

2013

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Article Reviews

h-diplo.org/reviews/

No. 404

Published on 13 June 2013

Updated, 13 June 2014

H-Diplo Article Review Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane N. Labrosse

Web and Production Editor: George Fujii

Commissioned for H-Diplo by Thomas Maddux

Alessandro Iandolo. "The rise and fall of the 'Soviet Model of Development' in West Africa, 1957–64." *Cold War History* 12:4 (November 2012): 683-704. DOI: 10.1080/14682745.2011.649255. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2011.649255>

URL: <http://h-diplo.org/reviews/PDF/AR404.pdf>

Reviewed by **Alanna O'Malley**, European University Institute

This article represents a truly inventive foray into an area of Cold War History which has, due to the unavailability of sources, long been neglected by historians: that of Soviet policy in West Africa under Nikita Khrushchev. Alessandro Iandolo sets out his proposal to investigate the introduction and expansion of the Soviet model of economic development in Ghana and Guinea from 1957-64 with impressive clarity. Using a complex array of sources from Britain, Russia and Ghana, Iandolo develops his argument that Moscow advanced and implemented in Ghana and Guinea a socialist model of modernity, based on low interest long-term loans to Accra and Conakry, their respective capitals. By supporting such schemes in these newly-independent states, Moscow could use the Third World as an exponent of the Soviet model of development, an alternative to the capitalist plans of the West.

Neatly divided into several sections, Iandolo's article first examines the case of Ghana. Despite the positive auspices for the adoption of Marxist ideology under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana failed, in Moscow's view, to wholly sever the umbilical cord to London. In the face of Soviet efforts, British influence in Accra was still strong, particularly with regard to the economy. Ghana was mainly reliant on the production and sale of cocoa beans in trade which was dominated by the London-based Cocoa Marketing Company. Through this and the American-financed Volta River Project, Britain and the United States had the means to exert pressure on Ghana to keep the USSR at bay. Gradually, despite great promises and bold rhetoric at the outset, Moscow found that British influence prevailed, and competition with the Western monopoly stalled Soviet ambitions.

In contrast, Guinea found itself in a very different situation with regard to relations with its former colonial master. The Guinean Premier Sekou Touré had radically broken from France and was officially attempting to construct a socialist state along Marxist lines.

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France retaliated strongly by withdrawing all administration and personnel from Guinea, and more importantly by blocking trade with its former colony. Guinea was suddenly economically stranded and in search of a trading partner, a role that Moscow soon filled with an economic cooperation agreement and a commercial treaty. As Iandolo writes, “For the first time the USSR had found a Third World leadership that was interested in basing the country’s whole development strategy on socialist principles, rather than just relying on the Soviet Union as a leader or trade partner” (9-10).

What is interesting about the Guinean case is not just the rapid spread of Soviet influence but the simultaneous attempts by Touré to play East against West. Alongside his courtship of Moscow, the Guinean leader was also in negotiations with Washington with the hope of securing American development aid. With the knowledge that the Soviets were keen to trot out their country as the show-piece of the socialist development model in Guinea, Touré attempted to play both sides and secure the best aid deal for his state. However, the African leader was frustrated in his attempts to take advantage of the middle ground between East and West by France, which pressurised the Americans not to aid the burgeoning state.

Meanwhile, in Moscow the Soviets were busy constructing what Iandolo terms “a socialist model of development” (10). Based on the three principles of the construction of mechanised collective and state farms, investment in infrastructures and industrial plants and nationalisation of existing companies and limiting of foreign capital, the CPSU Ideology Commission envisioned Guinea as fertile ground for the realisation of their new model for Third World modernisation. Iandolo does a good job of linking the local context to the global context at this point by emphasising the tensions inherent between the motivations of Moscow and those of Guinea itself.

What is absent from the piece is a little more context on the broader global position of newly-independent African states and how that may have impacted the attempts of African leaders such as Touré to look both ways. It was precisely at this time that the ideas of self-determination and decolonisation were gaining considerable ground in international affairs, not least due to the creation and growing sway of the Afro-Asian bloc at the United Nations. The emerging consensus on colonial African issues may well have had an effect on the ability and willingness of African leaders such as Touré to attempt to play the superpowers against each other.

Perhaps the best boldest endeavour to benefit from Cold War politics was made by the Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba. The Congo’s first Prime Minister immediately established relations with Moscow, as Iandolo notes, “Never before had the start of the bilateral relationship between the Soviet Union and a newly independent African state been so smooth” (13). While the links between the Soviet and Congolese capitals may have been strong, the Soviets were not, however, to realise their dream of a socialist model in Congo since very soon, things fell apart.

Although Lumumba had established links with the USSR, he had also appealed to the United Nations to intervene in the Congo in order to safeguard the newly-independent state from Belgian interference. The result was a disastrous guerrilla war which was fought between UN forces and a group of Belgian and European mercenaries when the south-eastern province of Katanga seceded in July 1960. In political terms, the effects were also devastating.

While Khrushchev may have anticipated a huge defeat for neo-colonialism in the Congo, he was essentially proved wrong when American and British forces indicated their willingness to prevent the spread of Soviet influence in the region by providing substantial aid through the UN. For the USSR, it proved logistically impossible to provide tangible support to Lumumba and his followers from 400 miles away.

The internal anarchy which took hold in the Congo eventually resulted in the assassination of Lumumba in 1961. Soviet hopes of establishing a socialist ally in the heart of Africa died alongside the African leader, but it was the blow to Soviet prestige which was perhaps the most wounding. Iandolo rightly contends that the Congo crisis revealed the extent to which Western leaders, particularly the Americans, were prepared to go to stop the spread of Soviet influence. Simultaneously, Khrushchev discovered the limits of his ideas; while rolling out a Soviet model for development may have been acceptable in theory, without the material means to support it, there was little hope of success.

Iandolo places his contribution to Cold War scholarship at the point in the conflict when the competition began to change from the military to the economic level. In this sense he provides a useful and innovative link between how the local African context was affected by, and itself affected, Cold War competition. This connects his work with a growing body of scholarship which is keen to investigate the Cold War in the Third World, including Michael Latham's *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present*, Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, and Philip M. Muehelenbeck's, *Betting on the Africans: John F. Kennedy's Courting of African Nationalist*.¹ What stands out about Iandolo's work however, it that it offers an insight into the Soviet motivations and policies developed for Africa.

Where the article has some weakness is in its lack of an expansive view of the global level. Although Iandolo uses Soviet sources in drawing out the Soviet plans and motivations for policies in West Africa, he could link this more convincingly with other simultaneous Cold War initiatives. In particular, this was the period when Khrushchev was most vociferous at

¹ Michael Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and, Philip M. Muehelenbeck, *Betting on the Africans: John F. Kennedy's Courting of African Nationalist Leaders* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

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the United Nations General Assembly in denouncing what he viewed as neo-colonialism in Africa. This may have contributed to an even more sympathetic ear being leant to African leaders, who in turn, also tried to capitalise upon this atmosphere of hostility by playing the West against the USSR. These efforts eventually contributed to the scuppering of Soviet policies by drawing the superpowers into economic battles, as was the case in Ghana and the Congo.

Similarly, the strategic element of development plans may be over-emphasised. At least from the American angle it is possible to argue that Washington granted altogether too much credit to Soviet capability in Africa, and to a large extent, American policies for Africa were rather reactive than proactive. Although Congo may have exploded this idea in revealing the shortcomings of tangible Soviet aid, it would be important not to exaggerate the argument that African development plans of either of the superpowers were altruistic in nature.

Overall however, Iandolo has provided a valuable contribution to Cold War scholarship; a Soviet view of Western Africa, which is a perspective that Cold Warriors have long desired.

Alanna O'Malley currently works as a research assistant at the Max Weber Programme for Postdoctoral Studies at the European University Institute. She is working on the publication of her dissertation which examines the Anglo-American Relationship at the United Nations during the Congo Crisis from 1960-1964. In February 2013 she was awarded a grant from the French Foreign Ministry and the French Institute of South Africa for further research in South African and the Congo.

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