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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

Soviet Policy in Africa South of the Sahara

Secret

№ 757

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28 February 1969
No. 0359/69A

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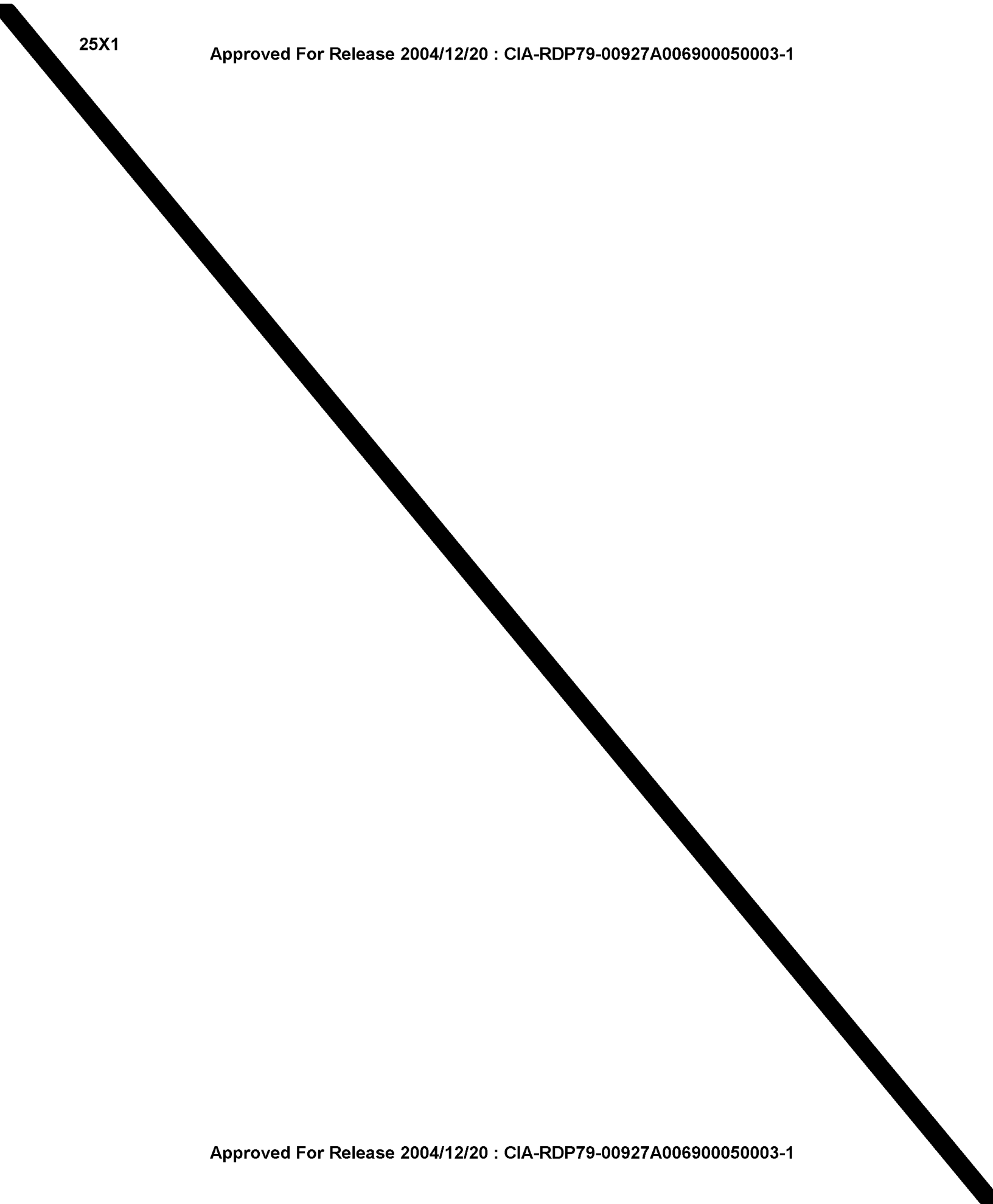

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SOVIET POLICY IN AFRICA SOUTH OF THE SAHARA

Soviet policy in sub-Saharan Africa since the fall of Khrushchev has focused increasingly on broadening and strengthening state-level relations in a long-range effort to replace Western influence. The application of this policy has been flexible and selective and has led to an accelerating tempo of Soviet activity, including cultural and economic delegations, bilateral diplomatic agreements, and expanded aid programs. In many cases, these have been at African initiative. Nevertheless, Africa continues to be a low priority area in Soviet global policy.

Although the Soviet Union has established a presence throughout Africa and a position of influence in a few countries, its record is mixed. The number and scale of setbacks is large. On the other hand, in Nigeria, one of the two major areas of current Soviet activity, Moscow has used the civil war to establish a stronger position. Prolongation of that war, combined with rising domestic pressures on the government, may open the way to further Soviet gains. In the Horn, the other area of primary current interest, Soviet policies are closely tied to the Middle East situation. Although there are substantial obstacles to the execution of Soviet policies in the Horn, its geographic importance makes it a subject of considerable and continued attention.

Mounting nationalism in the sub-Sahara is forcing the Soviets to be more cautious about interfering in internal African affairs. Moscow still supports liberation movements in the three Portuguese colonies, but its aid is limited. Only three Communist parties in the sub-Sahara receive Soviet aid.

BACKGROUND

The breakdown of colonial ties in the 1950s and the deluge of newly independent states after 1960 offered the Soviet Union a clear opportunity to extend its influence in Africa. As early as 1956, Premier Khrushchev set out a broad policy aimed at strengthening Soviet ties with underdeveloped areas. Among other things, he promised aid with no strings attached.

As Khrushchev's policy was implemented during the early 1960s, the Soviet position in Africa grew steadily despite several humiliating setbacks when ham-handed tactics often resulted in the exposure of meddling in African internal affairs. Between 1958 and 1968, the number of Soviet diplomatic missions in the sub-Sahara increased from three to 26, and in many cases they were heavily over-staffed, presumably to facilitate political activity and increase local contacts. Soviet economic aid rose from virtually nothing in 1958 to a cumulative total of over $600 million by 1968. Soviet military aid extensions now stand at about $133 million.

The overthrow of Khrushchev in 1964 signaled a shift of emphasis in Moscow's African policy. Support for radical regimes and adventuristic underground activity was diminished, and more cautious, long-range approaches were adopted.

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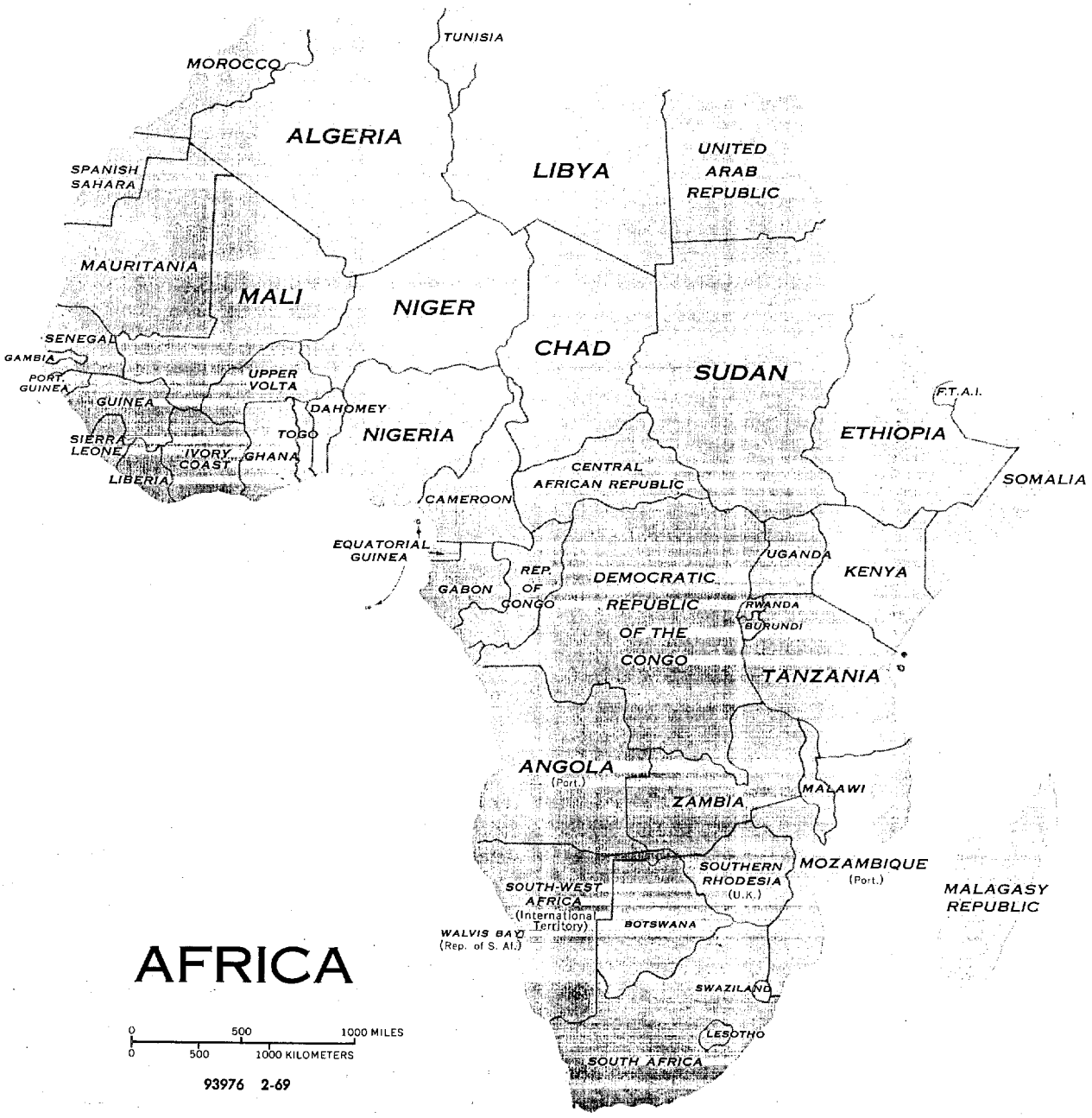


Moscow has long believed that students are good targets for long-term Soviet activity, and thousands have had the opportunity to receive academic training in the USSR. The number of African students going to the Soviet Union has grown from 75 during 1956-59 to 950 in 1967; there are currently more than 5,000 in the country, some of whom will stay more than four years as others have done in the past. Despite numerous problems, Moscow will continue to cultivate African students, counting heavily on their eventual sympathy for the USSR.

During the past several years, Chinese activity has pushed Moscow toward greater involvement in the sub-Sahara. The Soviets are no more, and perhaps less, willing to abandon the field to Peking than to the West, and the result has been bitter Sino-Soviet rivalry in some countries. The USSR probably also wants to demonstrate its world-wide involvement as a great power, to reap the propaganda value of aiding newly liberated states, and to build the Soviet image as a progressive and cooperative ally.

WEST AFRICA

Moscow has devoted considerable attention to West Africa since 1960 but has gained little for its efforts. Chronic defects of Soviet African policy have manifested themselves in this area and Soviet miscalculations have brought major political and economic setbacks.

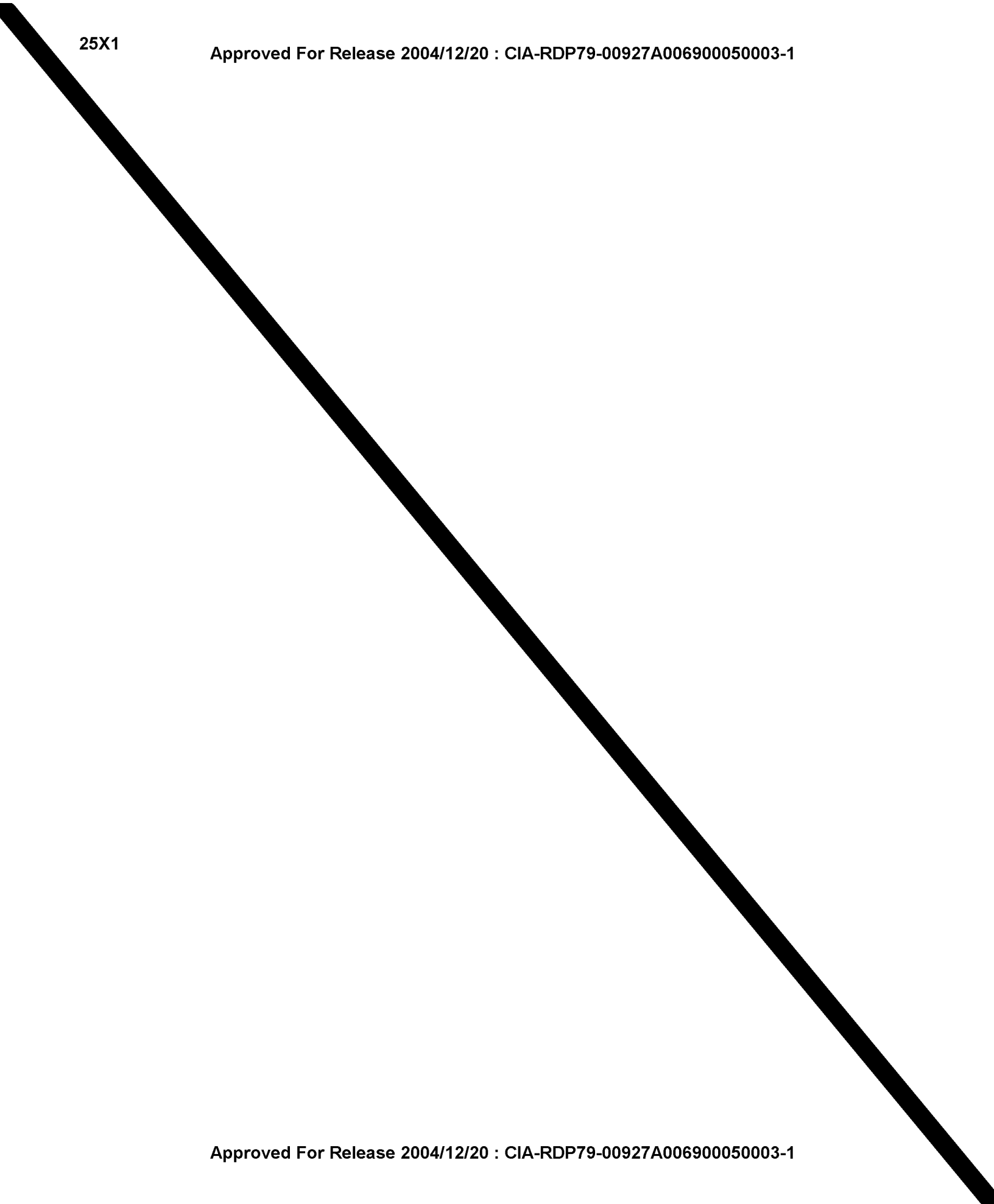
Nigeria One of the few bright spots from Moscow's viewpoint is Nigeria. Moscow has recognized Nigeria as a large, important country and seems willing to undertake a long-term campaign to establish influence there. It has provided Nigeria with a generous supply of military aid and has thus far avoided the overbearing behavior that it has shown elsewhere in Africa. The strengthening of the Soviet position in so short a time must be counted as a success and as a mark of the growing sophistication of Soviet African policy.

The civil war afforded Moscow the opportunity to gain a foothold in a conservative, pro-Western country and, in mid-1967 after months of backing and filling, Moscow came down on the side of the federal military government. When the Western powers refused to sell arms to Lagos, Nigeria turned to the USSR, which has since provided military supplies valued at more than $14 million. The Soviets have also won permission to station a defense attaché in Lagos, the first such in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Soviets have also moved toward increased economic ties with Nigeria, as demonstrated by the general economic agreement signed last November, which sets the stage for future Soviet-aided projects. This agreement, in addition to the recurrent offer of a $56 million credit, provides further evidence that Moscow seeks a long-term role in Nigeria. 25X1

There are major obstacles, however, to the spread of Soviet influence in Nigeria. One is the xenophobia that has gripped the country as a side effect of the civil war. Another is General Gowon, head of the government, who seems clearly aware of the political dangers posed by dependence on large Soviet arms deliveries. As the war drags on, however, pressures on Gowon to accept more Soviet aid will probably mount. Gowon also believes in Nigeria's strong attachment to the British—a further curb on Soviet influence.

Ghana If Nigeria has been a recent success, however, Ghana has been a major disappointment for



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the Soviets. As recently as late 1965, Soviet influence in Ghana was strong, even though President Nkrumah was hardly considered a reliable ally. He had allowed numerous Soviet advisers into the country and had accepted substantial Soviet aid. Ghana became a major staging base for African revolutionary and subversive movements, most of which had Soviet support. In February 1966, however, the army overthrew Nkrumah and one result was the forced withdrawal of all Soviet technicians and advisers, leaving only a handful of diplomatic personnel behind. Moscow's influence thus was erased in a single stroke in a vivid demonstration of the dangers of overidentifying with a single leader in politically unstable Africa.

Moscow patiently bided its time until early in 1968, when a slow but perceptible improvement in relations set in. Nevertheless, Accra has continued to suspect the Kremlin of providing clandestine aid to ousted president Nkrumah. These suspicions reached a climax last October when two Soviet trawlers were seized in Ghanaian waters.

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are still in Ghanaian hands.

Although Moscow has shown considerable restraint in the face of this indignity, there is mounting evidence that Soviet patience is growing thin, and more serious action may be taken if the ships are not released soon. The unprecedented visit to West African waters by a small group of Soviet naval ships in mid-February may be an effort by Moscow to apply pressure on Accra.

Mali Mali was another of the radical states in which the Soviets took an early interest. Nevertheless, by 1965 Soviet aid programs had run into serious difficulty—chiefly high costs and problems with delivery schedules—and Bamako was becoming increasingly infatuated with Chinese revolutionary concepts. Chinese influence grew in Mali, and for the first time in sub-Saharan Africa, Moscow tailored its aid to meet a Chinese challenge.

Though monumental economic problems forced it to turn to France for financial assistance in mid-1967, Bamako still supported both China and the USSR in international matters while continuing to seek economic aid from both. At the same time, President Modibo Keita attempted to foster more doctrinaire socialism internally. Mali's open endorsement of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 was unique in sub-Saharan Africa.

In November, however, a military coup ousted Keita. Although diplomatic relations with the USSR have remained intact, one of the new regime's first acts was to reverse publicly Mali's stand on the events in Czechoslovakia.

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Having gained some experience in such trying circumstances, Moscow has refrained from attacks on the new government and for the present seems content just to hang on.

Guinea Guinea remains the only country in West Africa where the Soviets have sustained a position of influence throughout the troubled past few years. The influx of Soviet aid and advisers shortly after Guinea declared its independence and after France abruptly withdrew its support in 1958 gave Moscow an excellent opportunity to expand its influence. Relations were seriously damaged for some time, however, by the exposure of an allegedly Soviet-inspired plot in 1961. Although it welcomes Soviet assistance, Conakry has kept a wary eye out for any new attempts to interfere in Guinean internal affairs.

President Toure has regularly supported Moscow in the international arena, particularly on

Vietnam. Ties between Guinea and the USSR have been further enhanced by Toure's belief that, with Soviet aid, Guinea can serve as a pattern for the radicalization of Africa.

Despite the closeness of the two countries as "fraternal socialist states," the USSR's influence in Guinea is limited by a virulent brand of nationalism. Unlike its past experiences with radical African states, however, Moscow's position in Conakry seems fairly secure as long as radical elements dominate the regime. This is a result, in part, of the long range, low-key approach that Moscow has followed. In addition, the Soviets have apparently tried to avoid staking their future relations with Guinea on Toure alone by cultivating ties with other officials in Conakry and by widening their contacts as much as possible.

The Other West African States In the other countries of West Africa, the Soviets have been received with suspicion and hostility. The 1966 coup in Ghana [redacted] brought home to most governments the danger of becoming too deeply entwined with Moscow. Confronted with such feelings, nearly all recent Soviet efforts in West Africa have been of an official nature. In the last year, there has been a parade of cultural, economic, and technical delegations, and diplomatic relations have been established with all but Gabon and Niger; an agreement with the latter seems close at hand.

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Nevertheless, Soviet efforts to build good will in West Africa, even on an official basis, have encountered obstacles. Eight of the governments, for example, expressly condemned the invasion of Czechoslovakia and only one approved. Articles in the Soviet press critical of the Ivory Coast's close ties with the West have led to an exchange of bitter recriminations with Abidjan, and raised threats of a break. Togo recently forced a drastic reduction in the Soviet Embassy staff and Dahomey may follow suit. Virtually all the governments regard the Soviets with a wary eye and keep even formal diplomatic contacts to a minimum.

EAST AFRICA AND THE HORN

It seems probable that Moscow's policies in East Africa and the Horn are more closely tied to its Middle East policy than to purely African affairs. Having a phalanx of friendly and neutral states in the area would considerably lessen Soviet difficulties in establishing and maintaining a more or less permanent naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

Ethiopia A major obstacle to Soviet influence in the Horn is Ethiopia, and current Soviet policy is aimed at the elimination of US influence there. [redacted] The Soviets have thus far made virtually no progress in the face of Haile Selassie's opposition and his long friendship for the West.

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Moscow, in one of its widely assorted attempts to accomplish its objectives, has tried to get Addis Ababa to accept arms, but the only tangible result thus far has been Ethiopia's purchase of several Soviet helicopters. More extensive Soviet offers of military aid have been flatly refused, and of nearly $102 million in proffered economic aid, only about $18 million has been used. At the same time, Moscow has kept the pressure on Addis Ababa by providing extensive military equipment to both Somalia and the Sudan, Ethiopia's traditional adversaries in the Horn.

Moscow's failure to accomplish anything appears to have resulted in a shift in its approach, which now seems to lean toward greater involvement in Ethiopian economic development wherever possible. Meanwhile, the Soviets are waiting

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for the Emperor to die in the hope that his successor will be more interested in nonalignment—and Soviet aid.

Somali Republic In all of East Africa, Moscow's position is probably strongest in the Somali Republic, which has received over $64 million in Soviet economic and military aid. Moscow has become the Somalis' prime source of arms and has thus gained a sympathetic ear among military leaders. In recent years, however, Somalia's civilian leadership has sought to avoid overdependence on the USSR for economic and military aid, and Soviet motives are now viewed with some skepticism. Somali President Scermarche, for example, has charged that the Soviets pushed the Arabs into war in June 1967 purely to profit from the results, and that the USSR was concerned only with achieving a dominant position in the Middle East. He also has expressed fears that the Soviets will gain a military base in Aden and then penetrate the Red Sea and Indian Ocean areas.

Prime Minister Egal's efforts to keep Soviet activities within bounds and to redress the imbalance in Somali foreign relations have been poorly received in Moscow. His campaign for a detente with Kenya and Ethiopia has also been disturbing to the Soviets. Although Moscow does not seem to want open war in the Horn and, in fact, has restrained Somalia on occasion, a state of continuing armed confrontation and turmoil would probably best serve Soviet purposes. Meanwhile, further Soviet aid to Somalia will continue to hinder its efforts to improve ties with Kenya and Ethiopia.

Kenya and Uganda In Kenya, President Jomo Kenyatta has checkmated all Soviet efforts to develop a strong position. Political ties are minimal and offers of economic aid have been allowed to lapse by deliberate delays.

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The USSR's position in Uganda appears largely dependent on the policies of President Obote, despite Soviet arms aid. Although Uganda has accepted the aid, there are few, if any, officials who sympathize ideologically with the USSR and Soviet influence in the military and security service (chief recipients of Soviet aid) seems to be carefully controlled. The Soviets are presumably interested in Uganda mainly because of their difficulties in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Tanzania.

Tanzania Moscow has made little progress in Tanzania despite that country's close ties to the Communist world. Terms and quantities of Soviet military and economic aid have been far less generous than Peking's. As a result, Moscow's assistance programs have never really gotten off the ground and the Chinese have attained a much more influential position.

Numerous irritants have beset Soviet-Tanzanian relations since 1964, not the least of which has been President Nyerere's belief that Moscow has supported his political foes. Relations have also been troubled by Moscow's decision to back the federal government in Nigeria and by Tanzania's recognition of Biafra.

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With current ties disturbed by such thorny problems, Moscow is presently in no position to try to compete with Peking for Nyerere's favor.

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CENTRAL AFRICA: THE CONGO

Moscow's interest in Central Africa is limited chiefly to the two Congos, Kinshasa and Brazzaville. Congo (K) is perhaps the most outstanding example in sub-Saharan Africa of the shift in Moscow's policy away from active interference in internal affairs and toward more cautious cultivation of official relationships. In the early 1960s, the Soviets sought to establish a firm advisory position in the Congo's central government, but they consistently overplayed their hand. By late 1963, they had already been expelled from the country twice.

Moscow supplied aid to Congolese rebel groups during the Simba rebellion in 1964-65. At this time, there was reportedly much friction and mutual undercutting in the rebel groups among the Soviets, Chinese, and Cubans, each trying to elbow the others out of the picture. Soviet support for the rebels began to decrease in late 1965 when the rebellion collapsed.

Diplomatic relations were restored for the third time in December 1967, and the Soviets this time have been careful to avoid activity that might further heighten Congolese suspicions and result in a third expulsion.

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Long-range Soviet efforts are directed mainly at students and the new generation of intellectuals.

The chief characteristic of Soviet policy in Congo (B) seems to be a willingness to cooperate with the Brazzaville government rather than with more extreme leftist elements. The Soviets have worked closely with the regular military in Congo (B), a policy that appears to have paid off now that the army is more or less on top. The present head of government, Major Ngouabi, seems fairly solicitous of Soviet requests.

Moscow continues to regard Congo (B) as being on the "correct path of noncapitalist development" and therefore worthy of special Soviet attention, even though the major portion of the economy remains in private hands. At present, Moscow's opportunity to expand its influence further seems good, but competition with the Chinese will remain an important concern.

SOUTHERN AFRICA: ZAMBIA

Soviet interest in southern Africa focuses mainly on Zambia, the only country in the area with which the USSR has diplomatic relations. Zambia has cautiously expanded contacts with Communist countries—chiefly Czechoslovakia, the USSR, and China—during the last several years. The main causes of President Kaunda's turning to the Communist countries for economic and technical assistance have been his opposition to white rule in southern Africa and the West's failure to act decisively against Rhodesia. Hoping to take advantage of this opportunity, Moscow has tried to gain the confidence of Zambian leaders and gradually increase its influence among labor unions and students. Soviet efforts, however, are hindered by Kaunda's wariness of Soviet motives, as well as the strong position of the West.

Other than Zambia, Moscow has no official presence in southern Africa. Most of the Soviet effort in this area is related to support of various liberation movements aimed at the Portuguese colonies, Rhodesia, and South Africa.

SOVIET AID TO LIBERATION MOVEMENTS

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As the USSR concentrates on widening its official presence in Africa, aid to liberation movements is becoming more selective.

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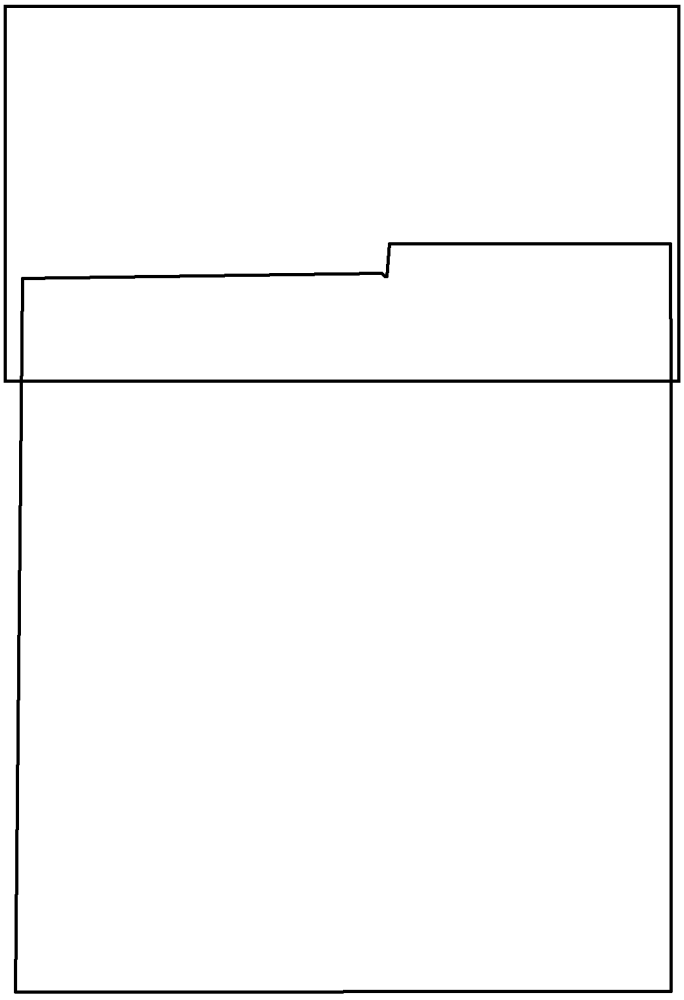

MOSCOW AND AFRICAN COMMUNISM

Moscow recognizes five Communist parties in the sub-Sahara, three of which—the Sudanese, South African, and Nigerian—receive limited Soviet financial assistance.

The Soviet Union, having recognized early that nationalism was the dominant political force in Africa, has placed little emphasis on the development of Communist parties there. As a result, the USSR has been willing to support anti-Western radical movements (and even conservative governments) throughout Africa, often to the exclusion and detriment of local Communist forces. Moscow has attempted to justify this ideological transgression with the concept of "revolutionary democracy," which is applied to radical regimes believed to be on a so-called noncapitalist path of development.

Whatever ideological peace of mind this rationalization has permitted Moscow has been seriously disturbed in practice by a series of coups and by the instability characteristic of the more radical sub-Saharan governments. These difficulties have apparently led to a reappraisal of the concept, and it may be discarded entirely. Recent articles in the Soviet press have attacked the peasant and petty bourgeois nature of radical African regimes and have assailed their failure to adopt the tenets of "scientific socialism." Nevertheless, declining Soviet interest in the concept of revolutionary democracy probably does not mean new Soviet emphasis on supporting local Communist parties, but more likely the further decline of ideology as a factor in the conduct of Soviet affairs on the continent.

OUTLOOK

To realize its twin objectives of expanding the official Soviet position and undermining Western influence, the Soviet Union has committed itself to a cautious, long-range program of image building. This campaign encompasses a variety of economic and military aid agreements, legions of delegations boosting Soviet-African friendship, and a web of educational and cultural agreements. The results have been mixed, but the course appears set—Moscow has opted for the safer, slower path of building its position on a base broad enough to survive the vagaries of African politics.

The relatively few authoritative statements of Moscow's view of Africa reveal not only a realistic and accurate assessment of development

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prospects and the conservative expectations of the USSR, but also that the sub-Sahara is likely to remain an area of relatively low priority. Two principles seem sure to guide Soviet policy in the future: flexibility and selectivity. Moscow has apparently finally realized that African politics will be unsettled for some time, and that this will require flexibility of commitment in the Kremlin. They have also learned that all of Africa is not about to fall to them like an overripe plum and they will therefore be increasingly selective in their choice of targets.

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