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# **The Soviet Response to Instability in West Africa**



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**An Intelligence Assessment**

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# **The Soviet Response to Instability in West Africa**



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**An Intelligence Assessment**

This paper was prepared by [redacted]  
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**The Soviet Response to Instability in West Africa**



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**Key Judgments**

*Information available as of 15 July 1985 was used in this report.*


Since the mid-1970s, the USSR's interests in West Africa have been overshadowed by the higher priority it has given to southern Africa and the Horn of Africa. However, the Soviets do maintain access to air and naval facilities in the region, provide arms to several states, and enjoy political and economic ties to almost all of the West African nations. 


The chronic instability that has plagued West African politics has presented Moscow with both opportunities and challenges. Moscow's response so far to this turmoil indicates that through the 1990s it will:

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- Cultivate radical regimes, especially where Western influence appears to be on the rebound. Ghana and Burkina (formerly Upper Volta) are two of the likely primary targets.
- Ensure that changes of regime do not harm relations with states, such as Guinea and Nigeria, that now maintain military and economic ties to the USSR.
- Continue to probe for entree in countries where it has little influence, as in Liberia and Cameroon. 

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Moscow's long-term success in exploiting openings offered in future accessions of radical regimes would closely depend on its willingness to give timely security and economic aid. Although cautious about backing such regimes, the Soviets might increase aid to obtain new rights of military access or to displace the West in an important regional state, such as Nigeria, should a leftist coup take place. The amount of aid that would sway a shaky new government probably would be relatively small. 

The Kremlin should be able to handle fairly easily the challenge that instability will present to its existing positions in West Africa. Regimes inclined to turn to the West for economic aid will still require a significant amount of security aid that Western countries probably will be unable or unwilling to provide. This reluctance will enable the Soviets to exploit the most effective instrument of their Third World policy—arms transfers and other military support—and ensure their continued presence and influence. 

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The Soviets will continue to probe for opportunities that instability may create in Western-oriented countries where they now have minimal influence. Although they have gained little in such situations in recent years, they are likely to persist with low-cost attempts to expand their diplomatic presence, cultivate trade ties, develop intelligence assets, and influence public opinion in a bid to improve their position to take advantage of future developments. 

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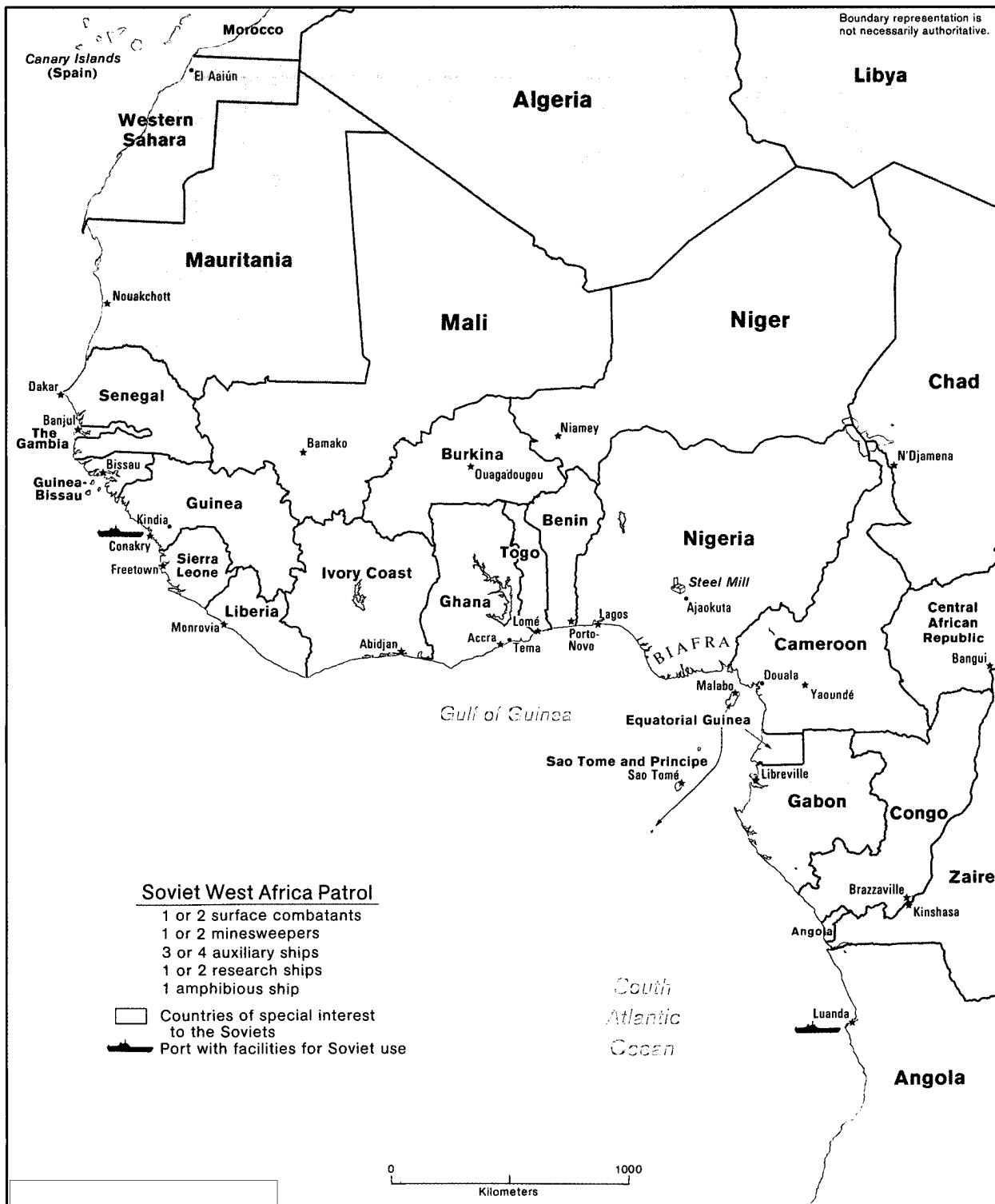
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Figure 1  
West Africa



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**The Soviet Response to Instability in West Africa**



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**Background**

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, West Africa was the primary focus of Soviet attention in Sub-Saharan Africa, while Washington and Moscow jockeyed for position in newly independent African states. The USSR appeared to have won major ideological and political successes. Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Guinea's Sekou Toure, and Mali's Modibu Keita responded enthusiastically to Soviet offers of economic assistance and political support (see figure 2). These leaders saw close relations with Moscow as a means both of demonstrating their independence from the colonial powers and of obtaining much-needed development aid. They also viewed the Soviet model of state-led industrialization and tight political control as well suited to their needs.



The Soviets were relatively generous with economic aid, and they provided credits and equipment for numerous modernization and development projects. Military and security ties also expanded, and Soviet advisers played key roles in building the Ghanaian, Guinean, and Malian armed forces. Moscow also used its presence in these countries to maintain contact with and, in some cases, funnel aid to leftist anticolonial movements elsewhere in Africa, such as the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). Some Soviet theoreticians argued that these countries' experiences proved the possibility of successfully negotiating the path of socialist development in the absence of the traditional "objective bases" for building socialism, a view embraced by Khrushchev. Even the more cautious analysts recognized the value of these states as supporters of Soviet foreign policy positions on decolonization and Third World development.



The close relations of the early 1960s proved short lived. African leaders became disenchanted with what they viewed as Soviet meddling in their internal affairs. Moreover, Soviet aid often proved unsuited to African needs and conditions, and the frequently

highhanded behavior of Soviet advisers and diplomats offended local sensibilities. Sekou Toure, for example, accused the Soviet Ambassador of interfering in local labor politics. In December 1961 he expelled the Ambassador and moved to scale down Soviet involvement in Guinea. During the 1960s, Moscow's ties to Mali stabilized at a comparatively low, but cordial, level. Relations with Ghana continued to be good until Kwame Nkrumah's fall in 1966 led to a sharp reduction in Soviet presence and influence.



After coups in Ghana and Algeria sharply reversed Soviet fortunes, the Soviets concluded that there was no easy way to achieve socialism in Africa and that major commitments to self-professed radicals could backfire. The Kremlin began to base its military and economic commitments on more narrow self-interest, rather than ideological affinity, and sought to cultivate good relations with several regimes. The Soviets continued to extend military aid to leftist-oriented states in West Africa—such as Benin, Mali, and, later, Guinea-Bissau—but they also cultivated diplomatic and trade ties to moderate states—such as Senegal and Sierra Leone. In an attempt to cultivate Africa's most populous state, Moscow sold MIG fighters and tanks to Nigeria for use against Biafran rebels. In the early 1970s, the Soviets established a continuous naval presence off West Africa and gained access in Guinea to facilities that would support Soviet ships and aircraft. Since then, the Soviets have turned their attention from West Africa to southern Africa and the Horn; they have also limited the resources allocated to West Africa.



**The Soviets and West Africa Today**

Although their primary interests in Sub-Saharan Africa are southern Africa and the Horn of Africa, the Soviets have established a variety of political,

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Figure 2. Leaders meet with African counterparts in the 1960s Keita and Khrushchev in Moscow (top), Nkrumah and Khrushchev in Moscow (lower left), and Toure and Brezhnev in Moscow (lower right)



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military, and economic ties to most West African states (see figure 1). They are also actively seeking entree in countries where they have had little or no presence (see table 1).



The Soviet's political objective is to limit the West's influence, now dominant in West Africa, and to encourage change to the left. Moscow also seeks to gain the support of West African states for its various

foreign policy positions, including disarmament initiatives and the linkage of the policies of the Republic of South Africa to those of the United States, and to portray itself as the "natural ally" of African interests against the "imperialist exploiters" of the West. Soviet observers have generally been less than optimistic

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**Table 1**  
**Soviet Relations With West African Countries:**  
**Economic and Military Deliveries and Personnel**  
**and Fishing Agreements**

	Aid Deliveries, 1979-84 (million US \$)		Presence, 1984 (number of persons)			Fishing Agreement
	Economic	Military	Diplomatic	Economic	Military	
Benin	8.8	5.0	35	20	5	x
Burkina	0.1	0.0	50	30	0	
Cameroon	0.0	0.0	200	45	0	x
Cape Verde	8.1	1.4	10	20	20	
Equatorial Guinea	0.6	9.0	85	15	0	
Gambia, The	0.0		0	0	0	
Ghana	16.0	5.0	135	10	0	
Guinea	166.5	48.5	110	450	50	x
Guinea-Bissau	15.5	20.0	40	150	55	
Ivory Coast	0.0	0.0	1	0	0	
Liberia	0.1	0.0	15	0	0	
Mali	44.9	75.0	125	500	50	
Niger	0.2		45	30	0	
Nigeria	1,207.2	165.0	315	2,800	10	
Sao Tome and Principe		4.0		0	120	
Senegal	0.0		85	40	0	x
Sierra Leone	1.5	2.0	45	10	0	
Togo	0.3		40	5	0	x

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about the prospects for the emergence of stable socialist—and reliably pro-Soviet—regimes in West Africa. Indeed, Soviet policy has concentrated on developing ties to all West African governments, including conservative pro-Western states, such as Liberia and Cameroon. These ties establish Moscow as a player in regional diplomacy and improve its ability to monitor and exploit future developments.

Militarily, Soviet interests in West Africa focus on the preservation and, if possible, expansion of access to air and naval facilities there. Existing access to such facilities in Conakry, Guinea, supports long-range transport flights to Angola and provisioning of the Soviet West Africa naval patrol. These activities in turn serve several purposes, including protecting the Soviet fishing fleet, providing support for the continuous flow of military assistance to Angola,

facilitating the transport of Soviet forces in a crisis, collecting intelligence, and demonstrating Soviet interest and involvement in a remote region. Expanded access in West Africa could facilitate reconnaissance and ASW operations in the mid-Atlantic.

Such access, while useful, is not of decisive importance to Soviet military operations, however, and West Africa as a whole is presently of limited strategic interest to the USSR. The Soviet Navy's primary mission remains the deployment and defense of nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines and the defense of the USSR from enemy nuclear attacks. The missions involving Soviet presence in West Africa—client state support, fisheries protection, and, in

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**The West Africa Patrol**

*In 1969 and 1970 Moscow sent small naval task groups to West Africa to support Soviet interests during crises in Ghana and Guinea. Since then the Soviets have maintained a continuous naval presence in West African waters.* [Redacted]

*Generally, the West Africa patrol has consisted of one or two surface combatants, an attack submarine, an amphibious ship, one or two minesweepers, one or two research vessels, and several auxiliaries. Logistic support is provided at Luanda, Angola, and provisioning at Conakry, Guinea. The patrol performs various missions, including the demonstration of Soviet interest in the region to both friendly and unfriendly governments, protection of Soviet fishing vessels, and the monitoring of local and Western naval activity.* [Redacted]

*During a crisis, the patrol's most likely task would be the evacuation of Soviet citizens and dependents from danger areas.* [Redacted]

[Redacted]

*They could also be used to back a friendly regime under challenge with a show of Soviet presence and power. However, the patrol's small size and its long supply lines suggest that its primary role would be symbolic.* [Redacted]

wartime, possibly sea lane interdiction—are of lesser significance in Soviet doctrine, and Moscow has not expended significant resources on expanding this presence in recent years. [Redacted]

Moscow's primary economic interests in West Africa are its profitable involvement in coastal fishing and in Guinea's bauxite industry. However, trade is minimal. The development aid the Soviets have given West Africa's faltering economies is also minimal, falling far short of the economic needs of even those states politically close to the USSR (see table 2). Much of the aid that has been given has been poorly planned and misdirected. For example, the Ajaokuta steel mill

in Nigeria—intended as a showpiece of Soviet economic aid and industrialization assistance—has become a white elephant due to poor planning and the use of outmoded technology. [Redacted]

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Moscow's most effective policy instrument in West Africa in recent years has been arms transfers. Between 1979 and 1984, Soviet military disbursements to West Africa amounted to \$383 million. (For military disbursements to each country, see table 3.) Mali, Guinea, Benin, and Guinea-Bissau depend on the USSR for much of their modern military equipment and technical support, items for which they have little or no alternative source of supply. Nigeria also operates Soviet planes and tanks as part of its diversified arsenal (see table 4). Arms transfers have enabled the Soviets to establish a sizable long-term presence in these countries through their control and manipulation of training, advisory support, and spare parts supply. Though the Soviets have not always enjoyed great success in translating arms transfers into substantial political benefit, they have gained a measure of influence in the military establishment of recipient states and ensured their role as key players in these states over the long term. [Redacted]

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Moscow has also sought to shape West African opinion and lay the foundation for future influence through various cultural, journalistic, and educational programs. For example, most states have accepted Soviet offers of scholarship assistance and cultural exchanges, and many have local chapters of Soviet front organizations and friendship societies (see table 5). In addition, local newspapers frequently publish articles originated by the Soviets on themes designed to embarrass Western states and promote Soviet positions on issues such as arms control, South Africa, and African debt. For example, a Nigerian newspaper ran a story in July 1985 alleging South African development of an "ethnic weapon" that only works on blacks, a longstanding Soviet propaganda theme. US embassies throughout West Africa report that the cumulative effect of such programs is not substantial,

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**Table 2**

Million US \$

**Comparison of Soviet and Western Economic Disbursements to Selected West African States <sup>a</sup>**

	1979		1980		1981		1982		1983		1984
	West	USSR	West	USSR	West	USSR	West	USSR	West <sup>b</sup>	USSR	USSR
Burkina	241		232		236		223				0.0
Cameroon	394		373		348		307		250		0.0
Ghana	200		211		174	NEGL	174	NEGL	190	1	11.9
Guinea	117	NEGL	108	2	109	19	75	2	75	4	3.3
Liberia	97		119	NEGL	147		132		145		0.1
Nigeria	118		183	24	183	90	287	300	300	150	564.0

<sup>a</sup> Includes official development assistance and other official flows.<sup>b</sup> Estimate.

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**Table 3**

Million US \$

**Comparison of Soviet and Western Military Disbursements to Selected West African States**

	1979		1980		1981		1982		1983	
	West	USSR	West	USSR	West	USSR	West	USSR	West	USSR
Burkina	5.2	0	13.1	0	8.6	0	0.9	0	6.0	0
Cameroon	0.6	0	3.7	0	26.6	0	22.9	0	47.3	0
Ghana	47.8	0	0.8	0	1.6	0	8.1	0	11.6	0
Guinea	2.0	20	0.2	6	NA	0	2.0	0		0
Liberia	1.1	0	4.9	0	1.6	0	0.7	0	10.5	0
Nigeria	36.1	82	78.9	0	414.8	6	229.0	13	253.5	13

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because moderate and leftist regimes alike generally resist what they perceive as attempts to meddle in their domestic affairs. The opportunities these activities afford the Soviets to enhance their image and cultivate key individuals and constituencies over the long run, however, may have more serious consequences for Western interests in West Africa's unstable political climate. [redacted]

The chronic instability that has plagued West African politics has presented Moscow with both opportunities and challenges. Moscow's response so far to this turmoil indicates that through the 1990s it will:

- Cultivate radical regimes, especially where Western influence appears to be on the rebound. Ghana and Burkina (formerly Upper Volta) are the likely primary targets.
- Ensure that changes of regime do not harm Soviet relations with states, such as Guinea and Nigeria, that presently maintain military and economic ties to the USSR.
- Continue to probe for entree in countries where Moscow presently has little influence, as in Liberia and Cameroon. [redacted]

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**Table 4**  
**Arms Transfers From the Soviet Bloc**  
**to West African States, 1956-84**

	Value of Deliveries (million US \$)	Key Systems	Quantity	Comments
Benin	185	AN-26 transport aircraft	3	Soviet military aid peaked in 1981 and has since declined.
		KA-26 helicopter	1	
		T-54 tank	20	
		PT-76 tank	4	
		BDRM scout car	6	
		ZHUK patrol boat	4	
Cameroon	NEGL	MI-4 helicopter	1	
Cape Verde	67	AN-26 transport aircraft	2	
		Patrol boat	1	
		Torpedo boat	4	
		Armored personnel carrier	10	
		BDRM scout car	17	
Gambia, The	NEGL	Small arms and ammunition		
Ghana	27	AN-12 transport aircraft	3	Almost all Bloc assistance to Ghana was extended between 1961 and 1965.
		MI-4 helicopter	3	
		Poluchat patrol boat	4	
		Armored personnel carrier	24	
Guinea	114	MIG-21 fighter	6	Although Guinea has recently sought to diversify its arms acquisitions, it remains heavily dependent on the USSR for spare parts and advisory support.
		MIG-17 fighter	12	
		MIG-15 fighter	6	
		AN-12 transport aircraft	2	
		AN-24 transport aircraft	1	
		Torpedo boat	9	
		Patrol boat	8	
		T-62 tank	10	
		T-54 tank	10	
		T-34 tank	31	
		PT-76 tank	24	
		Armored personnel carrier	50	
		BDRM scout car	20	
		Radar (various)	22	
Guinea-Bissau	70	MIG-21 fighter	6	
		MIG-17 fighter	3	
		MIG-15 fighter	3	
		MI-8 helicopter	1	
		MI-4 helicopter	3	
		T-34 tank	8	
		Armored personnel carrier	25	
Mali	166	MIG-21 fighter	6	
		MIG-17 fighter	21	
		MIG-15 fighter	5	
		AN-26 transport	3	
		MI-8 helicopter	6	
		MI-4 helicopter	1	
		T-34 tank	59	
		PT-76 tank	50	
		Armored personnel carrier	237	
		BMP armored fighting vehicle	41	
		BDRM-2 scout car	128	
		Radar (various)	24	
		SA-3 AA missile system	6	

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**Table 4 (continued)**

	Value of Deliveries (million US \$)	Key Systems	Quantity	Comments
Nigeria	259	MIG-21 fighter	31	Nigeria has frequently cited the relatively attractive prices of Soviet equipment as a key reason for its purchases.
		MIG-17 fighter	36	
		MIG-15 fighter	5	
		T-55 tank	65	
		SA-7 AA missile system	100	
		Radar (various)	22	
Sao Tome and Principe	4	AN-2 transport aircraft	2	
		Zhuk patrol boat	1	
Senegal	NEGL	Small arms and ammunition	NA	
Sierra Leone	2	Auxiliary ship	1	
		Radar	1	
		Small arms/ammunition		

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**Table 5**  
**Students From Selected West African Countries**  
**Attending Academic Institutions in the USSR <sup>a</sup>**

*Number of persons*

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Burkina	330	310	350	300	240	285
Cameroon	115	100	70	80	75	60
Ghana	500	650	650	800	875	960
Guinea	575	605	455	420	350	340
Liberia	45	65	65	65	90	90
Nigeria	1,030	1,180	1,000	1,100	1,110	1,250

<sup>a</sup> Numbers, drawn from attendance in December, are rounded to the nearest five.

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### Cultivating the Radicals

One form of political change in West Africa has been the emergence of regimes headed by leaders who had been disaffected junior military officers when they toppled previous governments. These leaders have often struck radical notes in their policy statements, arguing that socialist restructuring at home and an

“anti-imperialist” orientation abroad are the way out of serious economic and political troubles. The Soviets, however, have been cautious toward such regimes in recent years, and they have offered rhetorical support, but only token economic and military aid.

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Figure 3. Ghana's Head of State, Jerry John Rawlings

Ghana

Following Nkrumah's overthrow in 1966, Soviet-Ghanaian relations were generally cool, and the Soviets had little more than a diplomatic presence in Accra. Bilateral trade was minimal and military ties nonexistent, even though the Soviets had been Ghana's major benefactor during the early 1960s.

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The Soviets initially viewed Rawlings's return in December 1981 (he had ruled briefly in mid-1979) favorably. They portrayed the coup with a leftist cast, and they proclaimed it a setback for the West. They were not equally accommodating, however, when Rawlings looked to them for economic aid; they offered only \$10.6 million in credits, mainly for rehabilitating projects of the Nkrumah era. Their willingness to commit resources there appears to have been limited by suspicion of the mercurial Flight Lieutenant Rawlings and by previous political reversals in Ghana. Libya and Cuba emerged as the primary non-Western suppliers of military and economic assistance to Ghana; however, overall aid levels were relatively low.

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Figure 4. Burkina's President, Thomas Sankara

Their caution probably reflects their previous setbacks in dealings with African leaders who profess radicalism and a desire to limit commitment until the new governments have established their viability.

In Ghana and Burkina, junior military officers led coups that brought leftist regimes to power in previously pro-Western states. In 1984 Moscow—which had maintained a wait-and-see attitude—moved to improve relations with Accra and Ouagadougou, possibly to counter overtures they had made to Western countries. Moscow may also have concluded it could improve relations, with less chance of their sudden reversal, because the prospects for the survival of both heads of state—Ghana's Jerry John Rawlings and Burkina's Thomas Sankara—appear to be fairly good (see figures 3 and 4).

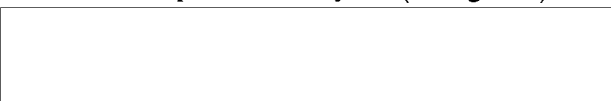
By mid-1983, Rawlings was disenchanted with the limited level of aid provided by Libya, Cuba, and the USSR. He began to moderate his radical rhetoric and turned to the West for economic help. This shift may have led the Soviets to reassess their approach in Ghana. In early 1984, the Kremlin launched a campaign to improve its standing there:

- In March, Vyacheslav Semenov, a diplomat with extensive experience in Africa, was appointed Ambassador to Ghana.
- A Soviet merchant ship landed a shipment of small arms and ammunition, probably for Ghanaian security forces,
- The destroyer Obraztsovyy visited the port of Tema for a week, showing the flag and probing Ghanaian interest in improved security ties (see figure 5).

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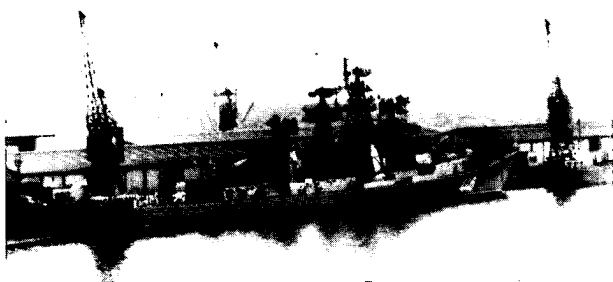


Figure 5. Soviet ship Obratsovyy in Tema, Ghana [redacted]

- A cultural and scientific agreement was signed, and the Soviets reportedly relaxed their terms for renewing previous aid projects.
- Bulgarian Prime Minister Filipov visited Accra, possibly to discuss intelligence cooperation arrangements.

[redacted]

- To build pro-Soviet opinion and influence government policy, the Soviets stepped up press placements, educational exchanges, and front activities.

[redacted]

Moscow seemed to believe it could prevent Ghana from moving too far toward the West by providing small amounts of economic aid and boosting military support, and that efforts to improve ties in the short term could lead to more substantial long-run gains. For example, if relations with Guinea deteriorate and the military access it gives them is threatened, the Soviets could use Ghanaian facilities much as they now use those at Conakry to support the West Africa naval patrol and long-range transport flights to Angola. Accra would also be a useful staging point for South Atlantic aerial reconnaissance, were Ghana to grant permission for such flights. [redacted]

The Soviets' campaign has had mixed results. [redacted] [redacted] Accra accepted Soviet offers of training for Ghanaian security officers, 24 of whom have reportedly completed a six-month course in the USSR. An economic cooperation agreement was announced in August 1984, though this appears to be

little more than an update of earlier Soviet commitments to aid in the renewal of several projects initiated during Nkrumah's regime. Since August 1984, at least 121 Ghanaian students have begun scholarship study programs in the USSR. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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[redacted] promoted Capt. Kojo Tsikata, head of security and intelligence, to the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC). Rawlings and other PNDC members, however, are said to suspect the Soviets' motives and to believe they are more interested in their own ends than in aiding Ghana. Moreover, the Ghanaians have not been impressed with Soviet assistance. They reportedly considered the guns and ammunition delivered last year to be useless. [redacted]

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[redacted] Rawlings wants to avoid alienating Western governments that provide almost all of Accra's outside economic assistance.

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Before the recent spy scandal, Rawlings had removed several other leftist members of his cabinet from positions of responsibility and promoted several moderates. The US Embassy in Accra reports that in November 1984 a US Navy ship—the first to visit Ghana since the 1981 coup—was warmly received. Foreign Affairs Secretary Asamoah announced that Ghana has not adopted socialism and seeks beneficial cooperation with both East and West. [redacted]

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The Soviets may continue to offer expanded military, security, and, possibly, economic aid in the hope that the unpredictable Rawlings will adopt a more radical posture if he is unsuccessful in obtaining it from the West. They probably will try to cultivate leftist officials, like Tsikata, to improve their ability to exploit future developments (see figure 6).<sup>1</sup> They will

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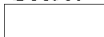
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Figure 6. Ghana's Security Chief, Kojo Tsikata

Cuba, Libya, and North Korea quickly moved to cultivate Sankara, but Moscow was cautious. While the Soviet media highlighted Sankara's radical rhetoric, officials of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed doubts about his reliability. The Soviets donated some school supplies and urged Ouagadougou to accept their scholarship offers, but they did not extend any financial aid. Sankara publicly berated the Kremlin for not providing substantive assistance to a fellow revolutionary government.

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also undoubtedly continue their persistent efforts to build a pro-Soviet constituency by promoting scholarships and cultural exchange programs and by placing Soviet-originated articles in the press. The Soviets might also be inclined to intensify diplomatic efforts and increase its economic aid should their air and naval access to Guinea be threatened. However, they are probably more likely to try to build influence slowly and avoid major commitment in a potentially unstable environment.

During the spring and summer of 1984, Moscow appeared interested in improving bilateral relations, probably because Sankara's prospects for survival made it likely that Soviet influence would not be subject to sudden reversal. In April, Moscow sent a TASS official to Ouagadougou to ease tensions raised by Sankara's criticism,

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In May Burkinan Defense Minister Lingani visited the USSR. Although no agreements were announced,

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Moscow probably was trying to reassure Sankara of its support for his revolution and to limit the influence of Western suppliers of aid.

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**Burkina**

After it attained independence in 1960, Burkina (formerly Upper Volta) followed a generally pro-Western foreign policy course, and it relied heavily on France for economic and military support. Soviet ties to Burkina were minimal during the period of coups and upheavals that preceded the establishment of Sankara's government. By 1983 these ties were only a small cultural and educational program, an airline service agreement, and provision of financial aid to trade unions.

Moscow, however, appears to have overplayed its hand in its attempts to interfere in Burkinan internal politics. According to a report from the US Embassy in Ouagadougou, in August 1984, Sankara fired five cabinet ministers who were members of a civilian Marxist party that favors improved relations with the Socialist world. Although apparently not the immediate cause of their firing, links between these figures and the Soviet Embassy had angered Sankara and led to a cooling of bilateral relations.

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Backed by key military personnel, leftist unionists, students, and intellectuals, Capt. Thomas Sankara, former Prime Minister, seized power in August 1983. A self-styled revolutionary, Sankara proclaimed a "revolutionary government" and advocated strong "progressive" foreign policy positions. At the same time, he avoided the initiation of radical programs, restrained extreme leftists at home, and maintained links to Western governments that donated aid.

The Soviets reportedly said

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Figure 7. Soviet ship in Conakry, Guinea

they found Sankara's firing of the leftist ministers unacceptable

Burkina responded by publicly criticizing the USSR's aid policy and, according to diplomatic sources, expelled the Soviet deputy chief of mission in Ouagadougou.

Sankara is highly sensitive to perceived slights to Burkinan sovereignty and probably will continue to be cool toward the Soviets. Although likely to accept small amounts of economic or military aid, he is also likely to limit the Soviets' presence and influence.

The Soviets, meanwhile, will almost certainly continue to probe for Burkinan interest in military and economic cooperation, but wariness of the unpredictable Sankara and the still questionable prospects for his regime will lead them to assume a low profile. They probably will also rely on Havana, which enjoys fairly good relations with Ouagadougou, to advance the Soviet Bloc interests. The Cubans opened their Embassy in Ouagadougou in 1984, and in July Cuba and Burkina signed a cooperation agreement.

**Protecting Existing Relationships**

Recent coups in Nigeria and Guinea overthrew governments that had maintained correct, if not particularly close, relations with the USSR. The Soviets responded by trying to preserve the economic and military ties already developed.

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**Special Ties To Guinea**

While political ties have cooled in recent years, the Soviet position in Guinea is still substantial, due to Moscow's extensive involvement in key economic and military sectors. This involvement does not always guarantee direct political influence, but it does underpin the Soviet position in Guinea and makes its sudden reversal unlikely.

Moscow has been Conakry's primary source of military equipment and training since independence. The Guinean armed forces operate various Soviet equipment, including MIG-21 fighters, T-62 tanks, and MI-8 helicopters, and they are aided by about 50 Soviet advisers. Many Guinean officers have received training in the USSR. While Conakry may seek to diversify its arms inventory somewhat, Guinea's need for Soviet spare parts and maintenance support and its poor prospects for obtaining favorable credit terms in the West should ensure continued military dependence on the USSR.

The Soviet Union plays a key role in the Guinean economy through its involvement in the Guinean bauxite and fishing industries. Moscow has invested over \$116 million in the Kindia bauxite project and receives some 2.5 million metric tons of bauxite a year—about 14 percent of total Guinean exports—in repayment. The Soviets have provided almost \$12 million in credits for Guinea's fishing sector. These credits are to finance the construction of cold storage plants and dock facilities, and the acquisition of trawlers and a hydrographic research vessel. Militarily, Conakry has no realistic alternative to the Soviets' continued aid. Past attempts to reduce Soviet involvement have failed, serving to underscore Guinea's economic dependence on the USSR.

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**Guinea**

Moscow's once close relations with Guinea have declined since 1977, when Sekou Toure suspended Soviet reconnaissance flights from Conakry. The Soviets continue to make periodic naval visits to Conakry, however, and Soviet transport flights regularly refuel there en route to Angola and Cuba (see figure 7). In addition, Moscow benefits from its participation in Guinea's bauxite and fishing industries. [Redacted]

Uncertainty resulting from President Toure's death in 1984 and the subsequent military coup increased the Soviets' concern over their position in Guinea. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted] The Soviet press, meanwhile, reported the coup in straightforward fashion and emphasized the importance of continuity with Toure's policies. [Redacted]

In the following months, as Guinea actively sought increased Western aid and investment, Moscow moved to protect its interests. Presumably to sound out Conakry's intentions and stress the benefits of cooperation, Moscow received a delegation led by Defense Minister Keita. Although no agreements were publicly announced, [Redacted]

[Redacted]

As reported by the US Embassy in Conakry, the USSR and Guinea signed a loan accord for \$115 million in September. Terms of the loan—which was to finance various agricultural and industrial projects—stipulated that 25 percent was to be used to purchase Soviet merchandise and that repayment was to be in bauxite or hard currency. An agreement on continued Soviet assistance to Guinea's fishing industry was signed in November. Finally, the Guinean press reported that existing defense assistance agreements were also renewed in November. [Redacted]

Once implemented, these measures would expand the Soviets' presence in Guinea and sustain their influence with the new regime. But Moscow as yet has not shown any willingness to provide the large amounts of economic aid Conakry requires. The \$115 million loan is apparently not an increase over previous levels of aid. Moreover, [Redacted] the Guineans are unhappy with the Soviets' implementation of previous agreements and their emphasis on ideological and cultural programs rather than development aid. As a result, the Kremlin probably will not be able to dissuade the Guineans from their overtures to the West or discourage them from pursuing free-market economic policies. [Redacted]

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Moscow's primary interest in Guinea is the preservation and, if possible, expansion of its air and naval access. Soviet naval ships now call at Conakry, and Soviet transport planes stop there en route to Angola. The Soviets probably can maintain this access through the 1980s at relatively low cost, because of Guinea's dependence on and present lack of alternatives to Soviet military and economic aid. Conakry probably will take care not to alienate the Soviets even as it opens its economy to Western aid and trade. The Guineans, however, probably will not allow a significant expansion of the Soviet military presence unless they become displeased with Western responses to their requests for aid. [Redacted]

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**Nigeria**

Until its civil war in 1967, Nigeria's relations with the USSR were limited. Lagos had remained close to the West after independence, and the country's few "progressive forces" were primarily in the province that was trying to break away—Biafra. However, the civil war gave Moscow an entree, and the Soviets, calculating that the Lagos government would win, abandoned the left—a pragmatic approach typical of their African policies in the late 1960s. Moscow gave its first military support to the Nigerians during their war with Biafran rebels and expanded trade and cultural ties as well. [Redacted]

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**The Ajaokuta Project**



*Ajaokuta Steel Mill, Nigeria* [redacted]

*The integrated steel manufacturing complex at Ajaokuta, Nigeria, was to be the showpiece of Soviet development aid in Sub-Saharan Africa. Joint planning began in 1967, and in 1979 Moscow extended a \$1.2 billion credit for construction. The Soviets designed the facility and provided technical support, training, and equipment for construction of the plant and associated facilities.* [redacted]

*Since its inception, however, the project has been plagued by problems. Although one of the four projected mills began operation in July 1983, rising costs, delays in payments, and a lack of equipment have seriously delayed completion of the entire project.* [redacted] *construction came to a halt in November 1984. Moreover, the US Embassy in Lagos reports that the plant's obsolete design and remote location make it unlikely that steel will ever be economically produced at Ajaokuta.* [redacted]

*The Federal Military Government is undoubtedly unhappy with Soviet performance on the project, in spite of the generally optimistic public pronouncements of both sides. Other West African leaders are presumably aware of the difficulties with the project and they, along with Nigeria, are likely to take Moscow's record at Ajaokuta into account when assessing the prospects of economic cooperation with the USSR.* [redacted]

Relations cooled gradually after the war. Although nominally nonaligned, Lagos was considerably closer to the West because of its extensive economic (it is a major oil supplier), military, political, and cultural links. Moscow's persistent interest in Nigeria, nonetheless, reflected its appreciation of the country's size, economic potential, and regional importance. [redacted]

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Since the late 1970s, the cornerstone of the Soviet-Nigerian relationship has been trade. It amounted to over \$500 million in 1983, for example, but it was only a small fraction of total Nigerian trade. Overall, bilateral trade levels have fallen in recent years, because of Nigeria's economic problems and reluctance to engage in barter. Moscow also provided \$1.2 billion in credits for the Ajaokuta steel mill project, but its poor design, rising costs, and construction delays contributed to Nigeria's growing disenchantment with the Soviets' economic aid. [redacted]

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The Nigerian armed forces operate various equipment purchased from the Soviets, including MIG-21 fighters, T-55 tanks, and ZSU-23 anti-aircraft guns. However, purchases of equipment and acceptance of Soviet advisers declined in the early 1980s, because Nigerian officers apparently were not impressed by either. The number of Soviet military advisers in Nigeria declined from 50 in 1980 to 10 in 1983. [redacted]

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Moscow has conducted numerous social, cultural, and educational programs in Nigeria. It has offered scholarships to Nigerian students and sponsored artistic and cultural exchanges. It has also supported so-called peace committees, placed numerous articles in Nigeria's relatively open and lively press, and—along with the Bulgarians—funneled funds to leftist trade unionists. According to the US Embassy, these efforts have not had a significant impact on Nigerian public opinion. [redacted]

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In response to the military takeover, the Soviet press stressed the desirability of honoring existing commitments to "friendly countries" and blamed Nigeria's troubles on the West. The Kremlin also encouraged

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Lagos to follow a "truly nonaligned" foreign policy, defined, in this case, in economic terms that include limiting foreign investment, resisting International Monetary Fund conditions, and increasing trade with the Soviet Bloc. In a bid to improve relations with the new Federal Military Government (FMG), the Soviets extended a warm reception to an FMG delegation sent to Moscow after the coup. [redacted]

Moscow is no doubt aware of the limits to the relationship and probably will concentrate on trying to revitalize the Ajaokuta project and on continuing military supply arrangements. At the same time, the Soviets will seek to influence Nigerian public opinion and improve their position to affect future events by supporting front activities, promoting press placements, and expanding contacts with leftist trade unionists and students. [redacted]

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The FMG expressed rhetorical interest in cooperation with the USSR on the South African and Namibian issues—probably to reinforce its claims to nonalignment—but did nothing else to improve bilateral relations. The FMG, like the preceding government, has suspected Soviet intentions; counting against Moscow are a trade balance in its favor and problems with the Soviet-built steelmaking project in Ajaokuta. [redacted]

Should the FMG prove unable to consolidate its hold on power, the fluid, potentially chaotic situation that probably would follow could offer Moscow attractive opportunities to increase its influence in Nigeria. To improve relations, Moscow might well offer diplomatic support and security aid to a successor regime. [redacted]

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In 1984 the FMG apparently authorized the purchase of 12 new MIG-21 fighters, but it reportedly saw these as a low-cost stopgap measure until it could afford Western interceptors. [redacted]

**Looking for Openings**

Political turmoil in some pro-Western governments has given Moscow the opportunity to improve its position at the expense of the West. Despite having made no major gains in West African situations of this type in the past, the Soviets are likely to persist with low-cost attempts to expand their diplomatic presence, cultivate trade ties, develop intelligence assets, and influence public opinion. [redacted]

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The Nigerian press announced the conclusion of a deal for the MIGs in October. [redacted]

**Liberia**

Following the coup in Liberia in April 1980, Moscow—in an effort to court the pro-Western nation—offered political, economic, and military cooperation to then Master Sergeant Doe (see figure 8). Liberia accepted scholarships for study in the USSR, signed an air service agreement, and allowed the Soviets to expand their diplomatic presence in Monrovia. [redacted]

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[redacted] serious snags arose in the negotiations and that Lagos was inclined to forgo the purchase of new aircraft in favor of a far more limited repair and maintenance agreement for its existing MIG fleet. These difficulties were apparently overcome by the end of 1984, though, when [redacted]

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[redacted] delivery of the MIG-21s had begun. [redacted]

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Nigeria's need for Western aid and investment, FMG suspicions of Soviet motives, and Moscow's poor track record on economic projects make significant improvement in Soviet-Nigerian relations unlikely—despite the aircraft sales. Lagos probably will continue its policy of spreading its weapons purchases among Eastern, Western, and Third World suppliers.

However, Doe soon cut off this expansion in bilateral relations because of his mistrust of Soviet intentions and his perception of Soviet links with his leftist opposition. Doe limited the Soviet mission in Monrovia to six officials, and he removed cabinet officials who favored improved ties to Moscow. His suspicions

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Figure 8. Liberia's Head of State, Samuel K. Doe [Redacted]

from the Soviets. Alternatively, Doe may have initiated the proposal merely to attract US attention. [Redacted]

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The Kremlin probably will have difficulty improving its position in Monrovia as long as Doe is in charge. His intense suspicion of Soviet meddling and close surveillance of opposition parties led him to break diplomatic relations with the USSR in July. Doe reportedly said he would not consider reestablishing relations until after the transition from military to civilian rule promised by January 1986. In the meantime, Moscow probably will seek to cultivate assets—by building contacts with Doe's opponents—that could be exploited should the transition process break down. [Redacted]

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of Kremlin involvement in alleged leftist plotting of coups finally led him to expel the Soviet Ambassador in November 1983. [Redacted]

Liberia appears to have moved to repair relations with the USSR in the spring of 1984, when its close ties to the United States cooled somewhat. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted] in an April speech, Doe stated that Liberia wanted good relations with all states, hinted that greater cooperation with Moscow would be welcome, and sharply criticized the United States. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted] Doe was interested in buying three MI-17 transport helicopters. Moscow reportedly agreed to sell the helicopters on commercial terms, but the Liberians ultimately backed away from the deal, [Redacted] possibly because they could not obtain concessionary terms

**Cameroon**

Soviet relations with Cameroon, both before and after the attempted coup in 1984 against the government of President Paul Biya, have been correct but cool. Trade levels have been limited and declining; security arrangements, nonexistent. Soviet freighters call at the port of Douala, but Cameroon has resisted Soviet pressure for additional diplomatic facilities. Heavily dependent on the West for economic and security aid, Cameroon's ties with Moscow merely reinforce its claims to nonalignment. [Redacted]

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The Soviet press has said almost nothing about the opposition military officers' attempted overthrow of Biya. Moreover, Soviet activity in Cameroon has remained at its usually low levels, including the freighter calls at Douala, occasional placements in the local press, and a few social and cultural exchanges, such as an agreement in September on training of Cameroonian forestry technicians. [Redacted]

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The prospects for any meaningful increase in Soviet influence in Cameroon are limited, even should the political situation deteriorate. Cameroon is a low priority for Moscow, which has few local assets—there are no Communist parties or affiliates of international front groups—and opposition within the military has not appeared to be inclined to seek help from

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the Soviet Bloc. Yaounde's suspicions are also fueled by memories of Soviet support for antigovernment insurgents in the late 1950s and early 1960s. However, the Soviets will take advantage of any opportunity to increase their presence in Cameroon so they can watch events and build relationships with people who might lead the opposition. However, no significant change in the bilateral relationship is likely soon.

[redacted]

**Outlook**

Instability in West African political life will present Moscow with many opportunities for improving its position there. Economic distress, the fragility of political structures, and lack of accepted succession mechanisms almost ensure frequent plots and changes of government. Moreover, the Libyans' persistent efforts to expand their presence and influence in the region add to the potential for instability. The Soviets, however, have not been able to manipulate events because they lack meaningful influence with West African opposition movements and parties. The Kremlin consequently will probably continue to be fairly cautious in dealing with governments following coups and will take time to assess new leaders and avoid substantive commitment even to those regimes professing the most vehement radicalism. Moscow probably will try, nevertheless, to exploit the opportunities presented by regional political instability and to limit damage to political, economic, and military ties that it views as beneficial. [redacted]

If a new radical regime seizes power in West Africa, Moscow will initially assess its stability and orientation. Then the Soviets will almost certainly try to take advantage of its insecurity and pretensions by offering arms, military and security training, and, possibly, a limited amount of highly visible development aid. They are unlikely, however, to be willing to pay the high price necessary to supplant Western providers of aid. [redacted]

Any expansion of influence would be gradual, but Moscow would be patient and persistent. The pay-offs—expanded Soviet presence, influence over a

regime's decisionmaking, potential access to military facilities—are attractive enough and the risks and costs low enough to justify Moscow's long-term attention. [redacted]

In instances where instability threatens Soviet influence derived from existing political, military, and economic links, Moscow will point up the importance of fulfilling past agreements. It might also extend new military and economic aid as an incentive for new rulers to continue these relationships. Alternatively, Moscow could try to stress the military and economic vulnerability of a state dependent on the USSR by threatening to stop such aid. Even pro-Western successor regimes are unlikely to entirely cut ties to the USSR, if only to demonstrate their nonaligned standing. [redacted]

Moscow will continue to try to build relationships in West African states where it has a minimal presence and little contact with either government or opposition forces. It will try to enhance its position by offering cultural and educational aid and military training and support for various Third World and Pan-African issues, such as opposition to South Africa (see tables 3 and 4). It may also use low-profile active measures, such as press placements and clandestine funding of leftist political groups. Once again, however, Moscow almost certainly will not expend significant resources. [redacted]

**Limitations—Often Self-Imposed**

The Soviets' ability to fully exploit opportunities in West Africa will be constrained until or unless they are willing to allocate substantial economic aid to the region. Higher priority objectives in southern Africa and the Horn probably will continue to receive the larger share of their attention, and West African leaders inclined to look to Moscow for significant military and economic aid are likely to be disappointed by its lack of generosity (see tables). Given these conditions, the West, notably France and the United States, will continue to be economically dominant in the region. [redacted]

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Moscow's policy in West Africa is also limited by the perceptions that West African leaders have of its past record. Its showpiece industrial project, the steel mill in Ajaokuta, Nigeria, is experiencing serious difficulty. Several West African countries have complained that the USSR takes unfair advantage of bilateral fishing agreements. Even Ghana's leftist Chairman Jerry Rawlings has expressed his doubts about Soviet ability to deliver promised aid. 

Local situations might trigger a Soviet resurgence in the region. *For example, if Guinea moved to cut off Soviet air and naval access*, Moscow might offer large-scale security and economic aid to other West African nations to try to regain access. The Soviets probably would turn to Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, and Cape Verde. *If Nigeria became unstable*, the Soviets might commit diplomatic backing and security and economic aid to the vulnerable successor regime. 

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Finally, activity in West Africa may be constrained by the widespread perception of Russians as outsiders meddling in African affairs. According to many diplomatic and academic sources, the good will Moscow built up in previous decades as the champion of anticolonialism has largely dissipated, in part due to the often highhanded behavior of Soviet nationals in Africa and openly racist treatment of Africans in the USSR. Moreover, ideology usually plays a limited role in the ultimate policy calculations of most African leaders. Even the most radical West African heads of state are inclined to assess relations with the USSR by strictly weighing cost against benefits.<sup>2</sup> 


Expanded access to West African air and naval facilities could improve the Soviets' capacity to monitor naval activity in the South Atlantic. Such access, in and of itself, however, would not result in substantial improvement in Soviet military capabilities in the region. It would be likely to influence area perceptions of the local balance of superpower capabilities and intentions, especially if Moscow were buying that access with arms transfers. At the very least, pro-Western states would look to France and the United States for increased military aid, potentially triggering a regional arms race. 

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**Alternative Outcomes**

There are, nonetheless, circumstances in which the Soviets might sharply upgrade military and economic support for certain West African states. For example, marked deterioration of Moscow's position in southern Africa might lead it to intensify its efforts in West Africa to regain a measure of dynamism in its Africa policy. In this case, Gorbachev might focus on West African opportunities as a means of reestablishing foreign policy momentum in the Third World. Conversely, successful consolidation of the Soviet position in southern Africa might incline the Kremlin to begin new ventures in West Africa. 

Moscow's success in establishing influence in a radical successor regime in Nigeria could pose more serious challenges to Western interests. Although such a regime probably would be too dependent on oil sales to the West to sharply change sales patterns, Moscow probably would exploit the regime's propensity to blame Nigeria's economic woes on the West and to resist existing debt and trade arrangements. The Soviets would also gain a useful ally in international forums. Once again, any Soviet arms shipments could raise the odds of a regional arms race involving pro-Western states such as Cameroon, Niger, and Ivory Coast. 

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<sup>2</sup> These limitations have affected the Soviet position in several states that profess to be socialist.   


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## Appendix

### The Soviet Bureaucracy's View of West Africa

Both the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Department (ID) of the CPSU's Central Committee have departments or sectors that deal with Africa. However, the responsibilities of the two institutions and the types of officials in those departments are different. [ ]

#### The USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for state-to-state diplomatic relations. Within the ministry, the bureaucratic structure for Africa is roughly similar to that for most other regions. Three regional departments cover Africa: the First African Department, which is responsible for Northern Africa; the Second African Department, which is responsible for the western coastal countries; and the Third African Department, which is responsible for East and southern Africa. Only the Third Department, which includes coverage of both Angola and Ethiopia, is represented in the ministry's Collegium (policymaking body), which indicates importance, especially relative to the other departments. [ ]

The ambassadorial posts to the West African countries are filled either by *government and party officials* who have been essentially "exiled" because their political careers have been cut short or by *career diplomats* who are African specialists. [ ]

The Soviet Ambassador to Guinea, Vladimir Kitayev, is a failed politician. An assistant to Presidium Chairman Nikolay Podgornyy until his political defeat by Leonid Brezhnev and subsequent forced retirement in 1977, Kitayev was sent to Algiers to serve as Minister-Counselor, and in 1982 he was sent to Guinea. [ ]

Generally, the career Africanists predominate: four of the five ambassadors to the countries considered in this study have spent most of their careers working on Africa. (Liberia is excluded because the Soviet Union does not have an ambassador stationed there.) Typical

of these specialists is the Ambassador to Ghana, Vyacheslav Semenov, who has worked in African affairs for almost 20 years. The prejudice in the ministry against Africanists is evident in the comment [ ] He stated that Semenov "has spent his entire career in Africa, and, as a result, does not have a brilliant future and again reflects the relatively low priority our ministry apparently assigns West Africa." [ ]

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#### The CPSU Central Committee's International Department

The International Department maintains CPSU's relations with nonruling Communist parties and other political organizations abroad. ID officials who work on Africa are usually former academics, members of research institutes, or journalists who have specialized in Third World affairs or Africa. [ ]

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Although we cannot determine the priority the ID has given it, West Africa is a region where the ID attempts to curry favor. For example, West African officials—like other Third World leaders—who belong to nonruling Communist parties or pro-Soviet socialist parties/organizations are among the delegates brought to the USSR on all-expense-paid trips. The visiting Africans usually meet Boris Ponomarev, head of the ID and a candidate member of the CPSU Politburo. Soviet delegations to West African countries are usually accompanied by ID personnel. [ ]

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Two of the six ID deputy chiefs share responsibility for West African affairs: Rostislav Ul'yanovskiy and Petr Manchkha. Ul'yanovskiy has been deputy chief for Asia and Africa since at least 1966 and is one of the senior Soviet authorities on the Third World. He served as deputy chief of the Institute for Asian and

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African Affairs during the early 1960s. Many of the numerous articles he has written are on African liberation movements. He is the ID deputy chief who usually accompanies Ponomarev when he meets with visiting delegations from West Africa. He is also involved with the Soviet Committee for Solidarity with Asian and African Countries—a front organization that works closely with the ID. [Redacted]

published much recently. There has been some speculation that his absence indicates that he is either involved in clandestine activity or not influential.

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Petr Manchkha, a former journalist, also covers African affairs in the ID. Manchkha came to the ID around 1970 and served as chief of the Africa sector. In 1978 he became a deputy chief of the ID. He has traveled in West Africa and has written numerous articles on the region. We have had very little information on Manchkha's activities in the past few years; he is rarely mentioned in the press and has not

Viktor Sidenko also appears to be responsible for African affairs in the ID. He has been an ID consultant since at least 1979, and he probably covers at least the Congo, Ghana, and Nigeria. He was the *New Times* correspondent for Africa during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1974 he was identified as the director of Novosti Press Agency. [Redacted]

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