

Ghana's Foreign Policy at Independence and Implications for the 1966 Coup D'état

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Abstract

Ghana attained independence in 1957 under its first prime minister and subsequently president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. His radicalism, coupled with his vision of complete political emancipation and unification of Africa set him on collision course with mostly moderate African leaders. By the early 1960s, President Nkrumah had embraced socialism, governed Ghana as a one-party state by 1964, and had established very cordial diplomatic relations with mostly Communist and Eastern European countries. Occurring under the rather tense Cold War political environment, the result was the erection of an ideological wedge between Ghana and the liberal democracies of Europe and North America. On 24 February 1966, Dr. Nkrumah was ousted from office with the causes attributed to internal and external forces, thus his autocratic tendencies at home coupled with his anti-Western rhetoric and policies. Conspiracy theories emerged that implicated the military, the police, opposition parties and civil society groups on one hand, and on the other, external forces led by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the United States. This study examines President Nkrumah's legacy, reasons for his removal from office, the repercussions for the Ghanaian state and concludes that his departure constitutes an irreplaceable loss to the pan-African agenda.

Introduction

Ghana's attainment of political independence in 1957 marked a significant milestone, not just for the people of the Gold Coast, as the colony was until then known, but also for the entire people of Africa and those in the Diaspora. It helped to intensify the struggle by the people of Africa for the complete emancipation of the continent from colonial domination and equally launched an irrevocable march towards the vision of the pan-African leaders of the time. The leaders envisioned the political unification of the entire African continent, the cessation of the exploitation of the continent's resources, accelerated economic development and the redemption of the image of the African people.

Some of these expectations for Africa in general and Ghana in particular were captured in the intriguing message of the then Prime Minister, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, during the country's independence celebrations.

And across the parapet, I see the vision of African unity and independence, her body besmeared with the blood of her sons and daughters, in their struggle to set her free from the shackles of imperialism. And I can see and hear springing up of cities of Ghana, becoming the metropolis of science, learning, scientific agriculture, industry and philosophy.¹

While this declaration set an important springboard for Ghana to pursue the agenda of African liberation, continental unity and economic development, the government of Kwame Nkrumah was confronted with a rather complex international system with repercussions for both internal politics and Ghana's external relations. The crucial point was reached in 1966 when his government was overthrown and the country had to undergo drastic changes in its foreign policy as well as domestic priorities.

These issues provide the basis to reflect on the following: the main principles that underpinned the country's foreign policy; the objectives the nation sought to obtain and the instruments for achieving them; the actors and factors that shaped and impinged on Ghana's external relations; the opportunities and achievements arising from Nkrumah's foreign policy pursuits and external relations; the challenges that confronted the Nkrumah regime and the strategies it adopted to overcome them; the repercussions for the Nkrumah government; and the consequences arising from the 1966 coup d'état for Ghana.

In this regard, the study sets as its objectives an examination of the main thrusts of Ghana's foreign policy from its formative stages in the immediate post-independence era, looking at her role in the pan-African movement, independence struggle and continental unification, evaluates both the internal and external political developments that shaped the direction of Ghana's foreign policy and external relations, for instance, the impact of the external environment on decision-making and foreign policy, examines the developments, immediate and remote as well as external and internal, that led to the military coup d'état in 1966 and then concludes with the lessons learnt.

The argument in this study is that the vision that underpinned Kwame Nkrumah's radicalism conflicted with the immediate preoccupations of most of his peers in addition to a hostile international environment that impinged negatively on his priorities and programs for the African continent and its people.

Before delving into these issues, it is instructive to examine some of the important elements of the foreign policy environment, the peculiar characteristics of the international system that Ghana, and for that matter, the rest of Africa had to confront and how these affected the policy choices of the principal actors in the immediate independence era.

The Foreign Policy Environment

Foreign policy constitutes a critical component of a country's conduct of public policy as it relates to other actors (both state and non-state) in the larger international system or the external environment. In this regard, consideration must be given to all the important actors on the international scene that affect the policy-making and implementation processes of the country concerned. The policy decisions include relations with other nations, international and non-governmental organizations, institutions and agencies, as well as individuals, in so far as they impact on the system of inputs and outputs. The dynamics of policy choice that entails the processes of formulation and implementation, sometimes conflicting, other times cordial, determine the character, content, direction and the possible impact of the country's foreign policy.

Foreign policy has attracted different meanings and definitions from both scholars and practitioners. It is viewed by some as 'the sum total of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations'.² Increasingly, however, different categories of actors and their relations, not exclusively states but encompassing international actors such as agencies, companies and organizations, have entered the matrix of foreign relations. In this regard, multinational corporations, religious organizations and movements, inter-governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations, development agencies and charities have become critical components in the foreign policy calculus.

For some analysts, foreign policy, just like domestic policy, is formulated within the state but unlike the latter (domestic policy); foreign policy is directed at and must be implemented in the environment external to the state.³ However, the role of the domestic structure bears significance for foreign policy making in the sense that it shapes and constrain foreign policy choices. Consequently, the individual decision maker or leader is often constrained in taking independent policy decisions.⁴ Domestic structures including, for instance, class and economic strata, political culture, preferences of political elites, societal pressures and in the case of developing countries, ethnicity has profound consequences for foreign policy. This situation has led to the conclusion that there is no clear fissure between domestic politics and international politics since one invariably affects the other.

A second consideration is the role and impact of the structure and forces of the international system on foreign policy. A general perception, spearheaded by the realist school in international relations, is that the international system is anarchical or decentralized, with no central authority or arbiter to regulate the actions of states. As such, the anarchical international system, coupled with the prevailing distribution of power relations, constrains the policies and decisions of states and leaders, for that matter.⁵ The implication is that the international system influences but does not necessarily determine foreign policy since the possibility exists for the system of states to offer both incentives and constraints.⁶ In the particular case of Ghana and for most African and developing countries during the Cold War, pressures from the international system impinged on the choices our political leaders had to make with some opting for the socialist path of economic development, others liberal capitalism, while the majority of them declared that they were non-aligned.

A third consideration is the role of the individual decision makers or political leaders in foreign policy. For this particular explanation, the cognition, beliefs and perceptions of the political elites, to a large extent, inform their choices in decision-making. This is even more profound if the choices of leaders are based on misperception, fear, lack of objectivity and inappropriate set of beliefs.⁷ The possibility thus exists for leaders and decision makers to commit blunders in foreign policy choices due to beliefs, miscalculation, misperception, political sympathies or ideological inclination. That this condition provides useful insights and clues relevant for an understanding of President Nkrumah's decisions and policies and, for that matter, Ghana's foreign relations is beyond dispute

Fourthly, is the consideration of state capability or national power in foreign policy and external relations? The extent to which a country is able to achieve its set purposes and influences the actions and activities of others in the international system depends to a large extent on the power resources available to that state. The geographical location and size of a state, the resources available to the state (both human and material), the extent to which these resources are harnessed or processed to serve the needs of the state, for instance, industrial production, its military arsenal, level of technological development or advancement are all critical to the kind of foreign policy the state pursues.⁸ In addition to these are such intangibles as leadership, the national character, patriotism, diplomacy, quality of government, and how these blend with the tangible resources to advance the country's purpose and external relations.

Fifth, is the reflection and articulation of the national interest in foreign policy making. Every state tries to and must be able to demonstrate what its priorities are. In an international system of competing interests, scarce resources and threats to national security, the fundamental prerequisite is survival.

According to one observer, 'the first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their positions in the system.'⁹ Depending on the historical circumstances of the individual state, domestic politics and leadership, the geo-political environment and the structure of international politics, a state will decide what shall constitute the vital determinants of its national interest and guided by what set of principles.

Emphasis by Ghana, for instance, on political emancipation and cessation of colonial exploitation, continental unity, racial equality and economic development at the time of independence was informed by the historical realities and exigencies of the times. Contemporarily, Ghana's priorities and national interests have expanded to include other concerns, for instance, good neighborliness, democratic development and good governance, economic diplomacy, regional integration to foster rapid economic development, the promotion of international peace and security, among others.

Finally, are the issues of cost-benefit analysis in foreign policy and the problem of rationality in decision making. Foreign policy is often executed in a terrain that is less familiar and policy alternatives are seldom explicitly stated. Thus, foreign policy is often formulated within a context of disagreements and varying alternatives, choices and values that require criteria for the desired decision.¹⁰ In this regard, various players and layers of issues, alternatives, interests and compromises come into the decision making process. In this context, it becomes difficult to judge whether rationality or any meaningful calculation of costs and benefits can be accurately determined, as the position of some analysts seem to suggest.¹¹

In the case Ghana, one distinguished statesman and retired diplomat suggested that 'though the determination of policy is the prerogative of government it is wise to involve experienced experts in its formulation, in the design of strategy and allocation of resources and analysis' so as to yield the desired results.¹² He added that copying others is not advisable but rather the country must be able to determine its objectives clearly and design implementation measures which are cost-effective and beneficial.

All together, foreign policy is a multi-faceted and dynamic process that entails constant flow of information as pertains to the security-military, political, economic, cultural and institutional integrity of the state. The system of input-output relative to the larger international system can therefore ensure the durability or otherwise of the state. The conceptual setting above thus provides a framework to examine Ghana's foreign policy at independence, taking into consideration the historical, geo-political, strategic and the systemic dynamics that impacted on the policy processes.

Ghana's Foreign Policy at Independence

It was no co-incidence that the leadership role of Kwame Nkrumah during Ghana's independence struggle was shaped by the vision and programs of the pan-African movement. Having attained independence in 1957, Ghana's destiny was irrevocably linked to the ideals of the first prime minister and head of government with a large measure of borrowing from this movement in molding Ghana's foreign policy. He was a participant in the Fifth Pan-African Congress held in London in 1945, in the position of Joint Secretary of the Organizing Committee with George Padmore, another staunch African nationalist.

Specifically, the Congress agreed to pursue the following program of action: complete independence of the African continent and total rejection of colonialism in all its forms; unification of the continent of Africa through a series of inter-linking regional federations with limitations on national sovereignty for a United States of Africa; building the African Personality through an African renaissance of moral virtues and cultures and recasting African societies in their own traditional forms with the possibility of appropriately marrying them with modern ideas; replacing the tribalism of the past with African nationalism towards the inculcation of the concept of African loyalty, wider than the 'nation' and which will transcend tribal and territorial affiliation; regeneration of African economic enterprise to replace colonial economic methods for a non-exploitative or communalistic socialism; adoption of democracy as the most desirable method of government based on the principle of 'one-man, one vote'; the rejection of violence as a method of struggle, preferring Positive Action as a peaceful method unless met with military repression;

solidarity of all Black peoples and a fraternal alliance of colored peoples based on a common history of struggle against white domination and colonialism; positive neutrality or non-involvement in superpower politics, but neutral in nothing that affects 'African interests' or world peace.¹³

A cursory look at the program of action of the Manchester Congress reflects in its entirety almost all the policies and long term vision that Dr. Nkrumah had for the colonial struggle, thus African liberation and unity, economic development and world peace. It meant the tailoring of Ghana's foreign policy to the exigencies of the times, to advance the cause of the African liberation struggle, to achieve a union of African states, to pursue the fight against neo-colonialism, and promoting the agenda of anti-racism, while creating the vision of the African personality that could attract the respect for African culture and identity. He also encouraged Ghana's membership and participation in international organizations and institutions, meant to promote the long-term interests of the country, for instance, membership of the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Commonwealth of Nations, and at the regional level, worked towards the establishment of the Organization of African Unity in 1963.

Despite the views of critics that the first president of Ghana neglected the economic development of the country, the evidence on the ground suggests that one of his primary pre-occupations was to make political independence meaningful by the consolidation of economic emancipation of Ghana, first and foremost, and then the African continent. That objective called for the satisfaction of the expectations of Ghanaians, often sacrificing his socialist inclinations and pragmatically co-operating with the colonialist administration before independence, working within the international economic structures, promoting private investment and a role for the private sector, all in the effort to accelerate Ghana's development.¹⁴ The clearest evidence or manifestation was the solicitation of funds from the West for the construction of the Volta River Project and the Akosombo Dam for the production of electricity, based on his conviction that 'the Volta River Project provides the quickest and most certain method of leading us towards economic independence.'¹⁵

Without a doubt, the most significant engagement of Ghana in international politics was within the African region where Dr. Nkrumah embarked on his pan-African project of a united states of Africa. His declaration at independence (at the Old Polo Grounds) set the tone for his vision, linking Ghana's independence to the total liberation of the African continent and the preparedness to surrender Ghana's sovereignty for the sake of a union of African states. The immediate preoccupation was a determination of the programs and policies towards the realization of these objectives, and the vision for Ghana's leadership role in Africa. This led to the organization of a series of conferences in Accra between 1958 and 1960, beginning with the Conference of Independent African States in Accra on April 15 1958.

The objectives of this conference were to consolidate and safeguard Africa's independence, strengthen the economic and cultural ties between independent African states, establish workable arrangements to assist the territories still under colonial rule and lastly, to examine the central problem of global peace.¹⁶ For Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, this particular Conference signified that 'Pan-Africanism had moved to the African continent where it really belonged...Free Africans were actually meeting together, in Africa, to examine and consider African Affairs.'¹⁷

The second conference, dubbed the All-African People's Conference was organized in Accra in December 1958 and attended by delegates from 62 African nationalist organizations and groups of freedom fighters. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, reflecting on the significance of this particular conference, was of the view that 'the total liberation and the unity of the continent at which we aimed were evolving and gaining reality in the experience of our international gatherings.'¹⁸ Immediately following on the heel of this meeting was the All-African Trade Union Federation in November 1959 to which representatives of all trade unions from Africa met in Accra for its inauguration. The Ghanaian leader's rationale for organizing this conference was that the African labor movement had always been closely associated with the struggle for political freedom, as well as with economic and social development.¹⁹ It was, therefore, proper that a coordinating structure was put in place.

Another important conference in the movement for cooperation in the anti-colonial struggle and the prevention of the balkanization of the African continent was held in Accra in April 1960 to discuss Positive Action and Security in Africa. It was initiated by the government of Ghana in consultation with other independent African states to consider the situation in Algeria, and South Africa as well as to plan for future action to prevent Africa being used as a testing ground for nuclear weapons.

The vision and consciousness of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah to the realities of his time was further demonstrated when he organized the Conference of African Women in Accra on 18 July 1960. This was completely devoted to discussing common problems confronting women in the colonial struggle for political emancipation. The delegates spoke of the need for freedom and unity and the need for social and economic progress.²⁰

There is no doubt that the most important element in Ghana's foreign policy agenda at independence was the liberation of the rest of the continent from colonialism. This was evident in the various policy initiatives and resultant conferences that the CPP government of Dr. Nkrumah pursued. However, the realization of this objective was undertaken alongside the other pre-occupation of continental unity. The position of Dr. Nkrumah was rather optimistically radical in the sense that anything less than complete political and economic integration of the entire continent was deficient.

He had well-founded reasons to conceive of African unity in this manner because of his interpretation of the forces and dynamics of the international system, his concerns about balkanization of the continent and the dangers of neocolonialism. His contemporaries, however, saw the issues differently and preferred to adopt a piecemeal approach to continental unity.

The commitment to the idea of African unity was demonstrated most infectiously by the Ghanaian leader when he talked of a Union of African States in the early 1960s. According to him, 'Since our inception, we have raised as a cardinal policy, the total emancipation of Africa from colonialism in all its forms. To this, we have added the objective of the political union of African states as the surest safeguard of our hard-won freedom and the soundest foundation for our individual, no less than our common, economic, social and cultural advancement.'²¹

His fears about post-colonial divisions and manipulations were also made very clear in his analysis. He asserted that

'The conversion of Africa into a series of small states is leaving some of them with neither the resources nor the manpower to provide for their own integrity and viability. Without the means to establish their own economic growth, they are compelled to continue within the old colonial trading framework.'²²

He went on to state that the creation of several weak and unstable states of this kind in Africa was the wish of the colonial powers to ensure their continued dependence on them for economic aid, and impede African unity. He termed the policy of balkanization as the new imperialism and a danger to Africa.²³

However, Nkrumah's practical approach to continental unity was not only baffling but equally inconsistent, if not unrealistic. President Nkrumah was opposed to the idea of federalism and yet initiated a political association with Guinea and later Mali. Whether this was meant to be a viable and long-term project or a loose association of states located in the same sub-region and led by likeminded individuals was left to speculation. Meanwhile, he took to task Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, and Milton Obote of Uganda for initiating the East African Federation, which was later transformed into the East African Community. Since the federal idea was an anathema to him, his critics easily concluded that he had hegemonic aspirations to become the "prime minister of Africa with a cabinet under his thumb, and a single representation of Africa in the United Nations", as he himself later wittingly acknowledged.²⁴ But it can be explained that Nkrumah's real intention was not to be content with a Ghana-Guinea-Mali Union but to use it as a stepping stone towards sub-regional integration and subsequently, continental union.²⁵

In the estimation of President Nyerere, African unity must come and must be a reality but it should not be at the behest of one country dominating the rest. African unity, in his view, could only be negotiated since it was to be based on the unity of equals.²⁶

The problem of continental unity was further compounded by the economic policies that President Nkrumah adopted within the West African sub-region. His decision to take Ghana out of all the regional arrangements and agencies that were inherited from the British, for instance, the West African Airways Corporation, the West African Currency Board, the West African Cocoa Research Institute and the West African Court of Appeal, all meant to foster cooperation among British colonial dependencies, also came up for some criticism. To the critics, it contradicted his desire to foster continental union since these were credible examples of unity at the sub-regional level. Nkrumah's own explanation was that these arrangements were vestiges of colonialism, appendages that a sovereign and independent country such as Ghana had to shed.²⁷

The concept of a union of African states was plunged into controversy from the very onset since most of the African leaders did not share the radical ideas of Dr. Nkrumah, particularly on issues pertaining to national sovereignty, security and economic development. Specifically, the Ghanaian leader preferred a politically integrated Africa with the possibility of creating a common foreign policy, common economic and monetary policy as well as defense policy. With regards to a common defense policy, it was to be anchored as an African High Command, a military-security structure that would defend the territorial integrity and sovereignty of African countries.²⁸ Indeed, this position led President Nkrumah to commit Ghana under the 1960 Republican Constitution to an African Union of which Ghana was perceived as the nucleus.²⁹

Within the larger African political landscape, the front of the African leaders became divided over the form and best strategy towards continental unity. Three groups finally emerged, the radical Casablanca Group that desired an immediate and total union of Africa, the moderate Monrovia Group that wanted a gradualist approach to the issue of unity and lastly, the Brazzaville Group whose political aspirations were somewhat linked to a continuing association with metropolitan France. These divisions and the dynamics of the independence struggle on the continent, including different colonial experiences and socio-economic conditions, made it impossible for the realization of the vision of a truly united Africa as envisaged by the radical group. The Organization of African Unity which was eventually established on May 25 1963 was, strictly speaking, a compromise arrangement but with the expectation that the continent could move towards the development of the necessary structures and institutions.

Looking back, there is the perception that Dr. Nkrumah might have committed some tactical errors, with accusations of imperialism and lack of realism, and even charges of committing subversion against some African leaders.³⁰

In his single-minded commitment to his pan-African ideals and vision, he took for granted the convictions of other African leaders as well as external forces which opposed him.

The Ghanaian state, however, had the opportunity to play the leadership role in the African independence struggle, particularly on the question of continental unity. Apart from being the first country, south of the Sahara to break the yoke of colonialism, it also had the wealth, inheriting over half a billion dollars at independence as external reserves (exceeding that of India at the time), and was well-endowed with natural and human resources, for instance, supplying one-third of the world's cocoa as well as one-fifth of its gold.³¹ The enviable leadership credentials of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah was equally supported by a core and competent administrative structure that was reputed to be the best civil service in Africa at the time, that provided the linchpin to the country's foreign policy drive for a union of African states.³² Thompson had this to say about Ghana's leadership role, not only in Africa but beyond.

'Beyond this, Ghana's foreign policy is intrinsically important during the years covered. This state, the first sub-Saharan colony to gain its independence, played a larger role in African and international affairs in the first nine years than might be expected from a country of seven million people. Excluding India, none of the successor states in the post-colonial era aroused so many hopes as Ghana, and none came to independence with so extensive a commitment to the development of a forceful foreign policy. On attaining independence, Ghana's leaders pledged to work toward the liberation of the rest of the continent, accumulating immense political capital in making their state the Mecca of African nationalism. Thus, pan-Africanism, a historical movement championing the cause of Black people, was brought to African soil for the first time.'³³

In line with the government's objective of pursuing a vigorous African policy, an African Affairs Secretariat was established and placed under the personal direction and supervision of Kwame Nkrumah.³⁴ Under normal circumstances, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should have been in charge of this particular area of activity since it fell effectively under its jurisdiction. With this development, two departments of state were thus in charge of foreign policy, with the African Affairs Secretariat encroaching on the area of competence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.³⁵ It soon was dealing with issues and programs related to the Commonwealth and Eastern bloc countries. Another department was also established known as the Bureau of African Affairs whose responsibility was dealing with African nationalists in African territories which were yet to be independent. Funding and facilities were made available to these and other groups (including freedom fighters, refugees and students from sister African countries) so far as they were in agreement with Nkrumah's philosophy.³⁶

The government of Nkrumah was actively engaged in the Congo crisis in his endeavor to assist in finding a solution. Through the instrumentality of the United Nations and coup d'état led with his special friendship with the then Prime Minister of Congo, Patrice Lumumba; President Nkrumah sent Ghanaian peacekeepers to assist in ending the conflict. The situation, however, got out of hand as events soon deteriorated to the extent that Prime Minister Lumumba was killed under very suspicious circumstances, through alleged complicity of certain power brokers within the international community.

Under the leadership of President Nkrumah, Ghana was very pro-active in tackling the racial problems of Rhodesia and South Africa. With regards to Southern Rhodesia, the settler regime of Ian Smith and his government unilaterally declared independence for the country against the larger interests of the majority African people and the international community as a whole. His leadership role in galvanizing international opinion against the recognition of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) by the Southern Rhodesian government yielded dividends, though not until an intensified arms struggle by the people led to independence for the territory under the new name of Zimbabwe in 1980. He was equally committed to the fight against the minority regime in South Africa and its entrenched policy of apartheid. This was a policy that perpetuated systemic humiliation and condemnation of African people to third class citizens, the fate of people of Indian descent almost as equally bad due to their skin color. His unambiguous position at international meetings on the race question and apartheid in general compelled the United Nations to take up the issue of the Black majority on similar footing as the condition of people of Indian descent.³⁷

On the whole, Kwame Nkrumah bestowed a rich and enviable legacy on the African continent and the Black race in general, defined by his commitment to a foreign policy of redeeming the dignity of the Black person after years of dehumanization, marginalization, and exploitation. This was further adumbrated by his call for the creation of a new African based on the concept of 'African Personality'.³⁸

In essence, Ghana's foreign policy found expression largely in his avowed commitment to the twin goals of emancipation of the African continent from colonialism and continental unity. In the process, the country's material and human resources were generously expended if only to spearhead the process towards the ultimate goal of overcoming neocolonialism and achieving overall human development. His policies which underpinned Ghana's foreign policy in the early and mid 1960s, gave it a characteristically radical posture and thus earned Ghana a reputation that did not endear the country to Western countries, happening as it did in the heat of the Cold War systemic climate.

Beneath this veil of anti-Western ideological convictions, however, laid Dr. Nkrumah's pragmatism, in that Western capital in the form of World Bank funds and corporate investment could be utilized for the speedy industrialization and development of Ghana. This culminated in the country entering agreement with Kaiser of the United States for the development of the Akosombo Dam for the generation of hydro-electricity for both industrial production and national electrification. Ultimately, however, one cannot be friends of all and sundry, and soon the Ghana government's true colour, ideologically speaking, did emerge when President Nkrumah embarked on his solidarity tours of Eastern European and communist countries in 1961. It included the principal actors of the opposing ideological camp, namely the Socialist Republic of the Soviet Union (USSR) and the People's Republic of China (PRC). His convictions about the preferred mode of national development soon changed as he swiftly moved to adopt the socialist path of economic development on his return. Diplomatic and trade missions were opened in most of these countries which further worsened Ghana's relations with the West, particularly, the United States, Great Britain and West Germany.

The 1966 Coup D'état and Implications for Foreign Policy

The abrupt demise of the government of President Nkrumah and the termination of his radical foreign policy choices as a result of the 1966 coup d'état had fundamental repercussions for Ghana's developmental goals and the country's external relations. There was a complete change in the ideological orientation of the country when the government of the National Liberation Movement (NLC) assumed office after the coup d'état, opting for a typically pro-Western or liberal stance. The coup d'état set in motion a series of coup d'états and counter-coup d'états for nearly two decades with very adverse consequences for national integration, economic development and social cohesion; and arguments were made to the effect that the coup d'état was necessary to arrest the dictatorial and autocratic tendencies of the Nkrumah government which invariably generated human rights abuses and the rampant incarceration of opposition elements and political activists. Essentially though, the effects of the coup d'état on Ghana's image, political development and external relations are issues that will forever engage public scrutiny.

Fundamentally, questions continue to be asked regarding the real perpetrators of the 24th February 1966 *coup d'état* that removed President Nkrumah from office, thus generating endless speculation and inevitably, the concoction of various conspiracy theories. Despite the fact that some leading members of the 1966 coup d'état, namely Generals Afrifa and Ocran claimed total responsibility for the coup d'état, revelations and assertions from other sources tended to prove that the coup d'état might have been master-minded by external forces, lending credence to conspiracy. A recent revelation came from an American Embassy staff working in Ghana at the time to the effect that the American government had a hand in the coup d'état.³⁹

Declassified National Security Council (NSC) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) documents provide new evidence that the government of President Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1968) was involved in the overthrow of President Nkrumah. The main reason for the putsch was American disenchantment for the socialist orientation of the Nkrumah regime and his anti-Western radicalism. President Nkrumah himself alluded to a possible American complicity in his 1969 published work entitled 'Dark Days in Ghana'.⁴⁰

The recent revelation was sourced from a former CIA agent, one Howard T. Banes, operating officially as a Political Officer in the American Embassy in Accra. The source of the information on how the coup d'état was plotted and executed, however, came from another CIA agent who was stationed in Cote d'Ivoire. This was one John Stockwell, a CIA Case Officer at the time and who was a friend to Howard Banes.⁴¹ According to investigations conducted by the New York Times and Covert Action Information Bulletin into Stockwell's story, Howard Banes was encouraged by CIA headquarters to maintain contact with dissidents of the Ghana Armed Forces for the purpose of gathering intelligence on their planned activities and were provided with a generous budgetary support to hatch the coup d'état. According to information contained in CIA Document 251 was the topic of 'Coup d'état plot, Ghana' in which the United States Ambassador to Ghana at the time, William P. Mahoney and the CIA Director John A. McCone (among other personalities) made certain comments as early as March 11th 1965, almost a year before the events of February 24th 1966 took place.⁴²

In their candid discussion, these personalities confirmed that 'Popular opinion was running strongly against President Nkrumah and the economy of the country was in a precarious state, but were not sure that the coup d'état being planned by Acting Police Commissioner Harlley and Generals Otu and Ankrah would necessarily take place.'

However, further meetings were to be arranged with the coup d'état plotters to determine the timing of the coup d'état and those who would assume initial political power. These representatives of the US government, including Ambassador Mahoney and Director McCone, also committed themselves to organizing with other Western governments to deny the Ghana government's aid request in order to financially strangle the Nkrumah regime, rightly guessing that China and the Soviet Union could not provide adequate financial rescue plan for the government of Ghana.⁴³

In keeping to strategy and political manipulation, the US Ambassador even held meetings (contained in CIA Document 252) with an unsuspecting President Nkrumah in April 1965, though the president had reason to complain to him (Mahoney) about the ordeal of seven assassination attempts on his life. According to the Ambassador, President Nkrumah was visibly shaken and virtually crying with his face in his hands when they met.

The US Ambassador intimated that he was convinced that President Nkrumah had enough reason and trepidation to believe that the United States might be engaged in these plots since he had cause earlier at a different forum (during the inauguration of the Kwame Nkrumah Institute of Ideology at Winneba) and also in his writings to implicate the 'invisible government of the US' in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba of Congo.⁴⁴ In his conclusion, Ambassador Mahoney observed that 'Nkrumah gave me the impression of being a badly frightened man. His emotional resources seem to be running out. As pressure increase, we may expect more hysterical outbursts, many directed against United States.'⁴⁵

It is further revealed that on 27 May 1965, a National Security Council staffer by name Robert W. Komer briefed his boss McGeorge Bundy, a Special Assistant to President Lyndon Johnson on national security affairs on the anti-Nkrumah campaign as contained in CIA Document 253. Robert Komer's report to McGeorge Bundy established that the effort was not only an interagency mission that was sanctioned by the White House and supervised by the State Department and the CIA, but was also inter-governmental, with support of America's Western allies. It was further confirmed in this briefing that 'We may have a pro-Western coup d'état in Ghana soon. Certain key military and police figures have been planning one for some time, and Ghana's deteriorating economic condition may provide the spark. The plotters are keeping us briefed and the State Department thinks we are more on the inside than the British. ... We and other Western countries (including France) have been helping to set up a situation by ignoring Nkrumah's pleas for economic aid. All in all, it looks good.'⁴⁶

After the February 24 1966 coup d'état, a clear nine months after these assertions, Robert Komer, who had then assumed a different position as Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, wrote a congratulatory assessment to the President of the United States, dated 12 March 1966 (CIA Document 260). He remarked that 'The coup d'état in Ghana is another example of a fortuitous windfall. Nkrumah was doing more to undermine our interests than any other black African. In reaction to his strongly pro-Communist leanings, the new military regime is almost pathetically pro-Western.'⁴⁷

Thus, entered a new phase in national politics with consequences for the country's foreign policy and external relations, incidentally championed by a military-cum-police junta whose first and foremost mandate should be the preservation of national security, and not governance. It must be explained, however, that the security establishment had reasons to coordinate the removal of President Nkrumah from office, if developments at the time were anything to go by.

An assessment of the report above, whether myth or factual, however, raises some fundamental questions as relates to the underlying problems and conditions that led to a coup d'état plot in the first place.

It also brings to the fore the motivation for external forces to assist in undermining the power base of the government, leading to collaboration with the security apparatus. Some may conclude it was predominantly internal forces that did the prompting for which answers are provided by the precarious condition prevailing in the security, political and economic spheres of national life, apart from the extenuating external circumstances.

Examples of these include the neglect and 'inadequate attention' the government had paid to the armed forces to the extent that the President had to establish a 'presidential guard system'. It raised concern within the security establishment as an infringement of their rights, particularly when the members of the presidential guard regiment were supplied with better material resources, including more ammunitions and arms.⁴⁸ In addition was the introduction of a Workers' Brigade, organized by the President as a paramilitary detachment that far exceeded the armed forces by 2.5 times in personnel.⁴⁹ Though the prime reason for its establishment was for agricultural production, perception among the army officers was that the Brigades were formed as an alternative that would hamper the development of the regular army and ultimately lead to the disbandment of the army, or at least a partial reduction in the number of regular troops. Again, the President took a further decision in 1965 to establish a National Militia that was to be armed to protect the constitutional government.⁵⁰

Apart from these concerns within the security establishment, there were other problems, mostly political that galvanized opposition against the Convention People's Party (CPP) and gradually undermined the legitimacy of the government. Socialism was adopted as state policy for national development, and underpinned by Nkrumahism, which was defined as 'scientific socialism adjusted to fit the particularity of Africa'.⁵¹ It meant that there was very little room in the CPP itself for opposing views since the structures of the party and rules for membership and operations were tailored to meet the expectations of the Central Committee headed by President Kwame Nkrumah. Indeed, it led to open disagreements when some party members had to resign, some expelled with charges of attempting to remove President Nkrumah from office. For instance, Komla Gbedemah and Kojo Botsio who were leading members of the CPP and top-notch ministers in Nkrumah's cabinet were expelled, accused of planning to undermine the president's authority and to oust him from power.⁵²

There were other developments that possibly contributed to the seizure of power from the Nkrumah government. Among the Ghanaian public was the perception of official corruption which the President swore in his 'dawn broadcast' of 8 April 1961 he was going to tackle by purging the CPP of 'harmful elements' and 'fellow climbers'.⁵³

President Kwame Nkrumah was also accused of dictatorial tendencies through what some analysts perceived as over-centralization and over-extension of his powers as head of state, all in the effort to monopolize power. He was also frequently fed with dubious information on planned coup d'états, the high point of which turned out to be a reality with an attempt on his life in Kulungulu, northern Ghana on 1 August 1962.⁵⁴ Political opposition to the CPP activists and other anti-government activities, particularly in the Ashanti Region led to the passage of the Preventive Detention Act (PDA) earlier in July 1958,⁵⁵ and subsequently, the declaration of a one-party state, making the CPP the only legal party in the country.⁵⁶ The stifling of opposition within the party and the larger Ghanaian public, together with disaffection within the security agencies meant that the government had created a fertile ground for its own demise. All these factors combined, culminating in what happened on 24 February 1966 when the President was away in Hanoi on a peace mission.

If these were worrisome enough, the economic situation of the country in the early 1960s was equally destabilizing for necessary action. The world price for cocoa, the backbone of the country's economy at the time, either due to international manipulation to subvert the economic programs of the Nkrumah government or due to an inter-play of market forces, plummeted so sharply that the country needed a large dose of external support to maintain financial solvency. By 1960, a ton of cocoa beans on the London Exchange was estimated at 240 pounds on average; by August 1965, it dropped to an unprecedented low of 91 pounds.⁵⁷ It became difficult for the government of Ghana to guarantee an acceptable price for the sizeable percentage of Ghanaians who depended on the cocoa industry for their livelihood.

Regime Change and New Foreign Policy Direction

The 1966 coup d'état tilted Ghanaian foreign policy and external relations towards a conservative ideology, far removed from the radical ideals that the Ghanaian leader expounded. However, the assumption of power by the National Liberation Council (NLC) after the removal of President Nkrumah from office did not mean that the entire international community accepted it unquestionably. After all, President Nkrumah had his own constituencies within the African continent (especially the Casablanca-group of countries) and beyond. This category of countries, groups and individuals showed their disapproval in no uncertain terms and questioned the legitimacy of the new government.

This realization undoubtedly compelled the new leadership to accept to play Ghana's traditional role in African affairs and to continue with the anti-colonial struggle. The kernel of President Nkrumah's foreign policy was thus accepted as national policy, and thereby assuaged some of the critics of the new government.⁵⁸ Despite this, Ghana's role as the initiator of ideas for African and Third World leadership diminished, with Ghanaian delegations at most international forum increasingly toeing the line of Western countries.⁵⁹

Relations between Guinea and Ghana deteriorated rapidly, particularly as President Nkrumah sought refuge in that country and was officially made a Co-President by President Sekou Toure and symbolically accorded all the rights and privileges of a head of state. The government of Guinea in fact refused to recognize the new administration in Ghana. To overcome a creeping syndrome of isolation, the NLC quickly embarked on a diplomatic drive in the sub-region to reassure its neighbours of friendly relations. It successfully negotiated the reopening of the country's borders with Cote d'Ivoire, Togo and Burkina Faso (Upper Volta) in April 1966 which ensured the reopening of all the borders between May and June 1966. A series of talks were also held with a number of major players on the continent in order to explain Ghana's position and foster friendly relations, for instance, with Nigeria and Egypt.⁶⁰ The National Liberation Council also embarked on a pro-Western foreign policy by expanding relations with the market economies of Western Europe and North America. Ghanaian government delegations paid goodwill visits to the United Kingdom, the United States and France with the added objective of seeking favorable changes to Ghana's financial obligations to these countries.

But the coup d'état invariably led to the alienation of Eastern European countries as well as the centrally-planned economies. Cuba, for instance, had to close its embassy in Accra, while others recalled their ambassadors with only skeletal staffs left behind. Trade and economic cooperation and technical agreements with these countries were unilaterally abrogated, forcing their technical advisers to leave the country.⁶¹ After three and a half years in office, the NLC regime decided to organize democratic elections and hand over political power to a civilian government. On May 1, 1969 the ban on political parties was lifted leading to the promulgation of a new constitution for Ghana which came into force on March 1, 1970, and the liberal Dr. Kofi Busia who was the victorious candidate in the elections became the Prime Minister. It was, however, very clear that most of the ministers and those in leadership position in the new government had been active participants in the NLC military government.⁶² This led to the conclusion by close observers that the PP was brought into power to continue with the policies of the NLC regime and that combating Nkrumahism as an ideology was at the center of its commitments. The Busia government refused Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and his associates to return to the country, a policy that was inherited from the NLC era. In addition, all state officials and individuals with a CPP past were disallowed to hold public office or serve in government.⁶³

The foreign policy objectives of the Busia administration were pivoted around what the then Foreign Minister; Victor Owusu termed 'non-alignment and positive neutrality.' While it appeared to be an endorsement of President Nkrumah's principles, he was quick to add that President Nkrumah deviated from those positions after his political overtures to Eastern European countries, thus making non-alignment and neutrality almost unrealistic in Ghana's case. He added further that the policy did not mean disengagement from international events and interests, or aloofness from constructive and creative international efforts, but then taking into consideration all the facts and circumstances of the case, always having regard to our own interests.

The Busia administration also acknowledged that world peace could not be built 'on the present balance of terror between the two superpowers' and emphasized the need for a more reliable and permanent mechanism to ensure continuous peace and security of the world, best represented by the United Nations. The government also acknowledged its pro-West leanings but explained its preparedness to establish relations with non-Western countries such as Eastern Germany and China.⁶⁴

With regards to the continent of Africa, the Busia administration explained that the total emancipation of the continent from colonial domination was a cardinal principle of Ghana's foreign policy but added that Africa liberation was a subject for all Africa states and thus Ghana must collaborate with them. On the question of African Unity, it was explained that the government was dedicated to the cause of African unity and that while a political union of Africa was desirable, the proper foundations through functional integration must be laid, preferably at the sub-regional level hence the interest in a West African Economic Community.⁶⁵

The Busia government, by choosing to be pro-Western in its foreign policy orientation, made it obvious that its foreign economic policy had an objective of attracting foreign investment and other forms of economic cooperation to supplement domestic efforts toward resource mobilization. It pledged to make the fullest use of Ghana's Diplomatic Missions abroad in this regard, strengthen the country's role in the various international trade and economic bodies of which it was a member as well as other international bodies of relevance to Ghana's over all national interest and development, for instance, the Commonwealth.⁶⁶

After barely two weeks in office, Dr. Kofi Busia undertook a two-week state visit and tour that took him to the United States to meet President Richard Nixon as well as deliver a speech at the 16th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. He also had talks with the representatives of the IMF and the World Bank in addition to official visits to the United Kingdom and France where formal meetings were held with Prime Minister Harold Wilson and President Georges Pompidou respectively. These overtures did not only confirm Ghana's pro-Western orientation but more importantly, the opportunity to bring the rescheduling of the country's debt onto the agenda of those who matter in this regard.⁶⁷

Two monumental foreign policy decisions impacted most negatively on the Busia administration. The first was the Alien's Compliance Order (ACP) that resulted in the expulsion of illegal aliens from the country, though purportedly towards a larger economic policy of indigenization.

The second was the infamous policy of 'dialogue with Apartheid South Africa' that urged the OAU and African countries to open direct talks with Apartheid South Africa as to how the problem could be resolved. With regard to the ACP, about approximately 300,000 foreign nationals, mostly from countries in the West African sub-region (Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Togo, Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, Benin and Niger) were forced in November 1969 to leave the country.

This was considered as an unfriendly act by a sister country and resulted in deteriorated relations and retaliation by other countries in the sub-region, for instance, by Nigeria in 1983.⁶⁸

In the case of Africa's relations with Apartheid South Africa, Ghana found itself isolated due to its imprudent decision to establish contacts with the Pretoria regime of South Africa. The overall policy recommendation of 'dialogue with South Africa' was out of tune with African and Third World international relations, thus meeting criticism and condemnation. There were other African countries that believed in this approach to resolving the apartheid question, for instance, Cote d'Ivoire. But coming as it was from a country like Ghana that spearheaded the liberation struggle under President Kwame Nkrumah, it brought nothing else but serious damage to the country's reputation and image.

Conclusion

The study examined, in some detail, the undercurrents and issues which shaped and contributed to the crystallization of Ghana's foreign policy and external relations from independence till the 1966 coup d'état, as well as the changes in policy direction after the event. It discussed the impact of the Pan-African Movement on the policy choices of President Kwame Nkrumah and how these translated into concrete strategies. Firstly was Ghana's commitment to the African emancipation project and secondly, the transformation of Ghana into the 'Mecca' for African nationals and liberation fighters to undergo the necessary ideological orientation. Very pronounced on President Nkrumah's agenda were continental liberation and the quest for political unification of the entire African continent. His ability to achieve this was to a large extent dependent on persuading the rest of Africa that his vision and the supporting political strategy was the right one and was in the interest of the entire continent. He nevertheless fell short of this mission and at the end created enemies both at home and abroad.

For many of his critics and admirers alike, he was too ambitious in this singular mission of establishing a Union of African States over which he presumably was going to dominate as the President of Africa. While he never hesitated to ridicule the issue in his works, particularly in *Africa Must Unite*, it became obvious along the way that there was a seeming allusion to a divine purpose backed by a forceful conviction on his part that the vision must be accomplished in his life time.

This proved to be quite elusive if not dangerous for a continent that was hinged on a multiplicity of opposing actors and forces, some internal and others external. Despite all the opposition, he proved steadfast to his convictions and committed the material, financial and human resources of the country to the realization of the cause of continental liberation and unity.

Quite a number of Africans, whether as leaders or ordinary citizens, have attested to the beneficial impact of President Nkrumah's African policy. The fact that he was going to sacrifice Ghana's sovereignty towards the realization of this objective underlines his tenacity of purpose. Apart from the fact that Ghana's attainment of independence galvanized other African leaders to demand political freedom for their own colonies, his political stance and astuteness, radical posture and indeed, policies which were all geared towards the anti-colonial drive, convinced his fellow Africans, whether on the continent or in the Diaspora to believe in themselves and to work towards claiming their rightful place. In a nutshell, his proclamation of the 'African personality' or identity went beyond just the claim for equality but bore an added dimension of the African deciding and charting his or her own destiny, and as he put it, an African who is 'capable of managing his own affairs'.⁶⁹

The external conditions, particularly the Cold War climate that pitched the two superpowers on a collusion course, did not permit the Ghanaian leader the independence of action to pursue his dream freely. The pursuit of non-alignment as a cornerstone of Ghana's foreign policy turned out to be unrealistic since most of his policy initiatives and activities tended to be supportive of one of the ideological blocs, namely the Communist countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. His declaration of one party rule at home and the acceptance of socialism as the preferred path of economic development soon broke his front and his relations with the liberal democracies of Western Europe and North America. The result was opposition to his government both at home and abroad and culminated in the coup d'état plots that led eventually to his overthrow in 1966. The issues at home were compounded by the deteriorating economic conditions and the opposition from the regular security services (armed forces and the police) due to lack of trust in President Nkrumah's leadership and his intentions for the security sector.

These developments generated political tension in the country leading to assassination attempts on his life and the subsequent introduction of the Preventive Detention Act that gave him the legal authority to incarcerate opposition members, sometimes including members of his own cabinet.

On the whole, Ghana's foreign policy at independence was shaped by the forceful personality of President Kwame Nkrumah. His understanding of the African condition, backed by his radical ideas and the strategies he proposed to deal with it will forever remain the driving force of the African political unification and developmental project. The vindication of his vision is buttressed by the number of initiatives at the highest levels of the African Union to revamp the idea of a United States of Africa and the consolidation of a common intervention force or stand-by force almost corresponding to the proposed African High Command of President Kwame Nkrumah.

Footnotes

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- ¹⁵ *Statement to National Assembly* 20 February, 1958, in Asamoah, *Nkrumah's Foreign Policy*, p.240.
- ¹⁶ Asante, *Foreign Policy Making in Ghana*, p. 29.
- ¹⁷ Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, p. 136.
- ¹⁸ Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, p. 137.
- ¹⁹ Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*.
- ²⁰ Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, p. 138.
- ²¹ Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, p. ix.

²² Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, p. 176.

²³ Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, p. 179.

²⁴ Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, p. 188.

²⁵ It would be recalled that President Nkrumah provided President Sekou Toure of Guinea with ten million pounds during the country's independence crisis. This gesture was purportedly a design meant not only to resolve Guinea's financial difficulties but also make her amenable to the continental ideal.

²⁶ Julius Nyerere, 'A United States of Africa' in Gideon-Cyrus M. Mutiso & S. W. Rohio (eds.), *Readings in African Political Thought*. (Heinemann Educational Books, Ltd., Edinburgh, 1975), pp. 334-335.

²⁷ Asamoah, *Nkrumah's Foreign Policy*, p. 241.

²⁸ Asamoah, *Nkrumah's Foreign Policy*, p. 245.

²⁹ This was enshrined in Article 2 of the 1960 First Republican Constitution of Ghana.

³⁰ Asamoah, *Nkrumah's Foreign Policy*, p. 247.

³¹ W. Scott Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy, 1957-1966: Diplomacy, Ideology and the New State* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1969), p. xvii.

³² Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy, 1957-1966*, p. xvii.

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³⁴ Asante, *Foreign Policy Making in Ghana*, p.31.

³⁵ Asante, *Foreign Policy Making in Ghana*, p. 31.

³⁶ Asante, *Foreign Policy Making in Ghana*.

³⁷ Asante, *Foreign Policy Making in Ghana*, p. 32; Nkrumah, *I Speak of Freedom* (Panaf Books, London, 1961), pp. 125-134.

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- ⁵⁶ Petchenkine, *Ghana: In Search of Stability, 1957-1992*, p. 23.
- ⁵⁷ Petchenkine, *Ghana: In Search of Stability, 1957-1992*, p. 18.
- ⁵⁸ Asante, *Foreign Policy Making in Ghana*, pp. 36-37.
- ⁵⁹ Petchenkine, *Ghana: In Search of Stability, 1957-1992*, p. 44.
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- ⁶² Petchenkine, *Ghana: In Search of Stability, 1957-1992*, pp.48-49.
- ⁶³ Petchenkine, *Ghana: In Search of Stability, 1957-1992*, p. 49.
- ⁶⁴ Asante, *Foreign Policy Making in Ghana*, pp. 38-39.
- ⁶⁵ Asante, *Foreign Policy Making in Ghana*, p. 39.
- ⁶⁶ Asante, *Foreign Policy Making in Ghana*, p. 40.
- ⁶⁷ Petchenkine, *Ghana: In Search of Stability, 1957-1992*, p. 54.
- ⁶⁸ Petchenkine, *Ghana: In Search of Stability, 1957-1992*, pp. 51-54.
- ⁶⁹ This was contained in his speech during Ghana's independence celebrations on 6th March 1957.

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