Nikita Khrushchev’s Support for Developing Regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa from 1955 to 1964

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During the period of colonization, the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa were exploited by the colonizing powers for their resources and manpower. After these powers left, the countries were rife with poverty and could not set up governments that satisfied their people. This paper examines the Soviet Union’s view of potentially revolutionary conditions in Sub-Saharan Africa, and how these nations fit into a system of class consciousness that was the basis for Marxist-Leninist communism. Nikita Khrushchev’s foreign policy expanded Soviet influence in these nations by offering aid in order to promote communist national liberation movements. This foreign aid was controversial both in the Soviet Union as well as the rest of the world, and was ultimately discontinued after Khrushchev was overthrown. Was this aid successful in promoting communist revolutions, or was it a waste of Soviet resources?

Introduction

“The Communist Party of the Soviet Union supports the just struggle of the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America against imperialism and the oppression of the multinational monopolies and advocates the assertion of the sovereign right to control one’s own resources, the restructuring of international relations on an equal, democratic basis, the creation of a new economic order, and deliverance from the debt shackles imposed by the imperialists.”

Since the Second Party Congress in 1920, the Soviet Union has always expressed an interest in national liberation movements worldwide. Prior to World War II however, the Soviet Union was preoccupied with developing the communist system first within the Soviet Union and then to Europe before spreading the message to post-colonial states. Indeed, there were fewer nation-states in the world before World War II, and any foreign aid to these countries, regardless of motivation, would be viewed by the colonizing power as supporting insurgencies. After the war and in the late 1950s, the Soviet Union was finally in a political and economic position to support socialist beliefs in the newly liberated Third World. Nikita Khrushchev, who rose to power in 1954, changed the Soviet Union’s role in the Third World greatly. He brought about two major shifts in strategic thinking. First, in contrast to Josef Stalin, Khrushchev supported an ally-based global strategy, believing that the USSR could and should persuade countries in the developing world to embrace a more

socialist economic and political structure. This theoretically would lead to more allies in the world able to contain potential Western imperial expansionism. Second, Khrushchev ideologically redefined national liberation movements, so that they were not understood by the USSR as local wars. These shifts in policy are Khrushchev’s legacy. The first part of this paper is about the revolutionary conditions in Africa that spurred Soviet interest in the region, and then what their opinions were on how they could ideologically promote socialist development within each state. The second part of the paper expands upon how the Soviets promoted this development through military and economic aid, and what the corresponding reaction was to these aid programs.

Revolutionary Conditions in Sub-Saharan Africa

The conditions that led to the emergence of national liberation movements were the natural consequences of colonialism as a system of imperialist exploitation. The Leninist argument is that Western imperialist regimes introduced capitalism to the colonies, which were unaware of the consequences it entailed. This system was often harsher than the capitalist economy within the colonizing state, and Lenin argued that colonizing states intentionally exported the harshest aspects of capitalism in order to placate domestic proletariats prone to radicalization. However, unlike the Western nation itself, the colonies were forced militarily to submit to a system that they were not ready for and did not understand. Consequently, this level of capitalist subjugation spawned a cycle of exploitation, impoverishment, and dissatisfaction on the part of the colonized peoples. Since the primary economic strategy for the colonizers was to exploit the colony’s natural resources as much as possible to send back to the home country, there was little focus on building infrastructure that would help the colonized peoples. Additionally, there were few checks on the governments and corporations that were operating within these colonies, and as a result, oppressive working conditions were instituted in order to produce as much as possible. This ruthless exported capitalism created a dichotomy between the interests of the Western colonizer and the interests of the people within the colony itself. However, since the Western nation was stronger militarily than the colony was, its interests took precedence. In order to maintain a stable society in which the workers would continue to help the Western nation, the colonizer had to instill values of subservience into the culture. They achieved these ends by corrupting the nation with national nihilism, which was achieved through institutional oppression of the natives. According to the Soviet theorists, “colonial domination with its plunder and violence, racial discrimination and scorn for the culture of the people...inevitably gave rise to the growth of nationalism.” This corruption of the nation served the colonizers’ ends effectively until their activities led to the growth of nationalist movements.


Golan, 25.
Over the period of Khrushchev’s reign, there were many internal debates within the Soviet Union over what qualified as a national liberation movement. These debates continued until the late 1960s, where the Soviet government came to a consensus that national liberation movements in the developing world were primarily based on socio-ethnic tensions rather than socio-economic tensions. This consensus was a major issue at the time, since this was a departure from Marxist-Leninism, where only an oppressed economic class could rise up. However, this departure led to a belief that those who were white controlled the means of economic development, while the black natives were the cogs in the machine. This distinction, as argued by the Soviet theorists, meant that socioeconomic differences were co-opted into the belief structure of the colonized peoples: white meant rich and black meant poor. This hierarchical structure reinforced the system of exploitation through national nihilism because the oppressed peoples believed they could not progress economically because of their race. In addition, as stated previously, ethnic groups in these colonies taught backward social beliefs and relationships in order to stifle any potential threats to the colonizer. They achieved this through institutionalized racism, resistance to demands for education, and humiliation and destruction of a colonial people’s cultural values.

In order to maintain stability within the colony, certain values were perpetuated by making the natives feel inferior to the West and treating them as second-class citizens. These beliefs were spread primarily through two means. The primary means of enforcing these distinctions was through the education system, where natives were taught very little of their own customs and history, instead focusing on the West and its superiority in the world. As a result, those who were lucky enough even to receive an education were given a Western-centric viewpoint of the world where they did not fit in. This affected the identities of these ethnic groups irreversibly. Consequently, natives were manipulated into thinking that the West was the benevolent entity that had come to save them from themselves. The second means of oppression was restricting native participation in local and colonial government. This particular means of exploitation, along with Western-centric education, created a distinction between the governing and the governed; perpetuating a feeling of oppression and helplessness on the part of the natives. The colonial laws were sustainable only if the colonizers stayed in each colony ad infinitum. At the time of liberation however, the West left the developing world with depleted resources, an oppressed people, and no means for the ethnic groups to govern themselves effectively. Additionally, even when the West left the colonies, most means of economic development were left in the hands of Westerners who decided to stay in the colony. Since this bourgeois exploitation occurred between the colonizer and colonized both before and after liberation, the only logical solution was to overthrow the foreigners both from the Western colonizers and

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4 Golan, 27.
5 Golan, 28.
6 Golan, 27.
7 Golan, 32.
those seeking to perpetuate the colonial laws once the Western nation left.

This institutionalized racism that was so pervasive in both education and the governmental bureaucracy that it was also extended to every other facet of society in order to destroy the will of those who might oppose the colonizing power. The purpose of this was to oppress the natives into complete submission. In institutionalized racism, resistance to education, and the humiliation and destruction of cultural values, the West was very successful. Even after the Western powers left, lingering foreigners continued to perpetuate these values, but without the same amount of power as the former colonizer. As a result, nationalist movements recognized this weakness, and sought to take advantage of it.⁸

As an element in colonial liberation, national liberation movements sought to overthrow the main source of power in each former colony: perpetuation of the colonial Western legacy through increasingly oppressive foreign-dominated governments. In order to form meaningful opposition to these forms of governments, oppressed natives formed national liberation organizations to seize power from the illegitimate government and return it to the colonized peoples.⁹ While these organizations were not always communist or socialist, almost all of them had to use populist ideas to attract a large following.¹⁰ These populist ideas became the basis for African Socialism, which used populist ideas of rising up against a foreign oppressor to fuel nationalist campaigns for independence. African Socialism appealed to the national identity of the oppressed Africans, and stressed cultural unity over opposition to capitalism. The USSR, even though this was a departure from Marxism-Leninism, strived to support these groups.

These national liberation movements reflected the current state of pre-capitalist society in these developing nations. In the previous section, numerous conditions were elucidated that show a clear potential for revolutionary ideals. Primarily, the humiliation of cultural ideals was the greatest source for discontent throughout classes, and therefore, all social classes had motivation to change the system. As explained earlier, this overwhelming oppression had the effect of co-opting socioeconomic struggle within a socio-ethnic dichotomy. Consequently, separation of populations tended to be along tribal or religious lines, instead of the economic lines that the Soviet Union hoped for.¹¹ Since tribal and religious identity was the primary means of societal organization in Sub-Saharan Africa, colonialism was “accused of purposely fostering the persistence of the traditional social structure so as to prevent progressive development.”¹² As a result, the USSR saw itself in a unique position to try to foster this development through support of socialist uprisings and movements.

Soviet Framework of Post-Colonial Theory

In the years immediately following World War II, the Politburo of the Soviet Union was debating what role

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⁸ Golan, 25.
⁹ Golan, 31.
¹⁰ Golan, 49.
¹¹ Golan, 48.
¹² Golan, 48.
the USSR should have in the world. However, until 1953, foreign policy strategy was largely dominated by Josef Stalin's personal thoughts on the nature of the Soviet system. His strategy was to focus on building a strong socialist state in the USSR and the countries the Soviet Union already had sway over before exporting the system to other nations, namely the developing world. However, after his death in 1953, his successor, Nikita Khrushchev, re-evaluated that policy in order to support his own ideas for expansionism. In his speech to the 22nd Party Congress, he explicitly stated that it was the job of the Soviet Union to liberate regimes from the imperialist West and support their desire for freedom through peaceful uprising and a socialist system. Thus, the USSR started to increase its military and economic aid to regimes that were just emerging from the colonial system, mainly in Africa and Southeast Asia.

During Nikita Khrushchev's time in office, a dramatic shift was taking effect in the developing world. The colonial powers were liberating their colonies at a dramatic rate; as a result, the number of independent countries in the world swelled. However, the colonial empires were not always prudent in how they liberated the colonies. There were frequent disputes over who held legitimate power once the West left; therefore, countries were in constant civil war. The Soviet Union felt that nationalist movements needed to be based on class loyalties, rather than tribal affiliations, in order to fill the power vacuum and have a functioning government. The Capitalist West had no systemic opinion on the issue; besides, they wanted to leave a system that was growing more unstable by the day. Since the former colonizers were not there to offer help to the fledgling nations, the USSR decided that it was their duty to step in and create regimes that would not only be stable, but provide a free, communist system for the citizens, regardless of tribal loyalties and previous power hierarchies.

In order to provide this support that would help these post-colonial states, the Soviet Union needed a framework to evaluate how the Soviet model of class revolution applied to countries where there was not a history of class struggle. The Soviets had to first define what a nation is in order to be able to consolidate essentially separate tribes into a broader national identity. The definition that prevailed was Stalin’s 1913 writings on the subject, that a nation was “a historically evolved, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychic make-up manifested in a common culture.” This definition was broad enough to encompass emerging nations in the developing world, and thus created a justification for Nikita Khrushchev’s renewed interest in promoting national liberation movements. Ostensibly, nations that had class separation and tension were more ripe for socialist revolution, but Khrushchev started a dialogue in the Soviet Union about whether states that had yet to

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13 Golan, 16.
15 Golan, 26.
16 Golan, 46.
17 Golan, 16.
industrialize were capable of supporting socialist government and economic structures.\textsuperscript{18}

This dialogue ensued with Soviet conservatives, who believed that only through socioeconomic factors and tension could emerging nations support these structures. The conservatives argued that in order to emerge as a socialist nation, there had to be property ownership and commodity exchange within the system to break down tribal bonds and create class identity. They argued that a majority of Africa was still broken down into pre-capitalist societies, so class identities did not exist yet. The key to creating class consciousness is industrial development, which Africa did not have.\textsuperscript{19} The other side of the debate consisted of theorists who took the ethnic-psychological approach. The latter group believed that socioeconomic class differences were not as important as the feeling of oppression and the inability to control a process that was exploitative to a large majority of the colonized peoples. The ethnic-psychological theorists argued that the Western colonizers took the form of a capitalist bourgeoisie and that they were fighting a system that was even more repressive than the Czarist system the Soviets replaced.\textsuperscript{20} The Politburo by 1959 felt that class identity is also formed by the environmental variables that exist within a system, and since the economic structure occurred in multiple nations at the same time, the oppressed needed help in order to rise up and defeat a system that had much more power than them.\textsuperscript{21}

As a result, the Politburo came to the conclusion in 1959 that the USSR, instead of debating theoretical ideology, should start actively courting these leaders in order to see how development would actually take place.

Support for the Developing World and Global Implications

In the late 1950s, the geopolitical climate was changing drastically. Specifically, more nations were coming into existence because of rapid decolonization; it seemed that multiple new countries were created overnight, and the global system had to embrace them in order for the fledgling nations to survive. Nikita Khrushchev was “enchanted and mesmerized” by the process, and it “[stirred] old memories of the revolutionary passions of the Civil War” for him.\textsuperscript{22} He saw this as a chance to surpass the West, specifically the United States, by wooing these nations over to the Communist bloc. Khrushchev’s stance on the developing world was also developed when he saw the amount of opportunity available to the Soviet Union. Instead of labeling these emerging nations as the “3rd World,” he relabeled them “...,” which, according to him, acknowledged their struggle for freedom and economic prosperity.\textsuperscript{23} Indeed, in a speech given on January 6\textsuperscript{th}, 1961, he pledges support to all of these nations in their quest for prosperity and independence.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Golan, 17.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Golan, 22.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Golan, 16.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Constantine Pleshakov and Vladislav Zubok. Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 206.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Kempton, 3.
\end{itemize}
Khrushchev invoked Lenin’s *Imperialism* to justify his stance, stating that “communists are revolutionary and it would be a bad thing if they did not exploit new opportunities.” However, many other officials in the Communist Party were wary of his stance towards these developing nations; many viewed Khrushchev’s policies as too idealistic and not grounded in rationalism. Many of them had a point, as Khrushchev at that point had not developed a strategy for the Soviet Union to follow regarding national liberation movements. It was only later that he solidified his strategy, thereby persuading more officials to support his efforts in the developing world.

After his initial pledge of support to the emerging nations, Khrushchev had to find a way for the Soviet Union to justify its support for socialist revolution in the developing world and not provoke the rage of the United States and Europe. The first goal he approached was by using an “ally strategy” to justify supporting these emerging states. This ally strategy stated that any country that was vocally anti-West was automatically an ally of the USSR. While the Soviet Union would not directly intervene in a nation that held this position, they were more than willing to offer military and economic aid to these states. This strategy was helpful to both the developing nation and the Soviet Union; the developing nation was free to develop its own institutions free of Soviet interference, and the Soviet Union was only there to serve as a lender of aid, not to control the state itself. Indeed, the example of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana illustrates this point: Ghana’s vehement opposition to the West made cooperation with any country in the West not only embarrassing, but impossible.

Therefore, in order to build up his country, Nkrumah had to ask the communist bloc for its support, which it gladly provided. Khrushchev actively courted leaders like Nkrumah, Sekou Touré in Guinea, and Modibo Keita in Mali; he thought they were reliable and could be persuaded to develop along a Marxist-Leninist model. This potential for persuasion again underlined the USSR’s ally strategy because each country was allowed initially to develop its own version of socialism, not import the Soviet model in its entirety. Khrushchev believed in the late 1950s, when he just started courting these leaders, that if a few countries implemented any socialist reforms successfully, eventually an indigenous form of Afro-Socialism, propped up by the Soviet Union, would emerge and spread throughout the continent.

The second step in Khrushchev’s strategy was how to define national liberation movements in the context of conflict. After the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, Khrushchev was afraid of a nuclear exchange, and felt that he had to show that national liberation movements were just, as opposed to Soviet meddling in proxy nations. While this classification could be interpreted as being irrelevant, the United States welcomed this new classification; it allows them to see the USSR’s motivations in each nation as not necessarily military.

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24 Zubok and Pleshakov, 208.
25 Zubok and Pleshakov, 206.
26 Kempton, 23.
buildups. This in turn allowed the U.S. to pare down potential military commitments in Sub-Saharan Africa and instead open up trade ties, which might have swayed potentially socialist states towards the Western bloc. This also made U.S. supported local wars seem less legitimate because they did not distinguish between local war and national liberation movements.

Khrushchev developed a viewpoint on war that was broken down into three categories: world war, local war, and national liberation movements. World war was similar to World War I and II, where multiple great powers fought each other with the full extent of their military. After the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, this presumably also meant that nuclear weapons would be used to achieve military ends.\footnote{Katz, 18.} This was the worst option for the USSR because the Soviet Union had not yet reached parity in nuclear weaponry to the United States, and also because at this point the Soviet Union was unable to project its military across continents quickly enough to respond to an attack from the United States. If there was to be a world war, the Soviet Union would quickly be decimated.

Local war was war that occurred between two non-Western or non-Communist bloc nations. This would be a war in which nuclear weapons could not be justifiably used, and only minor support, not full military support, would be offered by the two superpowers.\footnote{Katz, 19.} However, Khrushchev was still hesitant to say that the USSR would be supporting a certain party in local war; if the conflict spread, it was possible for the United States to enter the war, thereby creating a world war. This was a distinct possibility, as the United States shifted to a policy of “containment” (i.e. supporting multiple local wars) to repel Soviet advances after the Soviet Union gained second-strike nuclear capabilities.\footnote{Katz, 20.} This shift in U.S. policy was regarded by the Soviet Union to be a victory; since the U.S. could not win a war head to head with the Soviet Union. However, the Soviets were still cautious about these local wars. Soviet rhetoric increasingly shifted to the idea that local wars could lead to world wars in order to deter the United States from continuing to support these seemingly minor “inter-state conflicts.”\footnote{Katz, 21.} This focus on deterrence shows that the Soviet Union was trying to prevent these local wars from evolving into world war because in the event of a long world war, the Soviet Union could not compete with the United States. In spite of this belief, Maoist China pressured Khrushchev to support these wars more than the Soviet Communist Party was willing to. Khrushchev disagreed that the Soviet Union should provide more support; he felt that the Maoist regime was not looking at the rational consequences that could result from an escalation of local war.\footnote{Katz, 18.} The Soviet Union’s policy would still be containing Western imperialism, but they would not risk nuclear war in the process. Therefore, Khrushchev had to create a separate classification for wars of national liberation in order to justify any economic or military support for Sub-Saharan Africa that could be construed as offering aid for local wars.
Khrushchev argued that these wars of national liberation were quite unique from local war and world war and that by supporting them, the Soviet Union was taking a shortcut towards worldwide communism. This support for the ideology was unwavering even when frustration over the efficacy of the Soviet aid set in during 1963-1964. The main ideological challenge for the USSR was how these local communist parties within each of these emerging nations would achieve their goals. Prior to 1959, these parties were non-existent; colonizing regimes would crack down on them as anti-establishment groups and punish all of the supporters. Therefore, in 1959-1960, Khrushchev’s main goal was to develop these parties sufficiently enough so they could be a powerful force in the country’s domestic politics. Additionally, Khrushchev felt that the Soviet Union could expect allegiance because of the aid the USSR was offering them. In reality, however, once they achieved sufficient power, many of them wanted armed conflict. They tried to persuade the Soviet Union to give them military aid, but the Soviet Union took much more of a rational standpoint. Arguing that armed socialist coups could trigger support from the West for the regimes in power, the USSR advocated that these parties work within the bourgeois-led movements and regimes. Even though these bourgeois nationalist regimes were antithetical to Marxist-Leninist theory, the Soviet Union felt that the bourgeoisie in Africa were more progressive than those in the industrialized world. They had seen hardship, they were oppressed, and most importantly, they were willing to rise up to overthrow the remnants of the colonizing regime. Khrushchev, and the theorists who supported him, argued that in the case of Africa, a national bourgeoisie could skip the capitalist phase of development all together and create a socialist state with a decidedly African type of socialism. An oft-cited example within Soviet policy meetings was Cuba, which proved that an indigenous progressive bourgeoisie could successfully create a socialist regime from a post-colonial state. In Africa specifically, the rise of Sekou Touré in Guinea and Kwame Nkrumah shows that bourgeois leaders could effectively rally worker-bourgeoisie parties towards a more socialist orientation. However, even though the Soviet Union encouraged the communist parties to work within these bourgeois-led movements, they were skeptical of the continued reliability of the national bourgeoisie. Communists were told to spread their message within the bureaucracy, but also in the other groups that were integral to the nationalist cause: the intelligentsia and the army. These groups provided more ideology and firepower than the bourgeoisie had, and therefore it was imperative that the communist parties

34 Katz, 23.
36 Kempton, 23.
37 Kempton, 5.
40 Kempton, 5.
fight for their support.\textsuperscript{41} Soviet policy-makers and theorists believed that eventually, with enough loyal communists in the nationalist movement, the movement would take a decidedly socialist turn. In practice, however, these bourgeois-led movements did not always accept these communists in their midst, so from 1962 until Khrushchev’s ousting in 1964, the USSR stressed radicalization of nationalist parties, rather than creating more local communist parties.\textsuperscript{42}

Once the movement theoretically became socialist either through radicalization of nationalist parties or communist party infiltration, it was necessary to keep the movement within one country initially in order to minimize the chances of United States support. It was thought that the United States could not deny the will of the people, and therefore they would not support a regime that continued to oppress a majority of the people. In fact, Soviet aid was contingent on the movement staying within one country; it would stop if conflict branched out to other states.\textsuperscript{43}

This policy was again to minimize antagonism of the West; the Soviets wanted to achieve their goals as peacefully as possible. This classification of national liberation movements as a concept separate from local war did have results: the United States could not outwardly support these collapsing regimes and had to resort to espionage and covert action to achieve their objectives in the region.\textsuperscript{44} To the Soviet Union, this was seen as a great success; they were able to simultaneously support emerging socialist regimes, prevent war with the United States, and marginalize U.S. influence in Sub-Saharan Africa all at the same time.

Soviet Support for Individual Regimes and Movements

Political maneuvering by Khrushchev allowed the Soviet Union to provide aid and have close diplomatic ties with many emerging nations. As outlined previously, there were many ideological reasons for wanting to have good relations with these nations; the new allies could help legitimize communism in the rest of the world, a goal which the USSR was hoping to achieve. In addition to these ideological reasons, the USSR also had many practical reasons for expanding their influence in the developing world. The developing world offered many opportunities for the Soviet Union with few restrictions and low risk.\textsuperscript{45} Strategically, they would be able to deny the West (and an increasingly hostile People’s Republic of China) access to the remaining resources that Sub-Saharan Africa had to offer. Even though the Western colonizers had taken as many resources as possible during colonization, there were many other resources that were still largely untapped that could affect the West, specifically oil and uranium. This drive for resources was essential for the Soviet Union; it meant that they had more resources to fuel their military and economy while simultaneously depriving the West and China.\textsuperscript{46} Because modern-day militaries were vulnerable to disruptions in resources, it was imperative that the USSR hold these resources either directly

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Kempton} Kempton, 5.
\bibitem{Klinghoffer} Klinghoffer, 58.
\bibitem{Katz} Katz, 23.
\bibitem{Katz} Katz, 26.
\end{thebibliography}
or through proxy regimes. Unfortunately, the Soviet Union pulled out of Sub-Saharan Africa in frustration before this access to resources was fully realized. Until their pullout, this resource focus, along with the ally strategy, was the main reason other than ideology that the Soviet Union used to justify supporting national liberation movements.

The two primary ways that the Soviet Union supported these liberation movements were through military and economic aid. As stated previously, Khrushchev felt that if the Soviet Union was generous with its aid, it would be able to persuade regimes to reform politically towards a socialist orientation. In fact, Khrushchev even devised a formula, stating that “if 40% of the foreign trade of the newly independent country could be captured by the Soviet Union, then that country could be forced to become socialist.”

Military Aid

The USSR began arming Sub-Saharan African states in 1958, when the Soviet Union set up diplomatic ties with the socialist-leaning regimes of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and Sekou Touré in Guinea. At the time, the Soviet Union frequently announced its support for national liberation movements; however, they were not very specific in what they were offering. Soviet arms transfers were even more difficult to track. Unlike economic aid, arms transfers are more high profile internationally and could instigate backlash against the USSR. Consequently, there are few hard statistics on how many shipments of arms were given to certain countries. Additionally, this lack of statistics also shows that the USSR was not entirely forthcoming about their support for these regimes; there is a large difference between verbal support and actual willingness and ability to provide arms to these countries.

That being said, the Soviet Union did give a substantial amount of military aid to the region. Even though there was a dispute with China over how much military aid to give each regime (this disagreement contributed to the Sino-Soviet Split), the Soviet Union did not want to give so much aid that it could be perceived that they were arming regimes for conflict. The total amount of military aid given to Africa from the years 1955-1964 was $735 million, a respectable sum, but nowhere close to the amount of aid given by the U.S. to Africa. This figure represented 10% of the total Soviet aid given to the developing world during the same period of time.

Developing nations, especially those which had only tenuous ties to the Soviet Union during the Khrushchev era, also intentionally used Soviet military aid to balance their dependence on Western economic or military aid. It was an attractive option for them; the Soviets offered reasonable prices, low interest rates, and flexible payment. Often, African regimes postponed payment for multiple years in order to have the weapons but not tell the world that they

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47 Kintner, 67.
48 Guan-Fu, 1.
49 Radu and Klinghoffer, 31.
50 Katz, 31.
51 Katz, 31.
52 Katz, 18.
53 Guan-Fu, Table 1, 72.
54 Radu and Klinghoffer, 31.
55 Radu and Klinghoffer, 31.
were being armed by the USSR. The Soviet Union ultimately accepted this rationale; they were simply trying to gain influence in these regimes. Because aid and courteous diplomatic ties allow for other ties, such as increased trade, the Soviet Union was more than happy to defer payments by African elites.

Not only was it cheaper to buy weapons from the Soviet Union, but African regimes preferred the Soviet’s weapons to Western armaments. In the Khrushchev era, the majority of weapons supplied to these Sub-Saharan African regimes were either surplus weapons or older models being phased out from the military. While many other developing nations (specifically in the Middle East) did not want these weapons, African nations preferred them because they were much simpler to use. This simplicity allowed them to arm more than just the military. The military aspect of national liberation movements was not always fought by trained armies; a majority of the time they were fought by peasants, workers, and other peoples with limited military and technical knowledge. Therefore, it was better for them to use an AK-47, which had a reputation for never breaking or jamming, than a U.S.-manufactured counterpart. In addition to providing equipment that the armies actually needed, in Guinea, the USSR equipped the three thousand man army with mobile anti-tank guns, which served no useful purpose other than for parades. By providing the Guineans with high-tech equipment, the Soviets were then legitimized in creating a Russian military training facility at Camp Alpha Yaya, which was staffed at all times by forty-five men.

In addition to providing weapons, the Soviet Union was also instrumental in providing military and technical advisors for these nations to use. They were unwilling to provide ground troops, since this would be viewed as hostile by the West, but non-combat roles were often staffed by Soviets. In Guinea, there were over 1500 military advisors (mostly engineers) for a three thousand man army. While the Soviet Union was reluctant to send in ground troops, the Cubans were particularly willing to lend soldiers to liberation movements. Che Guevara lent his guerrilla fighting expertise to the socialist fighters under Patrice Lumumba in Zaire starting in 1964. Even though he was frustrated by the incompetence of the soldiers he was working with, he was ultimately able to set up infrastructure for later successes in the Republic of Congo. African nations were impressed with Cuban military support; as opposed to organizing grand strategy, Cuban fighters, including Guevara, were on the frontlines. This dedication to the cause showed African governments how much communist states were willing to help. Due to this support from communist regimes such as Cuba, the Soviet Union was better able to help national liberation movements while at the same time not angering the United States.

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56 Radu and Klinghoffer, 31.
57 Kempton, 23.
58 Radu and Klinghoffer, 31.
59 Radu and Klinghoffer, 31.
61 Radu and Klinghoffer, 32.
63 Guevara, xxii.
Economic Aid
The Soviet Union felt that while military aid was important, economic aid would be most helpful in their process of trying to influence elites. The primary motivation on the part of the Soviet Union was to reduce Western dominance of trade relations with the developing world.64 In order to compete with the West, the USSR had to seek out as many resources as possible for their own development and deny those resources to the United States. This primary motivation was accompanied by the ideological desire to influence elites to join the socialist cause. The policy makers in the Kremlin felt that the Soviets would receive the most potential support if they focused on building infrastructure. They argued that this would send a message to the developing regime that the Soviet Union was interested in the country's development as a whole, rather than being interested solely in the inherent benefits for the USSR.65 While this was the model for development aid, oftentimes the Soviets received more out of the exchange than the nation receiving the aid. This development aid was divided into two categories: industrial development and infrastructure development. Industrial development was focused on building large factories that could support many workers; they would lay the basis for later socialist development.66 To not seem contradictory, the Soviet Politburo decided that they could only legitimately give aid to the state economic sector; otherwise they would be supporting capitalist development. In Guinea, the Soviets did not think about cost; they were more concerned with creating a communist foothold in the country. Therefore, if the Guineans asked for anything, the Soviets would invest in it. The results of this policy were disastrous. Soviet projects included an unsuccessful experimental rice plantation, which cost $4 million, and a $1 million railroad survey where the only results were that Soviet trains could not fit on Guinean track beds. A Soviet tomato cannery was built in the city of Mamou, ignoring the fact that there was no water and no tomatoes in the area. A shoe factory had twice the capacity of Guinea's market for shoes. All of these projects were financially disastrous and politically embarrassing for the USSR.67

Infrastructure development was focused on roads, hospitals, and stadiums, which helped the people of the country in very immediate ways. These “prestige projects” were expensive for the Soviet Union, and ultimately they were not enough to convince a majority of people in these nations that the Soviet Union was a valued ally.68 To put these development projects in perspective, the USSR offered $90 million in aid to these regimes in just the year 1964.69 In Guinea alone, the Soviet Union offered $35 million in aid in August 1959, and an extension of $21.5 million in September 1960.70 By 1961, they offered an additional $100 million aid package and started ramping up infrastructure development in the nation. Conakry, the capital, was the site of a new Polytechnic

64 Radu and Klinghoffer, 15.
65 Radu and Klinghoffer, 16.
66 Radu and Klinghoffer, 16.
67 Atwood, 69.
68 Radu and Klinghoffer, 16.
69 Radu and Klinghoffer, 16.
70 Klinghoffer, 55.
Institute for 1600 students (where only fifty students in the country qualified to attend), a printing plant that never produced more than 5% of capacity, a 100-kw radio station that never worked because it was built over a deposit of iron ore, and a $1 million outdoor theater project and a multi-million dollar seaside hotel complex that were both abandoned during construction. Other projects included a 25,000 seat sports stadium for Conakry, with a population of 100,000 people, and an airport for the national airline equipped with nine grounded Ilyushin aircraft, with radar systems that were left to deteriorate in the African heat. Deterioration also plagued the buses and trucks that the USSR provided the Guineans. Since the Guinean drivers could not read the Russian manuals, trucks and buses were driven into ditches when even the most minor repair was necessary. After this occurred, the Guineans would complain that the vehicles were junk and demand new trucks and buses. The Soviet Union kept providing them. All of this infrastructure, while necessary for more industrialized countries, was seen as superfluous and mismanaged by the Guineans.71

The other economic aid that the Soviet Union provided was more in line with their stated ally strategy. This was to develop normalized trade relations with the developing nation, as opposed to exploiting them, which occurred under the previous colonial regime. For the most part, the Soviet Union did not need any of the resources that the emerging nations provided, and so they were forced to buy unneeded commodities. An example of this is the Soviet-Ghana relationship, where the USSR was pressured by Kwame Nkrumah to purchase an inordinately large supply of cocoa, Ghana’s largest export.72 Because the Soviet economy was centrally planned, the Soviets were able to purchase it, even though they did not need cocoa. In return, they offered deals on resources that African states needed for development. In Guinea, commodity exchanges became the norm. The primary example of this occurred in 1959, where the Soviet Union sold Guinea oil at hugely discounted prices.73 In 1961, total trade between Guinea and the Soviet Union was valued at 28.3 million rubles, no small sum.74 The logic was that these nations would be so overwhelmed with gratitude that they would have to listen to the Marxist ideas that the Soviet Union espoused. In reality, they did not, which significantly affected the efficacy of the economic programs.

These programs were expensive and frustrating for the Soviet Union. Many critics of this policy argued that the Soviet Union was unable and unprepared to offer this level of economic aid. However, these critics are incorrect. The Soviet Union was able to provide large amounts of money to Sub-Saharan Africa, but the money was spent on projects that were unnecessary. Because the Soviet Union was so focused on trying to establish a socialist foothold in Africa, they were willing to pay for any project that would help Sub-Saharan Africa develop.

How Aid Affected Ideology

In its quest to help these developing nations, the Soviet Union

71 Atwood, 69.

72 Radu and Klinghoffer, 17.
73 Radu and Klinghoffer, 15.
74 Klinghoffer, 55.
had a lot of problems in their method of distributing this aid. First, the perception from these developing nations was that the Soviet Union was unable and unprepared to provide the type and amount of aid that most of these countries required. For example, the Soviet Union offered extensive aid to Congo but in reality only provided 15 transport planes and a few shipments of small arms for the civil war.\(^5\) In Guinea, the aid that they did provide was mismanaged.

The Soviet Union was also accused of favoring only certain factions within developing nations. This favoritism estranged the USSR from the bureaucracy that propped up leaders like Nkrumah in Ghana and Touré in Guinea. In November 1963, the Soviet Union provided Somalia with $30 million in military aid, but was intent on distributing that aid only to Marxist-Leninist organizations.\(^6\) This belief that guerrilla organizations should be controlled by Communist elements not only was disputed by Soviet allies Cuba and China, but it also had the unfortunate effect of pushing radicalizing nationalist movements away from the Soviet Union. Because military and economic aid was provided with conditions to move to a socialist system, leaders like Nkrumah in Ghana and Touré in Guinea “adopted party and state structures and embarked upon economic policies that resembled those of the Soviet Union.”\(^7\) These structures tended to be authoritarian rather than socialist; however, the Soviet Union viewed these as positive steps forward to establishing a future socialist regime. Unfortunately, when the USSR continued to press for change, they were rebuked. Many of these leaders who had studied at the African Institute in Moscow increasingly began to view the Soviet Union as part of the problem, rather than a solution to the unique circumstances of post-colonial development. Marxist-Leninist socialism did not account for a tribal and religious social hierarchy, and many of these leaders felt that Soviet doctrine could not apply to them.\(^8\)

After the fall of Khrushchev in 1964, it was evident that the Soviet Union had not solidified connections with the entire nationalist movement in each country, which hurt them disastrously. After the fall of Khrushchev, many of the leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa, like Nkrumah in Ghana in 1966, were also overthrown.\(^9\) The national liberation movements for the most part severed all ties with the USSR, and the Soviet Union now understood that these allies were not reliable. After these downfalls, the USSR pulled back from Sub-Saharan Africa until the early 1970s; Khrushchev’s successor, Leonid Brezhnev, was not keen on repeating previous mistakes. Even though many nations, including Guinea, Congo, Ghana, and Mali, all followed the

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\(^8\) Radu and Klinghoffer, 78.

\(^9\) Hughes, 26.
Communist path for a while, Khrushchev's policies were considered in both the USSR and the developing world to be too idealistic and unsustainable. As opposed to other regions of the world, notably Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa was unwilling to accept aid on conditions of change to a Marxist-Leninist system during Khrushchev's tenure.

Conclusions

Soviet policy towards the developing world during Nikita Khrushchev's tenure is often cited as being too optimistic and too idealistic. The ideology was there—Soviet policymakers were initially excited at the prospects of multiple new communist allies in the developing world. However, the ideology that the Soviets espoused was seen as part of the problem, rather than a solution, to the problems in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Soviet Union did not stress race and religion as major obstacles to developing class consciousness, and their inability to recognize these powerful forces hastened their exit from the region. Khrushchev was very optimistic that these regimes would be overwhelmed with gratitude; instead, they took advantage of Soviet generosity. As opposed to embracing the aid that the Soviet Union provided, the nations took the aid and either completely ignored the ideology or played the Soviet Union off of the United States. Neither of these outcomes were particularly desired by the Soviet Union, and by the time Khrushchev was ousted in 1964, the Soviet Union was frustrated Soviet Union and the emerging nations themselves and cut off much of their aid to the region. This aid would not return until the mid-1970s.

In the developing world, the leaders who took advantage of Soviet aid did not do much better. After Khrushchev left in 1964, the previously favored leaders of Guinea, Ghana, and other nations were deposed. This was primarily because the Soviet Union focused on courting the individual leaders of these movements, rather than the majority of the members in the unions. As exemplified by Cuba, the latter strategy worked much better, but it was untenable for the Soviet Union, especially considering the potentially larger consequences of global war. The Soviet Union was not willing to risk global war, and this unwillingness translated to less aid for these regimes. Consequently, Khrushchev was surprised when these regimes were not open to Soviet ideology.

All in all, there were a few major weaknesses in the Soviet plan to develop socialist regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa. The first was unrealistic expectations from nations which had barely had a chance to develop national identity, let alone class consciousness. The second was restraining their aid, which as a result affected local politicians' decisions to implement socialist reforms. The final weakness was an inability on Khrushchev's part to recognize these key failures. As a result, the Soviet Union lost a lot of potential political capital with these nations. All of these weaknesses were detrimental to the
Bibliography


