specialise in the production of commodities that could be traded. In the Soviet view, this was a natural capitalist idea, for the Western countries desired to use their advantageous position to buy raw materials and food from third world countries

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<sup>330</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 20, d. 187, l. 73-75, l. 20-23.

at low prices, while selling them the capital goods and technology they needed at high prices. Therefore, Western, and especially American, economic cooperation was exploitative in nature. If Guinea had been hailed as a virtuous example, Ghana was used as a negative one: Ghana's economy was over-reliant on cocoa exports, which were still fully controlled by British companies. However, the GKES praised the second Ghanaian five-year plan, due to start in 1960. Contrary to the first five-year plan, which was designed to boost only the export sector, the new one directly addressed the problem of 'economic independence'. If thanks to this plan Ghana could begin to free itself from the prevailing Western influence, then the Soviet Union would be ready to help.<sup>331</sup>

The International Department and the Ideology Commission also agreed that policy towards Africa should be approached through economics. Both recommended that African problems should be analysed in Moscow through the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (*IMEMO – Institut Mirovoy Ekonomiki i Mezhdunarodnykh Otnoshenii*). The IMEMO was a research institute created in 1956 as part of the Khrushchev-inspired reforms for the "professionalization" of the study of international politics in the Soviet Union. It was devoted to the study of international relations in a Marxist-Leninist way, which meant that the political and economic dimensions were seen and treated as a whole. The Ideology Commission suggested that priority should be given to the study of the different paths to development, the system of colonial exploitation, the local workers' and peasants' movements, and the contemporary forms of colonialism and exploitation. It was also

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<sup>331</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 305, l. 116-288.



necessary to send researchers and research students (*aspiranty*) to African countries, in order to gain precious practical knowledge, still scarce in the USSR.<sup>332</sup>

From the analysis of the GKES reports and the MO and Ideology Commission's recommendations it appears evident that the Soviet leadership was convinced of the opportunity to compete with the West in Africa by opposing their development models. Moscow's aim was not the establishment of communist regimes in Africa, but instead supporting radical leaders who were ready to abandon the capitalist route to modernisation in favour of the "socialist model", which was seen as a scientific, effective route to progress. Although based on socialist principles, the model was far from suggesting revolutionary steps. On the contrary, it was based on ideas that several economists in the West also found acceptable. Moscow simply stressed the role of planning, public ownership of enterprises and collectivism in the organisation of the state and of the economy. These were principles that a significant group of countries in the third world had already adopted – India, Indonesia, Egypt, to name a few – with or without Soviet support. What made engagement with West Africa particularly important for the "socialist model of development" was that, due to the small size of Ghana and Guinea's economies, the Soviet Union could be directly in control of the agenda for development, contrary to what happened in larger countries.

#### Information and propaganda in Africa

At the beginning of 1959, the Ideology Commission also reviewed the state of Soviet information policies in Africa. The Commission was concerned about growing American activities in the continent, mainly connected to propaganda and cultural

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<sup>332</sup> RGANI, f. 11, op. 1, d. 39, l. 105-106 and f. 11, op. 1, d. 42, l. 22.

relations, and believed that the USSR should counter the US effort by focusing on showing how Soviet economic help was useful for the development of African countries, and to reveal the ‘exploitative nature’ of Western aid.<sup>333</sup>

Furthermore, the USSR suffered from lack of access to African means of information. Orestov drew attention to the fact that information in Ghana was almost totally channelled through Western media, such as the British press agency Reuters, which made it extremely difficult to distribute unbiased information about the USSR. The recently established Embassy was trying to offset the problem by distributing news bulletins and informative materials directly to journalists and correspondents.<sup>334</sup> A few months later, Ambassador Sytenko sent a message to the general director of Soviet press agency TASS arguing in favour of the opening of a station in Ghana. The West African state – Sytenko wrote – was at the forefront of the struggle against colonialism, and in favour of African emancipation and economic development. Recent events, for example Khrushchev’s ground-breaking visit to the United States in September and the Soviet sensational successes in space (the launch of the *Sputnik* in 1957 and the first rockets to reach the moon in 1959), had considerably increased the Ghanaians’ interest in the USSR and the socialist world. Thus, Sytenko argued, it would make sense to open a TASS ‘corresponding point’ in Accra, whose personnel ideally could speak both English and French, so to be able to cover not only Ghana but also the rest of West Africa, which was largely French speaking. Thanks to Minister of Information and Education Kofi Baako’s support, the Ambassador believed that the Ghanaian government was likely to approve the establishment of a

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<sup>333</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 94, l. 20-21, 190-93.

<sup>334</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 3, p. 2, d. 5, l. 49-58.

TASS centre in Accra.<sup>335</sup> In spite of the difficulties encountered, then, the Soviet Embassy in Accra was still optimistic about the future development of the relations between Ghana and the USSR.

### *Conclusion*

By the end of 1959 the USSR had rapidly established itself as Guinea's main ally, beginning an extensive programme of economic and technical cooperation. Cooperation with Ghana, however, proved to be more difficult, as Accra was still too connected to the West to accept Moscow's offers of collaboration. Nonetheless, the Soviet leadership continued to hope that the internal situation in Ghana would change in the near future, thus allowing the establishment of relations with the USSR.

The aim of Moscow's policy in Guinea was ambitious: through economic cooperation and aid programmes, the USSR wanted to change radically the newly independent state, transforming it into a modern, developed, socialist economy. The Soviet dream was to use Guinea as a "showpiece" of what could be achieved with Soviet help and Soviet supervision, so to convince other countries in the third world to choose the "socialist model of development".

Only the conviction that success in West Africa would mean a significant expansion of socialism in the third world could justify the adoption of expensive aid programmes as well as unfavourable trade with a country such as Guinea, which lacked either political or economic resources for the Soviet Union. Similar costly proposals were also repeatedly extended to Ghana, which was only marginally richer and politically more significant than Guinea. There is no doubt then that between

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<sup>335</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 3, p. 1, d. 7, l. 1-2. Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika, Tom II*, 185-86. It is important to stress that Sytenko considered the presence of the Chinese national press agency Xinhua in Ghana as a positive fact.

1957 and 1959 Soviet policy towards West Africa was dominated by ideological considerations, with little attention or space given to the analysis of the costs and the benefits involved. Moscow's actions were driven by the belief that rapid modernisation in West Africa would work, and would make the "socialist model of development" an attractive alternative to liberal capitalism for other developing countries. This assessment was destined to change in a few years, due to a set of factors that will be discussed in detail in the next chapters.

**PART II: CRISIS AND  
REASSESSMENT, 1960-61**

## **Chapter 6 – 1960: Continuity and Change**

1960 represented a crucial moment for the development of Soviet policy. Over the course of the year, the USSR improved its already good relations with Guinea, and jump-started the bilateral relationship with newly independent Mali – another radical state in West Africa. Moreover, Moscow finally managed to obtain a significant breakthrough in the relations with Ghana, overcoming nearly two years of frustration. This chapter will show how Moscow continued with the same policy aimed at exporting a model of economic development. The policy still derived from the ideas and beliefs of the Soviet leadership, but during 1960 it became evident that the West African context acquired more importance in shaping Moscow's actions. As the next sections will show, Soviet policy was more (or less) effective because of changes in West Africa.

In many ways policy in 1960 continued the trend that began in 1957. Moscow's actions were based on the belief that radical non-communist leaders were reliable allies for the adoption of the “socialist model of development” in West Africa. Policy had the same aim in all three countries: limiting the influx of Western capital, developing a strong agricultural sector based on cooperative organisations, and investing in rapid industrialisation. Changes in Africa seemed to favour a Soviet expansion. Guinea embarked on a troublesome economic reform, becoming increasingly more reliant on the socialist bloc. Ghana turned into a republic, cutting a symbolic – but strong – link to Britain and signalling its intention to continue on a more radical route. The Republic of Mali was born out of the desire to replicate the Guinean experiment, leaving the French Commonwealth and building relations with the Socialist bloc. Moreover, many other colonies in the African continent became

independent or autonomous in 1960. As the first wave of sub-Saharan African decolonisation was about to draw to a close, there seemed to be more space for radical third world leaders, who were critical of the West and in principle interested in socialist modernity. Finally, the Eisenhower administration – in its last days in office in 1960 – did not seem interested in devolving additional resources to West Africa in order to counter Soviet policy. Up to this point, Soviet policy had been successful: by 1960 the USSR was now an important actor in West Africa, and it appeared possible that its influence on the rest of the African continent could increase in the future.

However, some developments in 1960 also highlighted the first signs of crisis in Soviet relations with its allies in the region. Economic cooperation with Guinea, in particular, turned out to be more expensive and less rewarding than Moscow had initially hoped for. The local leadership kept insisting on using Soviet funds for prestige projects that did not favour in any way Moscow's aims of rapid modernisation. This time, the Soviet leadership could not ignore these problems, as the scarce results obtained through economic cooperation with Guinea did not justify the high costs associated with it. They were the first signals of a crisis that would grow to the point of triggering a reassessment of the whole policy of engagement.

### *Relations with Ghana*

The relationship between Ghana and the Soviet Union changed radically over the course of 1960. This was due to both internal and external factors. The Congo crisis was certainly contributed to drawing Ghana closer to Moscow, but nonetheless Ghanaian internal developments also played an important role.<sup>336</sup> Nkrumah was concerned primarily with two questions: transforming Ghana into a presidential

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<sup>336</sup> The Congo crisis and its impact on Ghana will be treated in chapter 7.

republic with himself as President, and obtaining as much foreign aid as possible for the development of the country. Both had an impact on relations with Moscow.

### Political developments

During the first half of 1960 what most contributed to drawing Ghana closer to the Soviet Union was the Accra government's progressive distancing itself from Britain. Nkrumah had never made a mystery of his hatred for colonialism and colonial powers and of his readiness to accept aid from all sides. Nonetheless, since independence London always managed to keep the Ghanaian Prime Minister "on track" by applying political and economic pressure. In 1960 Nkrumah was determined to change course.

The new direction that Ghana was taking became evident in early 1960. British Prime Minister Macmillan could not help admitting at the end of his visit to the former British colony in January that 'Britain and Ghana do not always see the situation with the same eyes'. The exchanges between him and Nkrumah had been cordial, but Nkrumah had repeatedly stressed Ghana's firm intention to support African liberation movements, even if this meant going against Western interest in the continent.<sup>337</sup> London's influence in Ghana was slowly decreasing, challenged by Nkrumah's rising personal power and prestige as the leader of the first sub-Saharan African independent country.

For Moscow this was obviously good news. The Soviet Embassy in Accra reported how the Ghanaian press had recently started to praise the Soviet Union for its condemnation of French nuclear tests in the Sahara desert, of which Nkrumah was a staunch opponent, while neither the US nor Britain had criticised them.<sup>338</sup> Furthermore, Nkrumah's rhetoric became markedly more radical. Soviet observers

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<sup>337</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 4, p. 5, d. 16, l. 1-7.

<sup>338</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 4, p. 5, d. 16, l. 12-15.



highlighted how in recent speeches he had stressed the importance of fighting against foreign economic interests in Ghana and in Africa in general, and even discussed some concepts with a clear socialist tinge such as ‘democratic centralism’ and ‘ideological education of the masses’. Nkrumah even declared that ‘the Party forms the government. The government is only a representative of the Central Committee. The Central Committee has the political power of the masses.’ Moscow approved of Ghana’s gradual transformation towards a one-party state.<sup>339</sup>

Ghana’s relationship with the Soviet Union also improved significantly. In January the limit on the number of Soviet personnel authorised to work at the Embassy in Accra was lifted, signalling Ghana’s willingness to improve relations with the USSR. In March, a Ghanaian Embassy was finally established in Moscow. The Ambassador was John Elliot, known for being a left-winger, who exchanged congratulatory speeches with Voroshilov – technically the Soviet head of state – when the embassy was officially inaugurated (22 March).<sup>340</sup>

Meanwhile, Nkrumah considerably increased his personal power in Ghana. This was a positive development for Moscow, as Nkrumah had always been in principle inclined to seek more economic cooperation with the socialist bloc. On 27 April presidential elections and a referendum on the new constitution were held at the same time, and the results were in Nkrumah’s favour. Ghana would officially become a Republic on 1 July 1960, and the incumbent Prime Minister would become the first President. His powers were very large, given that according to the new constitution Ghana was now a presidential system. Nkrumah’s victory meant a significant reduction of power for the British: Ghana did not depend any longer on the British crown, and the British General-Governor was not the formal head of state any longer,

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<sup>339</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 4, p. 6, d. 28, l. 1-10.

<sup>340</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 4, p. 4, d. 12, l. 26-31.

substituted by the President. As the Soviet delegation that visited Ghana in occasion of the celebrations for the proclamation of the Republic reported, London's grip on Ghana's state was declining. Even though the British maintained some key assets in the country – mainly the army and police, and large economic interests – Nkrumah's power was becoming more absolute.<sup>341</sup> Due to these developments, Nkrumah was now in a position to deal with the Eastern bloc as well as with the West.

#### Economic relations

Nkrumah was very interested in receiving Soviet aid, which Moscow had offered since 1957, but Ghana could not accept because of British pressure. Now, instead, Nkrumah felt he had enough power to choose a rapprochement with Moscow.

Nkrumah's main economic preoccupation was to find foreign help to finance Ghana's development strategy, which was centred on the construction of a hydroelectric complex on the River Volta to provide the country with electricity. Nkrumah wanted the Americans to take the lead on the Volta project, but if they dragged their feet, Ghana was ready to turn to Moscow for help. Soviet experts had already studied the project, and made a first rough estimation of the costs, but the Presidium never gave authorisation to go any further.<sup>342</sup> The reason was that Ghana had reached a provisional agreement with some Western companies through the US government for the realisation of the Volta project, although nothing concrete had begun as of early 1960. Now Nkrumah was ready to talk to Moscow too about development aid, including about the Volta complex.

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<sup>341</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 336, l. 96-107.

<sup>342</sup> AVP RF, f. 0573, op. 4, p. 3, d. 12, l. 9. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsyarkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 180.

In late April a Ghanaian parliamentary delegation visited the USSR for the first time. Officially, the delegates visited the Soviet Union to foster the friendship between the two countries. They attended a session of the Supreme Soviet (right in time to learn of the shooting-down of the American U2 plane on 1 May directly from Khrushchev's mouth), met several Soviet high officials, visited Moscow State University and exchanged congratulatory speeches with the First Secretary in person.<sup>343</sup> However, the real purpose of the visit was different. As Nkrumah himself had let the Soviet leadership know, the delegation – headed by the Economy Minister Kojo Botsio – had a clear economic outlook. Botsio had with him a personal letter from Nkrumah addressed to Khrushchev, in which the Ghanaian President made some preliminary enquiries about economic cooperation between the two countries. Botsio was supposed to discuss only with Khrushchev in person.<sup>344</sup>

A few days after arriving in the USSR, Botsio expressly told Soviet Minister of Foreign Trade Patolichev that Ghana was hoping to receive from Moscow a credit of roughly 100 million pounds, to be used for several projects of industrialisation and modernisation, including the Volta complex. Botsio also declared that Ghana was interested in increasing trade with the Soviet Union. Ghana was ready to sell up to 50 thousand tonnes of cocoa beans per year for 4 or 5 years.<sup>345</sup> This was a key development, as beforehand Soviet offers to buy Ghanaian cocoa were frustrated by the strict control on cocoa trade exercised by the largely British-run Cocoa Marketing Company. Following Ghana's transformation into a republic, however, Nkrumah

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<sup>343</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 4, p. 3, d. 12, l. 51-53. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika, Tom II*, 192-93.

<sup>344</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 4, p. 3, d. 12, l. 23. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsympkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 182.

<sup>345</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 4, p. 3, d. 12, l. 48. In *ibid.*

managed to obtain a higher degree of direct influence on the cocoa trade, and was pressing to obtain even more leverage in this area.<sup>346</sup>

The Soviet side generally replied positively to the delegations' proposals. Patolichev told the Ghanaians that, in accordance with the instructions received from the Kremlin, the USSR was in principle ready to start economic cooperation with their country, but that the exact details would be specified only once Soviet specialists could visit Ghana and carry out a complete assessment of the development projects to be financed. Botsio thanked him, and went back to Ghana to report to Nkrumah, but not before having extended an official invitation to Khrushchev to visit Ghana at any time he would find convenient. Botsio, who was among the most pro-Soviet figures among Nkrumah's entourage, even privately told a Supreme Soviet member that Ghana was ready to move towards socialism, with the crucial contribution of Soviet economic help.<sup>347</sup>

The visit of the delegation from Ghana was a success for Moscow's policy of presenting the Soviet Union as a model to imitate. The Ghanaians visited the USSR with the manifest intention of understanding how Soviet people lived, and to study development in the Soviet Union so to improve living standards in Ghana. Ghanaian Minister of Agriculture Asare – one of the most prominent members of the delegation – explicitly declared that his main aim was to study agriculture in Georgia, which was on one of the legs of the visit, in order to improve productivity and better the living conditions of the Ghanaian peasantry.<sup>348</sup> As with Guinea, Moscow insisted on presenting Central Asia and the Caucasus – which were fixed stops for every African

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<sup>346</sup> PRAAD, ADM/13/1/29, 16 August 1960.

<sup>347</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 336, l. 32-39, 56-57; AVP RF, f. 573, op. 4, p. 4, d. 15, l. 5-17.

AVP RF, f. 573, op. 4, p. 3, d. 12, l. 49-81. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsympkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 182-84.

<sup>348</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 4, p. 4, d. 15, l. 20-21.

delegation that visited the USSR – as successful examples of socialist modernisation. Moreover, the Ghanaian ‘visitors received the very best of treatment. They returned starry-eyed. Mr Edusei was impressed by the size of everything; Mr. Asare by the efficiency of those collective farms he was shown; Mr Botsio by the capacity of the Russians to produce results; and all three by what they took as a visible demonstration of the merits of the one-party system.’<sup>349</sup> The British High Commissioner reported to London how it was Nkrumah himself who felt the need to curb the pro-Soviet enthusiasm of his ministers in some of their official speeches.<sup>350</sup>

Nkrumah, however, was not less interested than his ministers in cooperation with Moscow. He wrote to Khrushchev in early June, saying that Ghana was making the necessary arrangements to receive the Soviet specialists who would help the Accra government to decide the priorities for development. ‘My objective – wrote the Ghanaian President – is the rapid industrialisation and electrification of the country, but also accelerated development and mechanisation of agriculture’.<sup>351</sup> Nkrumah’s sentence could have been used as a slogan for the “socialist model of development”.

In early August a new delegation from Ghana arrived in Moscow, this time with the official purpose of signing the economic agreements. On 4 August, a treaty on economic cooperation was signed, together with a connected commercial agreement. The agreement was very similar to the one signed with Guinea the previous year: the USSR would grant Accra a credit of 160 million roubles repayable over 12 years with 2.5% interest rate. The funds would be used to finance development projects in industry and agriculture, and Ghana’s exports could be used

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<sup>349</sup> UKNA, FO371/146801, A.W. Snelling ‘Ghana: Relations with the Soviet Union’, 18 August 1960.

<sup>350</sup> UKNA, FO371/146801, A.W. Snelling ‘Ghana: Relations with the Soviet Union’, 18 August 1960.

<sup>351</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 4, p. 5, d. 21, l. 1-3.

to pay back part of the loan.<sup>352</sup> The outcome of the negotiations on economic cooperation was particularly favourable to Ghana, as Moscow agreed to pay for part of the imports from Ghana using hard currency. This shows that Moscow was willing to invest in Ghana, even at high costs.

Although Soviet advisors would participate in the process, the Ghanaians had fairly precise ideas of what they wanted to achieve through economic cooperation with the Soviet Union, unlike the Guineans. First of all, Nkrumah wanted to reform Ghana's agriculture through the establishment of state and collective farms, and he asked for Soviet supervision. Nkrumah was attracted by the Soviet collective agriculture because at the time it seemed a successful way to boost production, and also because it conformed to his view of a society based on collective effort, in accordance with African traditional values.<sup>353</sup> Moreover, the Ghanaians wanted Moscow to assume the leading role in the building of the new town of Tema, which in Nkrumah's plans was to become Ghana's largest seaport. Both projects broadly conformed to the "socialist model of development". Modernisation of the agriculture was considered an absolute priority, and the building of industrial infrastructure would help the country to reduce its dependency on the cocoa trade.

By the end of 1960 the USSR had become one of Ghana's main economic partners, both in terms of development aid and trade. The transformation of agriculture and the construction of a much-coveted seaport were ambitious and expensive projects, among the most important ones the Accra government was trying to realise. Moreover, following the ratification of the new agreements, over the course of 1960 the USSR exported 5 million roubles in machinery to Ghana, and imported

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<sup>352</sup> PRAAD, MFA/4/83, 'Agreement for Economic and Technical Cooperation between the Republic of Ghana and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics', 4 August 1960. Russian version in: Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 1*, 580-89.

<sup>353</sup> PRAAD, ADM/13/2/74, 30 August 1960; ADM/13/1/29, 1 November 1960.

19.5 million roubles worth of cocoa beans.<sup>354</sup> In addition, between July and December 1960, many Soviet delegations visited Ghana, mainly formed by Soviet experts with the aim of helping with drafting the list of objectives, but also in different fields such as science, education, and sport.<sup>355</sup> New USSR-Ghana “friendship” associations were founded; the Soviet Embassy in Accra organised exhibitions of photographs and showed documentaries about life in the USSR, public lectures were held and Soviet movies were sent to Ghana.<sup>356</sup> Moreover, the CPP party requested copies of works by Marx, Engels, Lenin and also Khrushchev, in order to educate some of its members about Marxism-Leninism.<sup>357</sup> In November, Soviet press agency TASS opened an office in Accra. This was a major success for Moscow, given that beforehand all news coverage was monopolised by Western agencies: Moscow could finally give its own version of world affairs, transmit news from the USSR, and discuss the problems of world communism.<sup>358</sup>

However, the increase in economic ties with the Soviet Union developed alongside continuing economic relations with the West. The Volta complex remained in the hands of Western companies, despite Moscow’s interest in financing and realising the project. In fact, in early August – during the same days when the agreement with the USSR was being signed – Nkrumah wrote to President Eisenhower, hoping that the Americans would finally take the initiative about the Volta project. Obviously, Ghana’s dealings with Moscow were noticed in Washington

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<sup>354</sup> "Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR za 1959-1963 gody," 430-33.

<sup>355</sup> AVP RF, op. 4, p. 5, d. 25.

PRAAD, MFA/4/85, ‘Protocol on Cultural Exchange between the Republic of Ghana and the USSR in the years 1960-1961’, 25 August 1960.

<sup>356</sup> PRAAD, MFA/4/85, ‘Agreement on Cultural Cooperation between the Republic of Ghana and the USSR’, 25 August 1960.

<sup>357</sup> AVP RF, f. 0573, op. 5, p. 8, d. 10, l. 3-17. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsytkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 187-89.

<sup>358</sup> AVP RF, f. 0573, op. 5, p. 8, d. 13, l. 1-3. In *ibid.*, 191.

with concern, but the Americans believed that as long as the US was able to offer financial help – especially for the hydro-electrical complex – then ‘the West will still be far ahead.’ The whole project was estimated to cost \$168 million, of which Ghana would contribute for 50 per cent, Britain for \$14 million, the World Bank for \$40 million, and the rest would be covered by American loans, at standard interest rates. Moreover, Western companies would invest in the construction in the same site of a smelter powered by the electricity produced by the complex, for commercial purposes.<sup>359</sup>

The difference between economic cooperation with the West and with the USSR became evident in 1960. Western companies could be attracted to invest in Ghana only with the guarantee of an extremely low cost for the electricity produced by the Volta complex, which made the project a lot more onerous in the long term for Ghana.<sup>360</sup> Contrary to Western business, the USSR did not seek profits in Ghana, and its economic aid was larger in absolute terms. Western economic aid for the Volta complex amounted to roughly 85 million dollars (combining American and British loans with funds from the World Bank), whereas the proposed Soviet aid package totalled more than 100 million dollars in direct transfer of resources and loans at favourable rates.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Schwar and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1958-1960 - Africa*, 657-69.

<sup>360</sup> For more context on the economics of the Volta River project, see: Rod Sims, "Lessons from Negotiating with Transnational Corporations: Two Case Studies from Africa - The Volta Aluminium Company Agreements in Ghana," in *Developing with Foreign Investment*, ed. Vincent Cable and Bishnodat Persaud (London: Routledge, 1987), 178-90.

<sup>361</sup> PRAAD, MFA/4/83, ‘Agreement for Economic and Technical Cooperation between the Republic of Ghana and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics’, 4 August 1960.

See also: "Communist Aid Activities in Non-Communist Less Developed Countries, 1979 and 1954-79." This paper focuses on aid only.



Thus, even though the West would realise the single most important development project in Ghana, it was undeniable that relations between Ghana and the Soviet Union had improved radically. The Soviet embassy in Accra reported with eagerness the fact that Nkrumah appeared to share Soviet views on development in the third world. He had declared that Ghana would follow ‘a socialist policy in economics’, by focusing on the creation of cooperatives in agriculture and trying to limit the need for foreign capital through the development of local industry, thus supporting the basic principles of the “socialist model of development”.<sup>362</sup> Western influence in Ghana was being slowly eroded, and the “socialist model of development” had finally found a point of entry through the cooperation agreement with the USSR.

### *Relations with Guinea*

In 1960 Guinea was already an established ally of the Soviet Union, one of the most important in the third world. Over the course of the year the USSR showed that it was still interested in investing into Guinea, even in the face of difficult conditions and poorer-than-expected results in economic cooperation.

#### Political relations

The relationship between the USSR and Guinea in 1960 continued on the same positive track as in the recent past. Guinea was the most important Soviet ally in Africa, because it was the most clearly anti-Western, and the Kremlin leadership made this obvious by sending a new Ambassador to Conakry. Gerasimov, who had remained in office for less than one year, was replaced by Danil Solod on 30

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<sup>362</sup> AVPRF, f. 573, op. 4, p. 5, d. 18, l. 3-5.

December 1959. Sending Solod to Conakray carried an important meaning: the new Ambassador, who had been the key man behind Moscow's dealings with Nasser's Egypt, was the top Soviet diplomat with experience of relations with the third world. It seemed that Guinea was going to be the fulcrum of Soviet policy in Africa.

In January, President Toure officially invited Khrushchev to visit Guinea. However, Khrushchev replied that he preferred to let Sekou Toure visit the Soviet Union for the second time, and then negotiate his own trip to West Africa.<sup>363</sup> The Guinean President's visit took place in early September, and he was treated like a guest of honour. Toure met Khrushchev in the Kremlin, where the two leaders exchanged friendly speeches and condemned the imperialists' conduct in Africa, who were trying by all means to arrest the 'unstoppable' process of decolonisation. In addition, Khrushchev praised Guinea for the many steps forward it had made after independence, and he condemned the imperialist nations, which did not accept that 'the Soviet Union gives young African states uninterested help and support in the strengthening of their political and economic independence.' Any talk of 'communist penetration' in Africa or 'Moscow's hand' was therefore just a Western fabrication.<sup>364</sup>

The Guinean President echoed Khrushchev's compliments.

We also know that the African population celebrates with confidence and great trust the huge progress of the socialist countries. This progress is a historical contribution in the change of the correlation of forces in favour of the deprived peoples. This contribution is also decisive in the struggle of imperialism and socialism. This is a decisive contribution in the liberation of the peoples of our continent, in the economic, social and cultural development of our nations, which until now lagged behind because of exploiters and oppressors.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 1*, 528-29.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 618-19.

<sup>365</sup> *In ibid.*, 620-22.

Sekou Toure said exactly what the Soviet leaders wanted to hear: the Soviet Union by becoming a more developed society was making socialism a global model, a possible alternative to capitalism, which young nations found attractive and were ready to adopt.

#### Economic relations

The beating heart of the relationship between the USSR and Guinea was unquestionably economic cooperation. The proximity between the two countries in the economic sphere became even stronger in 1960, although the poor state of Guinea's economy began to cause preoccupation in Moscow.

Sekou Toure's government opted for a very radical economic policy in 1960. In March the Guineans decided to leave the Franc zone, renouncing use of the same currency as France and its African colonies. The reform was carried out with help from Czech experts, who were however very worried about negative repercussions on Guinean trade with the French commonwealth – most of Guinea's neighbouring countries were in fact in the Franc zone, which made trading with them easier. The economic situation in the country became soon chaotic, as the Czech Ambassador reported to Moscow in April.<sup>366</sup> An already poor economy was further strained by the currency reform, because of the lack of preparation in the Guinean financial institutions and because of the objective difficulty of trading with other countries, since the new Guinean franc was technically inconvertible. Trade was vital for Guinea, which largely depended on imports for several basic commodities. As a

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<sup>366</sup> AVPRF, f. 0575, op. 3, p. 3, d. 7, l. 8. Extract in Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War*: 130.

consequence, Guinea had to rely even more on exchanges with the socialist countries, which being based on barter agreements were still possible.<sup>367</sup>

Despite the fact that it did not encourage the currency reform, Moscow was nonetheless ready to help. President Toure appealed to Ambassador Solod, asking the Soviet Union to arrange supplementary purchases of Guinean coffee, the country's main export commodity. The MID recommended Minister of Foreign Trade Patolichev to come to the help of the Guinean government, 'in this as well as in other ways'. The Ministry of Foreign Trade complied, and in the end 500 additional tonnes of coffee were bought from Guinea, on top of the quantity already agreed upon in the existing commercial treaty, bringing the total purchases of coffee at roughly 1,800 tonnes.<sup>368</sup> On the whole, the USSR imported 0.7 million roubles in Guinean goods (coffee and some fruit), and exported 5.2 roubles in machinery; a remarkable increase compared to 1959.<sup>369</sup> Furthermore, the Guineans had received from the socialist bloc (especially from the People's Republic of China) several thousand tonnes of rice and potatoes to alleviate the severe food crisis that was wrecking the country.<sup>370</sup>

The cooperation between the USSR and Guinea did not end with Moscow's purchases and aid. On 8 September, in occasion of the visit to the USSR of the Guinean delegation that included President Toure, a new agreement was signed. It increased the credit that had been negotiated the previous year by 86 million roubles over four years, in order to relive the difficult economic situation in Guinea and foster

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<sup>367</sup> Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War*, 130-131.

<sup>368</sup> AVP RF, f. 575, op. 3, p. 3, d. 7, l. 8, 23; f. 575, op. 4, p. 6, d. 6, l. 15; f. 575, op. 3, p. 4, d. 17, l. 15-19. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsyarkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 212-14.

<sup>369</sup> "Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR za 1959-1963 gody," 432-35. The official statistics report Soviet coffee purchases for 1,600 tonnes instead of the 1,800 claimed by the Foreign Ministry. In the 5.2 million roubles exports are included the goods sent to Guinea in the framework of the loans, and therefore not immediately paid by Conakry. Trading with Guinea was onerous for Soviet coffers.

<sup>370</sup> Mazov, *Politika SSSR v Zapadnoi Afrike*: 96.

the development of the country. As agreed in 1959, the funds would be used mainly to finance the building of economic infrastructures for industry and agriculture, such as plants and factories.<sup>371</sup> At this point, the Soviet Union was basically footing the whole bill for Sekou Toure's three-year development plan. Mazov calculates from a MID report that Guinean funds accounted for less than 20% of the budget for the new development plan, the rest being credits from the socialist bloc.<sup>372</sup> Moreover, another agreement on the mutual exchange of goods was signed on 8 September too.<sup>373</sup> In fact, the "mutuality" was extremely limited: Moscow delivered goods to Guinea that were paid for at favourable conditions for the West African state, either in local produce or in weak currency. Everything considered, in 1960 the USSR gave Guinea Soviet goods for 22 million roubles (a large part of which were bought on credit), and imported 10.5 million roubles worth of Guinean goods.<sup>374</sup> Guinea was increasingly more reliant on the Soviet Union.

Notwithstanding these positive developments, there were some elements of anxiety from Moscow's point of view. Despite Soviet help, Guinea remained a poor country, whose ravaged economy did not seem to offer much hope for recovery in the future. First of all, a significant part of the Soviet funds was wasted on prestige projects that had a very limited impact on the overall development of the country. Moreover, Soviet observers reported rising expenses and delays in the realisation of the projects, which they blamed on the Guineans' lack of initiative and preparation.<sup>375</sup> Finally, Sekou Toure was concerned by the fact that Guinea's economic survival

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<sup>371</sup> The text of the agreement is in Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom I*, 627-29.

<sup>372</sup> AVP RF, f. 575, op. 3, p. 5, d. 23, l. 54-56. In Mazov, *Politika SSSR v Zapadnoi Afrike*: 98.

<sup>373</sup> The text of the agreement is in Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom I*, 622-27.

<sup>374</sup> AVP RF, f. 575, op. 3, p. 5, d. 23, l. 55. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiya i Afrika, Tom II*, 227-28.

<sup>375</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 371, l. 162-163, 221-226.

depended so much on cooperation with the USSR alone. He hoped that by sending some conciliatory signals, it would be possible to attract Western investments. In the spring of 1960, the Soviet Embassy in Conakry reported on how the project of the Guinean three-year development plan was being modified, in order to reduce socialist influence.<sup>376</sup> In addition, in August the Conakry government rejected the Soviet Embassy's proposal of a Soviet exhibition in Guinea. The decision was certainly political, given that at the same time the Americans were allowed to open their own cultural centre; a choice that obviously annoyed Moscow.<sup>377</sup>

These were all worrying signals, which Moscow had to take into account. The Soviet leadership's view of Sekou Toure as a relatively reliable ally began to change. If beforehand he was regarded as an opportunist, but ready to follow Moscow's advice to implement the "socialist model of development", he now looked increasingly more as a capricious and unstable leader, whose bad management of Guinea's economy was creating serious problems.

However, in spite of these difficulties, Moscow was still willing to invest into Guinea, a sign that there was still confidence in the "socialist model of development" in Moscow. A further worsening of Guinea's domestic situation, in connection with external factors, would eventually reverse this judgement over the next few years.

#### Western reactions

The Western powers, and the Americans in particular, did not seem particularly interested in competing with the USSR in Guinea. Although the Americans and the

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<sup>376</sup> AVP RF, f. 575, op. 3, p. 7, d. 7, l. 24. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsypkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 219. AVP RF, f. 575, op. 3, p. 3, d. 7, l. 35-39. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika, Tom II*, 225-26.

<sup>377</sup> AVP RF, f. 575, op. 3, d. 7, l. 46-47. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsypkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 218.

French did take into account the possibility of re-starting economic cooperation with Guinea, they were put off by the conditions that Sekou Toure demanded, and by Guinea's scarce strategic relevance.

In principle Sekou Toure desired to leave the possibility of receiving economic aid from the US open, according to the stated principle of Guinean "neutrality". Therefore, when in July the Conakry government decided to seek help for the construction of a hydro electrical complex on the Konkoure River (a project that before independence the French were planning to undertake), enquiries were sent to the US as well as to the USSR. However, the Americans were not prepared to help, at least not at Sekou Toure's conditions. When the US proposed a survey to study how to better proceed for the construction of the dam, the Guinean President decided to accept the Soviet offer instead.<sup>378</sup> Moscow's willingness to finance development projects in spite of their high costs and devoid of any direct benefit for the USSR – something the West was not ready to do in Guinea – provided the local leadership with an easy choice.

As the case of the Konkoure Dam shows, relations between Guinea and the USA were by then utterly compromised. Officials in Washington were aware of the fact that the former French colony was drifting towards the Soviet Union, and they knew that the only way to prevent or at least slow down this process was to compete with the USSR in economic aid, but the US reaction was too slow. American initiatives – such as a proposed 'technical assistance agreement' and the possibility of scholarships for Guineans students – failed because of what Conakry judged as excessive waiting times compared to Soviet readiness. Moreover, the lengthy parliamentary procedures necessary to approve the transfer of funds to foreign states

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<sup>378</sup> Schwar and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1958-1960 - Africa*, 716-18.

## Part II – Chapter 6

made Washington's offers of help far less attractive. CIA director Allen Dulles summed up the situation in the National Security Council in very negative terms:

Mr. Dulles reported that the recent actions of Guinea highlighted the drift of that country toward closer relations with the Sino-Soviet bloc. The recognition of East Germany and the probable taking of similar action with respect to North Vietnam reflected Sekou Toure's willingness to do business with the Bloc. Guinea's recent withdrawal from the Franc zone, reflecting a mistrust of Paris, resulted in considerable confusion. The currency for the new monetary system was probably printed in Czechoslovakia. The Three Year Economic Plan of Guinea had a strong socialist flavour, with the state exercising a virtual monopoly over trade and industrial development. [...] Mr Dulles felt the Bloc was attempting to make Guinea a showcase in Africa. Mr. Dillon [Under-Secretary of State] reported that the US had been trying to conclude a technical assistance agreement with Guinea, but had been unsuccessful because Guinea refused to allow U.S. technicians sent to that country any privileges. Apparently the Czech technicians in Guinea lived in barracks and marched to work like soldiers. Guinea thought the U.S. technicians should behave in the same way.<sup>379</sup>

Since Guinea's importance for US foreign policy was rather limited, and moreover other countries in the region were more receptive to Western offers of cooperation, it made little sense to commit more American money to Guinea. The Eisenhower administration, which in 1960 was in its last months in office, therefore decided not to step up the competition with the Soviet Union over influence in Conakry. Sekou Toure's treatment when he visited the US in occasion of the UN General Assembly in the autumn was proof of the American relative lack of interest for Guinea. In spite of Ambassador Diallo's repeated appeals, the Guinean President was able to meet only lower officials, with whom he mostly discussed the failed project of cooperation on

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 708.



the Konkoure River, while President Eisenhower did not receive him. Only the new US administration would show some more interest in the near future.<sup>380</sup>

The French came to the same conclusion: it was obvious to Paris that Sekou Toure was unmovable in his determination to pursue an economic policy 'contrary to French interests' – especially following the exit from the Franc zone –, and that Guinea's relationship with the West was rapidly deteriorating, in favour of building up relations with the socialist world.

Moscow does not miss a single occasion to praise the orientation taken by the new Republic, in which it sees a pilot-state destined to promote not only Africa's political emancipation, but also the transformation of its economic and social structures towards an authoritarian and planned way.<sup>381</sup>

Since France's positions in neighbouring countries such as Senegal and Cote-d'Ivoire were much more solid, there was not much else that the French government could do, apart from waiting to see what would happen in Conakry. For the time being, it looked like Moscow had free hands in Guinea, in spite of several reports concluding that not countering Soviet assistance programmes with comparable Western offers would unavoidably result in a further increase of Moscow's influence in West Africa.<sup>382</sup>

In spite of the growing costs of economic cooperation for the USSR, Guinea in 1960 still occupied an important position in Soviet policy towards West Africa. On one hand, Moscow showed it was still willing to invest in Guinea, in the hope that the

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 718-23.

<sup>381</sup> Maurice Vaisse, ed. *Documents Diplomatiques Français (DDF), 1960: Tome I (1er Janvier - 30 Juin)*, vol. 17 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1995), 302.

<sup>382</sup> UKNA, FO371/147519, W.N. Hugh Jones 'Soviet Bloc Positions in Guinea', 21 March 1960.

'Pro-Soviet Neutralism in Guinea?', Department of State Intelligence Report, 12 April 1960 in UKNA, FO371/147529.

economic outlook of the country would improve in the near future. On the other, possible Western competitors such as the US and France judged Guinea as not important enough to think about seriously challenging Soviet positions.

### *Relations with Mali*

In 1960 a new independent state was created in West Africa, destined to become another close ally of the Soviet Union. Over the course of 1960 Moscow's policy towards Mali followed the same pattern as in Ghana and Guinea: attracted by the radicalism and the relative isolation of a newly independent country in West Africa, Moscow offered economic aid at favourable conditions and political support. Moscow's aim was the same – exporting the “socialist model of development” – and thus the evolution of policies mirrored what had already been carried out in Ghana and Guinea.

### The birth of Mali

The territory known today as Mali was a French colony (“French Soudan”) until 1958, when it became autonomous with the name of Soudanese Republic. Contrary to Guinea, the Soudanese Republic accepted De Gaulle's constitution and stayed in the French Commonwealth, therefore arousing very little interest in Moscow.

In early 1959, the Soudanese Republic was joined with Senegal, another French colony that had recently become autonomous, to form the “Mali Federation”. The Soviet Union looked at this new event with increased interest, but also with considerable scepticism. The First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Conakry, V.I. Ivanisov, wrote to Moscow that the birth of the Mali Federation was certainly a positive development, for it showed how the French Commonwealth was an

‘anachronistic’ idea destined to fail in favour of an independent grouping of former colonies in French West Africa. However, Ivanisov criticised the fact that the creation of the Mali Federation was ‘reformist’ in character, and not ‘revolutionary’ as Guinea’s choice to sever fully its links with France the year before. The Federation leader – Senegalese president Leonid Senghor – was described as a convinced Catholic who nurtured anti-Soviet feelings, while the Soudanese leader Modibo Keita certainly had more progressive ideas, but his party (*Union Soudanaise du Rassemblement Democratique Africain* – US-RDA)) played only a ‘secondary role in the national movement’, therefore offering little hopes of an opening towards the socialist world.<sup>383</sup>

What changed the Soviet negative judgement was the fact that in less than one year Keita managed to become one of the most prominent leaders of the Mali Federation. In June 1960, the Federation was meant to become fully independent from France. Moscow was initially doubtful about the quality of the Mali Federation’s independence, since France seemed to be in control of the country’s economic life. However, Keita kept increasing his status, and was most likely going to become the president of the nascent constituent assembly – a promising development from the Soviet point of view. For this reason, the MID advised the Central Committee in favour of writing to Keita proposing formal recognition of the Mali Federation by the USSR and the exchange of diplomatic representatives. The main argument in favour of recognition was that supporting an independent Mali Federation would speed up the process of creation of a larger Federation encompassing all former French colonies in the region. Moscow hoped that the break up of France’s empire in West

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<sup>383</sup> AVP RF, f. 0607, op. 1-a, p. 1-a, d. 9, l. 2-12. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsykin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 222-23.

Africa would favour the emergence of more radical leaders, thus facilitating possible Soviet penetration.<sup>384</sup>

On 20 June, the day of independence, Khrushchev sent an official message to Keita, extending congratulations for independence and offering formal recognition and the possibility of future cooperation with Moscow. Keita replied favourably on 8 July.<sup>385</sup> As expected, he was elected president of the constituent assembly on 20 July, one month after independence. However, the Mali Federation itself was not to survive much longer: on 20 August, two months after independence, Senegal seceded to form an independent autonomous state as a result of a prolonged standoff with the Soudanese leadership over the organization of power in the Federation. This was bad news for Moscow, which hoped that the Mali Federation would be a first step towards the creation of a French-speaking West African “super state”. Solod, who as Soviet Ambassador to Guinea was charged with following the developments in Mali as well, reported on the situation after the break-up of the Mali Federation. According to his judgement, the responsibility for the secession lay mainly with foreign intervention. Solod believed that French and American agents had acted together with Senghor in order to make the project of integration between the two countries fail, so that France would keep its colonial interests in Senegal and Senghor would obtain more power at the expenses of a more radical leader such as Keita.<sup>386</sup> The independent Republic of Mali, formerly Soudanese Republic, was officially created on 22 September, with Keita as first President.

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<sup>384</sup> AVP RF, f. 0607, op. 1-a, p. 1-a, d. 9, l. 1-2. In *ibid.*, 223.

<sup>385</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 1*, 547-48.

<sup>386</sup> AVP RF, f. 0607, op. 1-a, p. 1-a, d. 9, l. 24-27. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsyppin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 223-24.

The establishment of diplomatic relations

While Senegal, with a more conservative leadership, remained in the French sphere of influence, the new Republic of Mali was led by a socialist sympathizer and was ready to embark on radical reforms. Keita, in fact, had nothing for which to envy Nkrumah or Sekou Toure in terms of anti-colonial feelings and interest in socialism. He was by far the strongest opponent to the idea of keeping some sort of relationship with France, and had since a young age gravitated towards socialist organizations and movements. Moreover, as Ivanisov had noticed a few months before, his party had a vast and very well organised structure in the country, able to engage virtually all strata of population.<sup>387</sup> Building a bilateral relationship with Keita's Mali was perfectly in line with Khrushchev's policy of looking for allies among radical nationalistic leaders in the third world.

Keita himself was very open in his decision to follow Guinea's course and look to the socialist world for help. As early as 4 September a delegation from Mali had visited Conakry and met with representatives of the socialist countries, including Soviet Ambassador Solod. Solod reported back to Moscow that the Malians were interested in the creation of a federation of West African states, fully independent from France. If this proved to be impossible, as was now apparently the case, their goal was to create an independent Mali, free from all French influence and 'arrange cooperation with Guinea and the socialist countries, in the first place with the Soviet Union.'<sup>388</sup> It was therefore natural that on 5 October the Presidium formally recognised Mali as an independent state.<sup>389</sup> A few days later, Khrushchev sent Keita a telegram signalling the USSR's readiness to establish diplomatic relations and

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<sup>387</sup> AVP RF, f. 0607, op. 1-a, p. 1-a, d. 9, l. 10-11. In *ibid.*, 226.

<sup>388</sup> AVP RF, f. 0607, op. 1-a, p. 1-a, d. 9, l. 35. In *ibid.*, 228.

<sup>389</sup> AVP RF, f. 0607, op. 1-a, p. 1-a, d. 6, l. 5. In *ibid.*

exchange ambassadors, to which the Malian leader predictably replied in a positive way.<sup>390</sup> Diplomatic relations were formally established in December. After Guinea and Ghana, a third radical West African state thus entered the Soviet orbit.

Western reactions and economic relations

As in the case of both Ghana and Guinea, Mali was in principle open to receiving aid – essential for the country's survival – from whatever source. However, this time the West had learned the lesson. The Americans, as the State Department wrote to Eisenhower, 'were particularly anxious to avoid a repetition of the Guinean experience', thus urging the American President to recognise Mali immediately and suggest that the US was interested in possible cooperation in the near future.<sup>391</sup>

Furthermore, France too had radically changed its strategy, having realised that refusing to provide Conakry with economic help was one of the prime reasons for Guinea's shift towards the socialist world. Paris was in favour of giving aid to Mali, and had no objection against Washington doing the same. The Americans, however, were more sceptical. President Eisenhower and his advisors were in principle in favour of extending credits to Mali, but they also feared that this could constitute a precedent, and that in the end the US would find itself too heavily committed to an area of the world where it had relatively little interest. The best strategy, according to Eisenhower, was to give some smaller sums as short-term aid at the moment, and then try to get the United Nations involved with longer-term aid projects.<sup>392</sup> Washington

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<sup>390</sup> V.A. Brykin, ed. *SSSR i Strany Afriki, 1946-1962 gg. Dokumenty i Materialy*, 2 vols., vol. 2: Sentyabr 1960 g. - 1962 g. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatelstvo Politicheskoi Literatury 1963), 36-37.

<sup>391</sup> Schwar and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1958-1960 - Africa*, 226-27.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 236-38.

was trying to take time without giving out too much, waiting for the outcome of the November elections in the US.

As a result, the West moved much slower than the Soviet Union. At the end of September, before the USSR and the nascent Republic of Mali had even established official diplomatic relations, Usman Ba, Minister of Civil Administration, Work and Social Affairs of the provisional Mali government, visited Moscow in order to probe the possibilities of receiving help from the Soviet Union.<sup>393</sup> The Soviet leadership immediately understood that there was a concrete possibility to expand the “socialist model of development” further, and reacted accordingly. As soon as the Mali Republic was officially created, a delegation from the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Trade and from GKES was sent to Mali for two months (October-November 1960) in order to prepare a trade and cooperation agreement with the new state. In the end Mali was granted an initial credit of 8 million roubles, and it was decided that 25% of Malian exports to the Soviet Union would be paid for in hard currency – a way to transfer much needed resources to the Bamako government.<sup>394</sup>

Moscow was generally fast to act in Mali. It only took a couple of months to establish diplomatic relations and put together the first aid package. Keita was obviously grateful: in November he wrote to Khrushchev thanking him for the USSR’s readiness to help his country, and announced that Mali was ready to undertake profound social and economic reforms, with the goal of improving the living standards of the population through central planning and state control. Mali thus began to adopt the “socialist model of development”.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> AVP RF, f. 0607, op. 2, p. 2, d. 12, l. 14. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsytkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 228.

<sup>394</sup> AVP RF, f. 0607, op. 3, p. 3, d. 7, l. 146. In *ibid.*, 229.

<sup>395</sup> AVP RF, f. 0607, op. 1, p. 1, d. 3, l. 3. In *ibid.*, 229-30.

*Conclusion*

At the end of 1960 Soviet hopes in West Africa were still high. Guinea was leaning even more towards the socialist bloc due to its currency reform, and Nkrumah's increased power was progressively drawing Ghana away from the West. In addition, a new radical state was born in Mali. Soviet experts and Soviet credits helped local governments to develop agriculture and plan industrialization. All three leaderships in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali showed interest to apply the Soviet-sponsored model of development, based on central planning and collective enterprise. Crucially, the Soviet Union was directly involved in determining which development programmes to finance and which areas of economic activity to prioritise. The "socialist model of development" had been introduced to three newly independent states now, and Moscow still believed that a growing number of countries in the third world would manifest interest for it.

However, major coordination problems were reducing the impact of Soviet investments in Guinea, and the rising costs of economic cooperation worried Soviet observers. Moreover, the outbreak of the Congo crisis in the second half of 1960 introduced new unexpected elements, making the Soviet position much more difficult.



## **Chapter 7 – The Soviet Union and the Congo Crisis**

The Congo crisis had a double meaning for the USSR's policy in Africa. On one hand, the second half of 1960 – when the crisis broke out – represented the apex of Soviet influence on the African continent. Thanks to its firm support for the government of Patrice Lumumba in Congo, Moscow gained much in the eyes of Africa's progressive regimes, which saw in the Soviet Union an ally and a sponsor of their interests against the colonial powers. On the other hand, however, the Congo crisis showed that expanding further Moscow's influence in Africa would considerably increase the risk of an open confrontation with the West, which the USSR was not ready to run. Combined with the growing costs of economic cooperation in West Africa, the Congo crisis contributed to trigger a process of reassessment of current Soviet policy, which eventually led to disengagement between 1961 and 1964. Both the local context and external factors, thus, influenced the evolution of Soviet policy.

The early stages of the Soviet Union's relations with Congo corroborate the hypothesis that Moscow was interested in Africa as a testing ground for its development model. The leadership of newly independent Congo manifested interest in the "socialist model of development", and the establishment of cooperative relations between the two countries was unprecedentedly rapid and smooth. Moscow tried to replicate in Congo what had successfully worked in Guinea, Ghana, and Mali: offers of economic aid, loans, trade and the promise to provide the technical know-how for the realisation of development projects.

When war broke out in Congo, the Soviet Union was unprepared for a confrontation with the West in Africa. Although the eventuality of an "imperialist

aggression” against the “forces of progress” in the third world was always present in Soviet rhetoric, the USSR did not have the capability to counter it easily. The Soviet leadership – and Khrushchev in particular – believed that the competition with the West was by that time firmly fixed in the economic sphere, and they were not willing to engage in high risk and high cost enterprises in Congo.

Even from a theoretical point of view, military intervention in a local conflict in Africa was judged negative for the USSR’s interests. The Soviet doctrine on local war was clear: wars in the developing world were considered ‘unjust’, as they could not result in the birth of a socialist regime – for which economic development was necessary as a precondition – and participation in them might compromise the security of the USSR itself, since the risk of escalation from local conflict to a destructive world war was considered high.<sup>396</sup> The Kremlin leadership was convinced of the necessity to avoid direct and large-scale intervention in armed conflicts in the third world, and in accordance to this policy the USSR had always been very careful to stay out of Africa’s other on-going bloody conflict – the Algerian war of independence.

Why then was the Soviet Union involved in Congo? Moscow did not suddenly think it could challenge the West militarily in the third world. Confident of the progress made in West Africa in the past few months, Khrushchev hoped instead that a combination of Soviet threats and limited material support for Lumumba would be enough to stop the “imperialist” aggression against a friendly government, and to gain the Soviet Union new prestige in the eyes of Africa’s progressive nations. During the Congo crisis the USSR always tried to eschew direct competition with the West on a military level, conscious of its relative inferiority. When the Americans stepped up

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<sup>396</sup> For a detailed discussion of the evolution of Soviet military thought concerning the third world, see Katz, *The Third World in Soviet Military Thought*.

the level of their involvement, Moscow backed off, at the cost of “losing” Congo completely. The usual pattern of Soviet policy – the quick recognition of a radical new independent state followed by generous offers of development aid – was disrupted by the shifting of the competition from the economic to the military plane, where the USSR could not match the West. The decline of Soviet influence in Africa thus began. It was a gradual process that took several years to be complete, but its roots can be traced back to the outcome of the Congo crisis.

### *The USSR and Congo*<sup>397</sup>

#### Congo's independence

Following prolonged turmoil in Congo over 1959, the Belgians agreed to grant their largest African colony independence on 30 June 1960. Patrice Lumumba, a young radical activist, was one of the most important leaders of the Congolese independence movements, and he became Congo's first Prime Minister after independence. The Soviet Union first established contacts with Lumumba in April 1959, when Gerasimov – at the time still Ambassador to Guinea – met him in Conakry when Lumumba was attending the Conference of the Peoples of Africa in quality of leader of the Congolese National Movement (*Mouvement National Congolais* – MNC). Lumumba told Gerasimov that ‘as soon as we reach power we will immediately exchange diplomatic representatives with the USSR’. Moreover, he expressed his

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<sup>397</sup> This section is not meant to be a detailed reconstruction of the breakout and development of the first phase of the Congo crisis, but instead an analysis of the USSR's role in it. Currently, there is no exhaustive academic treatment of the Congo crisis. For useful information, see M. Crawford Young, "Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi," in *The Cambridge History of Africa*, ed. Michael Crowder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 717-22. Also, Ludo De Witte, *The Assassination of Lumumba* (London: Verso, 2002).

willingness to visit the Soviet Union, and asked Gerasimov about possible Soviet help to his independence movement.<sup>398</sup>

Lumumba was not a Marxist, but his views were definitely radical.<sup>399</sup> Because of his leftist convictions, the Americans had been worrying about possible ‘Commie penetration’ in Congo well before the country’s independence.<sup>400</sup> Lumumba was friendly with both Sekou Toure and Nkrumah, with whom he shared pan-Africanist convictions. In addition, he was positively regarded by the Belgian Communist Party, and he made no mystery of being interested in cultivating relations with the socialist countries. Therefore, the International Department decided to invite him to the Soviet Union, but unofficially, so to prevent the Belgian authorities from learning of the visit. The Soviet Embassy in Conakry was entrusted with organising the trip.<sup>401</sup>

Although Lumumba was never able to visit the Soviet Union (he was arrested by the Belgians in October 1959 and released only in late January 1960), the relations between the USSR and newly independent Congo began in the best of fashion. National elections were held in Congo in May 1960, which Lumumba’s strongly anti-colonial MNC won, and the country became fully independent in June. Lumumba was the Prime Minister, while the more conservative Joseph Kasavubu was elected President.

The day before the official proclamation of independence – 29 June – Khrushchev sent Lumumba a telegram, congratulating him and signalling the USSR’s readiness to establish diplomatic relations, to which the Congolese Prime Minister

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<sup>398</sup> AVP RF, f. 590, op. 1, p. 1, d. 1, l. 4-5. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika, Tom II*, 232-33.

<sup>399</sup> Jean Van Lierde, ed. *Lumumba Speaks: the speeches and writings of Patrice Lumumba, 1958-1961* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972); Patrice Lumumba, *Congo: My Country* (New York: Praeger, 1962).

<sup>400</sup> Schwar and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1958-1960 - Africa*, 271-74.

<sup>401</sup> RGANI, f. 11, op. 1, d. 372, l. 30-32. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsytkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 258-59.

replied warmly a few days later.<sup>402</sup> A Soviet delegation – headed by the Secretary of Tajikistan’s Supreme Soviet M.R. Rakhmatov (once again Central Asia had been chosen to represent the USSR in Africa) participated in the official celebrations for Congolese independence. On 7 July, the delegation met the Prime Minister and reached an agreement on the establishment of official relations between the two countries.<sup>403</sup> Never before had the beginning of relations between a newly independent African state and the Soviet Union been so smooth.

#### The development of the crisis

The situation in Congo rapidly degenerated. A few days after independence, the country’s armed forces, whose officers were almost exclusively Belgians, began to mutiny over poor pay and the lack of career opportunities for the Congolese. The principal targets of the revolt were the Europeans left in the country. This gave Belgium the pretext to send troops to Congo, with the task of protecting its citizens there. Khrushchev publicly condemned the Belgian intervention, speaking of a ‘robber policy’, a neo-colonialist aggression directed at preserving Belgium’s economic interests in Congo. The First Secretary’s statement was followed the next day by an official declaration that blamed Belgium as well as the whole of NATO for the turmoil in Congo and called for the withdrawal of its troops.<sup>404</sup>

Meanwhile, the situation in Congo reached a critical point. On 11 July, the southern province of Katanga – rich in mineral resources, including uranium – declared independence. Katanga’s leader, Moise Tshombe, was actively supported by the Belgian mining companies that operated in the province, and he could count on

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<sup>402</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 1*, 549-50.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, 552.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, 553-58.

the help of several thousand Belgian troops and European mercenaries. Lumumba's government appealed to the UN Security Council in order to obtain United Nations assistance against the secessionist. The disorder in Congo thus became an international crisis.

The USSR strongly supported Congo's central government. The Soviet representative at the Security Council, A.A. Sobolev, spoke in favour of Lumumba's requests – that the United Nations assist Congolese forces in removing Belgian troops from the country – and urged the Security Council to act against what he defined as an illegitimate aggression of a sovereign state.<sup>405</sup>

14 July was a decisive date. The Security Council approved an ambiguous resolution, which on one side granted UN military assistance to Lumumba's Government against Tshombe, but on the other did not make clear whether or not the UN troops were authorised to use force. Following the UN resolution, both the central Congolese government in Leopoldville and Tshombe wrote to Moscow to obtain support. Katanga's leader officially wrote to Foreign Minister Gromyko, announcing that his province had seceded from the rest of the country in order to escape the 'chaos and anarchy' that ensued the independence of Congo from Belgium.<sup>406</sup> Prime Minister Lumumba and President Kasavubu instead signed together a message addressed to Khrushchev describing the situation as a consequence of the aggression by the 'Western camp' – and not only by Belgium – and demanding Soviet help.<sup>407</sup>

Whereas Tshombe's message remained unanswered, and the USSR did not recognise Katanga, Khrushchev issued an official declaration on 15 July that fully shared Lumumba and Kasavubu's views, denouncing a broader Western

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 558-60.

<sup>406</sup> Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika, Tom II*, 239-40.

<sup>407</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom I*, 562-63.

responsibility for the aggression of Congo. According to Khrushchev, Belgian troops and mercenaries in Katanga did not serve only Brussels' interests, but also Washington's, London's and Bonn's, since their 'monopolies' all exploited Congo's natural resources. The Soviet leader went to great lengths in his official declaration to support the Leopoldville government.

'If the aggression continues,' Khrushchev wrote,

in spite of this [UN] resolution, then the Soviet government declares that there arises the need to take more decisive measures than according to the UN line, in accordance with the line of sympathy for the situation of Congo of the peace-loving countries.

If the states that are ingeniously carrying out an imperialist aggression against the Republic of Congo and that are supporting it continue their criminal actions, then the Soviet Union will not refrain from decisive measures to stop the aggression. [...]

The government of Congo can be sure that the Soviet government will offer to the Republic of Congo the necessary help that can be required for the triumph of your just cause.<sup>408</sup>

The key message in Khrushchev's telegram seemed clear: the USSR was ready to support Lumumba's government directly, if the foreign intervention did not immediately cease. Since the situation in Congo was by then an open conflict, the First Secretary's words seemed to imply that Moscow's support for Lumumba could take the form of military action.

The reality, however, was quite different. The Soviet Union had recently obtained important advancements in the field of rocket technology and nuclear warfare, but its capacity to project conventional military force remained very limited. First of all, the USSR could not count on any base outside of its national territory and of Eastern Europe. Moreover, the Soviet navy was still far from fully operational in

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<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, 562.

blue water and, finally, airlifting troops some 4,000 miles away from the USSR was a considerable challenge for the Soviet air force, meaning that any kind of large-scale operation in Congo was impossible.<sup>409</sup> Contrary to what Khrushchev's message seemed to suggest, the USSR was in fact unable to help Lumumba in any significant way.

Western analysts, who took Khrushchev's words very seriously, shared this assessment. On 21 July, the Joint Intelligence Committee in London decided to 'consider the importance' of Khrushchev's 'threat' and to 'examine the capability of the Russians to intervene in the Congo.'<sup>410</sup> The JIC set out to analyse the crucial tactical questions of how Moscow could provide direct help to Lumumba's forces. Would they be able to 'move a military element to the Congo by air'? Could the USSR manage to provide the necessary logistical support – water, power and fuel – for a possible intervention in Congo? How long would it take instead to move troops by sea?<sup>411</sup> Less than 24 hours after the drafting of a preliminary version, the Committee decided to drop any further work on the report on 'Russian capability to intervene in the Congo', now judged not necessary any longer.<sup>412</sup> Western intelligence services were well aware of the limited capabilities of Moscow's armed forces and concluded that

Soviet military intervention in the Congo poses great practical difficulties for the Soviets. Essentially, they are limited to airlifting forces into the area or sealifting them. The former is the most expeditious means but the latter is the most feasible. There are general measures that the United States can undertake to aggravate the Soviet problem and consequences of their action as well as certain specific

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<sup>409</sup> Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts. Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in local wars, 1945-1980*: 19-20, 36-59.

<sup>410</sup> UKNA, CAB159/34, JIC(60)38, 21 July 1960.

<sup>411</sup> UKNA, CAB159/34, JIC(60)55, 22 July 1960.

<sup>412</sup> UKNA, CAB159/34, JIC(60)55, 22 July 1960.



measures which tend to forestall the possible success of either an airlift or a sealift. Moreover, there are measures that the United States should take in the event of a Soviet attempt to intervene or if actual intervention by then becomes a fact.<sup>413</sup>

The Americans were even ready to organise a blockade to prevent any Soviet interference in Congo. Secretary of State Herter told the Belgian ambassador to Washington that a Soviet intervention ‘would be a difficult and lengthy move by air and that if the Soviets were to move by sea, the U.S. carrier would be off the Congo coast before the Soviets could be there.’<sup>414</sup>

Moscow’s threats were empty. In his characteristically boastful style, Khrushchev was trying to bluff, by hinting at the fact that the Soviet Union was ready to help Lumumba militarily, without in fact having the concrete means to do it. As a matter of fact, the USSR’s position during the discussions at the UN Security Council was more moderate. The Soviet delegation had insisted – unsuccessfully – on condemning Belgian actions as an aggression and on demanding a rapid withdrawal of all foreign troops, but had also taken care to specify in the proposed resolution that military aid should be ‘provided by African member states of the UN’ only.<sup>415</sup> Being confident of having conquered the “moral high ground”, Khrushchev’s gamble was that the UN resolution would in the end persuade Belgium to withdraw, in what the First Secretary foresaw as a humiliating retreat for the neo-colonial West in Africa, and the definitive consecration of the Soviet Union as the champion of the oppressed peoples of the third world – by just speaking threateningly and without the need to fire a single Soviet shot.

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<sup>413</sup> Schwar and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1958-1960 - Africa*, 347.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, 315-16.

<sup>415</sup> AVP RF, f. 590, op. 4 p. 6, d. 16, l. 10. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsytkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 269.

## Part II – Chapter 7

What Khrushchev had not foreseen was that real Soviet help was actually requested. Since the early days of the UN mission in Congo (ONUC – *Operation des Nations Unies au Congo*), the USSR was providing some degree of support in the form of food supplies and vehicles, including airplanes to transport UN African peacekeepers to Congo.<sup>416</sup> This support was nonetheless largely token in nature: Moscow's logistical contribution was always conveyed through the United Nations rather than helping Lumumba directly, and moreover the Soviet effort was far inferior to what the Americans were doing, both in terms of management of the UN operation on the ground and also through Washington's direct channel of communication with UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld in New York.

In spite of the rapid creation of ONUC, Lumumba was becoming increasingly unhappy with the UN mission, which in his opinion was not doing enough to help his forces to fight the secessionists. By the end of July the Congolese Prime Minister had become utterly frustrated with the UN and with American policy, which he regarded as directly obstructing his efforts to reunite the country, and turned to the USSR for help. As a reply, Moscow issued an official statement in which the Soviet government announced that the transport trucks that were originally intended for the UN mission would be offered directly to Lumumba instead.<sup>417</sup> Moreover, on 5 August, Khrushchev wrote to Lumumba informing him that Mikhail Yakovlev – the Foreign Minister of the Russian Soviet Republic – had been appointed as Soviet Ambassador to Congo, as a sign of Moscow's interest. Khrushchev assured Lumumba that the Soviet Union firmly supported his positions and condemned the imperialist aggression against the young Congolese republic. Furthermore, he promised

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<sup>416</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 1*, 563.

AVPRF, f. 590, op. 2, p. 2, d. 17, l. 5-6. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsyarkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 271.

<sup>417</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 1*, 576-77.

significant economic and technical help from the Soviet side, in order to make the Congolese people able to exploit the natural wealth of their country, which at the moment was in the hands of the Western imperialists.<sup>418</sup> A few days later, Moscow sent food supplies to Congo, and a Soviet diplomat from the Embassy in Leopoldville met Congolese Minister for Economic Affairs Alphonse Nguvulu agreeing on the importance of Soviet economic help for the country.<sup>419</sup>

Soviet support for the Leopoldville government, nonetheless, remained of little practical use: Lumumba needed decisive military aid rather than foodstuff and guarantees of future economic cooperation. When on 9 August South Kasai – another mineral-rich province – following Katanga’s example detached itself from the central government, Lumumba was really desperate for help. He again appealed directly to Moscow, asking for military assistance in order to enable his army to fight the secessionists in both regions. The Soviet Union, faced with the need of providing more decisive help, offered what it could. A limited number of airplanes that were meant for the UN mission were instead given straight to Lumumba’s government. Between late July and early September, about thirty Soviet aircraft were used to airlift Congolese soldiers as well as troops from other sympathetic African countries (including Ghana and Guinea) to be deployed against the rebels.<sup>420</sup>

Thirty airplanes might seem significant military support, but a brief comparison with the American effort reveals the real balance of forces. Since the very first days of the crisis, the US was able to employ fifty aircraft to airlift troops and

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<sup>418</sup> AVPRF, f. 590, op. 36, p. 4, d. 1, l. 40. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika, Tom II*, 242-44.

<sup>419</sup> AVPRF, f. 590, op. 2, p. 2, d. 17, l. 6. In Davidson, Mazov, and Tsyppkin, *SSSR i Afrika*, 280-81.

AVPRF, f. 590, op. 3, p. 1, d. 6, l. 81-83. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika, Tom II*, 245-46.

<sup>420</sup> AVPRF, f. 601, op. 1, p. 1, d. 6, l. 1. In Davidson and Mazov, eds., *Rossiia I Afrika, Tom II*, 246-47.

transport supplies. The first provisions and equipment brought by the Americans reached Congo 24 hours after the UN resolution, and the first troops transported by the US arrived less than 48 hours later. Moreover, an American aircraft carrier – the USSR did not even have such kind of vessel at the time – was stationed at the mouth of the Congo River. Both President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Herter repeatedly praised their Air Force for having set up the Congo operation so quickly and efficiently.<sup>421</sup> On the contrary, the Soviet operation was challenging from a technical point of view, due to the difficulty of flying from the USSR to Congo without the possibility of making refuelling stops for much of the route. In 1960, the USA was a consolidated global military power; the USSR was not.

#### Mobutu's coup and the end of Soviet hopes

Although limited, the Soviet airlift of troops in Congo deeply annoyed Washington. Since Congo's independence, the Americans had been extremely suspicious of Lumumba's radicalism. As a result of the Congolese Prime Minister's repeated threats to seek help from Moscow, the US administration lost any will to come to terms with him. CIA director Dulles defined Lumumba 'a Castro or worse', meaning that in his view he was 'in the pay of the Soviets'.<sup>422</sup> The conclusion was straightforward: since Lumumba represented the main leverage for Moscow in Congo, Dulles wrote to the CIA operatives in Leopoldville that 'his removal must be an urgent and prime objective and that under existing conditions this should be a high priority of our covert action.' Hammarskjold agreed with the necessity to get

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<sup>421</sup> Schwar and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1958-1960 - Africa*, 311, 39-40.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

Lumumba 'out of the way', and the US government exercised pressure on the UN to put an end to the Soviet airlift.<sup>423</sup>

In early September, the UN forces in Congo took all the Congolese airports under their control and closed them down, making any further transport of troops or equipment impossible for Moscow. The Americans were pleased that it took a mere 18 hours to put the plan into action and thus block the Soviet airlift.<sup>424</sup> The closing of Congolese airports was however only the first part of the stratagem: on 5 September the CIA helped President Kasavubu to stage a coup against Lumumba. The plan failed, because Lumumba refused to step down as Prime Minister, and was able to broadcast several messages over the radio rallying his supporters, leading to a prolonged standoff.<sup>425</sup> Thus, on 14 September Colonel Joseph Mobutu – allegedly with direct CIA assistance – ousted both Kasavubu and Lumumba, taking control of the Congolese government, and arrested the former Prime Minister. The US immediately recognised the new government. Lumumba remained under house arrest – although he was still able to issue occasional communiqués denouncing the developments in Congo.<sup>426</sup>

After the blockade of the airports and the first coup, Moscow kept protesting about the events in Congo, and especially about the behaviour of the UN forces, accused of having become an instrument for the imperialistic policy of the Western powers.<sup>427</sup> Moscow even tried to attack Hammarskjöld's position as Secretary-

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 443-46, 56-57.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., 465.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 460-62.

<sup>426</sup> Young, "Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi," 421.

<sup>427</sup> AVPRF, f. 573, op. 4, p. 2, d. 9, l. 20-22. In Davidson and Mazov, eds., *Rossiia I Afrika, Tom II*, 247-48.

Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom I*, 631-35.

General during the Security Council meetings on Congo, hoping to be backed by the Afro-Asian grouping of states, which instead did not support Soviet views.<sup>428</sup>

However, besides the protests at the UN, once again there was nothing concrete the USSR could do to modify the situation. In Khrushchev's view the West had overthrown with impunity a Soviet-friendly government in Africa, but he was unable to influence the situation, beyond venting his frustration to British Ambassador to Moscow Frank Roberts.<sup>429</sup> The reality was that the Soviet Union had already lost Lumumba, its prime supporter in Congo, and was about to lose everything else. Mobutu's first act as the new head of state in Leopoldville was in fact to sever diplomatic relations with the USSR, and to expel all Soviet personnel from Congo. The Soviet Embassy closed down, and diplomats and advisors had to leave the country in a hurry.<sup>430</sup>

#### The last stage of the Congo crisis

Although the fighting in Congo would continue for a long time, direct Soviet involvement became negligible after 1961. Lumumba had been ousted from power and Mobutu's regime gradually established its power on the whole country. Lumumba's successors never managed to obtain significant support from the Soviet Union, which was increasingly more determined to cut its links to Congo.

In January 1961, Mobutu decided to turn Lumumba over to Tshombe's forces in Katanga, in order to prevent the deposed Prime Minister from issuing other statements and thus rallying popular support in Leopoldville. As soon as he reached

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<sup>428</sup> Brykin, ed. *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 1*, 639-72.

<sup>429</sup> Aleksandr A Fursenko, ed. *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Chernovye Protokolnye Zapisi Zacedanii Stenogrammy Postanovleniya*, 3 vols., vol. 3: *Postanovleniya 1959-1964*, Arkhivy Kremlya (Moscow: Rosspen, 2008), 845-46.

<sup>430</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 1*, 672-73. The official communiqué was worded in such a way to suggest that it had been a Soviet decision to leave Congo.

Katanga, Lumumba was brutally murdered, thus ultimately realising President Eisenhower's wish that the former Congolese Prime Minister 'would fall into a river full of crocodiles'.<sup>431</sup>

The news of Lumumba's death was first divulged in February 1961, roughly one month after the actual date of his assassination. The murder was initially masked as an accident that happened while Lumumba was being transferred from Leopoldville to Elisabethville in Katanga. The Soviet government predictably did not accept the official version, and in a special statement accused the Belgian 'colonialists' of having murdered Congo's legitimate Prime Minister. As usual, the Kremlin leadership used strong words, holding the UN responsible for the death of Lumumba and charging Hammarskjold with complicity with the imperialists.<sup>432</sup>

As in the recent past, however, Soviet support for the Congolese cause was limited to statements and token gestures (as for example renaming the recently established Peoples' Friendship University as Lumumba University). In spite of the repeated pleas for help that came from Antoine Gizenga – the former Congolese Deputy Prime Minister who meanwhile had set up a rebel government in Stanleyville in the North-East of Congo – the Kremlin never agreed to provide any significant military or logistical help to the Stanleyville government, and Gizenga was finally defeated and imprisoned by Mobutu in early 1962.<sup>433</sup>

Moscow's lack of enthusiasm for the pro-Lumumba government in Stanleyville shows that by early 1961 the Kremlin leadership had given up on Congo. The Soviet Union's bid for influence had failed. Lumumba and his allies were

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<sup>431</sup> Schwar and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1958-1960 - Africa*, 495.

<sup>432</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 2*, 194-98.

<sup>433</sup> For a complete overview of Moscow's policy towards the rebel government in Stanleyville, see Sergey Mazov, "Soviet Aid to the Gizenga Movement in the Former Belgian Congo (1960-61) as Reflected in Russian Archives," *Cold War History* 7, no. 3 (2007): 435-37.

defeated, and forces loyal to the West took power in Congo, ending any hope for Moscow to establish friendly relations with one of Africa's second-largest independent country. Khrushchev's bluff on supporting Lumumba militarily had been called, and the USSR ended up with a painful defeat. The Americans could organise the removal of an unfriendly government in Leopoldville and the USSR was unable to influence the situation in any concrete way. Allen Dulles was even 'surprised at the ease with which the Soviets were forced out of the Congo.'<sup>434</sup> It was a hard lesson for Moscow, which realised that, in spite of its dream to win Africa thanks to a development model, what had been really crucial during the Congo crisis was traditional "hard" power. This lesson proved to be decisive for the future of Soviet policy in Africa.

### *The impact of the crisis for Soviet-West African relations*

#### Ghana shifts eastward

The development of the Congo crisis had a deep and long-lasting impact on Moscow's policy towards West Africa. In the short term, the events in Congo led to a partial shift in favour of the USSR in Ghana. This largely happened because of Ghanaian initiative. Nkrumah was one of Lumumba's firmest allies since the early days of Congo's independence. The Ghanaian President viewed Lumumba as an ideal partner with whom to build a strong political bond, ideally leading to independent Congo joining the Ghana-Guinea union.<sup>435</sup> The two leaders shared the same strong dislike for European colonialism, and believed in the need to overcome Africa's ethnic and political divisions in favour of some form of unity. Furthermore, Nkrumah

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<sup>434</sup> Schwar and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1958-1960 - Africa*, 497.

<sup>435</sup> PRAAD, SC/BAA/282, February 1960.



and Lumumba were radicals in their approach to the economy: they were both seeking rapid development and both admired the economic success of the Soviet Union, showing interest in the idea of applying the same model to their countries. By the second half of 1960, the USSR had become one of the most important political allies and economic partners for both Ghana and Congo, and when the crisis came it was natural that Nkrumah and Lumumba looked at Moscow for support.

When war erupted in Congo, Nkrumah immediately understood that if Ghana managed to carve an important role for itself in the UN operation, this would considerably boost the country's prestige in the eyes of other independent governments on the continent, contributing towards Nkrumah's wish to make Ghana the leading force of independent Africa. During the early discussions at the UN, the Ghanaian President supported the view that the operation in Congo should be led by African countries, which should also contribute the bulk of the troops.<sup>436</sup> What Nkrumah had in mind was sending a relatively large Ghanaian contingent to Congo and then try to make appoint the Chief of Staff of Ghana's Armed Forces – British General Henry T. Alexander – as military head of the UN mission.<sup>437</sup> However, sending troops to Congo was a logistical challenge for Accra, which at the time did not even have an air force. Clearly, Ghana depended on foreign assistance to move its contingent to the crisis area as rapidly as possible. Nkrumah asked Moscow for help, and on 30 July Khrushchev agreed to 'leave' some Soviet Ilyushin-18 planes in Ghana in order to transport troops to Congo.<sup>438</sup> Obviously, Soviet assistance was

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<sup>436</sup> See Kwame Nkrumah, *Challenge of the Congo: A Case Study of Foreign Pressures in an Independent State* (New York, NY: Independent Publishers, 1967).

<sup>437</sup> PRAAD, ADM/13/1/29, 28 July 1960. General H.T. Alexander was Chief of Staff of the Ghanaian armed forces in 1960-61.

<sup>438</sup> PRAAD, SC/BAA/149, 30 July 1960, 4 August 1960. In the original Russian text Khrushchev used the verb *оставить* (*ostavit* – to leave, to stay, to keep), meaning that the planes were already in Ghana, and that the First Secretary now simply agreed to

more than welcome, and in the end there were five Soviet IL-18s regularly used for the airlift of Accra's troops into Congo.<sup>439</sup>

Similarly to Lumumba, as the crisis progressed, Nkrumah became increasingly dissatisfied with the UN mission, which in his opinion did not provide effective help to the Leopoldville government. Inevitably the Ghanaian President was drawing closer and closer to the positions of the Soviet Union, which at the same time was accusing Hammarskjöld of partiality in favour of the imperialists.<sup>440</sup> Nkrumah rapidly came to regard Moscow as the only source of assistance compatible with his plans. On 9 August he consulted the Soviet embassy in Accra about setting up a joint command between the Ghanaian and the Congolese governments to oversee military operations, and he directly asked for Soviet military help. Khrushchev replied that the USSR was ready to help the legitimate struggle of the African peoples for full independence, and that Moscow was willing to send weapons to Ghana in case of necessity.<sup>441</sup>

However, Nkrumah hoped to obtain from Khrushchev help that Moscow could only partially deliver. The Soviet Union sent some military supplies to Ghana, and kept transporting Accra's troops to Congo, but everything had to stop when the airports were closed in September (meaning that the whole operation went on for no more than approximately a month). Nkrumah was deeply upset by the coup against Lumumba, but – like Moscow – he was powerless to prevent it or to do anything to

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their use as cargo for Nkrumah's troops. It is possible that the first Soviet aircraft used for the Ghana-Congo airlift were in fact originally flown to Accra to transport non-military supplies in the context of the trade agreement between the two countries that was finalised during the same days.

<sup>439</sup> AVPRF, f. 601, op. 1, p. 1, d. 6, l. 1. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika*, *Tom II*, 246-47.

<sup>440</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki*, *Tom I*, 589-92.

<sup>441</sup> AVPRF, f. 573, op. 4, p. 2, d. 9, l. 1-3. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika*, *Tom II*, 196-97.

change the situation. The Ghanaian President was as much baffled as Khrushchev by the outcome of the Congo crisis: instead of recruiting Congo to the pan-African cause, its legitimately elected government was overthrown by forces loyal to the colonial powers, which in Nkrumah's view acted primarily to defend Western vested interests in Congo. Nkrumah – who had always been instinctively wary of Europe – felt he could no longer trust the US, which for long he had regarded as the best available source of support against colonialism.

The Ghanaian leader in the end came to share Khrushchev's reasoning: since both Belgium and the United Nations could be influenced relatively easily by American power, but the situation in Congo did not change, then Washington was directly responsible for the aggression of Congo. The personal correspondence between Khrushchev and Nkrumah shows that both became convinced that the Congo crisis was an imperialist plot in which the United States was directing the operations behind the scenes.<sup>442</sup>

The result was Ghana's progressive detachment from the West and partial realignment with the Eastern bloc. Nkrumah previously admired the Soviet Union for its rapid industrialisation and speedy development alone, but in the summer of 1960 he found in Moscow a political as well as military ally. Ghanaian documents reveal that as the emergency in Congo became more complicated following Mobutu's coup, the USSR considered stepping up the military cooperation with Accra. Marshall Rodion Malinovsky – the Soviet Minister of Defence – approached the Ghanaian Ambassador to Moscow inviting a military delegation from Ghana to the USSR and signalling that Moscow was ready to consider sending military advisors and equipment to Accra. Moscow even briefly contemplated the possibility of providing

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<sup>442</sup> PRAAD, SC/BAA/149, 24 August 1960, 9 September 1960; SC/BAA/490, 8 November 1960.

help for ‘Freedom Fighters’ in Ghana, possibly alluding at training irregulars in West Africa to be later deployed alongside the Congolese forces loyal to Lumumba.<sup>443</sup> Such proposals had never been made to a Sub-Saharan African country before.

#### The XV session of the UN General Assembly

The XV session of the UN General Assembly, which started in September 1960, represented the peak in the bilateral relationship between Ghana and the Soviet Union. In Khrushchev’s hopes, the General Assembly should have been the definitive consecration of the USSR as defender of the newly independent countries of the third world. The First Secretary decided to attend the XV session in person, and since the summer he began to lobby third world leaders to do the same.<sup>444</sup> By convincing them to be present at the General Assembly Khrushchev wanted to increase the political significance of the gathering and make the Soviet Union appear much more interested in the destiny of the newly independent countries than the Western world.

Khrushchev left the Soviet Union for the US still hoping that the Congo crisis would take a positive turn, strengthening the USSR’s role as protector of the oppressed in Africa. However, when he finally reached New York by boat Khrushchev found out that Mobutu had ousted Lumumba in a coup and thus the situation was far from promising from the Soviet point of view. Nevertheless, the First Secretary decided to use the General Assembly as a platform from which to denounce Western imperialism and at the same time attack Hammarskjold, who in Khrushchev’s opinion was an agent of the imperialists. In his speeches to the Assembly, the Soviet leader first of all refused to admit that the Soviet Union had

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<sup>443</sup> PRAAD, SC/BAA/381, 26 September 1960, 20 July 1962; ADM/13/1/29, 30 December 1960.

<sup>444</sup> PRAAD, SC/BAA/149, 22 August 1960.

suffered a setback in Congo – thus implicitly admitting that there was an active competition between the two blocs over the final outcome of the Congo crisis. In addition, Khrushchev strongly protested against the UN management of the operation, directly attacking Hammarskjold and proposing a radical reform of the organisation itself. Khrushchev suggested that an executive ‘troika’, composed by one representative each of the Western, Eastern and neutral blocs, substitute the figure of Secretary-General. This proposal, which failed to obtain the support of the Afro-Asian grouping at the UN, was a desperate move, born impromptu out of the necessity to counter the loss of prestige that derived from the worsening situation in Congo and fuelled by the resentment at Hammarskjold’s alleged support for the West.

The other speeches delivered at the General Assembly by Khrushchev show that the Soviet leader expected a completely different reality in September 1960: the First Secretary spoke of the end of colonialism, of the advent of a new era of international relations when the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America would count as much as their former colonial masters in the world. He publicised the Soviet Union’s readiness to provide economic help to the newly independent countries, trying to convince them that the Eastern bloc was the only reliable partner for their political, economic and social development.<sup>445</sup>

The General Assembly signalled an unprecedented affinity of ideas between Khrushchev and Nkrumah. In his own UN speech, the Ghanaian President shared Khrushchev’s prediction that the colonial system would be soon dissolved forever, and at the same time denounced the new forms of neo-colonialism, which he saw as deriving from the desire to keep exploiting the formerly colonised territories. As Khrushchev, Nkrumah attacked the colonial powers as a whole, for being responsible

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<sup>445</sup> The texts of Khrushchev’s speeches at the UN General Assembly can be found in Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki*, Tom 2, 5-33, 38-47, 52-59.

to try to preserve an exploitative and unfair system that the efforts of the African people would have otherwise already eliminated. The solution was economic development, autonomous and independent from the business interests of the colonial powers.<sup>446</sup> According to the Americans – who were surprised and annoyed by the content of Nkrumah’s address – ‘it was difficult to find a word in the speech showing any understanding of the position of the West in the East-West conflict.’<sup>447</sup>

Khrushchev instead was enthusiastic about Nkrumah. The two leaders met twice in New York, and the First Secretary eagerly reported to the Presidium the Ghanaian President’s affirmation that ‘for Africa there is no other path like the path of socialism’.<sup>448</sup> It seemed that a new era of understanding between Ghana and the USSR had begun. In late 1960 the British intelligence services noticed with preoccupation that Ghana’s activities in other African countries ‘amounted at times almost to subversion.’ London was worried by its former colony’s increasingly radical attitude and by ‘Nkrumah’s conformity with the communist line on many issues.’<sup>449</sup>

However much Nkrumah regretted ‘having looked too much to the West and little to the East before’ – as he wrote to Khrushchev – his hands were tied when it came to changes in Ghana’s foreign policy.<sup>450</sup> Western companies were in charge of one of the most important development projects in Ghana – the construction of the hydroelectric complex on the Volta River – and the US had promised Nkrumah a loan of approximately 40 million dollars to finance part of the project since early

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<sup>446</sup> PRAAD, SC/BAA/403, September 1960.

<sup>447</sup> Schwar and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1958-1960 - Africa*, 664.

<sup>448</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 1*, 445, 1078-79.

<sup>449</sup> UKNA, CAB159/34, JIC(60)61, 8 December 1960; JIC(60)64, 22 December 1960.

<sup>450</sup> PRAAD, SC/BAA/149, 24 August 1960.

September.<sup>451</sup> Washington thus had great leverage when dealing with Accra: from Nkrumah's point of view, any tension with the American government could risk compromising the Volta project. Although Soviet economic aid was larger in absolute terms than Western aid (more than double the amount of the American loan), Nkrumah had invested a good deal of his personal prestige in presenting the Volta project as a crucial step for the development of Ghana.<sup>452</sup> Therefore, he could not risk jeopardising it. As Ghana seemed to be drawing closer to the USSR, the US government duly reminded Nkrumah that American companies might not want to invest their money in a country where 'capitalism' and 'economic exploitation' were so vociferously criticised.<sup>453</sup> The message was clear: if Nkrumah wanted economic help from the West, then he should stop criticising American policies, let alone engage in initiatives which might damage Western positions. Thomas Noer writes that 'the decision to fund the Volta project was made quite reluctantly and only after Nkrumah was forced to accept a set of conditions that bound him to accept at least verbally American principles in economics, politics, and international relations.'<sup>454</sup>

It was obvious that Ghana could not deviate too much from its previous line. After the blockade of the Congolese airports in September, Khrushchev hoped to rally the support of the 'progressive' African states against the UN, on the ground that its troops were being used against the interests of Congo's legitimate government. Obviously, Khrushchev repeatedly tried to obtain Nkrumah's backing, but the

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<sup>451</sup> Schwar and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1958-1960 - Africa*, 660-61.

<sup>452</sup> Building a dam and a hydroelectric complex on the River Volta appeared as a key point of the Convention People's Party's programme as early as 1951, when Nkrumah ran for the Gold Coast's first general elections while still imprisoned in Accra. For more information on US policy towards the construction of the Volta complex, see: Thomas J. Noer, "The New Frontier and African Neutralism: Kennedy, Nkrumah, and the Volta River Project," *Diplomatic History* 8, no. 1 (1984): 61-80.

<sup>453</sup> Schwar and Shaloff, *FRUS, 1958-1960 - Africa*, 666-68.

<sup>454</sup> Noer, "The New Frontier and African Neutralism," 62.

Ghanaian President never accepted delegitimizing the Security Council, and always maintained that help to Congo's government should be channeled through the United Nations.<sup>455</sup> Moreover, when in early January 1961 Guinea and Mali – together with Nasser's United Arab Republic – agreed to withdraw their troops from ONUC in protest against the UN role in Congo, Ghana refused to do the same. Nkrumah was doubly bound to the UN mission: on one hand, his only hope of boosting Ghana's prestige through the Congo crisis was tightly connected to maintaining a significant role in ONUC; on the other, a boycott of the UN would have most likely resulted in a standoff with the Americans, which was unthinkable because of the importance of the Volta River project.

### *Conclusion*

In the short term, the Congo crisis meant positive progress in the relations with Moscow's existing allies in West Africa. Guinea and Mali kept a lower profile than Ghana during the crisis: they nominally supported Lumumba and his government, and also criticised the role of the UN following the Soviet example. However, both countries possessed neither sufficient political nor military weight to alter significantly the course of the events. Thus, the development of the events in Congo left their relations with the Soviet Union virtually unscathed. Progress of lack thereof depended on the economic agreements more than the political situation.

The case of Ghana was different. If the transformation of the country into a republic had already opened the way for the introduction of the “socialist model of development” in Ghana, then the trauma of the Congo crisis was the final element that

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<sup>455</sup> AVPRF, f. 573, op. 4, p. 2, d. 9, l. 20-22; f. 573, op. 4, p. 4, d. 12, l. 12-14. In Davidson and Mazov, *Rossiia i Afrika, Tom II*, 247-50. PRAAD, SC/BAA/149, 9 September 1960; SC/BAA/490, 8 November 1960, 12 November 1960.



tipped the balance in favour of the USSR. Nkrumah saw the coup against Lumumba as a blow against independent Africa's ambitions of freedom and development. The Ghanaian President shared the Soviet judgement that the West was directly responsible for the turmoil in Congo, and thus he felt he could not trust the old partners in Washington and London in the same way as before. As a consequence, Accra assumed a new course: the Soviet Union now appeared as a more attractive alternative for political as well as economic cooperation, since its policy on Congo was compatible with Nkrumah's. As a consequence, criticism of the West and the US in particular became considerably more frequent in government officials' speeches and in the government-controlled press, as the Soviet Embassy in Accra reported with satisfaction.<sup>456</sup>

Ghana's partial shift towards the East was mainly due to the unfavourable fallout of Western policies, and especially the perceived American machinations in Congo. British intelligence reported how, following Mobutu's coup in Leopoldville, the fear of the CIA meddling into local affairs and allegedly preparing coups became widespread among African leaders.<sup>457</sup> Nkrumah – as well as Sekou Toure – was no exception. The Americans were no longer seen just as a welcome trade partner and a source of development aid, but also as a fearsome presence that had the capability to bring down an unwanted government. US economic involvement in Ghana prevented Nkrumah from drifting too much towards the Soviet Union, but at the same time American development aid seemed to benefit Western businesses more than Ghana itself – another element of discontent for Washington's policies.

The Congo crisis, however, did not produce only positive effects for the Soviet Union. Khrushchev's gamble in Congo did not work out, and this failure had

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<sup>456</sup> AVPRF, f. 573, op. 4, p. 5, d. 18, l. 85-101; f. 573, op. 4, p. 6, d. 28, l. 11-76.

<sup>457</sup> UKNA, CAB159/34, JIC(60)61, 8 December 1960.

important consequences for Soviet existing policy in Africa. First of all, the Western powers, being perfectly aware of Moscow's inability to project power in Congo, were unimpressed by Soviet threats of intervention, and as a consequence Lumumba's government was overthrown without possibility of Soviet interference. The loss of a friendly government in Leopoldville contributed to dispel the Soviet belief that the African continent could be won thanks to a successful development model alone. The Congo crisis was "solved" through the employment of force, i.e. material power, and thus changed the "rules of the game". Since 1957 the Kremlin leadership always made decisions with the assumption that the struggle with the West in Africa was a competition between two different economic models, in which the Soviet Union had a real chance to prevail. On the contrary, the Congo crisis showed Khrushchev and the Presidium that the West was ready (and able) to recur to force to reverse a situation initially favourable to Moscow.

As the next chapters will show, policy towards the USSR's existing allies in Africa changed accordingly with the realisation that security factors mattered at least as much as economic cooperation to gain influence in Africa. In 1961, the positive momentum generated by the early stages of the Congo crisis would end, and its negative conclusion would initiate a process of reassessment of Soviet possibilities and objectives in West Africa which would eventually lead to a complete loss of interest. Although the process of disengagement took a few years, 1961 turned out to be "the beginning of the end" for Soviet influence in West Africa. It is to this that the next chapter turns.

## **Chapter 8 – 1961: Reassessment**

By early 1961 the cold war had expanded into Africa. The Congo crisis was the tangible example of how local conflicts could easily become major international crises with a considerable degree of superpower intervention, and the African states reacted by establishing groupings and alliances that divided them according to their position on the civil war in Congo, and their allegiance to one or the other superpower. The “Casablanca group” gathered together the more progressive African states – Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, and the provisional Algerian government – which on the whole had better relations with the Eastern than with the Western bloc. On the other side, Western-leaning states such as Liberia, Nigeria and Mobutu’s Congo formed the rival “Monrovia group”. Although most of them still believed in formal non-alignment, the creation of the two groups showed that for African states maintaining a truly neutral stance in international matters was becoming increasingly difficult.

This presented a problem for the Soviet Union. Although the USSR enjoyed good relations with all the member states of the Casablanca group, Moscow was worried that the competition with the West in Africa was becoming similar to the cold war in Europe and Asia. A bipolar confrontation based on military strength in Africa was not in the Soviet interests, as the Ideology Commission reported to the Presidium in late 1961, because it nullified the efforts of the most progressive African states.<sup>458</sup> Moscow had no intention to become entangled in a potentially dangerous standoff with the West in Africa and, moreover, the large investments in development cooperation had so far produced disappointing returns. The same report by the

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<sup>458</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 181, l. 93-125.

Ideology Commission lamented the West African leaders' poor understanding of socialism and 'personalistic' policies, which hindered Soviet plans.<sup>459</sup> The combination of these factors led to the Soviet decision to decrease the resources invested in the region.

The "socialist model of development", the dream of applying a successful development model in the third world disappeared almost completely from Moscow's dealings with Ghana, Guinea and Mali over 1961. The drive to push ambitious programmes of assistance designed to bring about modernisation in a short time was gradually substituted by more reactive policies, based on calculations of political and economic costs and gains. The Soviet Union still believed in the opportunity to keep the relations with its West African allies alive, but not at the same excessive expenses as in the past few years. The importance of the "periphery" in guiding policy grew considerably. In 1961, the Kremlin leadership committed some resources only when asked by the local leaderships in Ghana and Mali, but was not willing to improve the rapidly worsening relations with Guinea through approving a significant new package of aid measures. The new paradigm – destined to continue until 1964 – was to stick to low cost and low risk policies, which could generate gains for the Soviet Union, but without the risk of an open confrontation with the West, or the economic losses of ambitious development projects.

Khrushchev seemed to have lost most of his enthusiasm for exporting Soviet modernity in the third world, and now believed that Moscow's allies in Africa, Asia and Latin America could be used instead as a way to boost the USSR's strength when negotiating with the West, as he told the Presidium in May.<sup>460</sup> When discussing with President Kennedy in Vienna in June, Khrushchev admitted that the USSR would have

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<sup>459</sup> Ibid., I. 100.

<sup>460</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 1*, 505.

liked some African countries to follow a socialist path to development, but he was perfectly aware that countries such as Ghana were not in the socialist camp, and Soviet aid to them amounted to ‘non-interference in practice’.<sup>461</sup>

The shift in Soviet priorities was a consequence of several elements. First of all, the outcome of the Congo crisis convinced the Kremlin leadership that there was little point in openly challenging the West in Africa. Secondly, heavy Soviet investments since 1959 had produced relatively poor results in Ghana and especially in Guinea, due to the lack of preparation of the local elites, and significantly contributed to decrease Moscow’s willingness to commit additional resources. In addition, the new American administration that took office in January seemed more aggressive when it came to countering Soviet influence in the third world.

In 1961 Soviet official rhetoric on the third world seemed increasingly more detached from Moscow’s policies. The new programme of the Soviet Communist Party, which had been in the process of drafting since 1958, was finally approved at the XXII Congress of the CPSU in October. The programme contained ample references to the developing world, and was meant to cement the role of the Soviet Union as a global actor active in supporting the newly independent countries’ struggles for political and economic independence.<sup>462</sup> Furthermore, a few months before Ponomarev had published in *Kommunist* – the leading CPSU paper for ideological questions – an article that officially endorsed the “socialist model of development”. The head of the International Department wrote that the USSR ought to support the ‘national-bourgeois’ leaders of the third world, as long as they were interested in establishing in their countries a society founded on a state-controlled

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<sup>461</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 3: Postanovleniya 1959-1964*, 189.

<sup>462</sup> *Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, (New York: International Publishers, 1961), 51-57.

planned economy directly inspired by the Soviet experience.<sup>463</sup> However, during 1961 the USSR actually decreased its commitment to West Africa. Moscow virtually “abandoned” Guinea, and offered only limited support to Mali. Only the relationship with Ghana improved, largely as a consequence of Nkrumah’s willingness to move away from the West. In 1961, then, Moscow began a gradual process of withdrawal from West Africa.

### *Relations with Guinea*

Over the course of 1961 Moscow’s relations with Guinea – so far the USSR’s most important ally in West Africa – suffered a complete reversal. From a firm focus of Soviet policy, Guinea became progressively less important for Moscow, and Sekou Toure would in the end look for help elsewhere.

### Economic relations

The year 1961 apparently began in the best of fashion. In early February Leonid Brezhnev – an increasingly influential figure among Kremlin leaders, at the time head of the Supreme Soviet – stopped in Guinea as part of a longer visit to Africa. On the surface, the visit went very well: Brezhnev was met with all the honours and he exchanged congratulatory speeches with Sekou Toure. The Soviet leader praised Guinea for its role as a progressive African state, ready to follow the USSR’s example and fight against the colonial system. Brezhnev’s speech, however, was different from the usual Soviet rhetoric because it focused on the anti-colonial struggle in Africa – primarily in Congo – but made little reference to economic independence, development and firm Soviet support for the growth of the Guinean economy, until

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<sup>463</sup> Ponomarev, "O gosudarstve natsionalnoi demokratii."

then fixed references of the Soviet discourse. Actually, Brezhnev's address made careful references to the fact that Guinea had been independent only for a short time, and that those were just the first steps towards modernisation – contrary to the customary Soviet boastfulness about the breath-taking speed of socialist development. Brezhnev even highlighted the fact that the USSR was a 'huge country with a several-million population' with 'many internal tasks' still to accomplish, but nevertheless it used part of its resources to help Guinea, a small newly independent state.<sup>464</sup> The contrast with Khrushchev's address at the UN General Assembly delivered less than five months earlier, in which the First Secretary had promised to the third world development aid with no conditions and regardless of political interest, was certainly striking. Brezhnev's slightly unusual words were the first signal that Moscow was beginning to adopt a more sober assessment of Conakry's importance and of Soviet commitments there.

In fact, the really important matter discussed during the visit showed that the previous policy towards Guinea had changed. In spite of the large Soviet aid programme, the former French colony was still in dire straits, and it needed more economic help. During the Brezhnev's visit, Toure asked him to increase the USSR's purchases of Guinean goods and to extend more credits to the Conakry government. Although in his report after the trip Brezhnev expressed himself in favour of extending more aid to Guinea, no concrete steps were taken in Moscow. Over the course of the year, Soviet imports of Guinean goods increased compared to the previous years, but they remained far below the level of Soviet exports to the African country. Since the credits granted to the Guineans in the recent past to buy Soviet machinery were virtually over, Soviet imports now needed to be paid for, causing a

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<sup>464</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki*, Tom 2, 167-79.

deficit in Guinea's balance of payment – hardly helpful for its ravaged economy. Moreover, no formal procedure was initiated to concede new credits from the USSR.<sup>465</sup>

### Guinea and the West

The message from Moscow was clear. The Soviet leadership was not ready to rush to the help of Guinea any longer, as had happened in 1960 when Sekou Toure's pleas were immediately met with an increase in Soviet purchases of Guinean goods and the concession of new credits to pay for Soviet imports. Toure was not a fool, and he immediately grasped that the only source of foreign aid to Guinea had drained. Since the country was unable to manage its economy without foreign help, there was only one possibility left: a rapprochement with the West.

Over the course of 1961 Toure put out feelers to see how the US government would react to a shift in policy in favour of the West. The Guinean President began by first expressly criticising Soviet aid and then by making clear that he would be interested in receiving help from the West. Although initially suspicious of the USSR's still prominent role in Guinea, the Americans on the whole reacted positively to Toure's openings. By the spring President John F. Kennedy and his government had developed a general aid strategy for the former French colony, with the hope of driving the USSR out of the country, and negotiations with the Conakry government on its implementation began.<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> "Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR za 1959-1963 gody," 432-35. AVPRF, f. 601, op. 2, p. 4, d. 9, l. 1-14. In Mazov, *Politika SSSR v Zapadnoi Afrike*: 150-51.

<sup>466</sup> Nina Davis Howland, ed. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1961-1963 - Africa*, vol. XXI (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1995), 392-98.



No Soviet reaction followed. In 1961 Khrushchev and Sekou Toure communicated with each other only when they exchanged uncharacteristically succinct notes in occasion of the anniversary of Guinea's independence in October, when no mention whatsoever was made of the economic cooperation between the two countries – usually the main point of this kind of official communiqués.<sup>467</sup>

In December the situation reached the point of no return. Ambassador Solod was suddenly expelled from Guinea, accused of having supported a plot against Toure. Whether or not Solod was actually somehow involved in the protest movements that were active in Guinea at the time is a matter of debate, but his dismissal certainly signalled the lowest point in the bilateral relations between Moscow and Conakry.<sup>468</sup> Solod's expulsion was also a clear signal to the Americans, which were still concerned that investing into Guinea might prove to be a waste. Toure showed Washington that he was ready to cut Guinea's links to Moscow and realign to the West. By the end of 1961 it was obvious that the Soviet Union was not willing to commit any more resources, and Guinea now looked at the West as an alternative donor.

#### The reasons for the shift

The standard argument to explain the negative turn in the relations between Guinea and the USSR over 1961 is that the Conakry government became unhappy with the low quality and the poor results of Soviet aid – as Sekou Toure himself declared – and decided to look at the USA as an alternative. However, there are several reasons why this argument is not fully convincing.

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<sup>467</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki*, Tom 2, 424-25.

<sup>468</sup> Legvold, *Soviet Policy in West Africa*: 125-29.

## Part II – Chapter 8

It is undeniable that Soviet-Guinean economic cooperation was far from efficiently run. The level of waste was staggering. The Guineans imported large quantities of equipment and machinery that they did not need or simply did not know how to use, which was just left to decay. Moreover, although the terms of the 1959 trade and cooperation agreement seemed to allow the Soviet Union to define the priorities for development in Guinea, the reality was quite different. The Conakry government insisted on receiving funds and technical help to realise projects that Moscow regarded as of dubious practical utility, such as a stadium or a large polytechnic, but still required large resources to be realised. Such inefficiency meant that the costly Soviet effort in Guinea yielded less results than initially hoped, in the end making both parts unhappy.<sup>469</sup>

However, Toure and his government had relatively little to complain about. They received from Moscow what they asked for, and they knew that Guinea's economic survival was largely dependent on Soviet aid, regardless of its quality. In fact, Guinea's policy never changed its core aim: the country needed foreign assistance in a number of areas, no matter where it came from. As long as Moscow was happy to provide it, Guinea had no reason to look elsewhere, but when Toure's new request for increased aid in 1961 was not fully accepted it became crucial to secure a new source of funds. Guinea was since independence a small "opportunistic" state, in principle interested in socialist development, but only as long as it provided the necessary resources to guarantee economic survival. When Moscow's willingness to help decreased, the donor had to change. Therefore, Conakry's rapprochement with the West was a reaction to a change in Soviet policy.

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<sup>469</sup> Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War*: 182-85.

Two main factors determined Moscow's decision to alter its policy towards Guinea. The poor results of economic cooperation certainly played a crucial role. The "socialist model of development" as imagined by the Kremlin leadership was based on clear policies aimed at modernising agriculture and developing a local industry protected from foreign competition. These plans were in practice never fully carried out in Guinea, as Moscow stuck to the principle that the states receiving aid had the last word on how to use it. The Soviet agencies involved in trade or cooperation with Guinea constantly lamented the Guineans' lack of preparation and know-how to help them in the execution of the projects, and blamed their local partners for delays and inefficiencies.<sup>470</sup> Clearly, cooperation with Conkary produced inferior results compared to Moscow's initial expectations, and gave the Kremlin leadership a strong incentive to reduce the investments.

The outcome of the Congo crisis also influenced Moscow's decision to reduce Soviet commitment to Guinea. The USSR's engagement with the former French colony had always been motivated by the willingness of making Guinea a concrete example of what was possible to achieve thanks to Soviet aid, directed at winning over other radical African leaders to the "socialist model of development". This strategy was partly successful in Congo, whose radical leadership seemed ready to follow the same path as Guinea. However, Western intervention removed Moscow's allies from power and installed a more conservative leadership in Congo, which did not want anything to do with the USSR. Therefore, the central Soviet assumption that exporting the model to other countries in Africa was possible was shattered by the realisation that the West was ready to resort to force to counter Moscow's plans. As a consequence, keeping the Guinean experiment alive at the current high costs

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<sup>470</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 371, l. 162-163, 221-226.

(approximately 250 million roubles in two years) lost most of its sense. The bilateral relationship – which was based precisely on the Soviet willingness to “waste” considerable resources to help Guinea – thus began to unravel.

The local context, i.e. the objective difficulty of cooperating with Guinea successfully, proved to be an insurmountable obstacle. The interplay of local (the unreliability of the Conakry government), external (Western intervention in Congo), and domestic (Moscow’s reduced willingness to invest) factors resulted in the adoption of a more conservative policy towards Guinea.

### *Relations with Ghana*

Although in a different way from Guinea, Moscow’s relations with Ghana were also deeply influenced by the Congo crisis and its consequences. Ghana became much more radical following the crisis, and openly courted Moscow to receive aid and support. For this reason, the decline in Soviet interest was slower than in Guinea, showing its more significant signs only in 1962. On the whole, 1961 proved to be a relatively positive year for Soviet-Ghanaian relations, especially from the point of view of economic relations. However, it is important to stress that the USSR’s willingness to commit resources to Ghana came largely as a consequence of a shift in the local context. Contrary to what happened before 1960-61, now it was Nkrumah who pushed for closer cooperation with Moscow, due to his growing suspicion of the US role in Africa.

### Political relations

In early 1961 Nkrumah was completely convinced that the West had pursued policies contrary to Ghana’s interests during the Congo crisis, and that for the future it would

be advisable to invest more in the relationship with the Soviet Union. When in February the news of Lumumba's death – which shocked the Ghanaian President – became public, Nkrumah decided to shift his country's policy towards the Eastern bloc with urgency. He invited Brezhnev, who at the time was visiting Guinea, to stop in Ghana too and instructed his ministers to arrange a very good stay for the Soviet leader in spite of the little time left to organise the official visit.<sup>471</sup>

Brezhnev arrived in Ghana on 16 February and was treated as a guest of honour. Nkrumah went to great lengths to convince the head of the Supreme Soviet that Ghana's aspiration was to build a socialist society, based on the Soviet example and with the direct collaboration of the USSR. Ghana, as Western analysts observed with preoccupation, was indeed transforming itself into a one-party state, whose economy was progressively more controlled by the central government with the aim of reaching rapid development thanks to 'Marxist *dirigiste*' methods. Some key elements in the Accra government remained particularly impressed by the Soviet Union during their visit in 1960, and pushed for the establishment of closer links with the Eastern bloc. Ghana seemed ready to apply most of the basic principles of the "socialist model of development", including a progressive nationalisation of the cocoa trade, which greatly worried British analysts.<sup>472</sup>

Although Brezhnev's general assessment of Ghana and Nkrumah was on the whole lukewarm, relations between Accra and Moscow improved over the course of 1961. Nkrumah devoted himself to convincing the Soviet leadership that Ghana was worth investing into. He travelled to the USSR several times between July and September 1961, visiting several cities and Soviet republics, touring state farms and

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<sup>471</sup> PRAAD, ADM/13/1/30, 13 February 1961; ADM/13/1/30, 15 February 1961. Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki*, Tom 2, 205-10.

<sup>472</sup> UKNA, CAB158/41, JIC(61)73, 5 January 1961.

industrial complexes. The Ghanaian President warmly praised the achievements of the Soviet Union and its people, paying particular attention to highlight the positive role played by the CPSU in guiding the course of development and in mobilising the country's resources. During his visits, Nkrumah expressly hailed the USSR as a model to follow, as the archetype Ghana strived to imitate.<sup>473</sup>

In the following months, the Ghanaian government generally manifested support for Soviet positions on the major international issues, such as the question of Germany and the problem of nuclear disarmament.<sup>474</sup> On the domestic front, moreover, an increasingly radical Nkrumah faced stronger opposition from antagonist groups. In late 1961 a series of strikes and political demonstrations against the government forced Nkrumah to cut short his stay in the USSR, and go back to Accra. The Ghanaian government accused Britain and the US of providing support for the opposition groups, and even of plotting to overthrow Nkrumah. As a consequence, Nkrumah reshuffled the government, getting rid of the more conservative elements, and discharged all British officers from the Army, including the commanding general. Moscow was predictably satisfied of the latest developments, which drew Ghana further away from the West, and closer to the Soviet Union.<sup>475</sup>

### Economic relations

Nkrumah's courting of Moscow was quite successful in guaranteeing Soviet economic help for Ghana. Between October and November 1961, the two countries signed a new commercial treaty, and agreed on the expansion of Soviet aid to Ghana.

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<sup>473</sup> AVP RF, f. 601, op. 2, p. 4, d. 9, l. 4-9. In Mazov, *Politika SSSR v Zapadnoi Afrike*: 174.

PRAAD, MFA/4/112, 24 July 1961.

Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 2*, 325-30, 49-67.

<sup>474</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 5, p. 7, d. 12, l. 5-10.

<sup>475</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 5, p. 8, d. 21, l. 12-18.

The commercial treaty carried generally unfavourable terms for the Soviet Union, although slightly better than in the recent past. The USSR agreed to buy large quantities of cocoa beans for five years, to be paid in part in hard currency and in part with barter. The proportion of cocoa to be purchased in hard currency would progressively diminish over time: from 55% in 1962 to 30% in 1966. Moreover, Moscow managed to pay a significantly lower price than in 1960 for Ghanaian cocoa between 1961 and 1964. This was a consequence of Accra's increased autonomy from Britain in trading its cocoa and of Moscow's willingness to negotiate better prices, combined with the marked fall in the world price of cocoa that was taking place at the time. Even though the commercial treaty was still a better deal for Ghana than for the USSR, the Soviet Union showed the first signs of its desire to reduce the "political premium" associated with trade agreements with third world countries, in favour of a more solid commercial logic.<sup>476</sup>

The revision of the Soviet aid programme to Ghana reinforced this tendency even further. Although the agreement was called an 'expansion' of the existing one signed in August 1960, it was in fact a reduction of Soviet commitment to Ghana. The USSR agreed to grant Ghana 38 million roubles in credits to be used for the realisation of several industrial projects.<sup>477</sup> The amount was significantly smaller than the sums the Soviet Union had accorded in the recent past (160 million roubles in 1960) and, moreover, the number of projects to be financed with Soviet money would shrink in 1962.<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 2*, 443-48.

PRAAD, MFA/4/153, 4 November 1961.

"Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR za 1959-1963 gody," 432-33.

<sup>477</sup> ———, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 2*, 441-43.

PRAAD, MFA/4/154, 4 November 1961.

<sup>478</sup> See chapter 9 for the details.

Compared to what was happening in Guinea at the same time, the Soviet Union showed more willingness to continue the relationship with Ghana, even though not at the same onerous costs as in the recent past. Moscow accepted Nkrumah's calls to provide development aid and prolong the commercial exchanges between the two countries, but the overall Soviet degree of involvement in the Ghanaian economy was relatively small. Trade began to follow a more commercial logic, and the projects to be financed and supervised by Soviet specialists were of limited impact. Soviet plans for Ghana in 1961 were not nearly as ambitious as plans for Guinea in 1959.

#### Western reactions

The Western powers observed the situation in Ghana with preoccupation. Considerable anxiety in London and Washington was caused by Nkrumah's intention, following his visit to the USSR in September, to send a large number of Ghanaian cadets to be trained in the Soviet Union.<sup>479</sup> In general, the Americans were worried by Nkrumah's 'growing reliance on younger left-leaning radicals' and by Ghana's 'ugly lurch to the left' in recent times.<sup>480</sup> These preoccupations even led Washington to consider a possible cancellation of the financing for the Volta River project.<sup>481</sup> However, in the end, the Kennedy administration decided to go ahead with the plan, and to use American aid as a tool to exercise some pressure on Nkrumah and try to curb his radicalism.<sup>482</sup> In spite of Moscow's advancements, the West thus kept an important foothold in Ghana. Its relevance was destined to grow in the next few years.

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<sup>479</sup> PRAAD, ADM/13/2/85, 12 September 1961.

Howland, *FRUS, 1961-1963 - Africa*, 352-53.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, 354, 59.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, 365-70.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, 371-72.

PRAAD, SC/BAA/79, 14 December 1961.



*Relations with Mali*

Over the course of 1960 the Soviet Union had successfully established diplomatic relations with Mali, and had initiated a limited programme of economic cooperation with the Bamako government. In 1961 Soviet aid to Mali increased, although not to the level of the earlier aid programmes in Guinea and Ghana. Moscow's policy towards Mali in 1961 showed the same restraint as towards the other Soviet allies in West Africa.

Economic relations

In January 1961 a Soviet Embassy was officially established in Bamako, and shortly thereafter a Malian delegation – headed by Minister of Internal Affairs and Information M'bourke Keita – travelled to the USSR in order to negotiate the terms of an economic and technical cooperation agreement. The agreement was signed in March, and was very similar to the ones signed with Guinea in 1959 and Ghana in 1960, but on a smaller scale. The USSR granted Mali 40 million roubles in credits (roughly one fourth of the amount originally granted to Guinea and Ghana) payable back in 12 years with a 2.5% interest rate, to be used to finance development projects in agriculture and industry under Soviet supervision. As in the case of the other countries in West Africa, the trade agreement allowed the Malians to exchange local products with Soviet goods, while Moscow was going to pay for part of its imports in hard currency.<sup>483</sup> In total in 1961, the Soviet Union exported to Mali 7.7 million roubles in machines and tools, and imported 3.4 million roubles worth of peanuts – Mali's only export commodity.<sup>484</sup> At the same time, Mali continued to receive aid from France, approximately in the same quantity as Soviet aid, and also limited

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<sup>483</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki*, Tom 2, 227-45.

<sup>484</sup> "Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR za 1959-1963 gody," 438-39.

assistance from the US.<sup>485</sup> However, Moscow did not seem particularly concerned by Western economic competition in Mali, as no plan was made to increase aid or trade in the future. The agreement on economic cooperation with Mali thus reinforces the view that the USSR was still generally willing to invest in cultivating relations with radical leaderships in West Africa, but not to commit the same very large amount of resources as in the recent past.

### *Conclusion*

In 1961 a general reassessment of Soviet policy in the third world was under way. In the past five years the USSR had invested considerable resources into newly independent countries, with the aim of gaining influence and exporting its model of development. Africa was obviously one of the main areas of Soviet policy, but the results achieved were not particularly positive. Economic cooperation in West Africa turned out to be expensive and difficult to organise, due to the objective backwardness of the local economies and the lack of expertise of the local elites. Therefore, the Kremlin leadership decided to abandon grandiose, long-term projects in favour of more cost-effective strategy, based on smaller projects. This decision was determined by the interplay of different sets of factors. First, the limited strategic gains of obtaining influence in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali did not justify the high economic costs of development cooperation in West Africa. Second, Western intervention in the Congo crisis dispelled the idea that West Africa could represent a first step for the further expansion of the “socialist model” in Africa. Finally, a complex local context – the West African leaders were “opportunistic” players who

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<sup>485</sup> Howland, *FRUS, 1961-1963 - Africa*, 321, 30.

dealt at the same time with the Eastern and the Western bloc – significantly reduced Moscow's trust in them.

In June 1961 the GKES prepared a detailed report on the state of Soviet economic help to West Africa, highlighting the problems encountered. Although Ghana and Guinea (and more recently Mali) had begun to move in the right direction, thanks to the acceptance of agriculture and industrialisation as priorities for their development strategies, Moscow's cooperation with them had achieved relatively little. The GKES believed that the problem was due to the nature of the agreements signed with them, which gave the African states the last word on where to channel the resources that came from the USSR. Although Soviet specialists were invited to study the situation of the countries and formulate suggestions, their recommendations were often ignored. Soviet funds and expertise were instead directed towards the realisation of projects with high visibility – such as stadiums and palaces – but very little economic utility. The example of Guinea was cited as particularly bad in this respect.<sup>486</sup>

Local leaders refused to accept Moscow's guidance fully, rejecting the idea that the principles elaborated in the USSR could be applied in the same way to the African context. As Soviet observers reported in late 1961, there was a lot of talking about socialism and Marxism in Africa at the time, but this interest was spoiled by the overwhelmingly 'personalistic' politics of the local leaders, who always presented those ideas as their own and combined them with nationalism. The best example of this situation was Ghana, where Nkrumah was launching the idea of 'Nkrumaism', a philosophy that mixed a strong interest for collectivism and state-planned development with pan-Africanism and the 'personality cult' of Ghana's leader. In the

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<sup>486</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 371, l. 162-163, 221-226.

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Soviet view, this was just an attempt to create an African version of socialism, which Moscow regarded with considerable scepticism.<sup>487</sup>

Furthermore, the Congo crisis had demonstrated to the Kremlin leaders that forging strong links with newly independent countries through economic cooperation was not sufficient to gain lasting influence, for the West was ready to recur to force to prevent Soviet sway from spreading further. On one side, the dream of rapid modernisation in Ghana, Guinea and Mali required large investments over a long period of time. On the other, a further expansion of Soviet influence in Africa was likely to result in open confrontation with the West, as in Congo. In short, the cost for the Soviet Union of continuing the engagement with West Africa had risen, both in economic and political terms. The conclusion in Moscow was that disengagement was preferable. It is to the USSR's gradual withdrawal from Ghana, Guinea, and Mali that the next chapters turn.

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<sup>487</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 181, l. 93-125.  
PRAAD, SC/BAA/90

**PART III:**  
**DISENGAGEMENT**

## Chapter 9 – 1962-63: Withdrawal

The years 1962-63 were a difficult period for the Soviet Union. Growing tensions with China culminated in the complete break up of relations between the two countries, and the Cuban crisis in late 1962 represented a severe setback for Khrushchev's leadership. Moreover, the USSR's economy entered a difficult phase: growth rates shrank and crucial projects – such as the “Virgin Lands Campaign” – produced very disappointing results.<sup>488</sup>

During the same period, the USSR manifested a marked willingness to withdraw from West Africa. The Kremlin leadership aimed to reduce the burden of onerous development projects and trade agreements, while at the same time trying to maintain the best possible diplomatic relations with Nkrumah in Ghana and Keita in Mali. Moscow implemented cost-cutting policies towards all of its existing allies in the region, significantly reducing its financial commitment to development aid, and generally curbing the imports of overpriced local products in exchange for Soviet technology.

The reasons for Moscow's withdrawal are to be found in the impact of the difficulties that Soviet policy had encountered in the region during the period 1960-61. First of all, Khrushchev and the other leaders appeared weary of the West African leaders' ideological and managerial unreliability. On one side, Moscow was very suspicious of Nkrumah's “Nkrumaism” and Keita's “African socialism” – let alone Sekou Toure's supposed Marxism –, viewed as an attempt to combine elements of Marxism-Leninism with nationalism. The building of a real socialist society, as Mikoyan and Khrushchev reminded on different occasions to their African allies,

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<sup>488</sup> Zubok, *A Failed Empire*: 123-91.

required hard work and patience, not just bold statements and confused sets of ideas. In Moscow's judgement, Nkrumah, Sekou Toure and Keita's management of their countries' economies and of the Soviet credits had been very negative, at least compared to the high expectations of the late 1950s. Ghana, Guinea, and Mali were still poor countries, utterly dependent on foreign aid. Moscow ceased to believe that the situation could be changed in the short term.

Moreover, the impact of the Congo crisis on the prospects for Soviet policy in Africa became more evident. In their speeches, Soviet leaders always made lengthy references to the events of Congo, which were presented as an imperialist offensive with the objective of defending colonial privileges. What was not explicitly said was that the USSR did not have the means to counter this offensive. However, the question was addressed in various ways. The KGB reported at length on American aggressiveness in the third world, concluding that it was on the rise. Nonetheless, military cooperation with West Africa was scaled down on the ground that it was not necessary any longer. As long as the Soviet Union did not develop appropriate military and logistical capabilities there was no question of challenging Western predominance.

Khrushchev himself implicitly admitted the Soviet limited options when it came to projecting power: 'The Americans often send squadrons

of their ships to other countries and by this means exert influence to a certain extent on the policies of these countries. It wouldn't be bad if we also had such a navy that could be sent to those countries where in the circumstances it could be of use to us, for example in Cuba, in the countries of Africa, etc.<sup>489</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> In N.S. Simonov, *Voenno-promyshlennyi Kompleks SSSR v 1920-1950-e gody: tempy ekonomicheskogo rosta, struktura, organizatsiya proizvodstva i upravlenie*

Furthermore, Khrushchev always stressed the importance of ridding former colonial territories of foreign military bases, revealing his frustration at being unable to rely on the same resources as the Western nations.<sup>490</sup> All elements pointed to a significant reduction of Soviet existing interests and future ambitions in West Africa.

Policy towards Ghana, Guinea and Mali was generally directed at reducing the costs of economic cooperation, while trying to preserve diplomatic relations. Moscow decreased further its economic exchanges with Guinea, and made it explicit to Mali that it was not going to provide extensive development and technical aid. In Ghana, where Moscow had still showed willingness to invest in 1961, cooperation projects were cut down, to the point of becoming unattractive for the Ghanaian government.

### *Relations with Guinea*

Relations between the Soviet Union and Guinea appeared utterly compromised already in 1961, especially after the expulsion from Conakry of Soviet Ambassador Solod. In 1962 the trend remained constant: Moscow continued to withdraw gradually material support from Sekou Toure's regime, which meanwhile tried to attract Western investments.

#### Political relations

On the surface, Moscow tried to play down the rift with Sekou Toure. In early January 1962 a Soviet delegation due to visit several countries in Africa stopped in Conakry. Mikoyan – as head of the delegation – unveiled a Soviet exhibition of 'agriculture, science, technology and culture' and presented the new Ambassador,

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(Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1996), 299. Quoted in Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: from the October Revolution to the fall of the wall* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 200.

<sup>490</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 8, p. 13-A, d. 5, l. 2-19.



Dmitri Degtyar, to Sekou Toure. However, Mikoyan and Toure's official speeches revealed that under the surface relations between the USSR and Guinea were undergoing a very difficult phase. Mikoyan began his inaugural speech by describing – following the common Soviet practice – all the great achievements of the USSR in terms of economic and social development since 1917. Mikoyan identified the 'key' to Soviet development in the socialist system itself that allowed to mobilise society efficiently and without class conflict – thus indirectly hitting at Guinea's chaotic and wasteful management of the national economy. Moreover, Mikoyan praised Guinea for having rejected colonialism in 1958, but did not make any mention – as was instead common in the past – of any form of Soviet economic support for the African state.<sup>491</sup> The message from Moscow was clear: the Soviet Union was interested in keeping good diplomatic relations with Guinea, but resented the way in which its aid had been used by the Conakry government and therefore had no intention to continue the onerous aid programmes.

Sekou Toure – who thanked the Soviet Union for the economic aid received – replied by “defending” Guinea's post-independence record, stressing the fact that the country's current social and political organisation derived directly from the way in which the struggle for independence was conducted, and that many problems were a consequence of the years of colonialism. Thus, the Guinean leadership had to be left free to tackle the country's issues in the way they knew most appropriate to the national context. Guinea disliked the imperialists, but considered it more important to pursue a neutral line in foreign policy, and therefore could not join any of the blocs.<sup>492</sup> Essentially, Sekou Toure was saying that any aid from Moscow was very welcome,

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<sup>491</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki*, Tom 2, 496-502.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*, 502-06.

but that the Conakry government, and not the Soviet leadership, must remain in charge of the key decisions in development policy.

Mikoyan, in his final speech before leaving Guinea, declared that the Soviet Union ‘always believed and believes that the choice of one or the other political regime, or one or the other ideology, is a sovereign matter of each country.’<sup>493</sup> Mikoyan thus officially renounced the idea the Guinea would one day become truly socialist. Moreover, he stressed the fact that the economic and technical cooperation treaties were signed in full agreement with the Conakry government, and were designed to benefit the economic and social development of Guinea.<sup>494</sup> The hidden message to Sekou Toure was that he had little to complain about Soviet economic assistance, since his government had participated in the negotiations and had been left the last word on how to use Moscow’s funds. Again, no mention was made of possible future Soviet commitment to Guinea’s economy.

Mikoyan’s visit represented a symbolic farewell to Guinea. The exchange of speeches happened in a cold atmosphere, and a future rapprochement between the USSR and Guinea seemed increasingly unlikely. Further confirmation of Moscow’s intentions came in May, when Degtyar asked the Kremlin to increase the funds to sustain Soviet propaganda in Guinea. The Ideology Commission examined the Soviet Ambassador’s request, but did not authorise any further expense on Guinea. The Embassy in Conakry would simply receive the same ‘popular brochures’ that the USSR distributed in other third world countries.<sup>495</sup>

The bilateral relationship between Moscow and Conakry was compromised, and Sekou Toure’s behaviour during the Cuban crisis proved that the breach was

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<sup>493</sup> Ibid., 509.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid., 510.

<sup>495</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 210, l. 54.

impossible to repair. In October 1962 Khrushchev asked Toure to grant Soviet aircraft en route to Cuba authorization to land in Conakry's airport – recently refurbished thanks to Soviet funds – for a refuelling stop. The Guinean president, however, denied permission on the ground that conceding landing rights would have been incompatible with Guinea's neutral policy. It was the last drop for Khrushchev, who deeply resented Toure's conduct. In 1963, following a row with the Guinean government over basic military supplies, the Presidium decided to stop aid to Guinea. Khrushchev said to his colleagues in the Kremlin that 'we turned to them with such great hopes. He [Sekou Toure] did not appreciate it so much and behaves arrogantly.'<sup>496</sup> Khrushchev's words summarised all of Moscow's bitterness about the current state of relations with Guinea.

#### Economic relations

Although there were no discussions on economic aid during Mikoyan's stay in Conakry, an economic agreement between the USSR and Guinea was in fact signed in late February. It was a very limited treaty – to the point that *Pravda* only printed a short synopsis, whereas it had usually published the full text of Soviet agreements with Guinea – that provided for the export of Soviet products in exchange for Guinean goods, together with Soviet help in the realization of building projects.<sup>497</sup>

Moreover, in June 1963 the original 1959 bilateral agreement between the Soviet Union and Guinea was reviewed. It was decided that the Soviet side would

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<sup>496</sup> RGANI, f. 3, op. 16, d. 941, l. 1-44. In Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, Vol 1*, 753-54.

Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 2*, 661-62. In his congratulatory message to Toure on the anniversary of Guinea's independence, Khrushchev again reminded the Guinean President of the importance of Soviet economic aid for his country, and listed the refurbishment of the airport as one of the main results of bilateral cooperation.

<sup>497</sup> ———, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 2*, 534-35.

continue to help Guinea with the realisation of the objectives agreed upon in 1959 ‘through the delivery from the USSR to the Guinean Republic in the years 1963-64 of consumer goods, oil, construction and other materials.’<sup>498</sup> Nonetheless Soviet exports to Guinea decreased to 18 million roubles in 1962 (from 24.5 in 1961), and to 12.7 million in 1963. Moscow’s imports of Guinean fruits over the same period decreased by a half compared to 1961.<sup>499</sup> The 1963 agreement basically meant that Moscow was not going to provide any technical help, or any additional credits to Conakry. The Soviet Union was significantly downscaling its economic commitment to Guinea, in terms of development aid as well as trade fluxes.

This was very bad news for Guinea, which in 1962-63 again faced an extremely difficult economic situation. Since Soviet aid practically stopped, the former French colony was in desperate need to find a foreign donor in order to obtain crucial imports. American assistance was not forthcoming, as instead Toure had hoped, because the US government was still not convinced that Conakry had rid itself completely of any influence from the Eastern bloc. Sekou Toure went to great lengths to convince Kennedy and his administration that Guinea was a good investment for US firms and it was worth a large economic assistance programme. However, for the year 1962, Guinea obtained only about 20 million dollars in total from Washington – as opposed to the roughly 100 million dollars Conakry had received from Moscow with each economic agreement in 1959 and 1960.<sup>500</sup> Sekou Toure and his ministers often referred to the poor quality of Soviet aid to convince the Americans to step in and “fill the gap” that had been left by Moscow, but the US government was not convinced. The National Security Council wrote that ‘apparently, Toure himself is

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<sup>498</sup> L. F. Ilichev, ed. *SSSR i Strany Afriki 1963-1970 gg. Dokumenty i Materialy.*, vol. Chast 1 (1963-1966 gg.) (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1982), 37.

<sup>499</sup> "Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR za 1959-1963 gody," 432-35.

<sup>500</sup> Howland, *FRUS, 1961-1963 - Africa*, 401-15.

totally ignorant about foreign assistance to Guinea, whether it Bloc or non-Bloc – he simply does not and will not understand it’.<sup>501</sup>

Moreover, France – with which Toure hoped to rebuild good relations – decided to adopt a ‘careful approach’ towards Guinea, meaning that Paris was willing to give out only limited aid, as the situation in Conakry was considered too volatile.<sup>502</sup> In July 1963 a limited technical cooperation agreement with Paris was signed, which supplied Guinea with French specialists.<sup>503</sup> The Soviet Union did not take any significant action to counter the slowly improving Franco-Guineans relations.

### *Relations with Ghana*

Compared with Guinea, the USSR’s relations with Ghana had remained reasonably good over the course of 1961, with the partial exception of Moscow’s decreased willingness to accept onerous terms in economic dealings with the former British colony. In 1962-63 this tendency became more evident, marking a worsening in the bilateral relationship.

#### Political relations

After having left Guinea, Mikoyan visited Ghana in January 1962. Compared to his speech in Conakry, the Soviet leader praised with warmer words Nkrumah and Ghana, showing that at the time the Ghanaian President enjoyed more credit than Sekou Ture in the Kremlin. However, Mikoyan unusually stressed the fact that Ghana was different from the Soviet Union, and that therefore its ‘path’ to development

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<sup>501</sup> Ibid., 419.

<sup>502</sup> Maurice Vaisse, ed. *Documents Diplomatiques Francais (DDF), 1962: Tome I (1er Janvier - 30 Juin)*, vol. 21 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1998), 447-50.

<sup>503</sup> ———, ed. *Documents Diplomatiques Francais (DDF), 1963: Tome II (1er Juillet - 31 Decembre)*, vol. 24 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 2001), 81-82.

heavily depended on Ghana's own conditions and on Accra's decisions. The USSR was committed to fighting colonialism and thus helping the peoples of Africa, but Mikoyan made no reference to Soviet economic aid to Ghana. His words were in clear contrast to Nkrumah, who in his speech expressly said that Ghana aspired to reach the same 'phenomenal growth' in industry, agriculture and education as in the USSR. 'We are taking the path to socialist planning and organization, based on our conditions and peculiarities.'<sup>504</sup>

The exchange between Mikoyan and Nkrumah summarised very well the current state of relations between Ghana and the Soviet Union. On one side, the African state was interested in increasing cooperation with the socialist bloc, and hoped to receive significant aid. On the other side, however, Moscow remained sceptical of Nkrumah's self-styled "socialism", and was therefore unresponsive if not dismissive of Accra's openings. Over the course of 1962 the Soviet Embassy in Ghana constantly reported to Moscow about Nkrumah and his ministers' growing conviction that the future development of their country rested on increasing the role of the state in the national economy, and on building solid Party and state institutions to oversee most areas of public life.<sup>505</sup> In addition, the Ghanaian press maintained a generally positive attitude towards the Soviet Union.<sup>506</sup>

However, during the same period Accra also made it clear that it was not going to grant any kind of "special treatment" to the Soviet Union. Hence, some of Moscow's proposals, such as opening a Soviet news agency in Ghana or requesting the use of a military airfield for civilian *Aeroflot* aircraft, were rejected by the Ghanaians. Moreover, Khrushchev and the Presidium were worried by Nkrumah's

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<sup>504</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki*, Tom 2, 510-16.

<sup>505</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 6, p. 10, d. 16, l. 3, 25-26, 50, 68-70; f. 573, op. 6, p. 10, d. 22, l. 1-5, 6-28, 38-40, 135-136.

<sup>506</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 6, p. 10, d. 15, l. 1-13.

remaining economic links to the West, and by his insistence on portraying Ghana's policies of economic nationalisation and strong state control with a leading role for the ruling Convention People's Party as 'Nkrumaism', therefore as an autonomous African stream of socialism.<sup>507</sup>

Moscow decided to cut down on military cooperation too. Following the Congo crisis, the Soviet military accepted to train Ghanaian cadets in the USSR, and also considered providing some training for African "freedom fighters" through Accra. In July 1962 the Soviet Union withdrew the offer. Ambassador Elliot, who accompanied Minister of Defence Kofi Baako during a visit to the USSR, reported that the Soviet military had made clear that 'the previous emergency type of situation which the Soviets had entertained relating to a wish to receive positive military aid for Freedom Fighters as well as national needs no longer exists.' It was announced that no Soviet military personnel would be stationed in Ghana as advisers and, furthermore, Moscow would send only limited amount of Soviet military equipment to Ghana, which could be manned only by the limited group of officers trained in the USSR.<sup>508</sup> After the unfavourable conclusion of the Congo crisis, the Kremlin leadership did not feel inclined to risk other military adventures in Africa, and military cooperation with Accra was consequently scaled down.

It is striking that exactly in a moment when the work of Soviet advisers in crucial sectors such as agriculture were beginning to produce moderately positive results,<sup>509</sup> the Soviet leadership lost nearly all political willingness to invest in Ghana. Nkrumah desired significant Soviet aid to realise his ambitious projects of modernisation for the country, but Moscow was not interested. The Kremlin appeared

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<sup>507</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 6, p. 10, d. 22, l. 226-249; f. 573, op. 6, p. 11, d. 23, l. 17-18, 75-76, 127-128.

<sup>508</sup> PRAAD, SC/BAA/381, 20 July 1962.

<sup>509</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 6, p. 10, d. 22, l. 6-28.

to have renounced the idea itself of the “socialist model of development”. The Soviet leadership resented Nkrumah’s ideological unreliability and his lack of willingness to accept the Soviet Union as the only true example of socialism. Therefore, the bilateral relationship between Accra and Moscow was destined to deteriorate.

#### Economic relations

A brief survey of economic relations will make this tendency clearer. In 1962 Nkrumah’s CPP party programme was redrafted, and economic and social modernisation played a pivotal role in it. The Ghanaian President desired an accelerated path to industrialization, electrification of the country and alphabetization of the population.<sup>510</sup> To reach these goals, Nkrumah envisaged close collaboration with Soviet specialised agencies, which he hoped would offer expertise and funding for the development projects.<sup>511</sup>

However, the new cooperation agreement signed in 1961 between Ghana and the USSR practically reduced Soviet development projects in Ghana to two main areas: the collectivization of Ghanaian agriculture, and the construction of a fishing complex in the newly built port town of Tema. In February 1962, the report by the Soviet experts on the creation of state farms in Ghana was presented to Nkrumah’s government. Accra had much to complain about. The cabinet agreed that the Soviet estimations of the cost involved were too high, and that it was necessary to bring the expenses down by cutting the salaries of the Soviet personnel and acquiring part of the necessary equipment on credit. Moreover, the Ghanaian Ministry of Agriculture expressed preoccupation about the Soviet view that the state farms would pay back

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<sup>510</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 6, p. 10, d. 22, l. 226-249.  
PRAAD, SC/BAA/66, 28 July 1962.

<sup>511</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 6, p. 11, d. 24, l. 1.



the initial investment only in 7 to 10 years.<sup>512</sup> Lengthy negotiations ensued. In the end, the Soviet side agreed to reduce part of the expenses, but mainly by reducing the number of Soviet technicians to work in Ghana, meaning that the farms would not have Soviet management, as instead the Ghanaians originally desired.<sup>513</sup> Accra had to settle for an agriculture project that was more expensive than expected, and also less efficient, given the relatively low level of assistance provided by the USSR. It is no surprise, then, that the project to collectivise agriculture would be scrapped completely after 1966, when Nkrumah was ousted by a coup.

A similar fate befell the fishing complex – the other remaining major Soviet project in Ghana. In October 1963 Nkrumah's cabinet discussed the state in which the project was, revealing that nearly three years after the initial agreement the situation was far from promising. The Ghanaian Ministry of Finance complained that Moscow had not yet specified the full costs of the project, and moreover much of the technical effort was to be carried out by the Ghanaians. However, 'no working drawings on which our architectural consultants can work out estimated have yet been supplied by the Russians'.<sup>514</sup> Basically, Moscow insisted that the Accra government sign a "blind" contract, without knowing the exact expenses involved, and with the guarantee of only limited Soviet support. In the end, it was decided that an agreement on the fishing complex would be reached only if the USSR released realistic estimations of the costs and the times involved.<sup>515</sup> Predictably, the project was then cancelled. By the end of 1963, there could be no doubt that Moscow was no longer interested in significant economic cooperation with Ghana.

#### Ghana's domestic situation and the West

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<sup>512</sup> PRAAD, ADM/13/1/31, 14 February 1962; ADM/13/2/89, 14 February 1962.

<sup>513</sup> PRAAD, ADM/13/1/31, 17 April 1962; ADM/13/2/91, 17 April 1962.

<sup>514</sup> PRAAD, ADM/13/2/109, 15 October 1963.

<sup>515</sup> PRAAD, ADM/13/1/32, 15 October 1963.

The internal situation in Ghana was becoming increasingly difficult for Nkrumah. The strikes and demonstrations that erupted in 1961 gave the Ghanaian President the opportunity to get rid of most of the British advisers still in the country, accused of having fomented the popular unrest. However, the turmoil did not cease. Several opposition groups in Ghana resented Nkrumah's policies, especially his belief in his own version of "socialism". In August 1962, Nkrumah was injured by the explosion of a bomb in the village of Kulungugu, in the North of the country on the border with Upper Volta (Burkina Faso). Nkrumah, who after Lumumba's assassination in 1961 had grown increasingly more paranoid about the CIA, made no mystery that he believed the Americans were behind the attempt to kill him. An anti-Washington campaign followed, and in September two ministers were accused of having participated in the plot and arrested.<sup>516</sup> Nkrumah even decided to ask Moscow for help with his personal security. Khrushchev sent him 'Mr Svertchov', probably a KGB operative from the Protection Service (9<sup>th</sup> Directorate).<sup>517</sup> According to Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, in those years the KGB was very successful in fostering Nkrumah's (and other African leaders') paranoia by feeding him false information about Western plans to support and organise plots against him.<sup>518</sup>

However, this policy – given that it really was a Soviet policy and not simply Nkrumah's reaction to events – was only partially successful in reducing Western leverage in Ghana. American observers generally judged the evolution of the situation in Ghana positively, believing that Soviet influence was overall

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<sup>516</sup> The Ministers were Tawia Adamafio, a 'leftist', and Ako Adjei, a 'rightist'. See the report from the Soviet Embassy in AVP RF, f. 573, op. 6, p. 10, d. 22, l. 35-37.

<sup>517</sup> PRAAD, SC/BAA/149, 6 September 1962.

<sup>518</sup> Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive 2*: 434-38.

decreasing.<sup>519</sup> This process was delayed by the attempt on Nkrumah's life, which caused an outbreak of anti-Americanism by the Ghanaian information media. In those few months, the Accra government supported Soviet positions in international issues, including the Cuban missile crisis. Worried by the situation, Secretary of State Dean Rusk even suggested carefully approaching Ghanaian officers about a possible change of leadership at the very top in Accra, paying great attention not to create the idea that the US was working to oust Nkrumah.<sup>520</sup> By the end of 1963, however, the Americans concluded that there was no reason to change current American policies towards Ghana, including the financing of the Volta Dam project, which continued. US Ambassador William Mahoney reported that Nkrumah's 'Marxist bark is worse than his bite and that I felt we must learn to live with him.'<sup>521</sup> In conclusion, over the course of 1962-63 Ghana assumed a generally positive attitude towards the Soviet Union, but Moscow showed no sign of interest for any form of increased cooperation with Accra, and in fact cut down on aid and development programmes in Ghana.

### *Relations with Mali*

Mali represented no exception in the general trend of Soviet disengagement from West Africa. Similarly to Ghana, the Malian leadership – and President Keita in particular – were genuinely attracted by the achievements of the Soviet Union, and hoped to receive significant Soviet help towards the modernisation of their country. However, as in the case of Ghana, Moscow showed only limited willingness to invest resources into Mali.

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<sup>519</sup> Howland, *FRUS, 1961-1963 - Africa*, 373-83.

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid.*, 383-84.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, 391.

Political relations

After having visited Guinea and Ghana, Mikoyan stopped in Mali too in January 1962. The joint Soviet-Malian communiqué highlighted the two countries' common views in foreign affairs, and announced an increase in bilateral cooperation in the near future.<sup>522</sup> However, Keita's first visit to the Soviet Union in May betrayed a certain uneasiness in relations with Mali from the Soviet side. Similarly to Mikoyan speaking in Guinea, Khrushchev began his official speech in honour of Keita by praising the great achievements of the USSR over the years, but soon switched to reminding the Malians that 'it would be wrong to present the thing

in such a way that it is enough to proclaim the slogan "we are for socialism!" – and then lie down under the shade of a tree, and wait that all happens by itself. Instead, the building of socialism requires a lot of energy, persistence, work from the people. But then this work will pay off a hundredfold. The fruits of this work will go to the good of the people, to the good of society.

We would like the Malian friends to see and understand the complexity of the tasks that arise with the construction of a new society.<sup>523</sup>

Such a statement – bordering racism – was very unusual in official communications, and demonstrated of all Moscow's annoyance at the West Africans' strong words of praise for socialism as a system, but poor results when it came to economic cooperation. Khrushchev went on complaining about the fact that many African countries had obtained only partial independence, being still dependent on the capitalist West. The example of the Congo, and especially of the aggressive behaviour of the imperialists, was described in detail.<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> Brykin, *SSSR i Strany Afriki, Tom 2*, 516-18.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, 563.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid.*, 564-65.

To Keita's credit, it must be said that Mali had received less aid than either Guinea or Ghana, and that its leader genuinely wanted to increase cooperation with the USSR. In his speech, the Malian President – who referred to his Soviet audience as 'comrades', while Khrushchev called the Malians just 'friends' – stressed Mali's radicalism in supporting the "progressive" camp in international affairs, as well as in pursuing rapid modernisation at home. Keita hoped to receive Soviet assistance to guide Mali towards development.<sup>525</sup>

### Economic relations

During Keita's visit to the USSR, it was agreed that Moscow would provide economic and technical aid to Mali, following the existing bilateral treaty signed in 1961.<sup>526</sup> However, already during Mikoyan's visit in January, the Soviet side had made it clear to the Malians that the USSR was not going to finance ambitious yet expensive projects. In total, between 1961 and 1963 the USSR granted Mali 55 million roubles in credits – less than half of what Moscow gave Guinea or Ghana in one single year in the recent past.<sup>527</sup> The USSR agreed in January 1963 to realise in Mali a centre for training in agriculture, a higher school of administration and a centre for the training of medical personnel. Although certainly useful, these projects were too limited in scale to have any significant impact on development in Mali (the total sum involved was 1.6 million roubles, distributed over three years), and remained token gestures of goodwill.<sup>528</sup>

Moreover, in spite of the official speeches exchanged by Keita and Khrushchev, trade between Mali and the USSR did not increase, but remained at the

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<sup>525</sup> Ibid., 573-76.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 576-82.

<sup>527</sup> Mazov, *Politika SSSR v Zapadnoi Afrike*: 206-07.

<sup>528</sup> Ilichev, *SSSR i Strany Afriki 1963-1970, Chast 1*, 14-17.

same relatively low levels in 1962-63 (7.7 and 11 million roubles in Soviet machinery to Mali, and 3.9 and 2.7 million roubles in Malian peanuts to the Soviet Union).<sup>529</sup> According to the analysis by the *Quai d'Orsay*, the moderate increase in Soviet exports was due to Mali's Minister of the Economy J.M. Kone visit to the USSR in November 1963, which won Mali some commercial credits.<sup>530</sup> The increase was, however, hardly enough to improve Mali's difficult economic situation. In spite of Bamako's apparent willingness to follow the Soviet model, Moscow remained cold to the idea of investing into Mali.

### *Conclusion*

The period 1962-63 represented an almost total withdrawal of Soviet resources from Ghana, Guinea and Mali. As the chapter showed, specific cost-cutting policies were put into place with the precise aim of reducing the economic burden for Moscow of the development programmes.

A set of decisions was taken in Moscow that gives an indication of the reasons behind the withdrawal, and the orientation of future policy. First of all, the Soviet leadership was worried about Western – and especially American – military and economic policy in the third world. In March 1963 the KGB reported to the Presidium about growing American activities in the developing world. The Soviet security agency was particularly concerned by the Kennedy administration's new aggressive strategy for the third world, which combined military resources and a novel approach to development. The KGB reported about the significant progress made by the Americans in recent years in developing flexible military resources – such as special forces and 'partisans' (i.e. local "saboteurs" able to act without being detected) –

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<sup>529</sup> "Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR za 1959-1963 gody," 438-39.

<sup>530</sup> Vaisse, *DDF 1963, Tome II*, 672.

ready to be mobilised in the third world in order to tilt the balance in favour of the USA.<sup>531</sup> The supposed American willingness to engage in military activities in the third world decreased Moscow's willingness to intervene, as it increased the risk of a direct confrontation between the USSR and the West.

Moreover, the KGB suggested that the new 'stage development theory' designed by Walt Rostow signified renewed American willingness to engage with the crucial problem of development in the third world, and to pour in considerable resources.<sup>532</sup> According to usual practice, the KGB did not draw extensive conclusions, nor did it recommend precise policies for the future. The message, however, was clear: the Americans were following an integrated global strategy that combined elements of military aggressiveness with the willingness to increase US support for development projects worldwide. It is entirely possible that the KGB's fears were greatly exaggerated – although contemporary American reports in Africa show an actual willingness to increase military commitment to the continent<sup>533</sup> – but the basic idea behind the report remained valid. If the Soviet Union wanted to keep competing with the USA in the third world, it needed to commit additional resources in the same areas.

The Soviet leadership, however, gave a clear indication that it was not interested to do it, because of the combination of high costs and risk of conflict, which were judged unjustified. Various sources in the MID "bombarded" the Party leadership with reports on how Soviet propaganda in Africa was inadequate, Western penetration with cultural exchanges and development programmes was on the rise,

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<sup>531</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 55, d. 56, l. 92-118.

<sup>532</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 55, d. 56, l. 92-118.

<sup>533</sup> Howland, *FRUS, 1961-1963 - Africa*, 310-14.

and more resources were needed.<sup>534</sup> In spite of these reports, the Kremlin leadership took no significant action. In fact, Moscow was cutting down on development aid to Ghana, Guinea and Mali, and the potentially ambitious programme of sending young Soviet specialists to West African as an answer to the American “Peace Corps” initiative was rejected by the CPSU as too expensive.<sup>535</sup> Slashing costs had thus indubitably become the first priority of Soviet policy. By the beginning of 1964 Soviet existing interests and future ambitions in West Africa had been both hugely downscaled.

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<sup>534</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 55, d. 54, l. 30-55; f. 5, op. 55, d. 60, l. 110-118, 133-136.

<sup>535</sup> Mazov, *Politika SSSR v Zapadnoi Afrike*: 223.



## **Chapter 10 – 1964 and beyond: Khrushchev’s fall and the end of the “socialist model of development”**

At the end of the year 1964 Khrushchev was removed from the post of First Secretary of the CPSU, and a new leadership, more pragmatic and less interested in development in the third world substituted him. This resulted in a clear break with the policy of opening towards Asia and Africa that Khrushchev had begun in 1957. In terms of policy towards West Africa, however, not much changed. The USSR had already started to disengage from the area, and after 1962-63 its presence in the region was extremely limited. Even before Khrushchev’s fall, Moscow showed virtually no willingness to extend aid, and actually continued to cut down on the few remaining areas of cooperation with Accra, Conakry and Bamako. After 1964, relations with Ghana, Guinea and Mali would not be abruptly interrupted, but would be dominated uniquely by commercial interest. Trading with Ghana still made sense, but exchanges with both Guinea and Mali were further reduced.

The end of Khrushchev’s spell as head of the CPSU was the consequence of a combination of factors, both domestic and external. The large sums that the USSR had wasted in the hope of exporting its model of development to the third world certainly played an important role in reducing the Presidium’s trust in Khrushchev. He was the Soviet leader who had the most confidence in the “socialist model of development” and in its chances of success in Africa and Asia, and his removal from power unquestionably meant renouncing the idea that economic development based on socialist principles could be the best Soviet asset to build influence in the third world. The new Soviet leadership had other priorities and a different approach towards policy, based on available capabilities and material interests. Abandoning the

“socialist model of development” as a tool of policy was the natural consequence of the failure to establish it as a concrete alternative to capitalist development in West Africa.

### *Khrushchev's fall*

In 1964 Khrushchev was an insecure, unstable leader. William Taubman describes Khrushchev in his last months in power as increasingly estranged from his colleagues in the Presidium, conscious of the half-failure of his reforms and of the deep economic problems of the USSR, including in agriculture, once the First Secretary's main interest. Khrushchev, who turned seventy years old in April 1964, often mentioned retirement and discussed whom his successor could be.<sup>536</sup>

The First Secretary was right to be worried. His colleagues, led by Brezhnev, Aleksandr Shelepin and Nikolai Podgorny, had been planning to get rid of Khrushchev for some time already. In October 1964 the Presidium finally met to discuss relieving Khrushchev of his duties. The “conspirators” had by then convinced virtually all the top Soviet leaders to side with them, and therefore Khrushchev was dismissed from his posts and expelled from the Presidium. He would live the rest of his life as a pensioner, far from political life. Brezhnev became First Secretary of the CPSU, and Alexei Kosygin was nominated Soviet premier.<sup>537</sup>

Khrushchev's fall from power did not significantly alter Soviet policy in West Africa, but it meant the end of any hope to revive the dream of the “socialist model of development”, at least in the short term. If in February 1964 Suslov could still speak at the Presidium with pride about the important role of Soviet assistance to developing

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<sup>536</sup> Taubman, *Khrushchev*: 612-19.

<sup>537</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*: 529-38.  
Zubok, *A Failed Empire*: 193-94.

countries, the atmosphere had completely changed by November, when new First Secretary Brezhnev addressed the same Presidium on the topic of relations with the third world without mentioning economic aid at all.<sup>538</sup> The socialist model had yielded disappointing results, and the new Soviet leadership was set to shift the course of Moscow's policy away from economic development.

*The evolution of Soviet policy towards Ghana, Guinea and Mali*

Development aid and military cooperation

After the marked decrease in Soviet resources devolved to West Africa and the cancellation of several development projects in 1962-63, Moscow's policy did not change its course in 1964. No new aid or commercial agreements were signed, and even "standard" diplomatic exchanges were reduced to a minimum. The USSR was clearly not willing to begin any sort of new engagement in the region, even in the face of requests from local leaders. Ghana, in particular, was still hoping to receive substantial Soviet support. Nkrumah did not seem especially worried by the change of leadership in Moscow, and he warmly congratulated Brezhnev on becoming the new First Secretary of the CPSU in October 1964.<sup>539</sup> However, if Nkrumah hoped that the new leadership in the Kremlin would prove more responsive to Ghanaian requests, he was deluding himself. When in November 1964 the Accra government officially asked Moscow to participate financially to the creation of Ghana's Investment Bank, whose tasks included the financing of development projects, the immediate reply from Moscow left no doubt as of what the Soviet leadership's future policy towards

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<sup>538</sup> Ilichev, *SSSR i Strany Afriki 1963-1970, Chast 1*, 85-88, 160-62.

<sup>539</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 8, p. 13-A, d. 6, l. 30-31.

Ghana would be: the Soviet government refused to participate on the grounds that the USSR could not take part in the internal affairs of other countries.<sup>540</sup>

Any thought of Soviet military engagement in Africa was also out of the question. With Khrushchev still in power, in September 1964 Nkrumah wrote to Moscow highlighting the difficult situation in Congo – where the fighting had never stopped since 1960 - and expressing his belief that something needed to be done. However, the Soviet government, still sharing in principle Nkrumah's views, did not deem necessary to reply, signalling once and for all that Moscow was not going to risk a second military adventure in Congo.<sup>541</sup>

#### Trade fluxes

The analysis of trade fluxes between the Soviet Union and its West African allies reveals some interesting tendencies. After 1964, both Soviet exports to and imports from Guinea and Mali remained at relatively low levels, as they had always been, apart from the peaks caused by the Soviet aid programmes in 1960-61. On the contrary, Soviet exports to and imports from Ghana showed a marked increase in 1964-65. Even after the coup that ousted Nkrumah from power in 1966,<sup>542</sup> Soviet imports remained relatively high, especially compared to Guinea and Mali. Soviet exports to Ghana, instead, after 1966 rapidly decreased to the same levels as the other two countries (see graphs 1 and 2).

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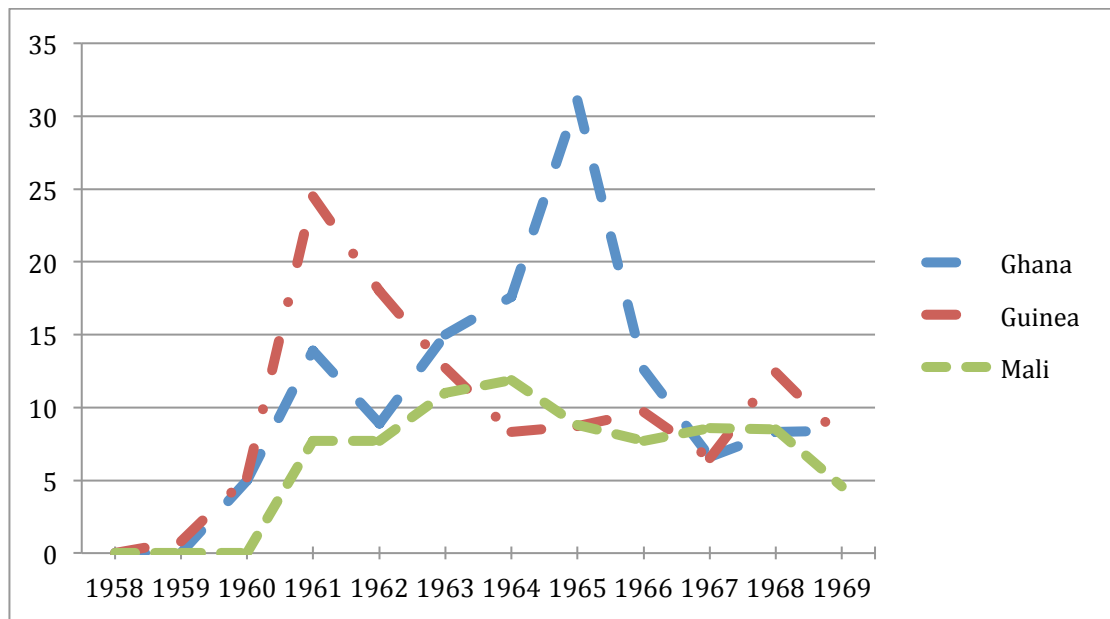
<sup>540</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 8, p. 13-A, d. 7, l. 1-2.

<sup>541</sup> AVP RF, f. 573, op. 8, p. 13-A, d. 5, l. 34-36.

<sup>542</sup> See the next section for details on the 1966 coup in Ghana.

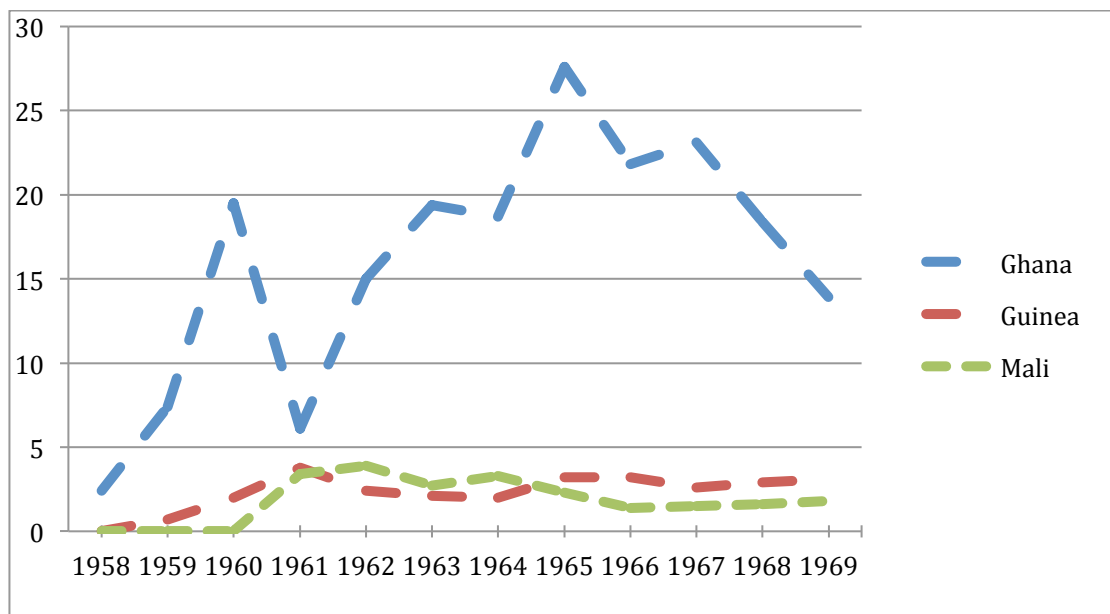
*Soviet Policy in West Africa, 1957-64*

*Graph 1: Soviet exports to Ghana, Guinea and Mali, 1958-69 (million roubles)*



Source: Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR series, 1958-69

*Graph 2: Soviet imports from Ghana, Guinea and Mali, 1958-70 (million roubles)*



Source: Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR series, 1958-69

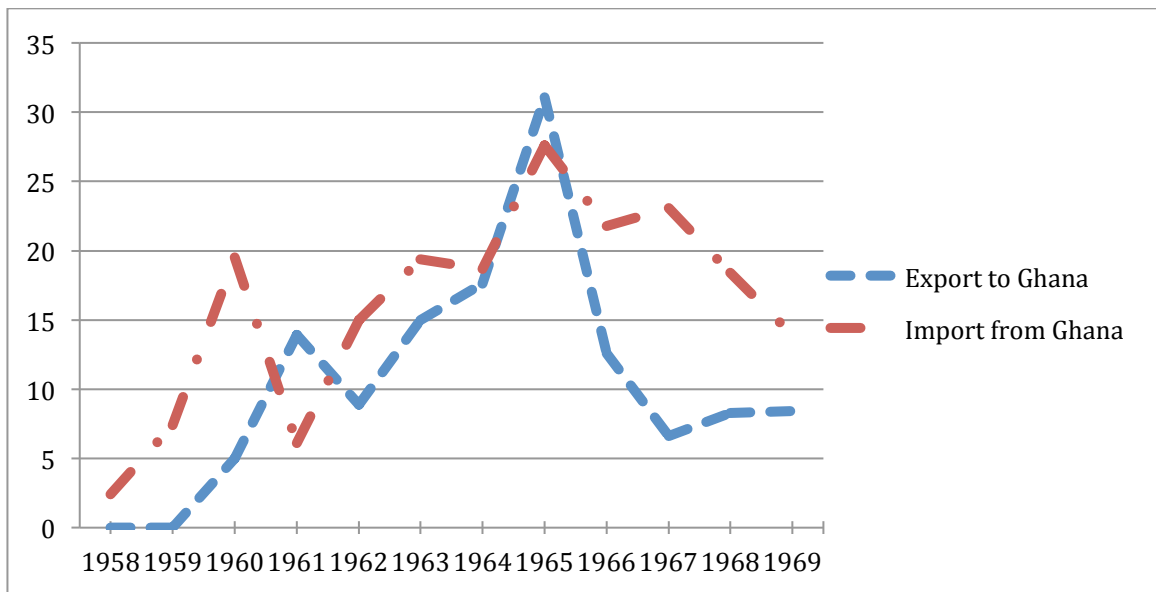
The difference in trade fluxes can be explained by the fact that Ghana's cocoa was for the USSR a more important commodity to buy than Guinean fruit or Malian peanuts.

Since Ghana's independence, the USSR constantly bought relatively high quantities of cocoa beans, for which there was a genuine commercial demand. In general, Moscow preferred to exchange the cocoa for Soviet machinery and technology, rather than paying in hard currency. As long as Nkrumah was in power (1957-66), increases in Soviet imports of cocoa corresponded to increases in Soviet exports of machinery, as Nkrumah was at least partially willing to accept the barter. However, once Nkrumah was ousted, Moscow kept purchasing cocoa, but had to pay in hard currency (see graph 3). Moreover, a broader look at Soviet purchases of Ghanaian cocoa reveals that trade always followed a sound economic logic (see graph 4). Moscow bought increasing quantities of cocoa from 1958 until 1965, when the price of Ghana's cocoa beans experienced a sharp decrease. After 1965, when the price of cocoa began to rise again, the USSR reduced the quantities of Ghanaian cocoa.

This basic analysis of the magnitude of commercial transactions between the USSR and its West African allies reveals some important facts. First of all, partially since 1961 and totally after 1964, trade with all countries in West Africa was disconnected from aid. As no more agreements were signed, Moscow had an interest in continuing only the genuinely advantageous commercial relations with its allies in West Africa. Therefore, the Soviet Union continued to trade with Ghana, but only because its cocoa was actually needed in the USSR. On the other side, once the willingness to invest in Conkary and Bamako decreased, commercial exchanges with them virtually ceased, as Moscow purchased goods from Guinea and Mali only for political reasons. The evolution of bilateral trade thus reinforces the hypothesis that after 1961 Moscow adopted more cost-effective policies towards Ghana, Guinea and Mali.

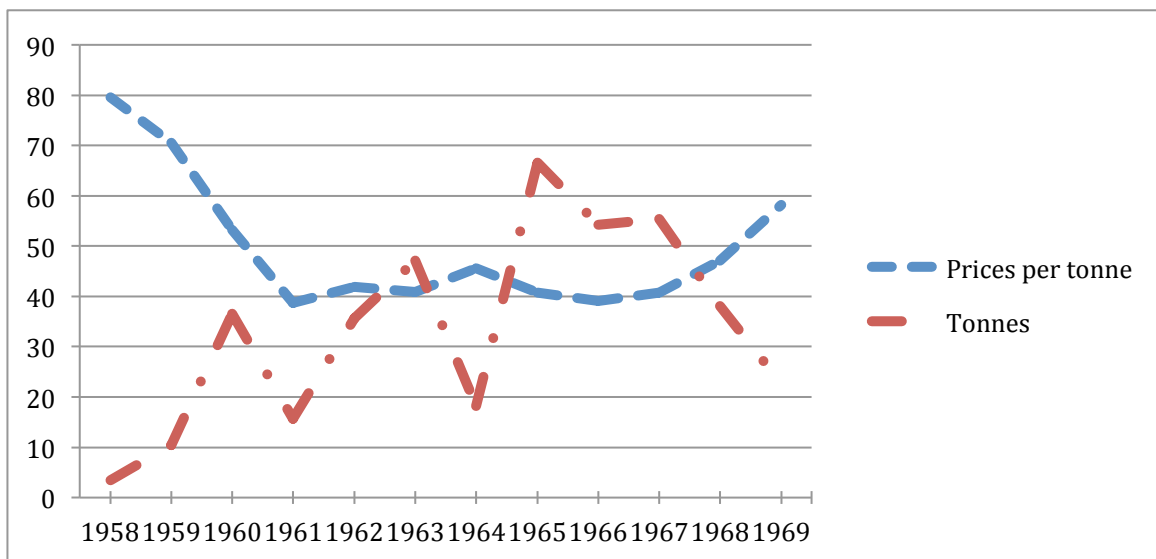
*Soviet Policy in West Africa, 1957-64*

*Graph 3: Soviet exports to Ghana vs Soviet imports from Ghana, 1958-69 (million roubles)*



Source: Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR series, 1958-69

*Graph 4: Cocoa price vs quantities purchased by USSR, 1958-69*



Source: Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR series, 1958-69

Coups and realignment

The regimes in West Africa were destined not to survive much longer than Khrushchev as First Secretary of the CPSU. In Ghana, Nkrumah faced growing internal opposition and a difficult economic situation. In early 1964 he escaped a second attempt at his life and, as in 1962, the Ghanaian President suspected that the CIA was behind it. The Americans were certainly unhappy with Nkrumah's behaviour, and since early 1964 the Johnson administration had been discussing at length what to do about Ghana. Measures to destabilise Nkrumah and counter his anti-American campaign were approved, but no plans were made for a coup in 1964 – although Secretary of State Rusk and the CIA did take the idea into consideration.<sup>543</sup>

Establishing the degree of involvement of Western intelligence agencies with internal developments in Ghana is outside of the scope of this thesis. The Americans were certainly closely monitoring the situation, and they were aware of the fact that in the period 1965-66 opposition to Nkrumah had grown to the point that a coup was in preparation. Traditional opponents – such as part of the military, the middle class and the Ashanti – gained more consensus as the increasingly paranoid and unstable Nkrumah progressively turned Ghana into a one-party authoritarian state, while Ghana's economic prospects did not improve. In the end, in February 1966 a group of army and police officers carried out a coup – of whose preparation the Americans were certainly aware of –, while Nkrumah was on his way to visit China.<sup>544</sup> The former President of Ghana would live the rest of his life in exile in Guinea, where Sekou Toure made him "Vice-President", as Ghana and Guinea were still technically part of a union. The Soviet Union did not recognise the 'almost pathetically pro-

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<sup>543</sup> Nina Davis Howland, ed. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1964-1968 - Africa*, vol. XXIV (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1999), 412, 13-16.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*, 442-58.



Western<sup>545</sup> military junta that substituted Nkrumah, but would recognise the civilian government that was formed after elections in 1969.

A similar fate befell Modibo Keita in Mali. After 1964, the USSR showed no willingness to help Mali, and Keita's government faced continuous economic problems, which led to a gradual rapprochement with the West, a growing role for China, and finally the decision to re-join the Franc zone in 1967.<sup>546</sup> It was however too late: in November 1968 a group of army officers staged a coup that ousted Keita and turned Mali into a military dictatorship. After 1968, the Soviet Union continued to buy limited quantities of Malian peanuts, but exports of tools and technology dropped significantly as the new rulers of Mali preferred to improve relations with the West.

In Guinea, on the contrary, Sekou Toure managed not to be overthrown, in spite of difficult economic conditions and growing opposition to his brutal authoritarianism. The Conakry government came to rely progressively more on French and American aid, as well as cultivating good relations with China.<sup>547</sup> Toure died in March 1984, and a military coup toppled what remained of the government. Guinea's generally pro-Western orientation in foreign policy did not change.

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<sup>545</sup> Ibid., 457.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid., 329.

Maurice Vaisse, ed. *Documents Diplomatiques Francais (DDF), 1965: Tome I (1er Janvier - 30 Juin)*, vol. 27 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 2003), 170-76.

———, ed. *Documents Diplomatiques Francais (DDF), 1965: Tome II (1er Juillet - 31 Decembre)* vol. 28 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 2004), 185-88.

———, ed. *Documents Diplomatiques Francais (DDF), 1966: Tome I (1er Janvier - 30 Juin)*, vol. 29 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 2006), 76-80, 344-48.

———, ed. *Documents Diplomatiques Francais (DDF), 1966: Tome II (1er Juillet - 31 Decembre)*, vol. 30 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 2006), 55-60.

<sup>547</sup> Howland, *FRUS, 1964-1968 - Africa*, 329.

Maurice Vaisse, ed. *Documents Diplomatiques Francais (DDF), 1964: Tome I (1er Janvier - 30 Juin)*, vol. 25 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 2002), 494-97.

———, *DDF 1965, Tome II*, 304-07.

A Chinese challenge?

As highlighted in the last section, China's role in West Africa had been constantly growing in the early 1960s, and would continue to grow after 1964. At the beginning the establishment of relations between Ghana, Guinea and Mali and Communist China was regarded positively by Soviet observers, who saw it as a sign of progressive thinking in Africa. However, as the Sino-Soviet split became a major concern in Moscow, Beijing's improving relations with Accra, Conakry and Bamako – as well as with other third world capitals – created concern in the USSR.<sup>548</sup> Was China a serious threat for the Soviet Union in West Africa?

Chinese propaganda was certainly effective in depicting the USSR as a white European country, in all similar to the old colonial powers, whereas China truly was part of the third world, and therefore its socialist society could more easily be an inspiration and a model for Africans. Soviet observers reported on several occasions that these ideas found some degree of success among the elites in Ghana, Guinea and Mali.<sup>549</sup>

However, no matter how effective its propaganda was, China did not yet have the capacity to constitute a real problem for the USSR in West Africa. The difference in the magnitude of economic aid was too large: the Americans, who obviously closely monitored both Soviet and Chinese moves in Africa, estimated that between 1954 and 1966 the USSR had given out 900 million dollars in economic aid to African countries, whereas the Chinese could only manage 350 million dollars.<sup>550</sup>

Moreover, Chinese ideas were not always particularly attractive for African leaders. In April 1964 Nkrumah's Convention People's Party prepared a long report

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<sup>548</sup> For an overview of Soviet-Chinese competition in the third world during the 1960s, see

<sup>549</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 55, d. 103, l. 169-177; f. 5, op. 55, d. 113, l. 100-102.

<sup>550</sup> Howland, *FRUS, 1964-1968 - Africa*, 383.

about the Sino-Soviet split, focused on which position Ghana should assume in the dispute. The report suggested to Nkrumah that Ghana should stay absolutely neutral, as not being a Communist country it had all to lose and nothing to gain from taking a side. However, Chinese aggressive rhetoric towards the West, and Mao's views on the feasibility of nuclear war worried the Ghanaians, who concluded that, since it was based on peaceful coexistence, 'the Soviet view has therefore more appeal for Africa'.<sup>551</sup>

The leaderships in Accra, Conakry and Bamako were guided by the need to secure foreign aid to sustain their countries' economies. Chinese support was obviously welcome, especially when Soviet aid began to decrease, but it could not constitute the only source of economic help for any of the countries, as Beijing was still not able to launch extensive aid programmes on the same scale as the USSR or the US. Therefore, competition from China represented a serious threat for Soviet interests in West Africa only in the field of propaganda, which between 1957 and 1964 always remained a secondary area of Soviet policy.

### *Conclusion*

Brezhnev and the other "conspirators" had many reasons to be against Khrushchev. A *Pravda* editorial published on 16 October (the day after Khrushchev's dismissal as First Secretary) condemned 'subjectivism and drift in Communist construction, hare-brained scheming, half-baked conclusions and hasty decisions and actions divorced from reality, bragging and bluster, attraction to rule by fiat, unwillingness to take into account what science and practical experience have already worked out.'<sup>552</sup>

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<sup>551</sup> PRAAD, SC/BAA/240, 26 April 1964.

<sup>552</sup> *Pravda*, 16 October 1964. Cited in Taubman, *Khrushchev*: 620.

Even though it was not directly discussed during the Presidium meeting that ousted Khrushchev, a vast majority of the Soviet leadership resented the way in which he had conducted the foreign policy of the USSR. Apart from the most obvious of Khrushchev's blunders – Berlin, Cuba, the Sino-Soviet split – Moscow's current policy towards the third world was also questioned. First of all, some Soviet leaders such as Shelepin resented Khrushchev's courting of nationalistic third world leaders, who only occasionally turned out to serve Moscow's interests, despite Khrushchev's hopes.<sup>553</sup> Between 1957 and 1964, the USSR had used significant resources to build influence in the third world, but with scarce results. Khrushchev's opponents concluded that 'we, in no sense knowing anything about such countries, from time to time render them extensive financial, technological, military and other forms of aid. [...] The results in many cases have been lamentable: having swallowed what we gave them, the leaders of some of these countries turned their backs on us.'<sup>554</sup> Moscow's policy towards West Africa perfectly fit into these accusations. It was undeniable that Nkrumah, Sekou Toure and Keita – nationalist and anti-Western, but not Marxist-Leninist leaders – "swallowed" a great amount of Soviet resources, but offered very little in return.

Khrushchev's "adventurous" military policy in the third world was not spared either. In discussing the Cuban crisis, Dmitri Polyansky said that 'only a gambler may assert that under modern conditions our state can grant real military assistance to any country of that continent [Latin America]. Missiles will not do in this case: they will burn to the ground the country that requires assistance – nothing else.'<sup>555</sup> Substituting

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<sup>553</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*: 533.

<sup>554</sup> "Doklad Prezidiuma TsK KPSS na oktiabrskom plenum TsK KPSS," *Istochnik*, no. 2 (1998): 115. Quoted in Haslam, *Russia's Cold War*: 270.

<sup>555</sup> "Doklad Prezidiuma TsK KPSS na oktiabrskom plenum TsK KPSS," 113. Quoted in Zubok, *A Failed Empire*: 193.

Congo for Cuba, and Africa for Latin America, the conclusion did not change: the Soviet Union did not dispose of sufficient military capabilities to offer real support to its allies in the third world, and should therefore refrain from adventures – at least as long as capabilities were not developed.

These two main criticisms of Khrushchev's policy – support for ideologically unreliable leaders and lack of capabilities for intervention – turned into two fundamental pillars of the policy towards the third world of the leadership that substituted Khrushchev in the Kremlin after 1964. Brezhnev and Kosygin were far less inclined than Khrushchev in placing so much confidence in the Soviet way to modernisation as the prime tool of Moscow's relations with the third world. They abandoned Khrushchev's 'rabid revolutionism'<sup>556</sup> in favour of an approach based on supporting Marxist-Leninists who were ready to stick to Moscow's instructions, and on building up military strength to compete with the West. Jonathan Haslam concludes that 'once Moscow had acquired the means of airlifting military supplies across the globe, opportunity and capability created a new basis for rivalry with the West'.<sup>557</sup> Following this logic, the USSR's future engagement in Africa, roughly one decade after Khrushchev's demise, involved direct military support for a Marxist national-liberation movement in Angola, and military and technical help to a Marxist-inspired military strongman in Ethiopia.

Whether or not the second generation of African post-colonial leaders proved to be more or less committed to Marxism-Leninism than Nkrumah, Keita and Sekou Toure, or whether Soviet military help was more or less effective than the economic aid extended to Africa during the Khrushchev era is a matter of debate. What is

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<sup>556</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*: 274.

<sup>557</sup> Haslam, *Russia's Cold War*: 271.

## Part III – Chapter 10

certain is that, after Khrushchev's fall, no Soviet leader believed that it was possible to use the USSR's road to modernity as the main tool of policy in the third world.

## **Conclusions**

Between 1957 and 1964, the Soviet Union attempted to export to West Africa a model of development based on principles of state-planning, collective enterprise and closed markets. This project did not succeed due to the combined effect of the objective difficulty of economic cooperation with Ghana, Guinea and Mali, and of the negative conclusion of the Congo crisis for the USSR in 1960-61. The Soviet Union was willing to bear the high costs of economic cooperation in West Africa as long as it thought it could expand its influence beyond Ghana, Guinea and Mali. However, poor coordination combined with the lack of expertise of the local leaderships resulted in rising costs and modest results. Moreover, Western intervention in Congo showed that growing Soviet influence in Africa increased the risk of open confrontation. Faced with harder-than-expected difficulties, the Soviet leadership decided to reduce the USSR's commitment to West Africa, in order to decrease the cost of cooperation and the risk of conflict with the West.

The experience of engagement with West Africa and Congo “taught” the Soviet leadership some important “lessons”, which guided future policy in Africa. Future engagement, as for example in Angola and Ethiopia during the 1970s, took the form of direct military support – once the necessary capabilities were developed – for radical leaders who were at least nominally Marxists, rather than “bourgeois nationalists” like Nkrumah, Sekou Toure and Keita.

## Conclusions

### *Findings and Hypotheses*

#### Ideology and the “centre”

During the period 1957-59 (analysed in part I of the thesis), Moscow actively tried to engage newly independent Ghana and Guinea, in order to exchange diplomatic representatives and initiate economic cooperation. Since the very early stage of relations with both countries, the USSR insisted on offering economic and technical aid, in particular in the field of agriculture, at relatively advantageous conditions for the newly independent states. The Soviet effort was not particularly successful in Ghana, where Nkrumah was potentially interested in the USSR's offers, but at the same time did not want to risk compromising Accra's relations with the US and Britain, and therefore accepted only limited cooperation with Moscow. In particular, Ghana's main economic activity, the production and export of cocoa beans, was virtually totally controlled by a British company, which prevented the Accra government from accepting the USSR's proposal of exchanging Soviet technology for Ghanaian cocoa. In spite of the difficulties encountered, however, the Soviet Union kept pressing Nkrumah and his government to initiate some form of cooperation, showing the clear willingness by Moscow to pursue a policy of engagement with Ghana.

The situation in Guinea proved to be more favourable to Soviet penetration. The Republic of Guinea rejected all links to France when it became independent. Yet, following the declaration of independence in 1958 the newly formed government in Conakry was diplomatically and economically isolated. France did not recognise it, and managed to convince the Americans not to recognise either – at least for the initial period. Moreover, Paris imposed an embargo on Guinea, which was desperate for political legitimacy and economic aid. Thus, Sekou Toure accepted Moscow's



offers of help with enthusiasm. The USSR rapidly established itself as Guinea's most important ally and sponsor: the two countries signed a comprehensive cooperation and trade agreement in 1959, which guaranteed large Soviet investments in the newly independent country, and in addition let the Guineans pay back the loans using local products. Furthermore, Soviet specialists were directly involved in the definition of the development projects to be realised with funds from Moscow, meaning that for the first time the Soviet Union had the opportunity of shaping the economy and society of a newly independent state in the third world.

As has been shown, the prime motivation behind the USSR's decision to become engaged with Ghana and Guinea was the Soviet leadership's conviction that "socialist modernity" – the level of progress and development reached by the Soviet Union since its creation in 1917 – could be exported to the third world. This conviction rested on three assumptions. First, Khrushchev and most of the Presidium leaders believed that socialism truly was a better system compared to Western capitalism to organise society and production. Second, they believed that this system could be exported elsewhere following some basic principles, and with close Soviet supervision. Finally, they were convinced that "nationalistic" elites in the third world would be willing to abandon the capitalist path to development, and adopt the "socialist model", attracted by the possibilities to repeat at home the successes of the USSR.

In the late 1950s, the idea of a "socialist model of development" – a set of policies to implement in order to obtain rapid economic growth – was institutionalised by the Party. The CPSU Ideology Commission and the State Committee for Foreign Economic Contacts (GKES) formalised the premises of the model, the requirements for its success, and its aims. The Soviet leadership generally agreed that, contrary to

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what happened during Stalin's times, supporting non-Marxist "nationalistic" leaders in the third world was right and advisable, given that both the USSR and the developing world had a common enemy in the colonial West. Moscow could shape the future of emerging societies in the third world by providing guidelines and material support for their modernisation, provided that the post-colonial leaderships were ready to cut all links to the West. The basic principles of the "socialist model of development" were: 1) to put a stop to foreign investments and foreign control of local enterprises; 2) modernisation of agriculture through the application of new techniques and modern technology; and 3) heavy investment directed at developing a national industry, meant for the local market rather than exporting. Between 1957 and 1959, Guinea and, to a lesser extent, Ghana seemed to offer the best opportunity to test the "socialist model".

Soviet policies towards Ghana, Guinea and Mali until 1960 thus confirm the hypotheses that *ideological factors played a powerful role in shaping Soviet initial policy about West Africa* (H1a) and that *Soviet policy derived from a centre-focused approach* (H1b). None of the countries considered offered any significant material benefit or strategic gain for the Soviet Union. Indeed, Moscow aimed at establishing relations based on large disbursements of funds to West Africa, and transfer of relatively pricey Soviet technology to the region in exchange for overpriced local agricultural commodities.

Moreover, Khrushchev and the Presidium thought globally. Ghana, Guinea and Mali were seen as the first step towards the establishment of the "socialist model of development" in other countries in Africa, and in the rest of the developing world. The costly investment made sense since the ambition was to use West Africa as a showroom of socialist modernity, and thus expand Soviet influence in the third world

– a long-term objective that Khrushchev considered of primary importance. Therefore, during the initial phase of policy, Moscow paid relatively little attention to the local context: Ghana, Guinea and Mali were regarded as homogenous realities, where the same policies would be effective, without need for adaptation.

Material factors and the “periphery”

During the period 1960-61 (described in Part II of the thesis), several key Soviet assumptions – mainly connected to the local context and to material (i.e. military and security) factors – proved to be unrealistic. This led to a negative reassessment of current Soviet policies. First of all, successful economic cooperation turned out to be more difficult than Moscow had hoped. The large Soviet investments into Guinea were not paying off: the costs of the development projects continued to rise, and poor coordination between the USSR’s agencies and the Guinean personnel caused severe delays and waste.

On the other hand, however, Nkrumah became more radical following Ghana’s transformation into a Republic in 1960, and chose to move closer to the Soviet Union. Moscow then launched a programme of economic assistance and trade with Ghana on the same scale as in Guinea. Moreover, Mali became independent in 1960 and, similarly to Guinea, decided to cut most links to the West and look at the USSR as a source of aid and political inspiration. However, economic cooperation remained difficult and expensive, and the Soviet Union became progressively less responsive to West African openings. As a result of the difficulty encountered in cooperating fruitfully with Guinea especially, but also with Ghana and Mali, the Soviet leadership modified a core assumptions: local “nationalistic” leaders proved to be problematic allies, who aimed at the USSR’s resources, but did not necessarily

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stick to Moscow's list of priorities for modernisation. The main consequence was a significant increase in the cost of the investments necessary to export the "socialist model of development". The belief that effective cooperation with radical anti-Western leaders in the third world was possible (an "ideological" factor) lost importance in favour of a cost-benefit analysis.

Moscow's reaction, which was already evident over the course of 1961, was to progressively cut the expenses of cooperation with West Africa, and adopt more cost-effective, low-risk policies. As a consequence, relations with Guinea worsened to the point that the Soviet ambassador was expelled at the end of 1961, while Moscow reduced the resources destined to Ghana, and initiated a programme of cooperation with Mali on a much smaller scale than in the past. This confirms the hypotheses that *material factors gradually came to replace ideological ones as the main drivers of Soviet policy* (H2a) and that *the "periphery" became progressively more important in shaping Moscow's actions* (H2b).

### The Congo crisis and foreign intervention

One of the crucial events of the 1960-61 period was undoubtedly the Congo crisis. As in the case of Ghana, Guinea and Mali, Congo reached independence under a radical leadership, and showed interest in establishing links with the Soviet Union. When a civil war erupted in Congo between the central government and separatists backed by Belgium, Khrushchev took a strong pro-Lumumba position, promising direct military aid if the Western intervention did not stop. However, due to limited power projection capabilities, there was relatively little the USSR could do to support Lumumba, whose forces were in the end defeated. Thanks to US help, a strongly pro-Western

government took power in Leopoldville, ending Soviet hopes to establish friendly relations with Congo.

Although the Congo crisis did not directly affect Ghana, Guinea or Mali, it had a significant impact on Soviet relations with them. The Western intervention in Congo had showed the Soviet leadership that the US was not ready to tolerate any significant increase of Moscow's influence in Africa, and was ready and able to resort to force to prevent it. The USSR, however, did not have the means to react. Therefore, the hope to spread the "socialist model" on the African continent now appeared considerably more complicated, even though the Soviet example seemed attractive to third world leaders. The Soviet decision was to withdraw from active competition in West Africa, thus confirming that *the Soviet Union was less prone to take security risks when foreign intervention increased* (H2c).

The example of Guinea showed that successful cooperation required very costly investments, which in addition could be nullified by unreliable local leaders, who wasted Soviet money on useless projects (as Moscow accused Sekou Toure of doing). Moreover, the development of the Congo crisis showed that the West was going to counter Soviet attempts at expanding the model farther, also employing "hard power", thus making the risks associated with policy in Africa much higher.

Both sets of factors contributed to cause the *de facto* withdrawal from West Africa that took place in 1962-64 (analysed in Part III), when the USSR progressively reduced resources and commitment to Ghana, Guinea and Mali. Moscow's relations with Guinea continued to worsen to the point that, following a row with Sekou Toure in late 1962, Khrushchev decided to stop all Soviet aid to Conakry. In Ghana, despite Nkrumah's radical rhetoric and frequent requests of help, Moscow significantly reduced its commitment to on-going development projects, which would be

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eventually cancelled by a disappointed Ghanaian government, unable to secure sufficient Soviet involvement. The situation in Mali was also similar: the Bamako government received no significant resources from Moscow, and began to look for alternative sources of political and economic support.

Soviet trade with Guinea and Mali shrank to negligible levels, whereas Moscow continued to purchase Ghanaian cocoa. However, this was due to a purely commercial logic: there was genuine demand for Ghana's cocoa, and in all transactions with Accra Moscow negotiated to obtain better deals than in the recent past. On the contrary, neither Guinea nor Mali had anything that the USSR was interested in buying outside of the framework of the economic cooperation agreements. As a result of Moscow's policies, by the time of Khrushchev's fall in late 1964, Soviet interests and activities in West Africa were insignificant.

Although Soviet interest for West Africa derived from a set of convictions held in Moscow, these convictions evolved over time because of changes in the local context – the “periphery” – outside of the USSR's control. Once the most ambitious aim – that of exporting the “socialist model” – was frustrated by rising costs and increased risk of conflict, the Soviet Union reacted by adopting more cost-effective, risk-free policies. This eventually resulted in a complete withdrawal from West Africa, and in the loss of the local allies.

### *Line of Argument*

#### A Reassessment of Soviet policy

The existing literature on Soviet policy in West Africa describes Moscow's engagement with Ghana, Guinea and Mali as a “peripheral” episode in the history of Soviet foreign policy, born out of the desire to achieve ill-defined, unrealistic goals in

an area of the world the Soviet Union knew and cared little about. According to Mazov, ‘the effectiveness of Soviet economic aid was limited, primarily because much of it was channeled towards large and prestigious projects, which proved to be white elephants that were either excessive for African needs or poorly conceived.’<sup>558</sup> Moreover, ‘the Africans could not find in the Soviet literature the formulas to solve their urgent economic problems.’<sup>559</sup> Legvold instead writes that ‘the Soviet Union has generally sacrificed considerations of the socialist revolution in Africa to the immediate interests of Soviet foreign policy.’<sup>560</sup>

The factors that Mazov and Legvold highlight certainly played an important role in determining the lack of success of Soviet policy towards Ghana, Guinea, and Mali. However, this thesis aims to draw attention to a different set of considerations. First, Moscow’s development strategy was not poorly designed or badly planned. At least on paper, it could have constituted a valid alternative to “capitalist” development, which West African leaders associated with economic dependency from the former colonial powers. Second, contrary to what Legvold argues, Soviet policy in West Africa was not in the USSR’s best interests. Cooperation with Ghana, Guinea and Mali was expensive and brought no strategic or economic gain to Moscow. Finally, the Soviet withdrawal from the region was not necessarily a failure. Given the circumstances, withdrawing can be seen as a rational choice to cut costs and decrease risk, more in line with Legvold’s previous point.

Although largely influenced by ideational factors, the policies that Moscow adopted were not irrational or short sighted. Given the situation of relative prosperity and stability in which the USSR was in the late 1950s, its economic model based on

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<sup>558</sup> Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War*: 255.

<sup>559</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>560</sup> Legvold, *Soviet Policy in West Africa*: 334.

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central planning and collective enterprise really seemed a concrete, if not a better, alternative to capitalism. Western observers took the threat of potential Soviet expansion in the third world very seriously: analysts and diplomats in Washington, London and Paris worried about the growing relations between Moscow and several newly independent countries that, anxious to find a quick fix for their economies, were adopting the same policies that had worked in the USSR. The Soviet leadership's idea that a "socialist model of development" could be successfully transplanted from Central Asia and the Caucasus to Asia and Africa was ambitious and optimistic, but not devoid of sense.

Ghana, Guinea and Mali represented the ideal testing ground for the "socialist model". They were among the very first countries in the third world to become independent after World War Two – thus carrying with them an important symbolic meaning – and were all dominated by radical leaders interested in experimenting with socialism. Moreover, the small size of Ghana, Guinea and Mali's economies meant that a relatively small – although still expensive – Soviet aid package covered virtually the whole development strategy of the country. This was not possible in Asia or the Middle East, where newly independent countries were much larger in terms of both population and economic activities. In West Africa the Soviet Union had the opportunity of shaping the course of development of entire societies, which had just emerged from decades of colonial rule. This opportunity at the time did not exist to same extent anywhere else in the third world, thus making the West African experience particularly important for the development of Moscow's policy on the third world.

The USSR's strategy was global in nature. The Soviet Union did not create a policy towards Ghana, Guinea and Mali to seek immediate material or strategic gains



– something none of the three countries could offer – but rather to pursue the ambition of exporting a development model based on socialist principles outside of Europe, demonstrating that socialism could really be the future for mankind and thus guaranteeing the Soviet Union global influence. Moscow’s aim never was to export communism to Africa, but rather to export socialist modernity, using non-communist elites as allies.

Although little more than basic ideas, the economic policies that Moscow recommended through the application of the “socialist model” were rational. Modernising agriculture to boost productivity made perfect sense in the context of largely rural economies, which often suffered from shortage of essential commodities. Moreover, especially in the case of Ghana and Mali, these truly were “colonial economies” dominated by the production and export of a “monoculture”, mostly to the former colonial ruler. Therefore, developing a local industry through investment in infrastructure and training of the workforce was the only way to break the country’s dependency on West European businesses, which dominated the market for Ghanaian cocoa or Malian peanuts and could then influence the price of the commodity more easily than the national government. Finally, halting foreign investments and foreign control of local enterprises served the double purpose of decreasing Western influence in Accra, Conakry and Bamako, and at the same time defending the nascent local industry against foreign competition.

What Khrushchev and the Presidium miscalculated was the impact that these policies would have, and the West’s reaction. Moscow expected the Soviet-sponsored aid programmes to produce positive results in the very short term. On the contrary, all the development goals described above required large continuous investments, whose costs the Soviet Union could not afford. Furthermore, cooperation with Ghana,

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Guinea, and Mali was far from easy. With the partial exception of Ghana – where in fact Soviet policies did have a more successful impact on the whole – all countries emerged from colonial rule unprepared to deal with the problems of independence. Their economies did not produce most of the goods the population needed, and there was no reliable state administration to manage the aid programmes. As a result, Soviet investments yielded much less than expected. Sponsoring the “socialist model” in West Africa was simply an excessive drain for Soviet coffers.

In addition, the Kremlin leadership believed that the USSR’s nuclear arsenal constituted a sufficient deterrent to allow the Soviet Union to support anti-Western regimes in the third world without fear of a US military intervention. The Congo crisis demonstrated that Washington was instead committed to avoid a significant expansion of Soviet influence in Africa. As long as Moscow cultivated relations with relatively poor, strategic resource-free Ghana, Guinea and Mali, the Americans interfered with Soviet plans only through (limited) rival aid programmes and propaganda. However, when Moscow set its eyes on Congo, a large country at the heart of Africa with substantial reserves of minerals, the US made sure that the ruling leadership in Leopoldville did not go the Soviet way. Therefore, supporting the expansion of the “socialist model” increased the risk of open conflict with the West – which proved to be seen as an unacceptable risk, also due to Soviet limited non-nuclear capacities.

In view of the new situation, Moscow again adopted relatively rational and effective policies. The USSR cut down the expenses and minimised risks. Cooperation with the existing allies was reduced while trying to make the most out of the existing commercial deals, while Moscow quickly withdrew from Congo so to avoid a clash with US-sponsored forces.

Khrushchev's behaviour – by no means unique to the West African context, but actually very common during his spell as First Secretary – was to launch ambitious, risky policies on the basis of confidence in the military and economic solidity of the Soviet Union, but then to back off when the game became too dangerous. Khrushchev's mistakes were typical of the Soviet Union between 1953 and 1964: overestimating the reliability and loyalty of local allies, and underestimating the US resolve to contain the USSR. The combination of these two factors ended Soviet influence in West Africa.

“Lessons” for the future

The experience of engaging with Ghana, Guinea, Mali and Congo taught the Soviet leadership two crucial “lessons” for the future conduct of policy towards the third world. The main leaders who emerged at the top of the Soviet system after the coup that ousted Khrushchev in 1964 – Brezhnev and Kosygin – had little interest in development and modernisation in the newly independent countries, and valued possible gains in the third world less than Khrushchev had. Nonetheless, this did not mean that the Soviet Union would refrain from seeking new allies and increasing its influence in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Contrary to the Khrushchev's era, however, Moscow's policy would be based on two principles, directly derived from the negative experience in West Africa and Congo.

First of all, the poor results of the cooperation programmes in Ghana, Guinea and Mali contributed to convince the Soviet leadership that allies in the third world had to be reliable Marxists, rather than generic anti-Western radicals as Nkrumah, Sekou Toure and Keita. During the Brezhnev era, Khrushchev's idea that nationalist elites were useful allies for they could be convinced to reject capitalism and adopt a

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“socialist model of development” was virtually abandoned, in favour of a more conservative view, which led Moscow to provide support only for Marxist leaders such as Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, Agostinho Neto in Angola and Mengistu Haile Mariam in Ethiopia. It was a rejection of Khrushchev’s belief that radical third world leaders were reliable allies as long as they were anti-Western, in favour of the “orthodox” idea that “vanguard parties” constitute the only possible allies for the Soviet Union. If with Khrushchev the USSR hoped that its prosperity and modernity would convince the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America to turn to socialism, under Brezhnev the Soviet leadership understood that only communist sympathisers were ready to follow Moscow’s instructions, and therefore deserved support.

Moreover, the nature itself of Soviet involvement in the third world changed. After the end of the Khrushchev era, modernisation, development and aid were forever relegated to a secondary role, in favour of more traditional intervention based on “hard power”. The Congo crisis showed that the USSR did not possess the means to influence the situation on the ground, and consequently suffered an important defeat at the hands of the West, which had more experience and expertise about intervention in the third world. The Soviet armed forces needed develop power projection capabilities comparable to the US, in order to make Moscow able to support its allies despite distance and logistical difficulties. Soon after Khrushchev’s demise in 1964 a process of heavy investment in the armed forces began, which equipped the Soviet Union with a blue-water navy, significantly increased transportation capabilities, and troops able to operate in theatres different from continental Europe. Thanks to these developments, Moscow was able to continuously supply the North Vietnamese since 1968, and then to mount successful military operations in Angola and Ethiopia in the mid-1970s. The failures of the Khrushchev

era showed that a global superpower needed conventional as well as nuclear military strength to gain influence in the third world.

*Indication for further research*

The study of Soviet policy in West Africa between 1957 and 1964 shows that Moscow really pursued the hope of exporting its modernity in the third world and that as a consequence of the failure of this project, subsequent policy was dominated by more pragmatic considerations. As long as ideology was the most important factor in driving policy, the USSR's actions aimed to reach goals that were defined by the Soviet leadership with relatively little regard for the local context. However, as local developments modified the initial assumptions, and increased costs and foreign intervention made the same goals more difficult to reach, the "periphery" assumed greater importance in shaping the evolution of Soviet policy.

Moreover, Moscow emerges as a relatively rational actor, who seeks gains and risks a confrontation out of a perceived advantage, but backs off when faced by rising costs and growing danger. These are important points, which improve and expand the existing knowledge of Soviet foreign policy. However, this thesis at the same time opens up new possibilities for further research.

Further research on the topic

The prospect of further research on Soviet relations with Ghana, Guinea and Mali is largely connected to broadening the range of sources used. Although this thesis is based on a large amount of Russian, Ghanaian and Western documents, several sets of sources could contribute to shedding light on important points.

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First of all, limited access to top Soviet documents makes it difficult to reconstruct the decision-making processes that took place in the Kremlin with precision. Even though researchers today can use a wide variety of sources for the Khrushchev era, access to the Presidium papers remains patchy at best. Unfortunately, short of major changes in the institutional structure of the Russian archival system, it is unlikely that these sources will become available in the near future.

Other potentially important Soviet sources are held at the Russian State Archive of the Economy (*Rossiiskii Gosudartsvennyi Arkhiv Ekonomiki*, RGAE), which is fully open to researchers. RGAE contains all records produced by the Soviet agencies that dealt with international trade and international economic cooperation, including the reports from delegations and missions abroad. Thanks to these sources it would be possible to study in detail the planning process behind the Soviet development projects in Ghana, Guinea and Mali, and thus analyse the evolution of Soviet thinking on development, and the influence that policy in West Africa had on it. Viewing and analysing sources at RGAE will be the next goal of this research project.

Additional sources from West Africa would certainly constitute a useful tool to deepen the understanding of Moscow's relations with Conakry and Bamako. This thesis shows how the use of local sources – in this case from Ghana – is extremely useful to research Soviet foreign policy. Besides providing a useful alternative source where Soviet documents are lacking or inaccessible, documents from Ghana offer a valuable insight into the evolution of Soviet policy over time, and into the reception of Moscow's policies by the Accra government. Being able to work on similar sources from Guinea and Mali would obviously constitute a huge advantage. African sources would also deepen the understanding of the mutual perceptions of the

recipient countries with Moscow, and the extent to which they were aware of the complexity of the great post-imperial game in the region. Unfortunately, however, Ghana is an exception in West Africa in guaranteeing unrestricted access to its documents. Any future research in Mali and especially in Guinea is likely to be extremely difficult.

Finally, Western sources should not be forgotten. British documents, as well as American and French published sources, proved to be extremely useful to assess the West's reaction to Soviet policy, and to assess the level of efficacy of the USSR's cooperation programmes without the bias of Soviet observers. Adding American and French archival sources, both easily accessible compared to sources in Russia or West Africa, would complete the picture of the West's actions in West Africa, and in particular on the increasingly leading role assumed by the US in countering Soviet expansion. Furthermore, being able to access Belgian sources on the Congo crisis would offer invaluable information on its development and conclusion – however, this is made difficult by the restrictions on access to these documents currently in place in Belgium.

#### Comparative perspectives

Even though Ghana, Guinea and Mali represented an ideal testing ground, the “socialist model of development” was not limited to West Africa alone. This thesis clearly points the way towards a comparison between Soviet policy in West Africa and in other regions of the continent, and of the third world in general.

During the period 1957-64, the USSR gave large quantities of aid to other African nations, mainly Egypt and Ethiopia. Was Soviet economic assistance to Cairo and Addis Ababa motivated by the same hope to export a development model? How

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did the much larger size of Ethiopia and Egypt's economies affect the "socialist model of development"? To what extent was Soviet policy in other areas of Africa influenced by the experience in West Africa and Congo? These are only some of the questions that a comparison with West Africa opens up for research.

Moreover, outside of Africa, the Soviet Union was extremely active in seeking new allies in the third world and in proposing trade and aid deals. Soviet advisers and funds spanned from India to Afghanistan, and from Indonesia to Iraq. Was policy towards these countries directly influenced by developments in West Africa? Did Moscow approach leaders in Asia and the Middle East in the same way it did in West Africa? Did the Soviet leadership regard the adoption of state planning by a large economy such as India as compatible with the principles of the "socialist model of development"?

Expanding the scope of research outside of Africa opens up another series of crucial questions for the analysis of Soviet foreign policy during the Khrushchev era. In particular, surprisingly little work has been done on the relations between the USSR and the non-aligned movement in general. If, as this thesis argues, one of Moscow's main goals between 1957 and 1964 was to export its model of development to the newly independent countries, how did the Soviet leadership regard the birth of the Bandung movement? Was a potentially united third world seen as an opportunity or a threat in Moscow? To what extent did the ideas of neutrality and non-alignment carry a negative meaning in the USSR?

Finally, the study of Soviet policy during the Congo crisis is well suited to a comparison with the USSR's policy towards the Algerian war of independence. Why did Moscow remain aloof from the war in Algeria, while instead it intervened in Congo? Was it due to security concerns, or to a lack of enthusiasm for the FLN



leadership compared to Lumumba? Analysing Soviet behaviour during crisis and conflict is also exceptionally useful to approach the interventions of the Brezhnev era in Angola and Ethiopia. In particular, as highlighted in this thesis, the process that transformed the Soviet armed forces into flexible tools to be deployed in the third world remains a crucial topic to study.

This project opens the way for future research in several different areas. All of them are inspired by the same consideration: in order to obtain a fuller understanding of the cold war that takes into account the struggle between socialism and liberal capitalism as “ideologies of modernisation” in the third world, it is necessary to devolve the same attention to the superpowers’ economic policies as well as political and military relations.

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