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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

20 May 1966

SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 8-66

SUBJECT: The Current Political Situation and Prospects in Tropical Africa

SUMMARY

Africa today is groping for new answers and reassuring guidelines. Old nostrums such as Pan-Africanism and one-man, one-party rule have failed to deliver prosperity or dislodge white regimes in southern Africa. Radical nationalists such as Nkrumah, who once seemed to be the wave of the future, have proved to be poor managers, and enthusiasm for their brand of militant change has lost steam. But moderates like Balewa equally have been turned out of office. The military are increasingly becoming the decisive power group, but they lack ideas and stature. During recent political skirmishing both Moscow and Peiping suffered notable setbacks.

We think current political floundering will continue for some considerable time without any African or external force or ideology becoming dominant. If anything, Africa's problems are likely to spread. For example, frictions between Arabs and Africans seem gradually to be emerging in countries on the fringe of the Sahara. There is also an increasing failure to meet current food requirements.

Africa's mood of the moment is largely one of drift and doubt, and intractable economic problems will continue to trouble nearly all African leaders. But the entrenched white regimes will provide a convenient target for those Africans who wish to divert attention from their internal difficulties and to restore their political standing.

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Introduction

1. A number of recent events have shaken African self-confidence. A rash of coups has toppled radical and moderate regimes. Evidence has come to light which is disillusioning those who believed that the USSR and China were merely disinterested providers of aid. The staying power of white Rhodesia is an embarrassing contrast to the stagnation of black "liberation movements". For much of the African political elite, it seems to be a time of subdued reappraisal.

The Current Situation

2. An important result of the recent political upheavals was, of course, to dramatize the fragility of Africa's political institutions and regimes. This was reflected in the recent conference of 11 East and Central African states, during which they tacitly agreed to cease interfering in the affairs of neighboring states and to curtail the political activities of refugees from other Black African states. There are some who are evading this agreement, e.g., the Somalis in Kenya, and others who are unable to control all refugee activity, e.g., Burundi, but by and large there is a stronger disposition on the part of a number of African

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governments not to do unto others what they would not want done to themselves.

3. Recent political developments represent a setback for the proponents of African "radicalism". Many Africans, particularly the young educated elite, set considerable store by the maxims of political showmen such as Nkrumah and Toure. These leaders succeeded in representing their brand of radicalism, including militancy, rapid change, and close links with the Communist powers, as the wave of the future. Riding the political crest, they carved out a role in Afro-Asian circles disproportionate to their countries' power. Then the radicals suffered a major setback with the humiliating disappearance of their colleague Ben Bella. Now, Nkrumah's ouster, Toure's troubles, the near economic bankruptcy of all the radical regimes have at least temporarily sapped much of their political appeal.

4. However, the radicals retain a considerable potential for troublemaking. Indeed, they still dominate regimes in Guinea, Mali, Congo (Brazzaville), and Zanzibar, among others. Figures

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such as Babu and Odinga are not without influence and funds.* Another disturbing factor is the growing number of armed exiles, especially in East and Central Africa, many of them extremely primitive and ready to hitch on to any cause. More importantly, there remain substantial numbers of discontented intellectuals and youth even in moderate states such as Senegal and Nigeria. But the political image, so crucial in Africa, of radical notables has suffered grievous damage, and for the moment the radicals seem unable to fire Africa's imagination or to marshal much in the way of political backing.

5. At the same time, so-called "moderate" or "conservative" governments have encountered a full measure of trouble. Balewa's assassination, the ouster of Presidents Dacko (Central African Republic) and Yameogo (Upper Volta), and growing pressure on Haile Selassie are manifestations of various kinds of discontent arising from various causes. In some places, governments have been

* Their adherents and other like-minded extremists recently formed the loosely-organized and Communist-financed "East African Front", designed to promote mutual interests in trade unions, youth groups, and women's organizations, and to promote radical policies in the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and Afro-Asian organizations.

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overturned because of belated attempts to impose a little "austerity"; in others apparently because of extravagance and mismanagement. In some instances, tribal and regional considerations have probably played a major role; elsewhere they seem to have had little effect in setting political forces in motion. Indeed, in moderate as in radical states, as often as not political change occurs when growing disillusion with the maximum leader concurs with the disposition of a small organized group -- usually military or labor -- to take action.

6. Although military leaders have demonstrated a growing willingness to take power, it is doubtful whether military regimes offer a panacea for Africa's problems. Probably the less sophisticated army leaders are closer to the simple people in the bush than are the Western-educated professional politicians, who now constitute something resembling a "class" of their own. But the thin layer of military leadership is ill at ease with the "educated elite" and the bureaucracy, though they must depend upon them (and the bureaucrats so far find it advantageous to go along). In those cases where the military has chosen to return nominal power to civilian authority while retaining its essentials, e.g., Togo, Dahomey, the politicians have again become quickly mired in

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familiar difficulties. When the military chooses to hold on to power, other problems come into focus. The armies, like the politicians, are frequently beset by tribalism, e.g., Nigeria, and corruption in their ranks is not unknown, e.g., Uganda. Discipline is often lax, and they tend to deal harshly with the populace, as in the Congo. Also, military figures such as Colonels Lamizana (Upper Volta) or Bokassa (Central African Republic), or slightly more impressive individuals such as Mobutu, simply lack the stature and skills to do much more than keep their nations limping along. As a whole, the African military establishments display little of the administrative and organizational talent for nation-building apparent in some military regimes elsewhere, say, Pakistan, or some of the better examples in Latin America..

7. In general, the lusty confidence and assurance that marked African politics in the wake of independence has eroded, to be replaced by something of a "morning after" syndrome. African political slogans and institutions no longer seem to generate much excitement. Pan-Africanism is in the doldrums, and "Negritude" failed to catch on. Even the one-man, one-party system, often claimed by Africans to be their unique contribution to the

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art of government, is increasingly on trial as it appears that these parties are used as a mechanism to control or indoctrinate the populace as in the case of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party. Meanwhile, intra-African cooperation has been slight in nearly every field, though it is always possible to get a measure of agreement on anticolonial issues. The most generous view of the OAU is that it has held together. The Organisation Commune Africaine et Malgache (OCAM) and its predecessors have been slightly more effective in practical terms, but this has been due chiefly to Houphouet-Boigny's subsidies and interest. Finally, the only regional organization which has worked in the past, and which was set up under British rule, the East African Common Services Organization, shows serious signs of breakup.

8. At the same time, the "liberation movements" seeking political change in southern Africa have come nearly to a full stop. The African Liberation Committee (ALC), affiliated with the OAU, has been an acknowledged failure. It is short of funds, and several states have indicated a desire to pull out. The guerrilla movements in Angola and Mozambique also have failed to flourish, though they continue to tie down large numbers of Portuguese troops. Nationalists in Rhodesia are ineffective, and those in South Africa have been forced into trifling clandestine activity.

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9. The Communist powers have also suffered some political setbacks in Africa recently. The most important of these undoubtedly were in Ghana, where Moscow and Peiping separately had established close links with Nkrumah's clandestine operations and were in a good position to abet subversion and guerrilla activity throughout the continent, and in Kenya. The depth of Communist involvement in these matters is now widely publicized in Africa. However, Communist setbacks are not due merely to exposure of clandestine operations, but are in large part caused by the every day hazards of the African scene. For example, despite substantial economic and military aid, events continue to go badly for the Soviets in Somalia, and the Chinese have lost ground with the mercurial Toure and, momentarily perhaps, in Mali. However, this is a continually shifting situation, and as against these difficulties, the Soviets seem to be improving their position in Uganda and the Chinese are apparently becoming even more deeply entrenched in Zanzibar.

10. As they contemplate the larger world scene, many Africans have had to recognize that their influence on international politics is not going to measure up to their earlier extravagant dreams. They have succeeded to a large extent in remaining outside

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the Cold War. But they have not imposed a new morality on the bad old powers, nor have they become a decisive factor in extra-African affairs. Adjustment to these facts of life has been going on slowly for some time; the recent troubles within Africa itself have probably brought the process along a little further.

Prospects

11. These developments could be healthy if they encouraged African states to turn to the work of internal development, to stop meddling in their neighbor's affairs, and to cease their international posturing. The record of upsets, frustrations, and disillusionments should constitute a strong case for discarding the sloganeering and the cliches in favor of a pragmatic concentration upon the enormous tasks at home.

12. The recent decline of some of the radicals will provide a breathing spell for the West and additional time for moderate Africans to work for economic and social progress under somewhat less political pressure. But this atmosphere is partly conditional on a modicum of economic progress, a "sense of success". For the attraction for grand prescriptions is far from dead. It is hard to see where new ones will come from; Houphouet-Boigny's economic

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liberalism, despite acknowledged achievements, is not exciting enough, and the military regimes are unlikely to create popular concepts. Thus uncertainty, floundering, and apathy will almost certainly continue to be the hallmarks of African politics for some time to come.

13. This is not to say that extremist and radical figures may not come to power or prove to be very troublesome from time to time. This eventuality seems almost certain to recur in a region with so many weak, one-man shows. Additional military coups, particularly in the extremely backward states of ex-French West Africa, are likely. As the military regimes fail to make headway on fundamental national problems, factionalization and internal conflicts within the African armed forces probably will grow. It is worth noting that three large African countries in which the US feels a considerable stake, i.e., Ethiopia, Nigeria, and the Congo, are among those beset by major problems which in large part involve the local military establishment.

14. Moreover, serious new problems are just ahead. Most African countries traditionally have been self-sufficient, but there is a growing trend toward dependence on imports for staple foods. This is already apparent in Ghana, Guinea, Sierra Leone,

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Liberia, Senegal, and Mali. Prolonged droughts have also caused food shortages throughout much of east and southern Africa, but may also conceal more fundamental agricultural problems. Declining per capita food production is due to a host of economic and social conditions, including among others, rapid urbanization, poor distribution, and mismanagement and neglect of national agricultural resources. In any case, the increasing failure of Africans to meet their food requirements aggravates other troubles as the military government in Nigeria is now discovering. Food shortages and high prices contribute to latent urban discontent, and drain off funds required for capital development. Perhaps most important, the failure to develop a progressive agrarian population limits the national tax base and economic development prospects generally.

15. Furthermore, we believe that Arab-African relations in Tropical Africa are gradually moving into a troublesome stage. These difficulties will be particularly severe in the states immediately south of the Sahara, where there are large numbers both of Africans and Arabs, but they will also affect the Horn, and Africa generally. Racial and religious differences which could lead to civil strife are already apparent in Ethiopia, Mauritania,

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and Chad and lie just beneath the surface in Mali and Nigeria. Meanwhile, Sudan's efforts to deal with black dissidents in its southern provinces have caused an outflow of refugees and attendant political problems in Congo (Leopoldville), Uganda, and Ethiopia. Somali-backed insurgency in Ethiopia and northern Kenya remains a chronic irritant in African circles. In general, we expect a fairly high incidence of quarrels, coups, and political upheavals of one sort or another. They will stem from a variety of causes, primarily local, and it seems clear that they will not lead to the domination of any single force or ideology, either African or external.

16. In this setting, Moscow and Peiping will continue to be attracted by the prospect of quick political gains on the cheap. But the USSR, at least, seems to have a good understanding of the limits of political opportunity in Africa. Moscow evidently expects to win a few and lose a few, recognizing at times that this is not the proper historical era for traditional communism. In Ghana, for example, the USSR is calmly trying to weather the storm, taking a beating for the present in hopes of staying in place while awaiting better days. China's policies still seem less realistic, and there may be additional setbacks in store for Peiping.

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17. In sum, the prospect for Africa is for continued, probably even more frequent, sudden political upheavals. Indeed, African political institutions have yet to establish sufficient vitality to permit constitutional succession or change. In almost every country the situation is complicated by growing and intractable economic problems. At the same time, the white-dominated regimes in southern Africa provide an attractive target for those Africans who wish to divert attention from their internal troubles and to restore their political standing.

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