**Decolonization in Africa and effects**

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**The Year of Africa**

When decolonization began, there were reasons for optimism. The year 1960 was heralded throughout Africa and the West as "the Year of Africa" for the inspiring change that swept the continent. During that year, the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa shook the world to awaken to the horrors of white minority rule as South African police fired into a crowd of peaceful black protesters, killing sixty-nine in full view of photographers and reporters. Also in 1960, seventeen African territories gained independence from the strong arm of European colonial rule. These seventeen nations joined the United Nation's General Assembly and gave greater voice to the non-Western world.

Fully recognizing the potential for the remarkable change that African independence could bring to global politics, on February 3, 1960, Harold Macmillan, prime minister of Great Britain from 1957 to 1963, delivered his famous speech, "Wind of Change," to the South African parliament. "The growth of national consciousness in Africa is a political fact," Macmillan said, "and we must accept it as such. … I believe that if we cannot do so we may imperil the precarious balance between the East and West on which the peace of the world depends." He cautioned Western nations to change their behavior toward Africa to prevent the continent from falling under the sway of the East.

**The Cold War**

It was this fear of Soviet influence in Africa, particularly on the part of the United States, that created such a major problem for African nations. Western powers viewed African independence through the lens of the Cold War, which rendered African leaders as either pro-West or pro-East; there was little acceptable middle ground. Naïvely, most African leaders believed that they could navigate the political land mines of the Cold War through political neutrality.

Nonetheless, as Africans declared themselves nonaligned, pro-West, or Marxist sympathizers, Cold War politics deprived them of the freedom to truly shape their political paths. Combined with the strong residue of the colonial political structure, African leaders designed their internal and external politics mindful of the Western powers' vigilance against socialist or communist influences.

Although Western European powers granted aid to African nations, they also coerced governments to support their agendas and instigated and aided coups against democratically elected governments. They also fomented civil unrest to ensure that governments friendly to their Cold War agenda remained in power and those that were not were removed by political machinations or assassination.

In the Congo, for example, Joseph Mobutu took a strong anti-communist position and was subsequently rewarded by Western powers. It mattered little that in 1960 he helped orchestrate the coup that removed and ultimately brought about the murder of Patrice Lumumba, was among the most anti-democratic leaders on the continent, and siphoned Western aid and revenue from the nation's natural resources into personal accounts. Mobutu's rise to power and economic and political damage to Congo in the process—with the help of his Western allies—demonstrates that the politics of the Cold War, more than anything else, defined the successes and failures of African decolonization.

**Neo Colonialism & Bandung**

Early in the decolonization process, there were fleeting moments in which the emerging African and Asian nations did seek to shift away from the Cold War's East-West dominance. Foremost among these initiatives was the 1955 Bandung Conference, held in Bandung, Indonesia, from April 18 to 24, 1955. Representatives from twenty-nine Asian and African countries gathered to chart a course for neutrality in the Cold War conflict. The attendees agreed that to avoid being trapped within a Western or Soviet political orbit, developing nations must not rely on the industrialized powers for economic and political aid. Therefore, they vowed to work together by pooling their developmental and technological resources to establish an economic and political sphere, a third way, to counterbalance the West and the Soviet Union.

However, it was a challenge for African nations to forge international links beyond words on paper: few national networks of administration, communication, or transportation within their borders operated consistently and effectively. In addition, the senior administrators who ran the colonies were removed with European rule, to be replaced by Africans with far less experience. Moreover, the political system that African leaders inherited was structured to benefit the evolving ruling classes with little regard for the needs of the people. There were few real efforts beyond the political speeches of Kwame Nkrumah—Ghana's first president, in power from 1957 to 1966—and the words of the founding charter of the Organization of African Unity to look beyond these accepted borders toward pan-Africanist or even regional confederations.

Moreover, the failure to dismantle the internal political structures imposed by European colonial regimes allowed ethnic and regional-based political competition (which acted as such a strong obstacle to national unity and progressive rule) to remain at the core of local and national political structures. Generally, the absence of national identities and political movements facilitated the continued intervention of the former colonial powers in Africa's internal affairs.

In addition, with few exceptions, European powers continued to dominate the economic affairs of the former colonies. Under European rule, people were forced to grow cash crops. This practice continued after independence, and the farmers remained vulnerable to the vagaries of the world market. A fall in world prices created political instability. This was the case in Ghana in the 1960s when the price of cocoa collapsed, and in Rwanda in the 1980s, when the price of coffee fell. The former contributed to Nkrumah's fall from power in 1966, and the latter to civil war and ultimately genocide in the early 1990s.

**Pan-Africanism and Kwame Nkrumah**

The most outstanding post-independence leaders were cognizant of the challenges of the Cold War and ongoing European economic and political influence and sought remedies to ensure the autonomy and development of their nations. Few pursued initiatives that transformed their nations into bastions of economic and political stability. Nonetheless, they worked steadfastly to dismantle the colonial political structures and replaced them with systems that reflected the history, culture, and needs of the people.

In addition to launching a bold and expansive, if economically unviable, industrializing program, Kwame Nkrumah believed in the political and economic unification of the African continent. A federally unified state, he argued, would allow Africa to pool resources to rebuild the continent for the benefit of its people as opposed to multinational corporations.