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By CH Date 17 Aug 98

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: March 6-7, 1972

SUBJECT: US/UK Talks on Africa, March 6-7, 1972, Washington, D.C. --
Soviet Activities and Influence in Africa, Agenda Item 6a

PARTICIPANTS:

UK

Mr. Charles Martin Le Quesne,
Deputy Under Secretary, FCO
Mr. John Wilson, Head of West
Africa Dept., FCO
Mr. Michael Anthony McConville,
Assistant Head of Central
and Southern Africa Dept., FCO
Mr. Peter C. Petrie,
First Secretary, UKUN
Miss Margaret I. Rothwell, First
Secretary, British Embassy

US

Mr. David D. Newsom
Assistant Secretary for
African Affairs
Mr. Robert S. Smith, Deputy
Assistant Secretary for
African Economic Affairs
Mr. William Witman II, Acting
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for African Affairs
Mr. W. Marshall Wright,
National Security Council
Mr. Gordon R. Beyer,
National War College
Mr. Hal W. Pattison
Policy Planning Staff,
(Rapporteur)

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Mr. Newsom opened the discussion with a brief resume of the current Soviet posture on the continent by noting that the USSR long ago abandoned any romantic notions about making rapid gains in Africa. Although they have been able to achieve a degree of influence in some countries where Soviet and local interests have coincided, the Soviets too have suffered their share of failures and have encountered the same difficulties as the West -- cultural differences, African nationalism, and conflicts of national interests. For the Soviets, the African picture is mixed. The USSR has significant influence in Algeria -- to which it has given considerable military and economic aid; but the Algerians are still at times difficult to handle. Qadhafi's Libya remains basically anti-Soviet in spite of the USSR's pro-Arab policies. The USSR suffered a significant setback in Sudan, where even the persistent efforts of their Egyptian proteges have failed to rehabilitate them. The Soviets best position in East Africa is in Somalia, but they have made little progress elsewhere. In West Africa their efforts

(Drafting Office and Officer)

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in Nigeria during the civil war paid off no better than those of anyone else. The Soviets will continue to take advantage of the deterioration of western influence, and are going to find themselves more bedeviled by Chinese than by western competition.

Ambassador Le Quesne suggested that perhaps a triangular competition will develop; to which Mr. Newsom added that we could very well find ourselves standing aside and observing a new cold war between the communist super-powers. He cited the number of instances of Soviet Ambassadors in Africa seeking out their American colleagues to voice complaints about Chinese activities.

Mr. Wilson agreed with the United States assessment generally and with that on Sudan and Nigeria specifically. The United Kingdom fully shares our opinion that the Soviets place naval requirements very high on their list of priorities. He cited Amilcar Cabral's attendance at the CPSU Congress as evidence that party contacts with the liberation movements were continuing, but inquired if the United States did not feel that Soviet influence in the African Liberation movements was being undermined by the Chinese. Mr Newsom noted that even in Moscow Cabral had been very careful about his posture of neutrality on the Sino-Soviet quarrel. The Soviets are definitely playing second fiddle to the Chinese; but whether this is by intent we do not know.

In response to Ambassador Le Quesne's comment that there had been no recent signal successes for the Soviets in Africa, Mr. Newsom stated that he believed this was at least partially the result of the Soviet's placing only a low priority on all of Africa south and west of Ethiopia. Guinea, he said, had been a target of opportunity with which the Russians were now stuck. Ambassador Le Quesne suggested that the Soviet's sole important African penetration in Somalia was essentially but a duplication -- in terms of facilities and strategic location--of their position in Aden. To Mr. Newsom, Somalia constitutes the most disturbing situation within his entire area of responsibility: our termination of aid there as a result of Somali shipping trade with North Viet Nam cannot be adequately justified to President Siad and therefore leaves us with no choice but to stand aside while the Soviets try to solidify their position in this strategically important area.

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3

In response to Mr. Wilson's query as to whether the Soviets will attempt to recoup their position in Ghana; Mr. Newsom replied that he considered it unlikely that they will make any major effort to do so: Ghana lacks strategic significance and the Soviets will be content merely to wait and see if an opportune situation develops. Ambassador Le Quesne acknowledged that Britain too lacked any indication of the Soviet attitude toward Ghana's debt problems. Mr. Newsom stated that we had no indication at present of any Soviet activity in the TFAI, although the North Koreans and Chinese are believed to be fishing in these muddy waters. In response to the Ambassador's question about Tanzania, Mr. Newsom replied that we had no evidence yet of any attempt by the Soviets to counter Chinese influence there and added that, even in Uganda, there was no indication of any effort by the Soviets to recoup their situation since the downfall of Obote. These comments prompted Ambassador Le Quesne to observe that the Soviets must be pretty disillusioned with Africa. Mr. Newsom agreed, except with respect to the Horn. When Ambassador Le Quesne suggested that perhaps the real Soviet interest lay in Ethiopia, Mr. Newsom asserted that he is convinced that their particular interest is in the waterways of the area.

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