

COLD WAR ADAPTATION MECHANISMS OF WEST AFRICAN STATES IN 1960S-1980S

Alexander Shipilov¹

Institute of World History RAS/MGIMO University, RUDN University

Abstract: In the wake of independence in 1950s-1960s, the States of West Africa faced the need to choose a foreign policy course under the regional confrontation between Western and socialist countries. For the newly independent countries key issues were relations with their former colonizers, willingness to cooperate with them or the desire to escape their influence, as well as a military and political presence. In addition, West African countries had to choose the degree and format of cooperation with the socialist bloc, depending on the ideological orientation towards the USSR, the United States or the non-alignment policy. Matters of regional and sub-regional leadership ambitions were also highly important. Conversely, despite the commonality of development and independence issues, West African countries chose very different strategies in the context of the Cold War. The chosen course depended on the conditions of independence, as well as the availability of resources and regional ambitions. Ivory Coast and Senegal preferred to maintain close military, economic and political ties with France and enjoy its support in regional leadership ambitions. This limited their ties with the USSR and other socialist countries. Liberia in its turn pursued consistent pro-US foreign policy in the 1960s and 1980s, acting as a regional ally in the struggle against communist influence. Guinea, having gained independence before the rest of the French colonies in 1958, found itself in a confrontation with France so its leadership chose to closely cooperate with the USSR. Ghana also actively cooperated with the USSR in the 1960s to promote pan-Africanism and its own regional ambitions. Sierra Leone, on the other hand, pursued a course of pragmatic cooperation and receiving assistance from all major international players, in practice implementing the principles of non-alignment. In general Cold War strategies relevant to small countries used in West Africa attracted presence of external powers and determined their further development and security risks.

Keywords: *West Africa, Cold War, adaptation mechanisms, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Ghana, Ivory Coast.*

INTRODUCTION

The decolonization of African countries, which began in the second half of the 1950s, led to the emergence of new independent States with significant resources and borders inherited from colonial empires, infrastructure, organization of social and political structure. The entry of these states into the system of international relations in the context of the Cold War was accompanied by a struggle for their involvement between the Western and socialist blocs. These international conditions have become one of the main factors that influenced the formation of the

¹ alexmo1994@gmail.com

foreign policy of the newly independent African States, their strategy of expanding independence, ensuring development and the opportunity to take their own place in global politically significant processes. The showcase of a particular subregion, West Africa, presents an array of ways in which African states have adapted to this global environment, characterized by diversity and even various degrees of polarity. In the given paper the author seeks to examine the basis for such diversity and reasons why states in similar geographic and economic position pursued drastically diverging foreign policy. The author relies on typical historical methodology and the use of archival material, in part personally extracted.

FUNDAMENTALS OF THE INTERACTION OF AFRICAN STATES WITH THE PARTIES OF THE COLD WAR

The interaction of African states with the two blocs was dictated to a large extent by the raw orientation of their economies, the need to strengthen and re-create key public and state institutions and overcome established forms of dependence on former colonialists, which is rightly emphasized to supporters of neo-Marxist and postcolonial approaches to the study of African history (Amin, 1968, pp. 208-209; Taylor, 2020, p. 50; Kassae, Ivkina, 2020, p. 28). In this situation, African countries faced a fundamental choice of a model of interaction with the outside world in an environment of confrontation between two systems (Shipilov 2019: 208). One of the possible options was to maintain relations with the former colonizers and join the world economy and the system of international relations on the terms that were mainly determined by France, Great Britain and smaller European powers. An alternative to this could be priority cooperation with the United States, which is ready to take into account the interests of the African side to a greater extent, to promote its development and the formation of independent institutions, but on condition of maintaining political loyalty and a model of economic relations that is most beneficial for American business (Rothermund, 2014, p. 23). In these cases, the possibility of political and other interaction of African countries with the States of the socialist bloc was sharply limited².

Along with this, some African countries were interested in cooperation with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. For them, it seemed to be an alternative to the colonizers and a source of help, thanks to which it would be possible to overcome the previous forms of dependence in a short time. The declared commitment of this group of countries to the principles of a non-capitalist path of development is often explained by modern researchers mainly for pragmatic reasons, and their access to the support of the socialist bloc countries is perceived as a way of material support for actual decolonization (see, for example, Mazov, 2020, p. 71).

Nevertheless, not all countries in the region have chosen the path of unambiguous foreign policy orientation towards one or another camp within the framework of the ideological confrontation between the two blocs. The countries of Asia and Africa, which had already gained independence or were preparing for it, demonstrated their isolation from the poles of the Cold War in the framework of the Bandung Conference of 1955, which laid the foundations of the non-Aligned movement.

² In addition, the countries with a significant white minority controlling power, mainly in Southern Africa, refrained from contacts with the USSR and other socialist countries (Filatova, Davidson, 2012, p. 47), however, this category of countries is outside the scope of our analysis.

Such a foreign policy position, which did not bind these countries with strict political obligations to the great powers, allowed them to cooperate with both camps and receive assistance from both sides (although not always in such volumes as those of the decolonized countries that decided on the camp) and at the same time maintain a greater degree of independence (Rothermund, 2014, p. 23). For all their political heterogeneity, representatives of non-Aligned countries mostly adhered to this line (Luthi, 2014, p. 97). Despite the nominal equidistance of this movement from the two camps, in general, since the Bandung Conference, representatives of the United States and other Western countries have treated it rather with caution, while socialist countries have approved of it. This happened within the framework of broad support by socialist countries for the desire for decolonization, even if non-communist forces predominate in anti-colonial movements. The support of the national liberation movements of Asia and Africa, as well as the organization of their interaction, was part of the policy pursued by the Comintern since the late 1920s, therefore, these countries were considered in the USSR rather as potential allies in solving at least part of international tasks³.

Realizing the possibility of such a convergence of interests of the “second” and “third” world, the American administration of the 1950s (President Eisenhower) treated this movement with distrust. Nevertheless, on the issues of decolonization, the United States maintained a more open position than the European countries – former metropolises. Unlike the latter, the American administration did not seek to preserve colonial privileges and formal inequality in the relations of the “first” and “third world”. Instead, the United States was ready to cooperate with the new leaders of independent countries in order to prevent Soviet influence in them, as well as to displace the interests of former colonial powers and provide advantages to its own capital. Even during the Eisenhower administration, in 1956, this position was expressed in diplomatic support for Egypt during the Suez crisis, and after the election of U.S. President John F. Kennedy in 1960. Kennedy’s key element of his policy was to promote the economic development of the decolonizing countries of Asia and Africa in a direction acceptable to the United States (Rothermund, 2014, p. 23, 26).

Thus, the competition of the USSR, the USA and related blocs in providing economic and other assistance to non-aligned African countries has become an important element of the global confrontation. At the same time, for the liberated countries, access to the resources of the great Powers made it possible to partially solve the socio-economic, institutional and infrastructural problems that they had faced since the 1960s. At the same time, the policy of both socialist and Western countries pursued in relation to the decolonized countries of Africa during the 1960s and 1980s was not constant and fluctuated depending on external and internal circumstances. Thus, the African policy of Jimmy Carter was more focused on the promotion of human rights, including in politically close countries, while during the Reagan administration, the most priority was the support of declaratively close political regimes ready to fight the penetration of Soviet influence in the context of the Cold War⁴.

Soviet policy on the African continent was characterized by a competition of ideological and pragmatic attitudes. The first approach required more active assis-

³ For example, in the framework of the Brussels anti-Imperialist Conference organized by representatives of the Comintern in 1927 (Miscovic, 2014, p. 2)

⁴ *Bright, N.O.* Interview with Jimmy Carter. PBS, Global Connections, Liberia. 1997. URL: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/liberia/film/jimmycarter.html>

tance to countries that had chosen a non-capitalist path of development, as well as containment of Western influence in the region, which also implied some support for conditionally non-aligned countries. The pragmatic approach to the realization of Soviet interests in Africa consisted in conducting profitable trade and economic activities in the region (with access to its mineral resource base, fish and agricultural resources) even with cooperation with ideologically distant forces, as well as providing them with assistance based on the limited capabilities of the USSR and other socialist countries (Mazov, 2020, pp. 66-72).

As a result, in many cases, Western States had more funds available to send aid to African countries. However, this could be offset by the qualitative features of aid from the socialist bloc, its concentration in the most important sectors for African states (for example, education, medicine and the development of the agricultural sector), as well as lower reporting requirements for allocated funds (Filatova, Davidson, 2012, pp. 281-282).

Thus, even African countries that did not declare their commitment to the socialist orientation were generally interested in maintaining contacts with the Soviet Union and the rest of the countries of the socialist bloc. The context of the Cold War, despite the increased regional risks associated with peripheral conflicts, has given the independence gives African countries the opportunity to use the resources of the warring parties to solve the most pressing problems of state-building, as well as, maneuvering between the great powers, to defend their own interests and increase their independence and importance in the international arena. At the same time, in the writings on the policy of the “non-aligned” during the Cold War, the interests and motivations of the largest or most influential countries claiming leadership in their own region are most often considered (see, for example, Miscovic Fischer-Tine Boscovska, 2014). The logic and principles of interaction with the outside world of small, de-facto non-aligned countries with less resource capabilities and regional political or economic ambitions are reflected to a lesser extent. This paper aims to assess what small West African countries were primarily interested in in the framework of cooperation with the poles of the Cold War and their respective allies.

SPECIFIC WEST AFRICAN CASES OF ADAPTATION STRATEGIES

West Africa is a subregion that has tried a variety of models of foreign policy interaction with both the former metropolises and the poles of the Cold War. Thus, the main part of the francophone countries of West Africa, primarily the Ivory Coast, gained independence from France in 1960 on the terms of maintaining its military presence to ensure the security of new political regimes, regulating the monetary and monetary policy of the countries of the region through the CFA franc tied to the French franc, as well as maintaining close political ties with France (Richter, 2011, p. 235)⁵. Privileged relations with Paris became the basis for the Ivory Coast for rapid economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s thanks to the development of cocoa bean production with French assistance and investment, as well as the justification for claims to political leadership in West Africa during the reign of Felix Houphouët-Boigny (Chauveau Dozon, 1985, p. 68, 71; Fauré, 1982, pp. 96-97). Such a foreign policy course also determined the restrained attitude of the leadership of the Ivory

⁵ Banque Centrale de l'Afrique de l'Ouest. URL: <http://edenpub.bceao.int/>.

Coast to the development of diplomatic relations with the USSR and other socialist countries, which were established only seven years after the country gained independence and with the approval of France, which pursued a more independent policy towards the socialist camp in comparison with other Western countries. Moreover, Soviet-Ivorian relations were severed already in 1969 due to the dissatisfaction of the Ivorian side with the policy of selecting students to study in the USSR and their possible ideological indoctrination. Diplomatic relations were restored only in 1986. At the same time, in addition to France, the leadership of the Ivory Coast maintained close economic and political ties with the United States, Germany and other representatives of the Western bloc, which is generally characteristic of those African countries that, after independence, chose a foreign policy orientation towards the former metropolis.

Liberia has become an example of a West African country that has chosen the path of political orientation towards the United States and the formation of a different, “decolonized” type of relations with Western countries. Nominally independent since 1847, it was only after the end of the Second World War and in the conditions of the beginning processes of decolonization of the continent that it began to establish active relations with the outside world. The interconnectedness with the USA was explained by the dominance since 1926 among the Liberian economic counterparties of the American firm Firestone, which displaced Great Britain as the country’s key trading partner, and the economic assistance that the country began to receive from the United States with the beginning of the presidency of William Tubman (the importance of the country as a military transshipment base on the Atlantic during the Second World War increased dramatically) (Dalton, 1965, p. 580)⁶. At the same time, in the 1950s, attempts began by the USSR and Liberia to re-establish bilateral relations (which existed with the Russian Empire from 1899 to 1917), which were crowned with success in 1956⁷. Nevertheless, the unambiguous foreign policy orientation of Liberia towards the United States during this period hindered the development of these relations and led, in particular, to the avoidance of the head of Liberia from full-fledged contacts with the Soviet side (the very establishment of diplomatic relations with the Liberian side was dictated by the desire to enlist Soviet support in the UN)⁸. Only when William Tolbert came to power in Liberia in 1971 did the situation change somewhat: the embassies were opened in 1972 in parity, as well as the development of economic relations with Cuba and Libya (Obi, 2009, pp. 122-123). In general, during his rule, Liberia adhered to a more neutral position on the key issues of the Cold War, and cooperation with the United States in the field of security was seriously limited (Kieh, 2012, p. 176). This lasted until 1979, when the embassies of the USSR and Romania were suspected of instigating anti-government protests, the so-called rice riots, which led to a reduction in the size of diplomatic

6 Papers Relating to the foreign relations of the United States. (1926). VOLUME II 882.51/1877 The Chargé in Liberia (Wharton) to the Secretary of State Monrovia, February 24, 1926. No.336. URL: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1926v02/d339>.

7 Note “On the course of negotiations of the Soviet government delegation with the Government of Liberia on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the USSR and Liberia.” January 24, 1956 / The History of Africa in documents, 1870-1960. Volume 2./ Ed. A.Davidson, 2005. p. 596.

8 J. Roberts to N.S. Khrushchev. Request for financial assistance in the construction of a clinic and school in the settlement of Virginia. May 20, 1961 / Russia and Africa – documents and materials of 1961 – early 1970s, p. 405; Note of the II African Department of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs on trade relations between the USSR and Liberia. July 23, 1962, Russia and Africa – Documents and materials of 1961 – early 1970s, pp. 409-410.

missions. Deposed in April 1980 In order to strengthen his personal power and under the pressure of increased Liberian debts, Samuel Doe chose a strategy of unambiguous foreign policy orientation towards the United States and close ties with the Reagan administration, offering himself as the main ally in the fight against the communist threat on the African continent⁹. This led to the complete severance of diplomatic relations with the USSR in 1982. Later, in 1987, they were restored due to difficulties in obtaining new volumes of American economic aid by Liberia, as well as in connection with the beginning of perestroika in the USSR, but in general, the pro-American course of Liberia remained until the end of the Cold War and the beginning of its own civil conflict in 1989 (Kieh, 2012, p. 180).

Guinea has become the most characteristic example of a West African country that has chosen the path of socialist orientation and priority cooperation with the countries of the socialist bloc. It stood out sharply from the majority of the Francophone countries of the region and the former French colonies by the fact that in 1958 it became the only one of them that chose independence from France in a referendum instead of expanded autonomy with the preservation of the sovereignty of Paris. This choice led to a sharp break with the former metropolis and the search for other sources of financial and economic support, the development of new institutions and infrastructure (Adamolekun, 1976, p. 56). This was one of the main reasons why the regime of Ahmed Sekou-Toure, who was in power in Guinea, chose a course of rapprochement with the USSR and receiving various types of assistance from the countries of the “second world”.

Ghana became the most influential country that claimed regional leadership and actively participated in the development of the African and world agenda of decolonization and non-alignment. It was the first in Africa to free itself from colonial rule, declaring independence in 1957. Its leader, Kwame Nkrumah, was one of the key ideologists of pan-Africanism and in 1955, representing it in the status of the British Gold Coast, took part in the Bandung Conference, and in 1963 became the main initiator of the creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Nevertheless, with formal active participation in the Non-Aligned Movement, Ghana, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, was politically very close to the USSR, which was expressed not only in the Soviet economic assistance it received, but also in sending political advisers there (for example, Vladimir Aboltin, who contributed to the composition of the country's economic development program, as well as the OAU) (Mazov, 2020, pp. 66-72). In general, before the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah in 1966 Ghana was one of the key political and economic partners of the USSR in Africa, and also claimed regional leadership, given Ghana's institutional capabilities within the framework of the OAU. In contrast, Sierra Leone can be attributed more to small non-aligned countries, devoid of large-scale ambitions of regional expansion and interested primarily in solving key issues of their own existence and development, building more even relations with both the USSR and the United States than the government of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana.

Sierra Leone presented a rather peculiar case of co-opting into the Cold War international context. The economic model inherited from British colonial rule, based on the export of mineral and agricultural resources, also influenced the interna-

⁹ Remarks of the President and Head of State Samuel K. Doe of Liberia Following Their Meetings. Reagan Presidential Library. August 17, 1982. URL: <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/81782d>.

tional situation of Sierra Leone, one of the poorest countries in the region (Zotova, Smirnov, Frenkel, 1994, p. 221; Keen, 2005, p. 36). By the end of the 1970s, the vulnerability of the country was partially compensated by the formation of common mechanisms of military and political support with neighboring Liberia and Guinea, which focused on different poles of the Cold War, but were interested in the stability of their own regimes¹⁰. In general, Sierra Leone was of rather limited interest to major world powers, mainly related to the country's resource capabilities, and it was this that significantly influenced the formation of national foreign policy in the 1960s and 1980s, and, in particular, relations with the countries of the socialist bloc.

The foreign policy of postcolonial Sierra Leone was based on relations with the former metropolis. Britain, having granted Sierra Leone independence, retained great political influence in the country, including in the military-political sphere, and the development of the most critical infrastructure of the young state depended on British assistance (for example, the construction of the capital's Lungi airport). Significant volumes of trade, economic and infrastructural assistance linked Sierra Leone with other Western economies, primarily the United States, Germany, Canada, France and Japan, which was also facilitated by the experience of cooperation between the country's first leaders with the outgoing colonial administration. Nevertheless, the internal political contradictions determined by ethnic and regional competition, did not lead to the polarization of the foreign policy courses proposed by the two opposing groups. This applied, among other things, to the socialist countries. Unlike the Ivory Coast or Liberia the leadership of Sierra Leone as early as the 1960s did not limit ties with the "second world" and immediately after gaining independence in 1961 established diplomatic relations with the USSR and other socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Bilateral relations with the USSR intensified in 1965, when a mission was initiated to establish trade and good-neighbourly relations - the Government of Sierra Leone approved the signing of a trade agreement with the USSR, a Protocol on the supply of machinery and equipment, an agreement on technical and cultural assistance. In February 1965, a proposal was initiated to send a Sierra Leone trade mission to the USSR¹¹. Within its framework, the Government decided to explore the possibility of opening an embassy of Sierra Leone in the USSR (the USSR Embassy in Freetown had already been opened by that time). During the mission, it was discussed receiving Soviet aid for the development of agriculture and natural resources, as well as for the modernization of railways. Representatives of Sierra Leone also visited Germany and Czechoslovakia, where they agreed on the terms of trade and the provision of technical and other assistance, regardless of the ideological attitudes of the counterparties¹². Such cooperation further intensified in the 1970's and early 1980's as a one-party regime was established by Siaka Stevens that distanced itself from Britain. Overall this example is representative of small regional states pursuing non-alignment in order to promote primar-

10 Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance of Defence. ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES. - Freetown, 29 May 1981. URL: http://www.operationspaix.net/DATA/DOCUMENT/3827~v-Protocole_d_Assistance_Mutuelle_en_matiere_de_Defense.pdf

11 PROPOSED SIERRA LEONE TRADE MISSION TO THE U.S.S.R. Extract from Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held on 31st Dec., 1964. Sierra Leone Public Archives office. Box 655. RG 4/ IA1162.

12 REPORT BY THE MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY ON THE TRADE AND GOODWILL MISSION TO WESTERN GERMANY, CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND U.S.S.R. Cabinet Conclusions CP (65) 284 on 27th May, 1965. Sierra Leone Public Archives office. Box 655. RG 4/ IA1162. Pp.8-19.

ily economic and social development goals rather than pursue regional leadership ambitions like Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah regime.

CONCLUSION

Thus, a variety of approaches to the development of foreign policy in the context of the Cold War were practiced among the states of West Africa, which also influenced their relations with socialist countries. These approaches depended to a great extent on the colonial past of such states, the policies that their former colonial powers pursued and the particular manner in which they got decolonized. Other important aspects that contributed to the foreign policy choices made by West African states were the size and specialization of their economy, needs and limitations of their economic and social development and, rather importantly, their regional political ambitions. Hence it is important to note that despite the heavy influence that external players had on states of the region during the Cold War era, countries and their elites have obtained enough agency to make independent choices on their foreign policy preferences and use the resources provided by cooperation with great powers of the time to advance their own unique agenda, ranging from overcoming economic dependency and most pressing social issues to raising a particular country's regional political profile.

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