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Innocent Abroad? Decolonisation and US Engagement with French West Africa, 1945–56

Martin C. Thomas

This article investigates America's deepening involvement in the politics, finance and international trade of francophone West Africa in the decade after World War II. It does so by analysing two constituencies of opinion: the US consular service across French West Africa and the network of American business interests then developing throughout the region. These actors, although closest to the events described, have yet to receive much attention in analyses of US policymaking in Africa. The reports, intelligence estimates, and opinions of consular officials and US businessmen were pivotal to the attitudinal formation of policymakers in the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, few of whom had much experience of West African affairs. The article traces American engagement with the post-war politics of French black Africa, and discerns a shift in US policy interests from concern with economic development, investment potential and improved living standards to more narrowly strategic concerns. By 1952 the promise of US-driven economic modernization had given way to a reductive vision of West African decolonisation informed by Cold War calculations of political advantage.

It cannot be claimed that the eight French-speaking colonies of sub-Saharan western Africa have generated much interest among historians of post-war American foreign policy. 'Hardly surprising' some might reply, and merely a true reflection of West Africa's lowly place in the diplomatic architecture of US overseas influence. Take account of US exceptionalism, and what Amy Kaplan terms 'the absence of empire from the study of American culture'. Take account too, of the absence of the United States from the postcolonial study of imperialism, and Washington's apparent disdain for francophone black Africa appears self-evident.¹ It was, after all, a commonplace among American diplomats and political analysts in the post-war decade to insist that US global power rested on solid foundations entirely separate from the

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rickety colonial structures that underpinned European influence in Africa and beyond.² French historian Pierre Mélandri goes so far as to suggest that, until at least 1955, one need go no further than the organisational hierarchy of State Department regional bureaus to discern the lack of foreign policy interest in Africa south of the Sahara.³ It is a view echoed by Crawford Young, who remarked that the State Department's creation of a Bureau of African Affairs in 1958 'symbolized the birth of an African policy', or, more precisely, of a rounded approach to US policy-making in black African territories.⁴

Writing some 25 years ago, another specialist commentator, Thomas Noer, was less forgiving. In his words, diplomatic historians' reluctance to engage with US involvement in Africa after the Second World War was a case of 'non-benign neglect', implicitly at least, a kind of historical replication of the iniquities of colonialism. Has much changed since then? In 2001, Ebere Nwaubani, one of the few scholars to shine a light on US concerns in French and British West Africa after 1945, amplified Noer's comment, pointing out that the proliferation of histories of US-African relations have remained overwhelmingly crisis-driven.⁵ South African apartheid, the Congo Crisis of the early 1960s, the internationalisation of Algeria's bloody struggle for independence and Portuguese Africa's protracted proxy wars have, quite understandably, tempted scholars far more than the more peaceful transitions from formal European Empire in French and British West Africa in the two decades after 1945.⁶ Decolonisation without the guerrillas and the guns may be something to be applauded, but, it seems, does not make for such riveting history.

Yet such observations are always a matter of degree. Political violence and popular protest were endemic to French West Africa's decolonisation, and the process was every bit as contested as in other better-known African theatres where armed insurgencies eventually wrested power from the colonial state. Moreover, France's western African colonies, separately administered but also federated into the larger collective of French West Africa, have elicited tremendous interest among Africanists, social anthropologists and colonial historians as laboratories of French imperial doctrine and cultural exchange and as prime examples of the consequences of rapacious capitalist exploitation.⁷ Surely the colonial assault on indigenous cultures, the spread of multinational corporations and the high incidence of industrial disputes and labour conflict should excite the diplomatic historian just as they animated State Department specialists at the time? The glaring contradictions between professed US anti-colonialism and Washington's post-war reluctance to antagonise European colonial partners are also instructive, illustrating that supposed liberal universality counted for little next to perceived strategic advantage and ingrained assumptions about black African primitivism.⁸ The United States had, after all, previously acquired a colonial empire stretching from the Caribbean to the Philippines, albeit hesitantly until the landmark year of 1898.⁹ And, while neither imperial conquest nor colonial consolidation fired American public, commercial or political imaginations to levels comparable with Europe, early twentieth-century American colonialism was just as racially ordered as its European equivalents.¹⁰ The United States, then, was no stranger to problems of colonial disintegration, and by 1946 it enjoyed the unique advantage of

having adjusted already to decolonisation. Add to the mix the emergence of organised anti-colonial nationalism as a dynamic force in the post-war international system and one has the ingredients for a vibrant trans-national history.

Well, perhaps not. One essential problem remains. Post-war America, from government to people, media to business, just was not interested. William Roger Louis, Ronald Robinson and Ritchie Owendale, among others, have all argued persuasively that, Suez aside, the US exerted an indirect and generally benevolent influence over the acceleration of British decolonisation from Africa and elsewhere.¹¹ To judge from historians' silence on the matter, any comparable American influence over French withdrawal from black Africa was either subtle to the point of invisibility or simply non-existent. As Nwaubani makes plain, any analysis of French West Africa's place in US foreign relations must, therefore, begin with the acknowledgement – difficult for any specialist scholar – that, in the overall scheme of things, the subject at hand was marginal to American diplomacy.¹²

While not disputing West Africa's lowly standing in post-war US foreign relations, there is a different way of approaching the issue. The political, economic and cultural future of French West Africa mattered to France. The strategic alignments of newly independent West African states mattered to all the European imperial powers. The changing business environment of Western Africa mattered to employers and employees, investors and purchasers, both foreign and domestic. The vastness of the African continent, in large part because of its iniquitous colonial attachments, mattered as a discrete location in which the Communist block might make inroads in a fast-globalising Cold War.¹³ Above all, the march of decolonisation, whether viewed positively as mass mobilisation, emancipation and nation building or, less dramatically, as an incremental process of political, social and economic change, mattered to the African populations involved. Cumulatively, then, much was at stake. And from 1945 to 1956, the period investigated here, the US was no mere passive observer of events.

I

This article investigates America's deepening involvement in the politics, finance and international trade of francophone West Africa in the decade after the Second World War. It does so by analysing two constituencies of opinion: the US consular service across French West Africa and the network of American business interests then developing throughout the region. These actors, although closest to the events described, have yet to receive much attention in analyses of US policy-making in Africa. Instead, it is typically contended that successive secretaries of state in the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, the State Department officers who served them and those of other government agencies formed a community of practice that shared four underlying assumptions about post-war colonialism in black Africa.

The four components of this prevailing outlook may be summarised as follows: first, that it made no sense to jeopardise the goodwill of Western European allies by pressing for a more rapid decolonisation from black Africa; second, that sub-Saharan colonies

remained economically and strategically valuable to the European imperial powers, whereas their importance to the US economy was negligible; third, that it was essential to prevent the communisation of black Africa, an objective shared by the European colonial powers; and, finally, that the growing strength of Third World nationalism threatened to unleash social disruption and political upheaval, which, if left unchecked, would facilitate Soviet penetration of the colonial world. Inherent in each of these four assumptions was the tendency to stereotype black Africans as politically naïve, socially volatile and, consequently, unready to govern themselves.¹⁴ Those who rejected such stereotypes and remained doggedly anti-colonial found themselves increasingly marginalised from the political mainstream.¹⁵

A further assertion is that the strength of these predominant assumptions negated the influence of the 'men on the spot'. Again, Ebere Nwaubani captures the problem: 'In this worldview, Africa was definitely nonexistent, except as an overseas province of Western Europe'.¹⁶ Post-war US government might pay lip service to America's proud anti-colonial tradition, but, in practice, there was no sustained pressure on France, Britain or the smaller European imperial nations to quit Africa. Such disinclination to intervene strongly was also rooted in the obvious disjuncture between American preference for reformist colonialism and the crying need for civil rights reform at home.¹⁷ The persistence of institutionalised racism in post-war America damaged the country's image overseas, weakening the force of its reformist arguments, not least in French West Africa where the slow progress of desegregationist legislation was closely followed in the Dakar press.¹⁸ The cumulative result of these factors was a softly-softly US approach to decolonisation in France's West African territories.

There is much to be said for the above interpretation. Nonetheless, this article suggests a rather different formulation both of US policy in French West Africa and of the attitudes that informed it. It would be foolish to deny the prevailing Eurocentricity and concomitant strategic concerns about the long-term preservation of black Africa's pro-western orientation. Yet, the reports, intelligence estimates and opinions of consular officials and US businessmen made a greater mark in Washington than the above characterisation suggests. Both groups were pivotal to the attitudinal formation of policy-makers in the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, few of whom had much experience of West African affairs. And both were anxious to alert the US government to the growing strength of nationalist groups and their affiliated youth movements and worker organisations. It also bears emphasis that these two constituencies were less distinct than might be imagined; their personnel were occasionally interchangeable, and their interests tended to converge.

This article does not, therefore, attempt to retrace the diplomatic history of American foreign policy towards francophone West Africa. Rather, the sections that follow seek to identify the dominant concerns and common attributes that US opinion makers ascribed to West African party and labour politics and colonial economic organisation in the transitional years between the launch of the French Union, the crystallisation of Cold War tensions and the quickening rhythm of African decolonisation in the early 1950s.

II

In the last years of the Second World War, the triangular relationship between the Gaullist authorities in French Africa, the US government and General Eisenhower's military command, often fraught, sometimes downright hostile, nonetheless signified unprecedented American involvement in francophone African affairs. Across much of the Gaullist-controlled empire, US dollar holdings enabled the colonial authorities to guarantee local financial stability before the Liberation of Paris paved the way for the reconstitution of a French Treasury reserve in late summer 1944. There were, however, massive regional disparities in this regard. Figures released to the US Treasury by the French Commissariat of Finance in Algiers a week before the D-Day landings revealed that the Gaullist authorities had access to total dollar holdings of \$33,210,137. Aside from \$8.8million held on deposit in New York, the bulk of these funds were tied up in colonial territories. The largest single colonial deposit was some \$7,605,989 held on account by the Office des Changes in New Caledonia, the Pacific Island that was at the time subject to fractious joint Franco-American civil-military control.¹⁹ A further \$2,137,196 was held on account in Morocco and Algeria, the Office of Strategic Services having made large purchases of newly issued francs in both territories.²⁰ By contrast, French dollar holdings in all the territories of French West and Equatorial Africa amounted to a mere \$115,769, less than the total held in Cameroon alone (\$122,336).²¹ These derisory figures were consistent with the much lower volumes of privately held securities and the smaller number of state issues of Treasury Bills to fund public borrowing in the two black African colonial federations when compared with the more extensive financial activity in French North Africa from late 1942 onwards.²²

Clearly, then, in French West Africa, whose vast territories were slowly brought into the orbit of Free French political control in early 1943, dollar reserves were of little or no consequence. This remained the case by the time de Gaulle's Commissioner for Finance, Pierre Mendès France, began detailed discussions with US Treasury representatives in Washington and Algiers over dollar assistance for liberated France in June 1944.²³ In other respects, though, American economic power was beginning to make an impact. With Vichy's grip on French African territories loosened by the end of 1942, on 13 February 1943 the US Treasury authorised the Federal Reserve and the French American Banking Corporation to license the accounts of the three French state banks in Algeria, Morocco and French West Africa. It thus unblocked the funds held on account in the United States by these banks, allowing them to resume dollar transfers to and from their overseas accounts.²⁴ A similar arrangement was offered to any French commercial banks in French Africa whose dollar holdings were frozen after the French defeat in 1940. Results were disappointing. The re-authorisation of dollar transactions with French Africa produced little increase in the foreign exchange holdings of the state and commercial banks in the region, largely because the branch network of several leading banks in francophone Africa had collapsed during the preceding three years. Reviewing the position in February 1944, the US civil affairs committee for French North and West Africa attributed this fall in banking activity to a chronic lack of qualified personnel and a more general decline in commercial operations.²⁵

With neither state nor private retail banking fully re-established across French Africa, large-scale commercial transactions remained the preserve of various allied civil affairs agencies, French, American and British alike. French inability to make substantial repayments of Lend-Lease, despite a tentative agreement to begin reimbursements in newly mined gold from French West Africa, only added to the overweening authority of the American civil affairs bureaucracy in French Africa.²⁶

One organisation stood out within this administrative apparatus. This was the North African Economic Board (NAEB), an inter-departmental agency set up under the terms of the November 1942 agreement concluded between US General Mark Clark and Admiral Darlan that paved the way for US military administration in French North Africa. The NAEB worked in tandem with the US civil affairs committee for French North and West Africa to ensure the maximum efficiency of the allied war effort in francophone Africa in the short term and to promote the recovery of French Africa's international trade in the long term.²⁷ By June 1943 the NAEB and civil affairs committee personnel were immersed in the financial and economic reconstruction of *Afrique occidentale française* (AOF). Their recommendations were essential to pricing policy, shipping allocation and goods distribution. Their advice determined which local banks and trading companies were deemed acceptable trading partners for the US government and the allied authorities as apposed to those judged unacceptable because of past collaboration or malpractice.²⁸ The NAEB's Finance and Control Division monitored the budgetary revenue and expenditures of the French African federations and was sharply critical of the regressive, iniquitous and inefficient colonial taxation structure.²⁹ American interest in the political economy of French colonialism was not about to end.

III

On 12 March 1945 the State Department's Division of African Affairs circulated a list of the principal officials in the Dakar Government-General, the federal administrative centre of AOF. Logically enough Governor-General Pierre Cournarie and his senior bureaucratic advisor, Secretary-General Yves Digo, headed the list. In other respects, too, the list was unremarkable, including Director of Political Affairs Georges Poirier, Chief Medical Officer Daniel Ricou, educational service chief Yves Aubineau, Pierre Bonnard and Paul Mazeau, respectively the heads of the Governor-General's civil and military cabinets, and Fernand de Montera, president of the AOF Court of Appeal. But one feature did stand out. This was the prominence given to the governor-general's economic and financial advisory staff. The inclusion of, among others, Director of Finances Oswald Durand, Financial Controller Roger Lemoine, head of the AOF state Treasury Henri Ravel and Director of Economic Affairs Charles Jarre meant that a full third of the listed officials engaged in economic policy-making. In this sense, the State Department genuinely mirrored American interests in francophone Africa at the time.³⁰

At the war's end three US assumptions figured large in the reports filed to Washington by consular staff in Dakar and Brazzaville. First was the belief that the wartime

surge in exports to America and Britain from Gaullist-administered French Africa could be sustained. Second was the recognition that French colonial administrations understood the need to give concrete form to the vague pledges of reform and economic development made at the January 1944 Brazzaville Conference.³¹ The official accent on colonial development and increased welfare provision to the African majority soon acquired tangible form in the creation of a colonial planning directorate that ranked public spending projects according to their contribution to improved African living standards.³²

With ambitious development projects on the horizon, the third assumption apparent in US diplomatic reportage was the stress laid upon future investment opportunities for American businesses in francophone black Africa. These opportunities were, broadly speaking, thought to be of two types. The first was for US engineering firms to acquire a substantial share of the work made available to sub-contractors employed by the French authorities to develop local infrastructure and build new transport networks. The second was for US banks, commercial importers and export traders to gain market share as volumes and varieties of primary goods traded in French African territories increased. US merchant banks were, for instance, likely to be called upon to provide dollar investment for the development of mining and timber extraction in Equatorial Africa, and the net volume of US imports to *Afrique Équatoriale Française* (AEF) was predicted to rise from a nugatory \$1.2 million in 1938 to at least \$9 million by 1949 as American motor vehicles and heavy machinery impelled the process of industrial mechanisation in the lumber industry of Gabon and Moyen-Congo. As far as Equatorial Africa was concerned, this American commercial activity was new. There was neither consular representation nor established US industrial or business enterprises in the federation before 1939. Total dollar investments across AEF amounted to only \$90,000: the sum spent by American missionary organisations on schools and other buildings linked to missionary work.³³

Moreover, opportunities appeared to exist across the two French black African federations to capitalise on the emergent divide between the technocratic reformism of government agencies and the profound hostility among settler industrialists and businessmen towards the new developmental thrust in French colonial policy. The establishment in Douala, Cameroon, in September 1945 of a reactionary lobby group, the *États généraux de la colonisation française*, created to represent the interests of settler enterprise in AEF and AOF, revealed the gulf separating reform-minded officials from the business community. Members of city chambers of commerce across the two French African federations complained of their exclusion from a reform process whose basic tenets were misguided. They insisted that well-meaning officials misunderstood the psychology of the African labourer. Business owners felt marginalised by an administration that portrayed them as obstacles to progressive Franco-African co-operation.³⁴ Unsullied by a colonial past and the very epitome of modern industrial practice, American corporate interests would face no such problems. For all this initial optimism, from 1945 to 1947 official encouragement of wider US investment in francophone Africa was minimal.

Matters began to change in 1948. In February a State Department Committee on Colonial Problems advised the policy planning staff on where America's regional

priorities in the colonial world lay. French West Africa still ranked low down the list, eclipsed strategically by Indochina and North Africa. More remarkable was the enduring belief that American policy in francophone black Africa need not be defined at all thanks to the region's unchanging internal stability. In the committee's words:

For the moment, there is no need for a statement of position on French West Africa, since neither international nor local political developments pose serious problems in the area. In time, however, a statement may be required because of the strategic and economic importance of the region and United States interests, specifically in Liberia, a contiguous territory.³⁵

If a certain lassitude pervaded State Department assessments of short-term political change in French West Africa, there was, by contrast, a sharper concentration on the federation's economic potential for dollar investment and trade development.³⁶

Even so, the operating assumptions of US diplomats and economic envoys stressed long-term possibilities over immediate prospects. Two examples should help prove the point. On 29 July 1947 the Dakar Consulate filed a detailed report on worsening economic conditions in Senegal, Ivory Coast and across the West African federation more generally. It noted that the notional freedoms accorded to black African 'citizens' under the terms of the French Union counted for nothing in the face of widespread foodstuff shortages, the discriminatory allocation of rations between whites and blacks and chronic hardship in the rural interior where lack of infrastructure and limited industrial diversification inhibited the growth of a vibrant cash economy.³⁷ Two and a half years later, Dakar Consul Perry N. Jester's annual economic report on AOF for 1949 noted that less than two per cent of French West Africa's working population was employed in private corporations or government service. The overwhelming majority that worked in agriculture was not counted as part of the wage economy at all. It was a profoundly misleading picture, but one that made the best use of the few colonial government statistics then available.³⁸ Jester's review also suggested that French West Africa's wage economy was too rudimentary to warrant much commercial interest, a view confirmed by the stultification of export trade in ground nuts, peanut oil, timber and cocoa because of AOF's inadequate internal transportation. Until better rail and road connections to the region's major ports were built, opportunities for American venture capital seemed limited.³⁹

The image presented by the diplomats on the spot of a regional economy stymied by the prevalence of peasant farming and the lack of decent roads did not chime with the greater ambition of the Economic Co-operation Administration (ECA), responsible for the disbursement of Marshall Aid funds to Europe and its colonial dependencies. The 1948 Foreign Assistance Act brought the overseas territories of its recipient nations under the aid scheme's umbrella, but made plain that funds allocated to colonies should help facilitate the broader recovery of international trade. It was left to the colonial authorities to request ECA support for capital equipment and technical assistance to advance their own colonial development projects. This chimed with what the ECA Advisory Committee on Overseas Territories identified as the primary objective of investment funding, namely, to unlock the dollar-earning potential of

colonial raw material exports, something considered advantageous to all parties concerned – the ruling power, local industry and American purchasers.⁴⁰

Simply put, ECA fund allocations sought to stimulate export trade, largely through investment in basic transport infrastructure and key industries, particularly those engaged in the extraction of strategic raw materials. Although ECA planners worried that dollar assistance might enable colonial governments to shirk their own responsibilities for economic development and the encouragement of other inward investment, it was virtually impossible to police the levels of public- or private-sector involvement in the economic growth of sub-Saharan Africa.⁴¹ Moreover, the French business community in West Africa viewed the problem of long-term capital funding differently. ECA assistance for infrastructure and technical projects was welcomed, but French business leaders worried that the combination of American corporations reluctant to invest in under-developed territories and vestigial anti-colonialism would ultimately leave French West Africa denuded of dollar investment.⁴²

As matters stood in 1950, there was a striking dissonance between the limited monies disbursed by ECA and the widening ambition of its proponents. With a Congressional allocation of only \$34.5 million dollars to cover projects throughout the colonial world and Latin America, and ECA support for individual development projects restricted to only two per cent of their total cost, it is tempting to dismiss the entire programme as an irrelevance. Yet this would be to misunderstand both its potential and its symbolic importance. During 1950 ECA's Overseas Development Branch finalised the first draft of a vast scheme to develop virtually the whole of sub-Saharan Africa through the provision of \$1.4 billion in Marshall Aid. French territories were to receive the largest single share: \$603 million. Of this figure, \$288.1 million was allocated to AOF. \$110.2 million was set aside for railway construction and a further \$147.4 million for improvements to ports and roads. In the short term, however, the entire Africa-wide scheme was held up pending agreement over the appointment of engineering consortia to conduct the preliminary surveys of internal infrastructure in each of the colonies identified under the scheme (in fact, the whole of colonial Africa excepting Liberia, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia).⁴³ In addition, reserved ECA dollar allocations to help support French West Africa's longest-running and most contentious public works scheme, the so-called Office du Niger project, were also blocked during early 1950 pending French agreement to match US payments with monies from the FIDES (*Fonds d'investissement pour le développement économique et social*) colonial development fund.⁴⁴

In June 1951 the director-general of finance in the Dakar government conceded that external funding held the key to progress across the spectrum of colonial administrative planning. His Finance Ministry bosses, never enthusiastic about public spending in the French Union, thought the existing plans for West African development unachievable.⁴⁵ This helps explain the profound ambivalence with which colonial officials in Dakar and Brazzaville viewed ECA assistance. On the one hand, suspicions of an ulterior economic imperialism underpinned French efforts to impose tight restrictions on the allocation of US aid. On the other, none disputed that American capital was pivotal to West Africa's economic modernisation.⁴⁶ From its financial backing for

new infrastructure projects to underwriting a 20-year-old public works scheme intended to turn parts of the French Sudan's Niger River Valley into a major rice-producing region, US governmental investment was already fundamental to the economic future of France's West African empire.⁴⁷ Albeit still largely unachieved, here was development ambition writ large, its strategic and neo-colonialist aspects hidden under a mantle of economic reconstruction pursued in parallel with Marshall Aid in continental Europe.

IV

The ECA's bold investment plans marked a step-change in US interest in sub-Saharan Africa's economic and strategic potential, its Atlantic territories in particular. Significantly, it was during 1950 that the State Department Office of African Affairs drafted its first individual country policy statements covering black African territories.⁴⁸ Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs George C. McGhee was well briefed by the time he attended the first of a series of bilateral reviews of French policy in sub-Sahara with French Foreign Ministry officials at the Quai d'Orsay on 25 September. Reiterating the US developmentalist agenda, McGhee's delegation tied targeted investment to American willingness to help curb Communist penetration of African nationalist groups and trade unions. The attendees concurred that such dangers were limited, but resolved to monitor Communist prospects more closely.⁴⁹ The office significantly increased the quality and quantity of reports filed on French West African affairs thereafter. In line with this, on 21 October 1950 the Dakar consulate filed its most detailed analyses of the operation of the Senegalese and Ivory Coast wage economies, always the hub of French West Africa's export trade. For the first time, the State Department acquired accurate statistics about urban labour forces, the scale of economic migration and differing seasonal employment patterns across AOF.⁵⁰

Economics was one thing, politics another. By 1947 the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (RDA), the one federation-wide African political party and the strongest of French West Africa's nationalist groups, was the focal point of diplomatic reports filed week by week from Dakar. The RDA was distinctive. It originated in the frustration felt by French African members of the Constituent Assembly in Paris over the rejection of the ambitious constitutional reforms proposed for metropolitan France and its overseas empire in May 1946. Five months later, between 19 and 21 October 1946, these African deputies convened in Bamako, French Sudan, to reiterate their call for wider constitutional reform. The convenors also had a more urgent purpose: to unite differing black African parties into an inter-territorial grouping. The new bloc adopted the appellation RDA.⁵¹ Although strongest in the Ivory Coast, the regional power-base of its charismatic leader, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the party was efficiently led and widely supported throughout francophone West and Equatorial Africa.⁵²

Organisationally innovative and with unprecedented geographical reach, it was something else – the RDA's affiliation with the French Communist Party (PCF) –

that stirred French hostility to it and ensured American interest in its activities. RDA policies were rarely assessed on their own terms, but were read as barometers of Communist influence in French African politics. Dakar consular staff reported extensively on fiery statements by RDA parliamentarians in France and Dakar and examined leading articles in the party newspaper *Réveil* (*Awakening*) meticulously. In both cases, their concerns turned on the confluence of two related factors. One was the extent to which the RDA leadership adopted the Marxist rhetoric and militant anti-colonialism of their French Communist patrons. The other was the degree to which an ideologically inspired anti-Americanism crept into the RDA programme.⁵³ What united the two in American eyes was the RDA's increasingly vocal opposition to Marshall Plan aid and the Military Assistance Program (MAP) linked to it. Each was attacked as evidence of US neo-colonialism and as proof of the Truman administration's intention to make black Africa a Cold War front-line. NATO was attacked as a white man's club in which colonial peoples were, as usual, expected to fight against their own interests to preserve western dominance.⁵⁴ And *Reveil* took to showing disturbing images of lynching and race riots in America's Deep South to remind its readers that the United States was tarred with the same brush of racial discrimination as the European colonial powers.⁵⁵

A political organisation affiliated to the PCF, stretching across two colonial federations, and with subordinate national parties in individual colonies, caused genuine alarm in Paris. The new party was identified as an unacceptable threat, particularly as Cold War tensions hardened in France during the course of 1947. Once the French Communists left the tripartite coalition in May, a clampdown against the RDA was only a matter of time. Still in government, the French Socialists, smarting from Communist success in winning greater popular support in black Africa, wanted the RDA cut down to size. But it fell to ministers of the Christian Democrat *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (MRP), who held the crucial portfolios of defence, foreign affairs and overseas France (colonies), to take the initiative. MRP leader Georges Bidault and his party colleagues called upon trusted colonial appointees to employ a range of administrative tricks to weaken the RDA's grassroots power. One of the boldest was to redesign the political geography of the West African federation. In 1948 Upper Volta was unilaterally declared a separate AOF territory, the objective being to detach it from RDA-dominated Ivory Coast in readiness for elections in June. Here, and in other territories, French officials and MRP supporters encouraged African deputies to serve as independents. Thanks in large part to this lobbying, in September 1948 Senegalese deputies broke with the French Socialists and joined former RDA supporters from Dahomey, Upper Volta, and Togo to form a new parliamentary bloc, the *Indépendants d'Outre-Mer* (IOM).⁵⁶

Soon afterwards the newly promoted Governor of Ivory Coast, Laurent Péchoux, began dismantling the RDA's rank-and-file network in its heartland. State repression peaked in 1949. In February known activists in the *Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI), a national affiliate of the RDA, were imprisoned without trial.⁵⁷ In December several of these detainees mounted a hunger strike, their action timed to coincide with RDA calls for a boycott of European goods. Women, including the

wives of the hunger strikers, figured prominently in a series of increasingly tense protests over subsequent weeks, which culminated in the death of 13 demonstrators at Dimbokro in January 1950. By the end of that year jails across AOF were crammed with at least 3,000 RDA political prisoners.⁵⁸

As French repression of the RDA gained momentum in 1949–50, US diplomatic staff became transfixed by the party's apparently inexorable rise. The party's Communist links dampened overt American criticism of French attempts to stifle it. At the height of the government clampdown in February 1950, Dakar Consul-General William D. Moreland focused instead on evidence that the RDA took instruction, not only from the PCF in France, but from the Cominform in Moscow. The key conduit between the two seemed to be the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), a well-known Communist front organisation with an established network of contacts with African trade union activists and politicians across AOF.⁵⁹ RDA secretary-general, Gabriel d'Arboussier, maintained the working relationship with the PCF's African Section via contacts in Paris and Dakar. Meanwhile, RDA 'strong man' Diallo Abdoulaye liaised with Cominform agents while en route to the WFTU conference in Peiping in December 1949. Dakar consular staff thought this sufficient justification for recourse to the French military, riot squads and secret police to break the RDA.⁶⁰

A similar Cold War rationale and ethnic stereotyping pervaded US consular reportage of Communist affiliation in Equatorial Africa. Dispatches were riddled with the pervasive cultural and racial tropes of the colonial locale: no-nonsense 'Kings of the Bush' officials battled-hardened during the recent war; stoical settlers determined to root out Communist dissent; artful educated Africans out to subvert the colonial system; and gullible African masses prone to external manipulation. Take, for instance the first major report on the spread of Communism to the territory. Submitted in April 1948 by Brazzaville Consul William H. Beach and his deputy, Vice Consul Dean Brown, this analysis noted that colonial government officials shared a passionate hatred of Communism with the close-knit European community of trading-company staff, lumber-camp managers and industrial engineers. These French public- and private-sector employees were equally contemptuous of the educated Africans – in the parlance, *évolués* – who filled the lowest strata of commercial and white-collar employment. Literate, upwardly mobile, politically engaged, these 'evolved' Africans were identified as the one social group capable of orchestrating mass dissent. With an eye to the 1947 rail and dock strikes in Senegal, the Brazzaville administration suspected *évolué* agitators of inculcating Communist ideas among railroad workers and the dockyard labourers of Pointe Noire.⁶¹ The result was an upsurge in industrial stoppages, a decline in worker productivity and increased absenteeism throughout Equatorial Africa's main industries: timber, mining and public works.⁶²

By no means all the incoming reportage from Dakar and Brazzaville was as sweeping or as racist as these examples might suggest. Two months after Moreland filed his damning assessment of RDA activism, his Dakar colleague, Perry N. Jester, submitted a subtler evaluation. His was the first assessment of RDA activities to make extensive use of covert sources of political intelligence, much of it gathered from police reports. The result was a detailed evaluation of how the RDA sustained its federation-wide

presence, having been driven underground by earlier state repression. Jester recognised that the party was increasingly centralised in the Ivory Coast capital Abidjan, from March 1950 the home of its permanent secretariat. Heads of country sections were to convene there three times a year for guidance and instructions. The RDA was also developing a cellular structure typical of covert Communist networks in predominantly rural societies. Its core component was the village committee directed by trusted party activists. In addition, those RDA executive members not in detention were courting West Africa's Muslim community leaders, challenging the received wisdom that the party's leftist nationalism was incompatible with Islamic doctrine.⁶³

Perry Jester was a capable analyst. He was also convinced that the RDA represented the vanguard of a tangible Soviet menace. In an August 1950 report on Cominform intentions in West Africa, Jester concluded that, unwittingly or not, the RDA had advanced Soviet plans to foment political disturbances across francophone black Africa in the event of a major war in the Mediterranean and Middle East. What might pass as coordinated nationalist protest fitted Soviet strategic plans to provoke such instability in West and Equatorial Africa that the region could not function as a staging area for NATO air strikes against advancing Soviet forces to the north and east. Eventually, an effort would be made to Communise French West Africa, beginning with an RDA seizure of power in Ivory Coast. In this reading of events, Chad, at the northern reaches of French Equatorial Africa, was a new Cold War frontline, while the RDA stronghold of Abidjan was West Africa's key strategic prize.⁶⁴ It would remain a cornerstone of Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs thinking in the decade ahead that French West Africa was the principal region where extensive contacts existed between Soviet and Chinese envoys and local nationalists.⁶⁵

V

If, by 1950, the State Department's Africa specialists were more animated by socio-political developments in sub-Saharan Africa than in previous years, they were anxious not to rely primarily on French-supplied intelligence, preferring, in addition, to view matters for themselves. The dialogue between State Department officers and diplomats in the field became increasingly systematic, promoting a clearer sense of what US choices in Africa might be. The Office of African Affairs, still finding its feet as an autonomous analytical centre within the State Department establishment, convened regular conferences with US consular staff in Africa to exchange ideas about impending political changes across the Continent and so to clarify ECA investment priorities.⁶⁶ Both such consular conferences in 1950, the first in the Portuguese East African (Mozambique) port of Lourenço Marquez and the second in the international port of Tangier, discussed Communism in Africa. Furthermore, the Office of African Affairs and the CIA kept abreast of British Foreign and Colonial Office discussions about the same.⁶⁷

These contacts with British officials also gave State Department officials and CIA analysts indirect access to the covert intelligence gathered in West Africa by the British and French colonial administrations and their respective security agencies. By 1950 such bilateral intelligence liaison between the two colonial powers was well

established after each agreed over summer 1948 to regular exchanges of information on West African nationalist groups.⁶⁸ The connection is significant because the security services on both sides of the English Channel condemned the RDA as a Communist plaything. A British internal security service (M.I.5) memorandum of 10 March 1949, for instance, recorded that RDA policy 'is laid down by the Colonial Section of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party'.⁶⁹ Much like their CIA counterparts, by the end of the 1940s, British security service analysts saw a mounting Communist threat in AOF, which, if left unchecked, might infect the nearby British colonies of Nigeria and the Gold Coast.⁷⁰

On 20 September 1950, five days before Assistant Secretary of State McGhee met Quai d'Orsay officials in Paris, he and Office of African Affairs Director Elmer H. Bourgerie had been in London. Armed with the information supplied by the Dakar consulate, they discussed British intelligence assessments of leftist subversion in colonial Africa with Foreign Office, Colonial Office and Commonwealth Relations Office representatives. On the basis of the earlier Lourcenço Marquez meeting, Bourgerie advised his British colleagues of a crucial State Department conclusion: Communism would make most headway in black Africa via populist nationalist groups with a broadly socialist platform. Foremost among these were South Africa's African National Congress and West Africa's RDA. The strength of African trade unionism, the rapid growth of youth movements in French West Africa's urban centres and the 'exploitation by Communists' of West African university students in Europe and the United States were other, though lesser, causes for concern.⁷¹ Bourgerie's comments corresponded with the earlier Foreign Office intelligence sent to Washington, which had identified the RDA as 'completely under the sway of the French Communist Party... and the most powerful Communist-inspired organization on the Continent'. However, the British also noted with approval 'the stiffer attitude of the French Administration' and the RDA's general decline, registered in falling levels of support, a shortage of funds, the defection of key leaders and heightened inter-party rivalry.⁷²

The Foreign Office assessment derived from the resolutions of the most recent RDA conference, held in Bamako, French Sudan, from 18 to 21 October 1949. There, the RDA leadership avowed its support for West African Islam, for the interests of native chiefs and for free trade and increased export prices. These were hardly declarations consistent with Marxist doctrine. Nonetheless, the RDA executive also backed local trade union campaigns for greater worker rights, pledged to recruit more women propagandists and reaffirmed its confidence in the French Communist Party, described as 'the only democratic body in metropolitan France'. If these signals appeared contradictory, the Ivory Coast disturbances of January 1950 were a reminder that radical nationalism exerted a powerful hold over West Africa's urban poor. And the RDA-controlled newspapers, *Réveil* in French West Africa and *A.E.F. Nouvelle* in Equatorial Africa, remained stridently pro-Communist, although circulation of the latter barely exceeded 1,000.⁷³ In a bid to forestall popular enthusiasm for Communist egalitarianism, McGhee agreed to provide State Department funds for a British colonial propaganda drive to convince Africans through educational films, leafleting and press publicity that their best interests were served by western rule.⁷⁴

The main point to note here is that the British, supposedly the more seasoned observers of West African colonial politics, were just as perplexed as their American colleagues about the RDA's subversive potential. Perhaps, then, we should not be surprised that, over the winter and spring of 1950–51, Office of African Affairs preoccupation with the RDA as a Trojan Horse for Communist penetration south of the Sahara reached a peak before completely evaporating in the aftermath of the June 1951 national elections in France and French West Africa. With the election preliminaries already under way, on 23 April 1951 Office director Bourgerie requested a complete reappraisal of political, social and economic conditions across AOF. He wanted a definitive answer to a single question: in the event of a NATO war with Soviet Russia, where would francophone African allegiances lie?⁷⁵ The issue soon became academic.

VI

On 18 October 1950 Félix Houphouët-Boigny officially confirmed the RDA's acrimonious breach with its former French Communist sponsors. This was later echoed by a breakdown in relations with the French trade union confederation and the creation in January 1952 of a new, more independent African workers' group: the *Union de syndicats autonomes africaines*.⁷⁶ Houphouët-Boigny's adoption of a more conciliatory strategy of peaceful coexistence with France also bore fruit in the RDA's new marriage of electoral convenience with French premier René Pleven's centre-left *Union Démocratique et Socialiste de la Résistance* (UDSR). The expediency of this new alignment emerged more clearly over the winter of 1950–51. The UDSR, impelled by its dynamic young Minister of Overseas France François Mitterrand, forged a series of working partnerships with French African deputies on the parliamentary commissions then turning their attention to accelerated constitutional reform and economic liberalisation across West Africa.⁷⁷

Although US observers drew encouragement from the mounting evidence of an effective RDA-UDSR partnership, it was the rightward shift in French politics following the June 1951 general election that signalled the end of the alarmist reportage from US diplomats in West and Equatorial Africa about Communist incursion. Rather than viewing West Africa's political parties in terms of their susceptibility to external influence, in the final years of French imperial rule from 1951 to 1956, State Department analysis shifted towards closer scrutiny of party policies, constituencies of support and the African elites that looked set to dominate post-independence politics. The Office of African Affairs' more voluminous reportage of French West Africa's internal politics was also of a piece with the steady accumulation of regional expertise by other recently installed consular staff and by itinerant US military attachés and specialist observers, whose tours of western colonial territories became increasingly commonplace in the early 1950s. The Department of Defence thus ranked alongside the State Department's Office of African Affairs in accumulating a fund of knowledge about everything from local topography, mineral resources and interior communications to political affiliations and regional threats. This intelligence – part economic, part political, part strategic – expanded once US military observers gained admission to the periodic

Conferences on African Defence Facilities jointly convened by France and Britain. Other participants included Belgium, Portugal, South Africa and the British-ruled Central African Federation. The first such meeting was held in Nairobi during August 1951. But it was the second that attracted greater American interest. It opened in Dakar, Senegal, on 11 March 1954.

The four US observers, experts in transportation and logistics, mirrored the Dakar conference's primary focus on the facilities available for the rapid redeployment of troops and military supplies along the lines of communication running east and west, north and south, across the African continent and between Africa and the Middle East. The objective was to ensure that, should Soviet forces sweep through the Arab world, their advance would be halted, not only by NATO forces in Western Europe and the Mediterranean theatre, but also by an allied colonial coalition holding the line below the Sahara.⁷⁸ It was this that made the Dakar consulate's assessments of RDA disruption in the northerly territories of French West and Equatorial Africa so pertinent.

French strategic planning for its sub-Saharan territories was, by then, changing fundamentally. Between 1949 and 1954 the Military Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Overseas France and the inter-departmental Central African Defence Committee had based their mobilisation planning for francophone black Africa on three core objectives. These were the maintenance of sovereign control whatever the circumstances of a war in Europe, the development of a regional war economy integrated with that of France and, finally, the assembly of African troops prior to their assignment to North Atlantic Command.⁷⁹ Following the March 1954 Dakar conference, French strategic planning in sub-Saharan Africa became more explicitly 'Eurafrican' in focus, its primary objective being to hold a defensive line from the Normandy port of Dunkirk to Leopoldville in the Belgian Congo.⁸⁰ Once fully operational, a colonial force of 75,000 troops was to be deployed across francophone black Africa.⁸¹ However, the Dakar conference also made plain that such an ambitious defensive scheme was unlikely to be realised for lack of adequate funding.⁸²

Other, more pressing concerns also intervened. One was the urgent problem of strategic readjustment as the French defensive position in Indochina collapsed over the winter of 1953–54. While the West African professional cadres serving in Indochina were reportedly unaffected by the spectre of imminent French defeat by the Vietminh, it is difficult to accept that this was entirely the case.⁸³ Furthermore, the subsequent massive deployments of French professional units to Algeria from 1955 onwards made the previous strategic planning for the defence of French Africa still more unrealistic and anachronistic.⁸⁴ Another, more revealing consideration was the requirement to reassign an increasing proportion of the long-service troops in French West Africa from external defensive duties to internal policing as French fears of local nationalist protest increased. By mid-1956 the order of priorities for the use of professional troops in francophone black Africa was fundamentally reversed: units were now held in reserve, first and foremost, to maintain internal security.⁸⁵

Thus, by the time the US military observers filed their reports on the Dakar inter-governmental conference's discussion of black Africa's strategic role in fighting the Third World War, the gathering pace of decolonisation rendered much of the

programme irrelevant. The only constant, as French military planning was scaled back to reflect the pressing needs of colonial policing, was the abiding preoccupation with Communist sedition. As we have seen, this was a subject long familiar to the American diplomats stationed in Dakar and Brazzaville.

What of US commercial representatives? The experience of US oil companies in French Africa suggested that ECA hostility to imperial protectionism and discriminatory French tariff policies was slow to register among colonial officialdom. On 26 January 1950 Commerce Department staff called a meeting with State Department and ECA officials in Washington to highlight exclusionary French policies towards American companies attempting to market and distribute petroleum products in French West Africa. The Dakar government reserved the bulk of the petroleum marketing rights across AOF for the West African subsidiary of France's largest oil company, the *Compagnie française des pétroles* (CFP), even though it lacked the storage and distribution facilities to meet all the resultant orders. But what really antagonised the Commerce Department was that the Dakar authorities had allowed the CFP subsidiary to expend a large proportion of the colonial government's ECA dollar exchange in order to import refined petroleum products from US suppliers. This was a misuse of Marshall Aid funds that violated open competition regulations by appropriating ECA dollars in order to preclude US oil firms from more direct involvement in the West African market.⁸⁶

Had the West African experience been an isolated one, the matter might have aroused less comment in Washington, but it soon emerged that US oil corporations encountered similar obstacles north of the Sahara.⁸⁷ In French Algeria the US oil firm CALTEX, operating through its affiliate company American Overseas Petroleum (AOP), tried during 1952 to cement a deal with the Algiers government, giving AOP the exploration rights to approximately 150,000 square kilometres of territory in the Tindouf Basin of Algeria's western Saharan region.⁸⁸ The plan soon ran into difficulties. Governor-General Roger Léonard warned that AOP required official approval before drilling could begin. No such exclusive arrangement had been signed, nor was one likely. The Algiers authorities were reluctant to set such a precedent, and knew that French oil companies, especially the state-owned *Société Nationale des Recherches et d'Exploration des Pétroles en Algérie* (SN REPAL), expected first refusal on any oil exploration schemes.⁸⁹ A further complication was that the region in question straddled the Saharan frontier between Algeria and Morocco, the exact demarcation of which had still to be resolved.⁹⁰ Clearly, unexplored oil fields were a special case. The oil companies' experience reveals something bigger, nonetheless. Whatever its opinion about ECA colonial grants, the official French attitude towards US multinationals in its African territories seemed, at best, ambivalent, at worst, overtly hostile.

Yet foreign investment remained critical. By the end of 1952 French West Africa's economic outlook seemed bleak. The major capital investments of the preceding years, driven by the combination of ECA funding and the French FIDES colonial development programme, were running down. ECA-style support would continue after 1952 under the auspices of the Foreign Assistance Act and the Foreign Operations

Administration established in 1953 to disburse aid monies. But the overall sums involved were smaller than in the preceding years and were narrowly targeted at key export industries and those development projects previously underpinned by ECA grants.⁹¹

Much remained to be done. The 45 billion French African francs (equivalent to 257 million dollars) invested in French West African infrastructure between 1948 and 1952 had, it appeared, generated only a short-term surge in economic activity as road building, port improvements, public works, construction, electrification and hydro-electric projects all surged ahead. There was, as yet, little indication of much industrial diversification arising from these schemes.⁹² More serious, after years of increasing demand for West Africa's primary products stimulated first by post-war shortages in Western Europe and then by the Korean War boom, world market prices for AOF's foodstuff and raw materials exports were falling. Meanwhile, inflationary pressure within French West African colonies continued, and was, in turn, exacerbated by their economic ties to France. West African consumers paid above-market prices for otherwise uncompetitive French finished goods as a result.

Reaction among French West Africa's wage labourers was swift. Late 1952 witnessed several major industrial disputes, culminating in a well-observed 24-hour general strike that crippled AOF's transportation system on 3 November. Across the entire federation between 50 and 90 per cent of all public sector employees, including hospital and teaching staff and utility company workers, walked out in sympathy. Organisers of the November stoppages confined their demands to better working conditions and wage increases, but they threatened to bring AOF to a standstill with a renewed general strike in January 1953 if other, more overtly political demands went unfulfilled.⁹³ Trade union anger focused on two issues: the partial application of the French labour code to African workers and continued French dumping of overpriced imports on AOF consumers.⁹⁴ Dockworker and railwaymen's leaders led calls for the additional general strike in the new year unless the Paris National Assembly voted to apply French labour legislation in its entirety to French West Africa. Since the French Parliament had, by then, agreed to reconsider the *Code du Travail* and was expected to vote it through, union leaders' refusal to withdraw the threat of strike action was widely interpreted as being politically motivated: a means to consolidate trade union influence over the pace and scope of colonial reform. By April of the following year, according to Dakar Consul Williams Blake, the federal government had become convinced that worsening economic conditions would trigger an explosion of anti-colonial unrest.⁹⁵

If the industrial relations picture indicated a deepening crisis in French West African affairs, other economic indicators suggested otherwise. The year 1953 saw above-average crop yields that eased fears of rural hunger. Furthermore, AOF's restrictive economic relationship with France cut both ways: metropolitan legislation closing off both the domestic and French Union markets to foreign supplies of ground nuts, palm oil and cocoa ensured that French West Africa's principal exports all sold at artificially inflated prices within the franc zone. Meanwhile, reduced freight rates and lower business taxes provided similar assistance to Ivory Coast's timber

industry.⁹⁶ During late 1954 the earlier pessimistic forecasts resumed, even so. Again, it was the combination of a mounting AOF deficit, galloping inflation and an incipient collapse in consumer confidence that suggested to US diplomatic observers that declining living standards and concomitant political instability lay just around the corner. The recent influx of so-called 'flight capital', as French corporate interests and commercial investors switched funds from Indochina to West Africa, was too small a phenomenon to affect the overall economic outlook.⁹⁷

The most significant feature of these forecast reports was the acute sensitivity to changing economic conditions they identified among urban wage earners and agricultural producers. The corollary of this was the expectation, confirmed in discussions with senior colonial officials, that an economic downturn could cause immediate industrial stoppages and political protest. To read Dakar consular reports was to be told unequivocally that French capacity to maintain undisputed control across AOF was balanced on a knife-edge.

An obvious question to ask is, 'What had changed?' What had brought the French colonial edifice in West Africa so close to collapse by 1953–54? After all, only three years earlier the RDA, still the region's major nationalist group, was, apparently, brought to heel, leading State Department evaluations of civil emergency in French West Africa to be scaled back. Were tougher economic conditions the foremost consideration? If so, what role might US capital play? Alternatively, was the inexorable march of decolonisation, confirmed most recently by French withdrawal from Indochina, the critical factor? Again, might America exert decisive influence just as it had sought to do in Vietnam? Or were local West African political developments and an acceleration of French colonial reforms more important?

Fundamental questions such as these featured larger in US thinking after French withdrawal from Indochina and amid the mounting evidence that the West African territories were moving ever faster towards self-government. Negative answers to some of these problems came easily over the winter of 1954–55. There was never any question of direct US political pressure to delay or expedite decolonisation in AOF. Nor was there any enthusiasm for stern diplomatic intervention in Paris at a time when Pierre Mendès France's government was preoccupied with the more urgent question of French North Africa's future. But, on other issues, there was less clarity. One lesson of ECA funding seemed to be that it could achieve a good deal, but only gradually. It was a conclusion confirmed by the subsequent experience of the Foreign Operations Administration. Using American dollar assistance to achieve predetermined political outcomes made sense only in the most general terms, as an encouragement to increased export activity, freer trade and responsible business practice. Few doubted that African industrialisation, urbanisation and social marginalisation would have lasting effects, but the State Department and its close affiliates in various UN specialist organisations increasingly consigned the study of such societal changes to specialist commissions packed with the leading social scientists of the day.⁹⁸ These were issues that the French colonial service and French Africanist academics had been debating for decades, but for the US diplomatic community in West Africa this was unexplored terrain.

Answers were slow in coming. With confirmation of West African states' independence imminent after de Gaulle's launch of the French overseas 'Community' in 1958, the Eisenhower administration had yet to codify its basic regional priorities. On 20 June 1958 the Council on Foreign Economic Policy submitted policy recommendations for sub-Saharan Africa to the National Security Council Planning Board. Over the next three months the National Security Council, in turn, added a series of military requirements to this list, obtaining the approval of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for these changes in August.⁹⁹

VII

If one of the recurrent themes of this article has been of deepening American engagement with the post-war politics of French black Africa, another has been of a shift in the focus of US concerns. The findings here support those of John Kent, who relates changing priorities in America's early 1950s diplomacy in black Africa to the more interventionist and strongly anti-Communist Cold War strategy pursued under Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles.¹⁰⁰ Where once the State Department Division of African Affairs and the ECA administration took a close interest in the minutiae of the native labour code, welfare legislation and public works projects, by 1954 political and economic intelligence gathering in Dakar and Brazzaville and State Department policy assessments in Washington were tailored to the Cold War requirements of short-term strategic analysis.¹⁰¹ The promise of US-driven economic modernisation had given way to pervasive anxiety over West Africa's uncertain political future. Similarly, US recognition of France's pivotal role in European defence co-operation and the early phases of Western European integration inevitably coloured State Department reading of colonial troubles in Africa. But, if the requirement to consolidate French strength was clear, francophone black Africa's longer-term contribution to its former colonial master was more obscure. The very idea of such an unequal arrangement, a Cold War equivalent of the old-style 'colonial pact' by which France had traditionally exploited the human and natural resources of its colonies for metropolitan benefit, seemed anachronistic and indefensible. It was easy to support transition to a more amicable partnership through peaceful decolonisation, but few American or French officials were sure how this could be best achieved. Between 1950 and 1956 there was also little certainty in either Washington or Paris about the place of the French Union's West African territories as affiliates of any European defence or economic community.¹⁰²

US doubts about the future of French Africa reflected a wider attitudinal shift. The ECA-inspired optimism of the late 1940s that massive dollar assistance for colonial development would minimise political conflict, generating warmer relations between the United States and the future leaders of independent francophone African states, did not long survive into the succeeding decade. It gave way instead to a pessimistic reading of events in the final years of formal French rule in West Africa. Washington's more strident anti-Communism, as well as the quickening pace of decolonisation north of the Sahara, proved critical to this shift.¹⁰³ So, too,

the popularity and organisational coherence of West African nationalist parties, the explicit anti-colonialism of West Africa's industrial trade unions and the volatility of student associations added to the sense of events running beyond French – or American – control.¹⁰⁴

By the time Charles de Gaulle returned to the Elysée Palace in 1958, US policy towards French-speaking Africa was informed by additional considerations. The launch of the French African Community, a loose agglomeration of soon-to-be independent dependent territories, seemed finally to have replaced the coercive centralism of formal imperial rule with a more consensual relationship, albeit one that reserved numerous strategic, economic and cultural privileges to France. This latest French imperial scheme generated less interest in Washington than the wider trends whose development it was designed to stem.¹⁰⁵ African neutralism, the proliferation of one-party regimes and regional blocs, and the growing penetration of Soviet and Chinese influence north and south of the Sahara provoked the greatest discussion among State Department analysts as the Eisenhower administration neared its end.¹⁰⁶

More important in the short term, the proliferation of independent nation states in Africa, South East Asia and the Caribbean altered the balance of power in the UN General Assembly. It was this, above all, that concerned the State Department's specialist Africa watchers as the 1960s began to unfold. Compared to their difficulty in keeping pace with the rapid social and political changes in the last decade of French rule in West Africa, in the Kennedy years the Office of African Affairs could reduce its policy advice to a single sentence: 'We must make every effort to keep as close as possible to French speaking Africans.'¹⁰⁷ It had taken a long time for the wisdom of this maxim to hit home.

Notes

[1] Kaplan, "Left Alone with America", 11.

[2] Williams, 'The Frontier Thesis', 379–95, cited in Kaplan, "Left Alone"; 3, 13.

[3] Mélandri, 'Les États-Unis et les indépendances africaines', 537.

[4] Young, 'United States Policy toward Africa', 1.

[5] Thomas Noer, cited in Nwaubani, *The United States and Decolonisation in West Africa*, xiii.

[6] As examples: Noer, *Cold War and Black Liberation*; Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention*; Lumumba-Kisongo, *The Dynamics of Economic and Foreign Relations*; Wall, *France, the United States and the Algerian War*; Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*; Cohen, *Intervening in Africa*; Newsom, *The Imperial Mantle*. The most recent example of this crisis-driven approach is Odd Arne Westad's excellent *The Global Cold War*.

[7] A recent example of this innovative, inter-disciplinary work is Frederick Cooper's *Colonialism in Question*.

[8] Fraser, 'Understanding the American Response', 105–25; Gibbs, 'Political Parties and International Relations', 306–27; Kent, 'The United States and the Decolonisation of Black Africa', 168–75.

[9] Love, *Race over Empire*, esp. xvi–xviii, 159–200 and *passim*.

[10] Rafael, 'White Love', 185–204; Colby, "Banana Growing and Negro Management", 595–621.

- [11] Robinson and Louis, 'The United States and the Liquidation of the British Empire'; Louis and Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Decolonisation', 462–511; Ovendale, *Britain, the United States, and the Transfer of Power*.
- [12] Nwaubani, *The United States and Decolonisation*.
- [13] Kent, 'United States Reactions to Empire', 197–205.
- [14] Thoughtful analyses of these prevailing assumptions include: Bills, *Empire and Cold War*; Nwaubani, *The United States and Decolonisation*, 28–55; Kent, 'United States Reactions', 195–220.
- [15] Von Eschen, *Race against Empire*, 112–21; also cited in Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 11.
- [16] Nwaubani, *The United States and Decolonisation*, 48.
- [17] Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*; Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 25–35.
- [18] Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 108.
- [19] United States National Archives (USNA), College Park, MD., Treasury Department files, RG 56, Office of the Assistant Secretary of International Affairs, box 7: French Africa/file: dollar balances, Treasury representative, Algiers, 'French dollar position', 5 July 1944. Regarding wartime New Caledonia, see Kim Munholland's excellent *Rock of Contention*.
- [20] USNA, RG 56, box 7: French Africa/file: French North African currency, memcon., 'OSS purchases of franc currency in North Africa', 10 June 1944.
- [21] USNA, RG 56, box 7: French Africa/file: dollar balances, Treasury representative, Algiers, 'French dollar position', 5 July 1944.
- [22] USNA, RG 56, box 9: French Africa/file: war expenditure, NAEB Finance and Control Division memo to Committee for North and West African Civil Affairs, 1 April 1943.
- [23] USNA, RG 56, box 7: French Africa/file: French North African currency, tel. 1996, US Treasury Mission, Algiers, to Secretary of State, 13 June 1944.
- [24] This step was taken despite the fact that several directors of Banque d'État du Maroc faced charges of collaborationism and profiting from trade with Nazi Germany. See USNA, RG 56, box 9: French Africa/file: French Morocco-banks, Assistant to the Treasury Secretary memo, 'Treasury investigation of the State Bank of Morocco', 25 Aug. 1943.
- [25] USNA, RG 56, box 7: French Africa/file: administration, Committee for French North and West African Civil Affairs memo to Secretary Morgenthau, 10 Feb. 1944.
- [26] USNA, RG 56, box 9: French Africa/file: trade, 'Meeting of US side of FEC, April 26, 1944'.
- [27] USNA, RG 56, box 7: French Africa/file: banks and banking, Committee for French North and West African Civil Affairs memo, 'Banking and licensing program', 21 Feb. 1943.
- [28] USNA, RG 56, box 9: French Africa/file: FA stockpiling, CCNA to NAEB. Joint Mission, Dakar, 7 June 1943.
- [29] USNA, RG 56, box 9: French Africa/file: FA taxation, NAEB draft report, 'Tax structure in Algeria', 25 March 1943.
- [30] USNA, State Department decimal files, RG 59 851T.00, FWA Political, box 6326/folder 4, Division of African Affairs, 'Principal officers: Government General of FWA', 12 March 1945.
- [31] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 6328, Brazzaville consulate memcon., 'Economic developments in FEA', 14 June 1945.
- [32] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 6327/4, AMCONGEN, Dakar, to State Department, 'Long range economic and social planning in FWA', 5 Dec. 1945.
- [33] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 6328, Brazzaville consulate memo, 'FEA – opportunity for American trade', 14 July 1945.
- [34] Led by Léon Viard, the *Etats généraux* centred on Chambers of Commerce networks in the major trading ports of AOF and AEF; see USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 6326, AMCONGEN, Dakar, to State, 3 Nov. 1945.
- [35] USNA, Policy Planning Staff files, RG 59/250/D/12/01, box 8: colonialism, 1948–52, 'Report of the Committee on Colonial Problems', 11 Feb. 1948.

- [36] Kent, 'United States Reactions', 197–200; see also Kent, *The Internationalization of Colonialism*.
- [37] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 6327, AMCONGEN, Dakar, memo, 'Conditions under which nationals of French Overseas Territories exercise rights of citizenship', 29 July 1947.
- [38] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 5009/1, USCONGEN, 'Cost of living indices for native labor in Dakar', 25 Oct. 1950.
- [39] USNA, USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 5008/2, Perry N. Jester, Dakar, 'Annual economic report', 10 Feb. 1950.
- [40] Nwaubani, *The United States and Decolonisation*, 59–61.
- [41] USNA, RG 59, Lot file, 65D350/box 12, Bureau of Intelligence and Research paper for East-West African consular conference, n.d. Jan. 1949.
- [42] Hodeir, *Stratégies d'Empire*, 237–41; USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 5011/1, NEA memcon., 'ECA, Point IV', 8 May 1950.
- [43] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 5008/2, State dispatch 193, 'Tentative proposals for development of Africa by ECA funds', 29 June 1950.
- [44] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 5009/1, Jester to State, 'Reported suspension of dollar allocations by ECA to the Office du Niger project', 22 April 1950.
- [45] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 5009/1, AMCONGEN, Dakar, 'Financial difficulties concerning development projects in FWA', 29 June 1951.
- [46] Nwaubani, *The United States and Decolonisation*, 63–64, 66–71.
- [47] For the Office du Niger irrigation project, see Roberts, *Two Worlds of Cotton*; Echenberg and Filipovich, 'African Military Labour', 533–51; Filipovich, 'Destined to Fail', 239–60.
- [48] USNA, RG 59, Lot File, R20B, OAA, country files 1944–63, box 5, 'Preparation of country policy statements', 10 Jan. 1950; Kent, 'United States Reactions', 197–200.
- [49] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 5009/1, State memcon., 'General review of French problems in Africa south of the Sahara', 25 Sept. 1950.
- [50] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 5009/1, W. D. Moreland report, 'Labor problems in FWA', 21 Oct. 1950.
- [51] Coquery-Vidrovitch and Goerg, *L'Afrique occidentale au temps français*, 323–25.
- [52] Chafer, *The End of Empire in West Africa*, ch. 3.
- [53] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 6326/3, AMCONGEN, Dakar, to State, 'Criticism of the US by the "Rassemblement Démocratique Africain"', 6 April 1948.
- [54] RG 59, 851T.00, box 6326/2, Jester to State, 'Communist line for FWA', 1 Dec. 1949.
- [55] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 6326/3, AMCONGEN, Dakar, to State, 'Criticism of the US by the "Rassemblement Démocratique Africain"', 6 April 1948.
- [56] Person, 'French West Africa and Decolonisation', 155.
- [57] Coquery-Vidrovitch and Goerg, *L'Afrique occidentale*, 325–26.
- [58] Chafer, *End of Empire*, 105–09.
- [59] Cooper, *Decolonisation and African Society*, 222–24, 286–87.
- [60] USNA, RG 59, 751T.00, box 3702/2, Moreland to State, 'Communist developments in FWA', 18 February 1950.
- [61] For analysis of the 1947 strikes and African trade union politics, see Cooper, 'The Senegalese General Strike of 1946', 165–215; "'Our Strike'", 81–118; *Colonialism in Question*, 204–30.
- [62] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 6328/4, Brazzaville consulate, 'Communism in FEA', 8 April 1948.
- [63] USNA, RG 59, 751T.00, box 3702/2, Jester to State, 'Communist developments in FWA', 19 April 1950.
- [64] USNA, RG 59, 751T.00, box 3702/1, Jester to State, 'Cominform pattern for FWA', 1 Aug. 1950.
- [65] USNA, RG 59, Office of African Affairs, Political-military adviser records, 1951–63, box 1, 'Contacts between the Free World and the Sino-Soviet Bloc – a review', 30 Oct. 1959.

- [66] Nwaubani, *The United States and Decolonisation*, 56–59; see also McGhee, *Envoy to the Middle World*.
- [67] The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), Colonial Office confidential original correspondence, CO 537/5263, 'A Survey of Communism in Africa', 30 Aug. 1950.
- [68] TNA, CO 537/2760, Colonial Defence: Local intelligence services, minutes of Colonial Office meeting with M.I.5 representatives, 9 June 1948.
- [69] TNA, CO 537/4307, M.I.5 memo, 'Communist influence/African continent', 10 March 1949.
- [70] TNA, CO 537/4307, M.I.5 memo, 'Communist influence/African continent', 10 March 1949, 42; Colonial Office draft report to Joint Intelligence Committee and M.I.5 Director, 'Communism in the African Colonies', n. d. Nov. 1948.
- [71] The expansion of youth movements in the post-war decade was especially marked; see Goerg, 'Le mouvement associatif', 87–101.
- [72] TNA, CO 537/5263, 'A Survey of Communism in Africa', 30 Aug. 1950, 4.
- [73] *Ibid.*, 10, 44, 48–49.
- [74] TNA, CO 537/5263, 'Communist influence in the African Continent: summary of Foreign Office discussions', 20 Sept. 1950.
- [75] USNA, RG 59, RG 59, 751T.00, box 3702/1, Bourgerie letter to Moreland, 23 April 1951.
- [76] Coquery-Vidrovitch and Goerg, *L'Afrique occidentale*, 326.
- [77] Doumergue-Cloarec, 'Le soutien de l'UDSR et de l'SFIO aux parties politiques d'AOF (1951–1958)', 115–16.
- [78] USNA, Joint Chiefs of Staff records, RG 218, Geographic files 1954–56, box 1/CCS92/Africa, Assistant Secretary of Defense, Instructions for Brigadier General J. P. Doyle, 26 Feb. 1954.
- [79] Service Historique de l'Armée de terre, Vincennes (hereafter SHA), Série 14H: Administration centrale des affaires militaires d'Outre-Mer, Carton 14H48/Dossier 1, Direction des affaires militaires, 3e bureau to Commandant supérieur des forces armées, zone de défense AOF-Togo, 'Mobilisation des forces terrestres dans le groupe AOF-Togo', 5 Oct. 1951. See also 14H48/D3, Direction des affaires militaires, 'Plan quinquennal', n.d., Nov. 1952.
- [80] SHA, 14H46/D1, Ministère de la France d'Outre-Mer, Section des affaires militaires, 'Politique de défense eurafricaine à long terme', n.d. 1954. Regarding African troops in the Indochina expeditionary force, see Bodin, 'Le combattant français du corps expéditionnaire', 175–93.
- [81] SHA, 14H48/D4, Direction des affaires militaires, 'Effectifs des forces terrestres d'Outre-Mer mises sur pied à la mobilisation', 17 May 1954.
- [82] SHA, 14H48, Comité de défense de l'Afrique centrale, compte-rendu annuel, 25 May 1954.
- [83] SHA, 14H48/D3, 'Rapport du Général Borgnis Desbordes sur le moral des forces terrestres stationnées Outre-Mer pendant l'année 1953', 2 Feb. 1954.
- [84] SHA, 1H1374/D2, 'Situation des effectifs en AFN au 1er avril 1956', n.d., 1956.
- [85] SHA, 14H48/D5, MFOM, Direction des affaires militaires, 'Organisation militaire des territoires d'Outre-Mer en vue du maintien et du rétablissement de l'ordre', 27 June 1956.
- [86] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 5009/1, State memcon., 'French government discrimination against U.S. Oil Companies', 26 Jan. 1950.
- [87] For a chronological summary of the inter-actions between French and US oil companies, see http://www.ihtp.cnrs.fr/dossier_petrole/petrole_chronologie.html
- [88] USNA, RG 59, 851S.00, box 5008/1, AMCONGEN, Algiers, to State, 25 Aug. 1952.
- [89] *Ibid.*, AMCONGEN, Algiers, 'Recent developments concerning American Overseas Petroleum Limited activities in Algeria', 18 Sept. 1952.
- [90] *Ibid.*, Olaf F. Sundt, Petroleum Attaché, Paris, 'CALTEX petroleum exploration in Algeria', 10 Oct. 1952.
- [91] USNA, RG 59, Lot file Africa, 65D350/box 12, Bureau of Intelligence and Research memo, 'US aid programs in Africa', 15 Oct. 1955.

- [92] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 5009/1, Williams Blake, Dakar, to State, 'Resumé of achievements of the four year plan', 11 Aug. 1952.
- [93] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 5009/1, Williams Blake, 'Report on 24-hour general strike', 4 Nov. 1952.
- [94] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 5009/1, C. Vaughan Ferguson, Dakar, 'Labor in West Africa: The *Code du Travail*', 16 Nov. 1953.
- [95] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 5008/2, AMCONGEN, Dakar, '1952 annual economic review', 30 April 1953.
- [96] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 5009/1, AMCONGEN, Dakar, '1953 annual economic review', 14 June 1954.
- [97] USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 5009/1, C. Vaughan-Ferguson, Dakar, to State, 1 Dec. 1954. Regarding 'flight capital', see Hodeir, *Stratégies d'Empire*, 164–69.
- [98] USNA, RG 59, Lot file, 65D350/box 12, 'Conference of Social Scientists on the social impact of industrialization and urban conditions in Africa', Abidjan, 9 March 1955.
- [99] USNA, RG 218, Geographic file, 1958, Box 1/CCS92/Africa, Joint Strategic Survey Council report to JCS, 'US Policy toward Africa south of the Sahara prior to 1960', 15 Aug. 1958.
- [100] Kent, 'United States Reactions', 209–16.
- [101] Compare USNA, RG 59, 851T.00, box 6327/3, Paris Embassy memo, 'Promulgation of the native labor code in French African colonies', 24 July 1945, with RG 59, 851T.00, box 5008/2, AMCONGEN, Dakar, 'Economic war potential of French West Africa', 24 May 1951. The latter document began from the following proposition: 'We are interested in how this [West African] Federation would be able to contribute to a war effort of the U.S. and its allies now or in the near future – not five or seven years from now'.
- [102] Kim, 'France's Agony', 61–84.
- [103] Kent, 'United States Reactions', 209.
- [104] Cooper, *Colonialism*, 226–28; Chafer, 'Students and Nationalism', 388–407.
- [105] Girault, 'Les indépendances des pays d'Afrique noire', 467–74.
- [106] USNA, RG 59, Lot file 65D350,/box 13, Office of Research and Analysis for Africa memo, 'Outstanding trends and events in past year in Africa', 15 Sept. 1959.
- [107] USNA, RG 59, Lot file 63D393/box 3, 16th UNGA airgram 273, 19 April 1962.

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