CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The year 1960 is sometimes called the "Year of Africa" — the year that witnessed the emergence into independence of several Black African countries. The process had begun three years earlier, in 1957, when Ghana became free with Kwame Nkrumah as its Prime Minister. Black Africa was not regarded in the years immediately following the end of World War II as a "priority area" for the United States. Those areas were regarded as the responsibility and preserve of the European colonial rulers who were allies of the United States and the latter did not wish to intrude into the sphere of influence of its allies. The factors that brought about a change in American attitude were the process of decolonization, strategic interests, the need for access to raw materials, prevention of the extension of Soviet influence, and building of economic, political and cultural relations aimed at inducing the countries to remain oriented towards the West in general and the United States in particular. ¹

The emergence of Ghana gave a significant impetus to the momentum in the direction of decolonization. Nkrumah became the most articulate advocate of African liberation. To speed the

process of decolonization, a series of precedent-setting international conferences were held in Africa by Africans in 1958, two of which were hosted by Ghana. Thus, Vernon Mekay points out, "the year 1958 marks a turning point in Africa's international relations and a subsequent shift in American policy toward Africa." 2

For the American policy-makers putting Africa in proper perspective within the range of national priorities has always been difficult, because of the dual and often contradictory commitments that the United States shared with regard to the colonial question. 3 On the one hand, they felt committed to the concept of freedom for non-self-governing countries of Africa. On the other hand, they were allied with the European colonial powers in a global defence network for the defence of the "Free World". The United States considered its NATO alliance and its ties with its European allies indispensable for its own security and survival. It was unwilling to challenge the African possessions as long as any such move might weaken or undermine the alliance and endanger Western unity against "Communist expansionism". The policy-makers tried to steer a course of uttering vague indications of support to African aspirations for freedom and avoiding of actions that might be regarded as inimical to the interests of its NATO allies. There were elements within

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the government and outside that were critical of such an ambivalent course and that called for a more positive American posture towards the issue of elimination of colonialism.

It was not as though American policy-makers were unaware of the importance of Africa or that they were willing to envisage or endorse the continuance of European control over vast areas in Africa for a prolonged period. American Corporations were aware of the opportunities that might open up for them when colonial ties were dissolved and the privileged position of their European competitors removed. Equal access to American interests could not be made available so long as European masters controlled the doors of opportunities in Africa. Military planners, drawing on the experience of the Second World War, remained interested in the potential use of African facilities in a possible future conflict against the Soviet Union. Captains of industry and resource planners did not remain oblivious of the many vital raw materials that America would continue to need from Africa. And policy-makers were alive to the importance of ensuring access to these resources for the United States and averting the passing of influence and control over these resources into the hands of the Soviet Union. Politically too, the growing demand not only from the liberals but from the increasingly articulate elements among American Blacks could not be ignored. For these reasons, American policy-makers were poised to respond quickly, once an opening was crested towards decolonization by any of their European allies. Thus, when the British Government initiated steps towards independence for the
Ghana, American policy-makers were not lagging behind in devising ways and means to establish relations with the emerging nation and to promote American objectives in Ghana in general and Africa in particular.

Official statements made from time to time indicate the evolution of American policy sketched above. McKee has discussed various aspects relating to American interests and policies comprehensively in his work *Africa in World Politics*. In the immediate post-war period, American policy-makers tended to refer to a statement that had been made by Secretary of State Cordell Hull in July 1942 to the effect that the United States supported the principle of self-government or independence for all people who had the desire and the capacity for it. It was a posture intended to appease both the African nationalists as well as the colonial powers since it could be explained appropriately to either of them.

The Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, George McGhee, touched on the issue cautiously in a speech on 8 May 1950 before the Foreign Policy Association, Oklahoma City. McGhee regarded Africa as a region in which the United States had "few direct responsibilities". Although tensions in several parts of Africa were mounting up, still "it is not a crisis area". It "is imperative that advantage be taken of the absence of pressure to plan against the time when such

4. See McKee, n. 2, pp. 245-356.
pressure may be applied", the Assistant Secretary added. He went on to urge that advantage must be taken of this period of grace to further the development within Africa of healthy political, economic and social institutions "to create an understanding on the part of the Africans of the forces of communism which are disturbing the peace and security of hundreds of millions of people elsewhere in the world, and to inspire a determination to resist these forces." Further, McGhee said that "even though we do not have direct responsibilities in the case of much of Africa, we Americans cannot neglect Africa because it is quiescent in the present crisis. We must play in co-operation with others, the part which our position in the world demands that we play," he added. Describing European sensibilities to the colonial question, he said:

An important factor affecting the nature and direction of our Africa policy is the attitude of the European powers themselves toward us, which is at the same time friendly, critical, and suspicious...these powers are fearful of what they regard as an apparent American tendency to give indiscriminate and uncritical support to movements toward self-government or independence without adequate consideration of the experience and resources of the people concerned.... The European powers are convinced that the rate of political advancement for their dependent peoples must be carefully geared to the tempo of progress in economic, social, and educational institutions. They feel that they understand the situation better than we, and are, in many cases, proud of the progress which has been made. 6


McGhee emphatically declared that the United States had "no desire to assume responsibilities borne by other powers". Speaking of the importance of Africa from the long-term interests of the United States he added: "We must continue to have access to Africa's vital reservoir of minerals which are critical stockpile items in the United States, manganese, chrome ore, rubber, industrial diamonds essential to our machine-tool industry, asbestos, and many other important minerals." 7

Ambivalence continued to be reflected in a policy statement made more than three years later by McGhee's successor, Henry A. Byroade on 30 October 1953 before the World Affairs Council of Northern California at Asilomar, California. Vernon McKay describes the speech as "the classic masterpiece of American ambiguity" on the colonial question. 8

Byroade stated that Africa was surcharged with emotions focussed primarily on questions such as "imperialism", "colonialism" and "nationalism". But the movement for self-determination "has recently encountered a tragic paradox" because of the "new Soviet colonialism...which masquerades under the guise of nationalism". He said that the United States believed "in eventual self-determination of all people through evolutionary process". He spelled out his position in these terms:

7. Ibid., p. 1002.
8. See McKay, n. 2, p. 320.
The world is a shrinking community.... The withdrawal of foreign influence not yet capable of independent existence... will create a power vacuum, an area of weakness which invites internal disorder and external aggression.

When dependent peoples attain self-determination, we want it to be real, and we want it to endure... and that they should be able to maintain their independence against the new Soviet imperialism and any other form of tyranny.... If a few additional years of evolution can make the difference between a self-determination that endures and a reversion to dependency or chaos, the years will not be wasted. 10

Byroade had gentle words to say about the role of the colonial powers. He said:

Let us be frank in recognizing our stake in the strength and stability of certain European nations, our allies, which exercise influence in the dependent areas... in particular, we cannot ignore the legitimate economic interests which European nations possess in certain dependent territories. Nor can we forget the importance of these interests to the European economy which we have contributed so much to support. There has been much talk about "economic exploitation" of dependent people. Too little attention has been paid to the economic relations between the European nations and overseas territories which are beneficial to both parties.... A sudden break in economic relations might seriously injure the European economies upon which our Atlantic defense system depends. 11

Byroade said that the United States did not propose that the rights of dependent peoples should be subordinated to the interests of the European powers. He reiterated, however, that "an evolutionary approach to self-determination can help to

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10. Ibid., p. 656.
11. Ibid., p. 657.
preserve legitimate European interests in foreign territories while...giving these territories economic opportunities and benefits which would be lost by a complete severance of relations. 12

The Byroade approach was thus not one that could evoke any enthusiasm from African nationalists struggling for national liberation. However, the United States Congress expressed its appreciation of the great strides made by the Gold Coast colony towards achievement of self-government. The President approved a joint resolution of the Congress on 27 August 1954, extending greetings to the Gold Coast Legislative Assembly. 13

Three years after Byroade's speech, however, on 21 April 1956, we find his successor, George V. Allen declaring: "A strong, free, and friendly Africa is extremely important to United States security." 14 It heralded the fact that the United States had begun to take cognizance of "the winds of change" in Africa in the context of the changed international circumstances. Kwame Nkrumah was Prime Minister of the Gold Coast Colony which was clearly moving in the direction of independence. The demand for a speedy end to colonialism was being pressed not only by the Soviet Union and its allies but by India and the non-aligned

12. Ibid.
nations and even by Asian military allies of the United States
in the UN and other forums.

In October 1956, the Eisenhower Administration took
a public posture of opposition to the Anglo-French-Israeli
intervention against Egypt. The American Government appeared to
have not only turned its back on its historical allies, but it
took the lead in the United Nations in demanding that their
forces must evacuate Egyptian territory forthwith. Vice President
Richard Nixon asserted that the course of action pursued by the
United States should convince the people of Asia and Africa that
the United States did not believe in applying different standards
to the "East and the West" and that it did not subscribe at all
to the doctrine of the "white man's burden". The United States
had "met the test of history" and as a result of its lead, "the
United Nations had been saved", Nixon said. 15 Secretary of
State John Foster Dulles declared that the United States Govern-
ment took one of its most difficult and momentous decisions in
recent times when it resolved to be loyal to its commitments to
the United Nations rather than to its historical ties with
Britain and France. 16 The change of attitude was further reflec-
ted in December 1956, when the United States joined the Soviet
Union for the first time in voting in the UN Trusteeship Council

15. "Address by Vice President Nixon, December 6, 1956", U.S.
Department of State, United States Policy in the Middle
7-8.

on a procedural question regarding a new status for French Togoland to which France was opposed. 17

By this time some voices began to be raised in Congress calling upon the Administration to take a positive stance towards aiding the newly independent African countries. Senator Theodore Francis Green (Democrat, Rhode Island), Chairman of the Sub Committee on Near Eastern and African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations undertook a tour of Africa (4 September-18 October 1956) to examine the operation of American aid programmes in thirteen African countries. In his report on 21 February 1957 he described Africa as "a continent in ferment". He stated that American policy "had failed to keep pace with fast moving developments and to anticipate their relentless sweep". "We have given insufficient attention either to the needs of this great region or to our own important stake in our future", Senator Green added. 18 Asserting that "Africa stands on the threshold of a burgeoning social and political upheaval", Green urged the United States to proceed in such fashion as to promote the African march towards freedom without endangering the relations between the African countries and their respective metropolitan nations. The Senator said:

It is fitting that the United States should support the aspirations of dependent people who desire to

17. See Waldemer A. Nielson, n. 1, p. 265.

achieve a national existence of their own. But these laudable and idealistic sentiments should not blind us to the risks inherent in encouraging less advanced people to break prematurely with the metropolitan countries. It is a disservice to say people to turn it loose in the community of nations before it is ready to assume the responsibility not only of government administration but of sustaining a satisfactory economic existence.

The cold war with the Soviet Union was another major factor in the thinking of the Eisenhower Administration and the architect of its foreign policy, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. The advent to power of Nikita Khrushchev and the skilful and flexible policies that the Soviet leader initiated in support of national liberation movements in the underdeveloped regions of the world spurred the United States to take action calculated to win the goodwill of elite groups in the emerging African nations and offset the growth of Soviet influence.

In July 1956 in the State Department, a comprehensive paper was prepared on the political and economic developments in the Gold Coast and its progress towards self-government. The paper noted that British colonial policy had as its objectives "the advancement of the people of the Gold Coast to eventual self-government within the framework of the British Commonwealth of Nations". It referred to a major project to be developed, the Volta River Project whose cost was to be shared by the Gold Coast and United Kingdom Government and with which United Kingdom

19. Ibid., p. 650.
and Canadian aluminium interests were to be associated. The paper thus described American policy towards developments in the Gold Coast:

United States is one of sympathy for efforts toward independence and self-government which are truly expressive of the desires of the people and as they demonstrate the capability to establish and protect free institutions. As the Gold Coast nears independence, United States policy aims at maintaining and expanding the existing friendship between the two countries and convincing the people of the Gold Coast that their best interest lies in continued close association with the nations of the Free World.

When the date was set for freedom for Ghana, Secretary of State Dulles sent a memorandum to President Eisenhower on 8 January 1957: "I believe that this event deserves special attention from the United States Government," A week later Congresswoman Frances P. Bolton (Republican, Ohio), member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives wrote to the President suggesting that a truly high-level United States delegation should be sent to Ghana to participate in its independence celebration. She declared that "what we do toward this emerging country of Ghana on March 6th can well decide our influence in that great awakening continent for a century or

21. Ibid., pp. 4-5.
22. Ibid., p. 5.
23. Memorandum from John Foster Dulles to President, January 8, 1957, Central Files, Official File of 304, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.
Eisenhower responded by deputing Vice President Richard M. Nixon to head the American delegation. To Mrs Bolton the President wrote that the importance of Africa was great and was steadily growing. He added that "significant values would accrue from a visit by the Vice President to the Gold Coast Colony." It is revealing that even in designating his Vice President to the independence celebration of an African country, the President tended to use the word "colony".

On 14 February 1957 Secretary Dulles announced the appointment of the United States delegation to accompany Vice President Nixon for ceremonies marking independence of Ghana. Apart from Nixon, members of the delegation were to be Congresswoman Frances P. Bolton, Black Congressmen Charles C. Diggs (Democrat, Michigan), Walter A. Gordon, a Black and Governor of Virgin Islands, and Mason Sears, US representative on the UN Trusteeship Council.

Apart from Ghana, Nixon visited Morocco, Liberia, Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan, Libya and Tunisia during this tour which lasted from 23 February to 21 March 1957. In his report at the


end of the tour he spoke of "the tremendous potentialities of this great continent." The course of Africa's development "could well prove to be the decisive factor in the conflict between forces of freedom and international communism", Nixon wrote. He emphasized that the "Free World" had a "vital interest in assisting the leaders of Africa to maintain and develop governmental institutions which are based on principles of freedom and democracy". He added:

"Herein lies the wider significance of the emergence of the new nation of Ghana. The eyes of the peoples of Africa South of Sahara, and of Western Europe particularly, will be upon this new state to see whether the orderly transition which has taken place from dependent to independent status, and whether the retention of close ties on a basis of equality with the British Commonwealth, will continue to work successfully and thereby present a formula of possible application in other cases. By the same token, inimical forces will be closely following the situation to see whether any openings present themselves for exploitation in a manner which would enable them to disrupt and destroy the independence which Ghana seeks to achieve." 27

Referring specifically to Ghana, the Vice President stated:

"Nor is the situation peculiar to Ghana. The same factors are present everywhere among the independent states which I visited. Africa is emerging as one of the great forces in the world today. In a world in which, because of advances in technology, the influence of ideas and principles is becoming increasingly important in the battle for men's minds, we in the United States must come to know, to understand and to find a common ground with the peoples of this great continent." 28

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28. Ibid.
The Vice President described Prime Minister Nkrumah of Ghana as an African leader who could be "compared most favourably with the great leaders of the world". Nixon urged as his first recommendation the need for the United States to get to know better Nkrumah and other leaders of emerging Africa. 29

The Vice President mentioned that his discussions with African leaders had convinced him that American private investment was welcome in Africa. He reported that the African leaders had indicated "preference for developing their economics through encouraging the investment of private capital and through loans from international agencies like the World Bank wherever feasible rather than through government to government grants. 30

A spokesman of the Eisenhower Administration made a friendly public reference to the first Conference of Independent African States held at Accra in April 1958. William M. Rountree, Assistant Secretary of State for Near East, South Asian and African Affairs, told the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations:

"... The Conference at Accra was a good example of a healthy trend in Africa toward the establishment of co-operative regional ties. Indigenously inspired and organized, the Accra Conference made a display of authoritative and responsible African nationalism contrasted sharply with the Soviet and communist Chinese attempts to control the Cairo-held Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference for propaganda purposes. 31"

29. Ibid.


Even at this time other spokesmen as for instance, Julius C. Holmes, interim Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, continued to warn of the "dangers of premature independence" and to praise the role of the colonial powers in building up the administration, education and economy of the area in preparation for their eventual self-government. The approach of the United States appeared to be to avoid any precipitate action even in respect of African countries that had attained freedom that might be regarded as unwelcome or unfriendly by the erstwhile metropolitan nation. Indeed, there was significant agreement in the Executive branch as well as in the Congress with the concept that the continued maintenance of economic relations between the metropolitan countries and their erstwhile colonies was not counter to American interest especially in view of the elimination of discriminatory treatment in favour of metropolitan interest as against American investors.

In Congress too interest in the development in Africa became manifest when on 12 March 1957 the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations released a Staff Study on Development Programmes, South of the Sahara. Referring to Ghana the Staff Study said: "Few countries at any time or place have progressed as expeditiously from the stage of tribal institutions to that of a modern state based on representative government."  

In November-December 1957, a Special Study Mission of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs visited Ghana as well as a number of African and Near Eastern countries. The Mission consisted of Wayne L. Hays of Ohio as Chairman and Barratt O'Hara of Illinois and Marguerite Stitt Church also of Ohio. In their report, published on 29 May 1958, they declared that the "spotlight of the free world is turned upon Ghana and the development of democratic institutions and traditions there, including treatment of minorities, which will have a decisive bearing on the political trends elsewhere in the free world." The report paid considerable attention to the contacts between Ghana and the Soviet Union and noted that Soviet invitation to the Prime Minister and a parliamentary delegation to visit the USSR had been accepted. It also reported "a sudden hush-hush visit to Accra of Russian trade group", a few days before the arrival of the Study Group in Accra and noted that the Government of Ghana had announced that it would exchange trade delegation with the Soviet Union. The Study Group was confident, however, that the new states like Ghana which needed economic assistance would invariably turn to the United States. While stating that there was no inherent obligation on the part of the United States to provide aid, the group declared that the American approach to assistance should be no less realistic than that of the Communists. If Ghana requested American technical assistance, the Study Group said "considerations should be given to working
out of co-operative ventures with the British. 34

The Study team made a reference to a project that was close to the heart of Kwame Nkrumah. "The Prime Minister has personally sponsored a very ambitious development program for the Volta river...the seeking of support for this project has assumed crusade proportions and the personal prestige at home of the Prime Minister hangs on the balance," the report said. 35 The Study team made no reference to the possibility of American association in the realization of the Volta River Project. Apparently, aware of the British Government's projected collaboration with the Government of Ghana in the project and the association of British and Canadian aluminium interests with it, the Study team probably did not regard it as a venture in which the United States should seek to play a role.

The present work will be concerned with the evolution of American policy towards aid to this very venture in Ghana -- the Volta River Project. An effort will be made to examine the factors and the influence in American policy as it evolved leading first to Eisenhower's letter to Nkrumah offering to explore the possibility of assistance in respect of the Volta River Project and next to Kennedy's letter of 29 June 1961


35. Ibid., p. 24.
to Nkrumah informing him virtually committing American Government’s share of the financing of the project, and culminating in the inauguration ceremonies marking the opening of the Volta Dam by Nkrumah on 22 January 1966 when Lyndon B. Johnson was President of the United States.