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"OUR EXPERIMENT": NKRUMAH'S GHANA IN BRITISH DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENCE[1]

ABSTRACT

Ghana's independence in 1957 was a milestone for African decolonisation, as well as for the winding up of the British Empire. While the years of Kwame Nkrumah's government, as well as Britain's decolonisation, have each been widely discussed, the perspective of bilateral post-colonial relations between Ghana and Britain has so far been underemphasised in literature. In this article, these relations are observed mostly from the perspective of British diplomats and civil servants who interacted with Ghana in the first years after independence between 1957 and 1966. The relationship is analysed through four most significant dimensions in the bilateral relations: Britain's disagreement with Ghana on internal policies and international standpoints in the light of its Commonwealth membership; the economic level and the backlash to the 1961 budget, which was shaped by a British economist; the military assistance provided by Britain to Ghana, as a significant area of British influence; and the quarrel about Britain's policies in Southern Africa, which in the course of the Rhodesia crisis led to the severing of diplomatic relations. As Ghana's first President cracked down against internal opponents and stepped up the support for anti-colonial movements and armed groups throughout the continent, Britain's idea that Ghana might act as a role model for post-colonial relations and nation-building in Africa, as well as Ghana's expectations for more British support, were equally disappointed.

Keywords: *Ghana, Britain, Nkrumah, Decolonisation, Commonwealth, Post-Colonial, Democracy*

1 Parts of the article are drawn from the author's doctoral dissertation, published as M Landricina, Nkrumah and the West: "The Ghana experiment" in British, American, German and Ghanaian archives (Phd, Wien, Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2018).

1. INTRODUCTION

This article aims to provide a contribution to a subject which has so far received only scant dedicated attention, namely the relations between Great Britain and Ghana in the first years after independence (1957–1966) when the former British Gold Coast colony was ruled by Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972). It puts the focus mostly on perceptions and views of High Commissioners and officials of the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO), the Foreign Office and other British government departments, drawn from correspondence and reports in British archival repositories.

The end of the British Empire is a classic research subject in international relations and post-colonial studies. However, as Poppy Cullen has duly noted, relatively little attention has been paid by scholars to British foreign relations with its former colonies.[2] This is understandable, given the concentration of British foreign policy on the Western world as of the 1960s, in the post-imperial era. However, although the United Kingdom never tried to retain as close a relationship with its African colonies as France, British relations with former dependent territories deserve to be further investigated for the significant consequences they had in many cases. This is even more so where the relations were difficult and of a special kind, as in the case of Ghana during Nkrumah's rule. Ghana's domestic affairs and foreign relations between 1951 and 1966 have been the object of intense scrutiny by contemporary and posterior observers. However, although Ghana's first President is usually remembered in connection with the term "neocolonialism", which he himself made popular with speeches and publications, relatively little specific attention was devoted to studying Ghana's relationship with its former colonial power during these momentous years.

Nkrumah's attitude towards Britain was actually ambiguous and often puzzled foreign observers. As one British official noted, "the Queen and Mr. Khrushchev, Marxism and Christianity, the Commonwealth and the Communist Congress – this perpetual dualism of Nkrumah must be as puzzling for the Communists as it is for us in the West".[3] On the one hand, there was undoubtedly, as of 1960, a frantic effort to escape British political and economic influence. Considering that Nkrumah's anti-colonial pan-Africanism was perceived as part of "the revolt against the West",[4] the

2 P Cullen, *Kenya and Britain after independence: Beyond neocolonialism* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

3 The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA; Kew), DO 195/11, West Africa Department, "Some thoughts on Ghana – Anglo-Ghanaian relations", 3 August 1962, p. 11.

4 G Barraclough, "The revolt against the West". In: P Duara (ed.), *Decolonisation: Perspectives from now and then* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 118–130.

relations with most of the Western world, especially with the United States and Britain, over the years deteriorated consequently. On the other hand, Nkrumah maintained a fascination for most things British, for the Crown, and contributed in a constructive way to the development of the Commonwealth, for instance, when he supported the establishment of its Secretariat. In consequence, British diplomats and officials watched closely what happened in their first sub-Saharan colony to become independent and the turnarounds of Ghanaian politics, but sent heterogeneous assessments to London, as this paper will show. They mostly disapproved of Ghana's government policies but were also quite nuanced in their reports and often distributed fairly the responsibilities for the escalating tensions between Ghana and Britain.

Drawing heavily on archival sources, this paper argues that while certain tactical aspects played a role in Nkrumah's decision to sever relations with Britain in 1965, the UDI crisis only acted as the final catalyst for a departure that had been looming for years, and stemmed in the first place from opposed reciprocal expectations about the roles that each country was supposed to play in the process of African decolonisation and in the Commonwealth.

The article is divided into four different sections, which correspond to what I could identify as the main areas of British interest in the relations with Ghana and, at the same time often also the main areas of friction. Firstly, a general political dimension, in which discontentment arose on the part of Britain due to disappointed expectations about how Ghana, as a member of the Commonwealth, should behave both domestically and internationally. The British press voiced this feeling in harsh tones, which then entailed a bitter "press war" as Ghanaian government organs hit back, denouncing Britain's attitude as neocolonialist. Secondly, challenges in the economic sphere weighed heavily on the bilateral relations. Nkrumah's expectation that London would support Ghana's industrialisation with substantial capital aid and investments was disappointed, as Britain sought in the first place to defend its existing commitments and commercial interests. A third relevant dimension of the relations was the military cooperation, in which Britain was caught between the intention to use this particular kind of aid to moderate the increasingly maverick Ghanaian regime and worried that British support might be used for internal repression or military adventures in Africa. The last section is devoted to disagreements on how to deal with the settler regimes in Southern Africa, the thorniest issue in the decolonisation of British Africa, which culminated in the Rhodesian Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) crisis and brought the deterioration of the British-Ghanaian relationship to a climax.

2. AN AFRICAN DEMOCRACY? BRITAIN AND THE "GHANA EXPERIMENT"

Cullen argues that both Kwame Nkrumah and Kenya's first President, Jomo Kenyatta, "were nationalists recast by colonial policy-makers from 'extreme radicals' to 'moderates'".[5] As for Nkrumah, the assessment by British observers was, in fact, not linear but rather parabolic and subject to sudden changes. The Ghanaian leader was often denounced in the first years by colonial officials and British public opinion as a dangerous subversive, then praised as a nationalist statesman in the years before and after independence. By 1960, he was branded as an unreliable, neurotic, left-wing dictator. In an early brief for the CRO, for example, Prime Minister Nkrumah is soberly described as "shrewd", with "great intuition" and knowledgeable, his cabinet being composed of, "a relatively Westernised and broadminded group of Ministers" and a group of power-oriented "toughs", which he managed to hold in balance.[6] In a 1962 report, on the contrary, Nkrumah is described as an "atavistic, semi-educated demagogue" obsessed with neocolonialism and full of anti-white hatred and delusions of grandeur.[7]

In the first years after independence, British diplomats and bureaucrats expected – or at least hoped – that their former "model colony", the Gold Coast, would evolve after independence into a poster boy for post-colonial attachment to British (and Western) values and institutions. Being the first attempt of this kind south of the Sahara, the leitmotiv of Britain's approach to the Gold Coast's road towards self-government was to consider Ghana an experiment: "*our* experiment", as they said.[8] At the same time, they considered the new state immature and Ghana's politicians naïve and unprepared, especially for the dangers of Cold War politics. With notable paternalism, High Commissioner Ian Maclennan argued in 1957 that,

> Ghana's innocence is matched by her misplaced self-confidence, and, if left unprotected, she is liable eventually to be weakened by Soviet wiles. […] Ghana needs some positive attraction by the West. Without it she could certainly be an embarrassment, and possibly a danger. […] We have launched an immature state, likely to become weaker, rather than stronger in the years ahead unless she is helped.[9]

5 Cullen, *Kenya and Britain after independence*, p. 9.
6 TNA, DO 35/9408, Brief for Mr. Ian Harvey, CRO, 10 February 1958.
7 TNA, DO 194/14, Walker-Brash, "The President and the Press", 5 December 1962, pp. 3-4.
8 TNA, DO 35/9427, Maclennan to Home, 16 April 1957. The Canadian-American magazine *The Christian* carried a leader titled "The Ghana Experiment," in which it was highlighted that "what Ghana does today other African states are likely to do tomorrow." As found in Ghana Public Records and Archives Administration (PRAAD), ADM 16/21, "Ghana Through the World Press During December 1959."
9 TNA, DO 35/9427, Maclennan to Home, 16 April 1957.

He recommended a careful dosing of aid and investment in order to keep Ghana aligned with the West, "if Ghana Ministers decide that it is worth trying to keep our confidence, there is a fair prospect that the 'Gold Coast experiment' will succeed".[10]

The idea that a Western-style democracy could be exported to Africa using the Ghanaian example can be viewed as an extension of the Labour Party's post-World War Two "new policy" for Africa during the Tory era in the 1950s. This policy represented a "gigantic experiment" in nation-building within the Commonwealth, aiming to counteract Soviet expansion in the African regions of the declining British Empire.[11] However, Ghana's leadership had quite different plans for the country, other than just to play the role of democratic poster boy. Aware of the special role Ghana had been cast internationally – he referred to his own country as, "a new nation — working in an almost blinding limelight of world publicity"[12] – Nkrumah worked with his chief advisor on African affairs, the Trinidadian pan-Africanist George Padmore, to make Ghana the springboard for the total liberation of Africa from colonialism, imperialism and racial segregation.[13] Yet when Nkrumah "spoke of freedom", he didn't refer to civil liberties, freedom of speech or the rights of the opposition. Soon after independence, he began implementing what he named "measures of a totalitarian kind" at the internal level in order to bring the residual opposition under control and consolidate his regime.[14] These policies were viewed very critically in the United Kingdom. In an internal report in 1959, High Commissioner Arthur Snelling esteemed that Ghana was "a grave disappointment",

> When she became independent some people apparently thought that her new constitution, modelled closely on ours but with some safeguards of a quasi-federal character, would suit her well; that she would behave in a properly democratic manner; that she would continue to base herself in most political and economic matters upon our precept and practice; and that she would settle down to pursue her own affairs without making a nuisance of herself internationally.

10 TNA, DO 35/9427, Maclennan to Home, 16 April 1957.

11 R Hyam, *Britain's declining empire: The road to decolonisation 1918-1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 143-144.

12 PRAAD, RG 17/1/10, Broadcast by the Prime Minister, 7 p.m. (Accra Time), transcript issued by the Prime Minister's Office, 24 September 1957.

13 L James, *George Padmore and decolonisation from below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War, and the end of empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 164-190. Cf. M Grilli, *Nkrumaism and African nationalism: Ghana's pan-African foreign policy in the age of decolonisation* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); F Gerits, *The ideological scramble for Africa: How the pursuit of anticolonial modernity shaped a postcolonial order, 1945–1966* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2023), pp. 62-84.

14 Nkrumah, as quoted in A Rivkin, *Africa and the West: Elements of free-world policy* (New York: F. A. Praeger, 1962), p. 6.

> Instead, Ghana has frustrated the intentions of the authors of her constitution by sweeping away most of the rights of the Regions, and by establishing highly centralised government. Her Ministers have cowed the Opposition by locking up without trial over fifty of its members […] there is now virtually one-party rule […] none of the give and take, or measured courtesy of British Parliamentary conduct.[15]

As they witnessed Ghana progressively throwing overboard the vestiges of Westminster parliamentarism, a feeling of betrayal began making its way among Western observers of African events. An article in *Reader's Digest,* for instance, recalled that while, "the British has provided long years of careful tutelage in parliamentary democracy", the showcase of democracy in Africa was now "a shambles", and asked how this would influence others soon-to-be independent African territories.[16]

Ghana's gradual abandonment of liberal democratic principles, as well as the government's outspokenness on international matters, triggered an intense "press war" between British and Ghanaian governmental media, which in turn weighed heavily on diplomatic and political relations between the two countries. In 1961, at about the time when Queen Elizabeth was coming on an official visit, the West African BBC correspondent, along with a *Daily Express* correspondent, were expelled from Ghana due to critical reports they had written. The UK Information Office in Accra considered the situation "ominous" yet tried to analyse it with surprising equanimity. While the officials contended that Nkrumah and his ministers felt unfairly treated by the British print media since gaining independence, describing it as reaching "a stage of near psychosis," they acknowledged that Ghana had, to some degree, been arbitrarily singled out for criticism. They complained that British journalists tended to focus solely on the negatives of the Convention Peoples' Party (CPP) regime without giving some credit to the man, who, in their opinion, had rescued the country from "tribal savagery".[17] In the light of the risk that the escalating press feud might drive the "senior African member" out of the Commonwealth and into the arms of the Soviet Union, the UK Information Office even suggested holding a high-level conference between the British Prime Minister, the leader of the opposition and the proprietors and editors of the British national newspapers, in order to bring the situation back under

15 TNA, DO 35/9408, Snelling to Home, Despatch N° 40, 5 December 1959.

16 C W Hall, "What is happening to freedom in Ghana", *Readers Digest*, December 1959, as reported in PRAAD, ADM 16/21, "Ghana through the world press during December 1959", p. 3.

17 TNA, DO 195/36, Walker-Brash to CRO, 2 December 1961, pp. 1-3.

control.[18] In his valedictory report at the end of 1961, High Commissioner Snelling wondered how Ghana's Commonwealth membership could possibly survive, "the irresponsible and arrogant paternalism of Fleet Street".[19]

The animosities between British and Ghanaian press organs somewhat abated thereafter but then escalated again after the assassination attempt against Nkrumah in August 1962. As Ghana's party press violently attacked Western imperialism and neocolonialism, insinuating foreign responsibility for the bombing which left the President wounded, Ghana's envoy in London protested against press criticism against Nkrumah for the expulsion from Ghana of the Anglican bishop of Accra, suspected of anti-government activities.[20] The "press war" was also the subject of a meeting between High Commissioner De Freitas and Nkrumah in September 1962, during which the Ghanaian President denied being involved in newspaper editing.[21] In fact, the British by then had begun believing that Nkrumah himself was the mastermind behind the anti-Western media campaigns. The Information Office esteemed that by doing so, he wished to, "redress the facts that favour the West", i.e. Ghana's cultural and economic ties to Britain and the capitalist world, "by theories that point in the opposite direction".[22]

After 1962, the "press war" simmered down to a certain extent, mostly because the British press got tired of Ghana. However, well before the Rhodesian crisis escalated, British diplomats and officials remained concerned about the possibility of Ghana exiting the Commonwealth. Given the fragile state of Ghanaian-British relations, Commonwealth membership was viewed as a stabilising force, countering Ghana's perceived "lurch to the left."[23] In April 1964, as press comments questioned the presence of an increasingly Marxist Ghana in the Commonwealth, High Commissioner Arthur Smedley recommended the CRO a pragmatic line, reminding that "the way a state chooses to run its own affairs is its business and not ours except in so far as it has a direct impact on British relations with the country concerned".[24] The CRO agreed that they would have to put a good face on things and avoid hastening Ghana's possible departure with impulsive reactions.[25] The

18 TNA, DO 195/36, Walker-Brash to CRO, 2 December 1961, p. 5.
19 TNA, FO 371/161361, Snelling to CRO, "Ghana: Valedictory Review", 19 December 1961, p. 6.
20 TNA, DO 153/64, Armah to Sandys, letter, 1 October 1962.
21 TNA, DO 153/64, De Freitas, telegram, 21 September 1962.
22 TNA, DO 194/14, Walker-Brash, "The President and the Press", 5 December 1962, p. 4.
23 TNA, DO 195/4, UK High Commissioner for Ghana to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, "Ghana: The Lurch to the Left", 1 December 1960.
24 TNA, 195/264, Smedley to Chadwick, letter, 18 April 1964.
25 TNA, 195/264, Chadwick to Smedley, letter, 8 May 1964.

British press was pleasantly bewildered by the moderate and constructive role Ghana's head of state played at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in July 1964 in London, during which the foundations for the establishment of the Commonwealth Secretariat were laid. The diplomats were equally puzzled by Nkrumah's behaviour, speculating about what intentions might possibly lie behind this friendly attitude.[26] Broadly speaking, the CRO and the High Commission agreed that Nkrumah's motives were most probably of a tactical nature.[27] As a matter of fact, despite all the anti-imperialist rhetoric, Nkrumah valued the Commonwealth as a North-South dialogue platform.[28]

In the same period, the United States asked the British for support in its strategy of pressure on Nkrumah by high-level visits to avoid a further drift to the left by Ghana.[29] The CRO agreed with the usefulness of such a tactic and recommended a visit to Ghana by Secretary of State John Boyd Carpenter, which was envisaged but eventually cancelled, much to the displeasure of the High Commission.[30] Although the flow of correspondence between the British Prime Ministers and Nkrumah continued, when Ghana officially became a one-party state, the diplomats encountered more difficulties in finding political personalities willing to travel to Accra. As it seems, the political leadership was more interested in countermeasures against Ghana's support for nationalist organisations and militias throughout the African continent, especially in Southern Africa. Prime Minister Home inquired with the Cabinet Office about the possibility of discreetly sharing intelligence reports on Ghanaian support for oppositional groups ("Ghanaian subversion in Africa") with other African governments. The CRO, in collaboration with intelligence agencies and the Information Research Department, agreed to implement this on a case-by-case basis.[31] Following the CRO's guidance, Britain adopted a strategy of patiently containing Ghana's assertive activism. The realisation was that "to slap Ghana in the face or to engineer her dismissal from the Commonwealth would lose us our remaining opportunities of influencing her for the future", especially in the post-Nkrumah era.[32]

26 TNA, 195/223, Smedley to Chadwick, letter, 17 July 1964.
27 TNA, 195/223, Chadwick to Smedley, letter, 22 July 1964.
28 Nkrumah, *I speak of freedom*, pp. 223-227.
29 TNA, DO 195/264, Washington Telegram N° 1516 to Foreign Office, 23 April 1964.
30 TNA, DO 195/264, Smedley to Chadwick, letter, 14 April 1964.
31 TNA, FO 11/4823, Counter Subversion Committee, Working Group on Ghana, Record of a meeting held on March 23, 1964 in the Commonwealth Relations Office.
32 TNA, DO 195/11, Chadwick to du Boulay, letter, 11 October 1962.

3. BRITAIN AND THE "JET-PROPELLED DEVELOPMENT"

There were also economic issues which contributed to the estrangement between Britain and Ghana in the Nkrumah years after 1957. The Gold Coast was regarded as a "model colony" of the British Empire in West Africa since it contributed greatly, in economic terms as well as with troops, to the fight by the United Kingdom against its enemies during the two world wars. In the post-war years, thanks to the booming demand for cocoa, the Gold Coast became one of the top earners of hard currency in the empire, and between 1945 and 1947, it was involved in Labour's "productivist vision of economic development," which pushed for development projects, "that would boost production, yield a return on investment, and earn dollars".[33] In practice, the colonies were helping repay Great Britain's war debts without receiving much in return in terms of consumption, infrastructure, or welfare.[34] As we have seen, though, parts of the British establishment valued the behaviour of the former Gold Coast colony as an independent state, especially its attitude towards Britain and the Western world, as a test for the future of British foreign relations: Was Britain capable of exporting the democratic nation-state ("even") south of the Sahara?

The stability of Ghana and its institutions was, therefore, a major cause for concern. Sir Robert Jackson, a former Australian naval officer and spouse to the British economist Barbara Ward, who became a development consultant seconded by the United Kingdom Treasury for Nkrumah's government, referred in a meeting with Canadian officials in October 1957 to Ghana as, "the so-called [...] 'pilot plant of African democracy'", which he hoped Commonwealth and other Western countries could influence with technical aid and other forms of assistance. This, he believed, would demonstrate their interest in Ghana's well-being, mitigate "the impression of Britain's overwhelming influence on Ghana," and thereby prevent a shift towards a totalitarian, socialist regime.[35] However, the road towards the Gold Coast's independence had left the basic economic patterns of colonialism untouched. Britain's bequeathal to Ghana was, "a certain sort of economy, one which worked passably well according to the standards set for it: the earning of sufficient revenue to run a government to provide for order and

33 F Cooper, *Decolonization and African society: The labor question in French and British Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 203-205.

34 WA Nielsen, *The great powers and Africa* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1969), p. 206.

35 TNA, DO 35/9408, Meeting with Sir Robert Jackson Director of Development in the Government of Ghana, 07 October 1957.

promote the exports necessary to pay for imports from the metropolis".[36] At the end of the day, the British government's expectation was that this economic model would work in the post-colonial era as well, provided a Western-friendly government took over in Accra.[37] Moreover, the British considered that with around £200 million in reserves accumulated mostly during the 1950s, Ghana was a relatively rich country and did not need any special kind of capital aid from the United Kingdom.[38]

Nkrumah, however, was obsessed with fears of missing the rendezvous with modernity and promoted his version of the Great Leap Forward, which he called "jet-propelled development".[39] Initially, he expected that the British and the West would help to complete Ghana's independence at the economic level, providing investment and aid with which to transform it from a territory largely dependent on exports of one commodity to the first industrialised state of Black Africa.[40] This aid, however, did not materialise, much to the chagrin of Ghana and also of Britain's diplomats on the spot. Arthur Snelling went out of his way to convince his government that Ghana needed more positive policies, "designed to demonstrate that there is real value to Ghana in maintaining her ties with the West and her membership in the Commonwealth".[41] As of 1960, witnessing the rising influence of the Eastern camp in Ghana, the High Commissioner appealed to London to increase Britain's commitment to Ghana's development plans since he considered that even relatively small sums might have "bought" some fair amount of goodwill on the part of the Ghanaians.[42] Yet these appeals mostly fell on deaf ears as Britain struggled with its own financial weakness and structural economic problems. In fact, the only notable capital aid contribution to Ghana in those years was a £5 million allocation to the Volta River Project, which, in the end, could not even be brought entirely to use for the purpose.[43]

36 JH Dalton, "Colony and metropolis: Some aspects of British rule in the Gold Coast and their implications for an understanding of Ghana today", *The Journal of Economic History* 21 (4), 1961, pp. 552–65, 555.
37 TNA, DO 35/9408, Snelling to Home , Despatch N° 40, 5 December 1959.
38 TNA, DO 35/9427, Ghana Republic Inauguration, July 1960, Brief for Lord Privy Seal.
39 Rivkin, *Africa and the West*, p. 6.
40 TNA, DO 35/9427, UK High Commissioner for Ghana to CRO, "Economic Aid for Ghana", telegram, 29 May 1957.
41 TNA, DO 195/4, UK High Commissioner in Ghana to CRO, "Ghana: A Policy for Anglo-Ghanaian Relations", 1 December 1960, p. 1.
42 TNA, DO 195/4, UK High Commissioner in Ghana to CRO, "Ghana: A Policy for Anglo-Ghanaian Relations", 1 December 1960, pp. 3-4.
43 TNA, OD 30/72, Chadwick to King, letter, 30 July 1965.

It is probably true that at least until the early 1960s, before the Ghanaian-British relations soured, modest financial support would have won much political goodwill in Accra. In those days, Nkrumah still trusted British expertise enough to rely, for instance, on the advice of a Cambridge economist, Nicholas Kaldor, for the formulation of Ghana's economic policy. Although a disciple of Keynes, Professor Kaldor recommended as a cure for Ghana's deficit-based spending, which was depleting the country's reserves at an alarming speed, an austerity budget which was supposed to provide for an increase in government revenue of 40 per cent at one jump. As a consternated High Commissioner reported to the CRO, "Kaldor's budget" of 1961 represented, "an attempt to put order in the national finances by deflationary means of such intensity as to make the efforts of most other countries which find themselves in economic straits appear quite mild".[44] The budget imposed foreign exchange and price controls, all sorts of new taxes, as well as a remodelling of income tax, compulsory savings for individuals, cocoa farmers and companies, import duties on consumer goods, and a wage freeze. The rationale behind it was that internal costs of development should be met just by internal revenue, while external borrowing should cover external development costs only. As Nkrumah's government had grandiose and costly development plans for the country and generously supported anti-colonial movements from all quarters of Africa south of the Sahara, the jump in government revenue inevitably had to be tremendous.

The Kaldor budget had massive consequences on Ghana's social and political stability. There had been some discontentment in the population growing beneath the surface for some time.[45] While Nkrumah and his closest associates were on a public relations tour in the communist world and the country was temporarily ruled by a Presidential commission, the harbour and railway workers in Takoradi went on strike against the financial squeeze caused by the budget. For the first time since independence, serious labour unrest took place in Ghana against the opposition of the trade unions, which by then had been put under government control. The strike extended to public transportation, shops, and public offices. Even in Kumasi and Accra, the railwaymen went on strike. They all demanded the termination of the compulsory saving scheme and the abolition of the purchase tax.[46] The social protest lasted about three weeks, during which the party and state apparatus showed all its weakness and helplessness. The strike ended only

44 TNA, PREM 11/3369, Snelling to CRO, "Ghana: The Budget", 31 August 1961.
45 TNA, DO 195/5, Keeble to Chadwick, letter, 9 February 1961.
46 TNA, DO 195/64, Snelling to CRO, Despatch n° 32 (61), 22 October 1961, pp. 1-2.

when Nkrumah came back to Ghana and personally appealed in a radio broadcast to the workers to go back to work, which shows the extent to which the regime depended on the leader's personality. The British, for their part, were relieved that their military contingent had not been called on to put down the strike, as this would have put them in an awkward situation.[47] The press aroused suspicions that Britain might have supported the strikes, and the High Commission reported an "unreal, isolated, Anglo-phobic atmosphere" in government circles,[48] but in the end, the White Paper published by the government on the "conspiracy" only slightly hinted at British complicity.[49] The High Commission was actually approached by three leaders of the oppositional United Party looking for support, which the British considered too risky to do though.[50]

In retrospect, the strikes of 1961 can be considered the first serious trouble for the CPP regime, and quite interestingly, they were provoked to a large extent by the advice of a British economist. More research would be needed to evaluate the exact lessons Nkrumah drew from these events and the relations with Britain. To be sure, he never tried again to impose such draconian financial measures on his people, even though this did not avert the country's eventual financial collapse. The last years of Nkrumah's reign were especially marked by Ghana's demands for financial assistance to all Western countries, met with scepticism by Britain and its allies. Debating the Ghanaian requests, High Commissioner Smedley expressed the view that it was not in Britain's interest that the Nkrumah regime should continue in power and, therefore, should receive as little assistance as strictly necessary, "I believe, as you will know from other correspondence, that any likely successor regime at this juncture would be an improvement from our point of view. [...] It follows that we should do nothing which will help to keep it in power except where our clear national interest dictates otherwise".[51] What the British actually wanted was just to avoid complete financial turmoil in Ghana, which would have endangered their £100 million stock of investments in the country, without prolonging the life of a government which by then they considered hostile.[52]

47 TNA, DO 195-64, Accra to CRO, Telegram, 10 September 1961.
48 TNA, DO 195/64, Snelling to CRO, Despatch n° 32 (61), 22 October 1961, p. 6.
49 TNA, DO 196/65, "Ghana - Statement by The Government on the Recent Conspiracy", 11 December 1961.
50 TNA, DO 195/6, CRO to Accra, telegram, 23 September 1961.
51 TNA, DO 221-58, Smedley to Chadwick, 30 October 1964.
52 TNA, DO 153/17, High Commission to CRO, Despatch N° 23, 2 November 1965, pp. 15-16.

4. THE "NON-POLITICAL" ARMY

A policy domain where Britain could exercise a considerable yet discrete influence in its former Gold Coast colony was the military. While already in his 1961 report about Ghana's "lurch to the left", High Commissioner Snelling lamented a considerable loss of British and Western influence, mainly caused by lack of capital aid and unfortunate policies in Africa, he reported a steady increase of British influence among the armed forces. He even went so far as to call the British officers seconded to Ghana's Armed Services and their commander, General Henry T. Alexander, "the President's insurance policy against a possible coup d'état by an Army discontented at Left-wing trends". [53] The British were quite convinced that they were successfully exporting the "non-political army" model to Ghana. [54] However, in Ghana's volatile and radicalised political environment, it proved difficult to separate the military from political affairs.

When Ghana became independent in 1957, its armed forces were very small and insufficient for the necessities of external defence and internal order. The country had no Navy and no Air Force and largely relied on British assistance for military issues. From 1957 to 1961, two British officers, first General Victor Paley and then General Alexander, acted as Ghana's Chief of Defence Staff.[55] Nkrumah pushed for a rapid build-up of the armed forces, which he needed to pursue his pan-African anti-colonial policies. The issue of Ghana's military independence became acute for Nkrumah for the first time in 1960, when public order collapsed in the Congo, and Ghana had to ask Britain to provide the aircraft needed to transport the Ghanaian UN contingent to Léopoldville. As the deployment went on, Nkrumah came to realise that he did not have full control of the Ghanaian troops led by Alexander and how they were being used under the UN command, which put him in an embarrassing position vis-à-vis his ally Patrice Lumumba.[56] He, therefore, started a "Ghanaianisation" initiative of the higher military ranks, the most prominent victim of which was General Alexander himself, who was dismissed in September 1961. By doing this, Nkrumah deprived the British of what they considered one of the main "counters in our hand" to keep Ghana Western-friendly and part of the Commonwealth.[57]

53 TNA, DO 195/4, UK High Commissioner for Ghana to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, "Ghana: The Lurch to the Left", 1 December 1960.

54 TNA, DO 195/210, "Summary of Colonel Mermagen's views with Mr. V.C. Martin at 3.30 pm on the 6th of May 1964".

55 TNA, DO 195/30, Keeble to CRO, 31 January 1962.

56 K Nkrumah, *Challenge of the Congo: A case study of foreign pressures in an independent state* (London: Panaf, 2002), p. 42.

57 TNA, DO 195/6, Greenhill to CRO, 15 August 1961, Annex G.

The unannounced sacking of Alexander, in connection with Nkrumah's anti-British statements during his tour of the communist world, caused an uproar in Britain.[58] Nkrumah had to write to Harold Macmillan to reassure the United Kingdom that, "there has been no change in Ghana's fundamental position of neutrality" in the Cold War.[59] Nonetheless, Ghana's President had by then made up his mind and decided that Ghana would rely both on the West and the East to develop its armed forces. In October 1961, Nkrumah announced to Macmillan that Ghana would formally apply for a British Military Training Team and that it had submitted a similar request to Canada. As to the Soviets, Nkrumah admitted their presence yet played down their role to a team of military experts dispatched to train Ghana's military in the use of ammunition, which the Soviet Union was providing on credit.[60] The British, of course, were wary about Ghana's military cooperation with the Soviet Union. They suspected that the real purpose of the Soviet officers was to train a Ghanaian brigade to be put to service to the planned African High Command[61] and used to support anti-colonial struggles and revolutions in Africa.[62] However, they valued the chance to exercise influence on Ghana via the military instructors and replied positively to the request for a training team. Nevertheless, Macmillan asked Nkrumah to provide assurance that the British and the Soviet training teams would be kept separate and that their roles would not overlap, which Nkrumah did.[63]

By supporting the military build-up of a foreign country whose loyalty and sympathy in the East-West conflict it could not be sure anymore and whose relations with the neighbouring countries were increasingly tense, Britain was actually walking a dangerous tightrope.[64] Moreover, the strikes in Takoradi and Kumasi had shown that British military advisers were at risk of being involved in the suppression of rebellions or riots.[65] However, the threat posed by the Soviets possibly taking over completely, military training and equipment supply of the Ghana armed forces, and creating a bridgehead in Africa weighed more

58 TNA, DO 195/6, CRO to Accra, telegram, 23 September 1961.
59 TNA, DO 195/6, Nkrumah to Macmillan, letter, 26 September 1961.
60 TNA, DO 195/30, Nkrumah to Macmillan, letter, 4 October 1961.
61 A Zack-Williams, "Peacekeeping and an 'african high command': plus ca change, c'est la meme chose", *Review of African Political Economy* 24 (71), 1997, pp. 131-137.
62 TNA, DO 195/30, Accra to CRO, telegram, 31 January 1962.
63 TNA, DO 195/30, CRO to Accra, telegram, 8 February 1962; Accra to CRO, telegram, 23 February 1962.
64 TNA, DO 195/30, Keeble to CRO, 31 January 1962. On Ghana's tense relationship with its West African neighbours see also M Wyss, "The Nkrumah factor: The strategic alignment of early postcolonial Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria", *English Historical Review* CXXXVIII (592), 2023, pp. 591-619.
65 TNA, DO 195/64, Alexander to Commodore Forman, telegram, 5 September 1961.

heavily.[66] The armed forces also provided useful personnel for high-level visit diplomacy in times when no one in Whitehall seemed interested anymore in being photographed with Nkrumah. When the Americans asked Britain to increase, "the flow of visits of people who could influence Nkrumah" and to keep "Nkrumah's feet to the fire",[67] it was Admiral Louis Mountbatten, British Chief of Defence Staff and war hero, who stepped into the breach after Secretary of State Boyd-Carpenter had turned down the proposal. Nkrumah, always susceptible to high-level diplomacy and ceremonialism, went out of his way to please the very special guest. Mountbatten's visit in October 1964 was deemed by the High Commission "a success on all counts",[68] although the positive effect on British-Ghanaian relations was ephemeral.

Apart from keeping the Soviet military presence largely out of Ghana, which remained their main task even after the break in diplomatic relations,[69] the role of the British military training mission was to assure London that the bulk of Ghana's armed forces remained aligned with Britain and would not be used for political-military adventures in Africa.[70] In Nkrumah's steadily radicalising vision, though, there was no space for a conservative army in the British tradition; a revolutionary army was needed instead to pursue the dream of the All-African Union Government.[71] He, therefore, sacked 1965 his Chief of Defence Staff, General Michael Otu, and replaced him with General C. M. Barwah, who was politically more loyal. It seems that Nkrumah himself did not fully understand how much Ghana's military valued the British connection and how much, therefore, British influence provided stability to his own regime by keeping tranquillity in the armed forces. To be sure, there had been rumours of plots for coups for years in Ghana, yet the assassination attempt against Nkrumah in 1964 came from a police officer, not from a soldier. After the reshuffling of the higher ranks and the break in relations with Britain in December 1965, reports about attempted military coups increased.[72] When on 24 February 1966, only five weeks after the military coup in Nigeria, a joint army-police operation finally toppled the CPP regime, the acting High

66 TNA, DO 195/64, Accra to CRO, telegram, 4 September 1961.
67 TNA, DO 195/38, Washington to Foreign Office, telegram, 22 April 1964.
68 TNA, 195/238, High Commission, Despatch N° 22, 21 October 1964.
69 TNA, 195/246, Extract from minutes of a meeting of the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee held on 22 December 1965. On British postcolonial defence policies in West Africa see also, M Wyss, *Postcolonial security: Britain, France, and West Africa's Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).
70 TNA, DO 195/246, Tanzania and Ghana, Consequences of Breach of Diplomatic Relations, Joint Memorandum by Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations and Minister for Overseas Development, 20 December 1965.
71 Nkrumah, *Challenge of the Congo*, p. xii.
72 TNA, DO 195/211, FO to Accra, telegram, 30 January 1966.

Commissioner rejoiced - in a quite oxymoronic manner - for this "revolution" carried out by "the established national forces of law and order".[73] Having failed with Westminster-style democracy, it seems that the British had also given up on the export of the "non-political army" to their former colonies in Africa.

5. BRITAIN, GHANA AND THE RHODESIAN ISSUE

There was also a racial dimension in the way the Gold Coast, and later Ghana acquired a central role in British public debate in those years. As nationalist agitation in the 1940s and 1950s had taken place there without any considerable racial tensions, this former "model colony" was supposed to become not only the "model independent African state", [74] but also the model *black* state. As the British socialist Geoffrey Bing, who acted as Nkrumah's Attorney General and political advisor, highlighted quite well in his memoir, there was among British liberals the belief that, "in one field at least Ghana could succeed where Britain, the United States and the Western World had failed" and correct, "the great African error which their forebears had made fifty years before",[75] namely endowing in South Africa a minority of whites with the power to rule over the majority of coloured. In Bing's view, when white South Africans in 1948 instituted the system of racial segregation and exploitation infamously known as *apartheid*, those who despised this outright model of white supremacy cast Nkrumah, out of a sense of guilt, in the role of, "Messiah, but as a Messiah of orthodoxy, who, by his exercise of British political techniques would convert the racialists of Southern Africa"; in their eyes, Bing argued, "Ghana had been called into existence out of pure imperial beneficence so that Western Africa might prove Southern Africa wrong".[76]

In this perspective, Ghana was supposed to show the world that British colonialism could be, at the end of the day, a win-win experience for both the mother country and for the dependency, and also prove wrong those who argued that black Africans were not in a condition to lead a modern country without resorting to violence, and without abusing their power for self-enrichment and corruption. Kenya's Governor, for instance, said in 1947, during the African Governor's Conference, that the "theoretical ideas of colonial self-government [are] totally divorced from the realities of the present

73 TNA, DO 195/239, British High Commission, Despatch N° 2/66, 28 March 1966.
74 D Rooney, *Kwame Nkrumah: The political kingdom in the Third World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988), p. 130.
75 G Bing, *Reap the whirlwind: An account of Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana from 1950 to 1966*, (London: Maggibon & Kee, 1968), p. 15.
76 Bing, *Reap the whirlwind*, p. 16.

day [...] as if there was — yet — any reason to suppose that any African can be cashier of a village council for 3 weeks without stealing the cash".[77] In the speech he held on the day of independence, 6 March 1957, Nkrumah reminded his fellow citizens that "if we show ourselves disunited, inefficient or corrupt, then we shall have gravely harmed all those millions in Africa who put their trust in us and look to Ghana to prove that African people can build a state of their own based on democracy, tolerance and racial equality".[78] He also solemnly declared,

> You ought to stand firm behind us so that we can prove to the world that when the African is given a chance, he can show the world that he is somebody. […] Today, from now on, there is a new African in the world [...] ready to fight his own battle and show that after all the Black man is capable of managing his own affairs.[79]

Britain surely would have appreciated a black democratic "success story" in one of its former dependencies as a counterweight to the news from its colonies in Southern, Central and Eastern Africa, where tensions between white settlers, the British administration and the black majority often made the order of the day. Instead, Ghana turned out to be, "a sharp thorn in the flesh of the United Kingdom" in the matters of decolonisation and racial relations in Africa.[80] Nkrumah had vowed that Ghana's independence was meaningless unless linked with the total liberation of Africa from imperialism and colonialism. Accra thereafter became a safe haven for nationalists and freedom fighters from all over the African continent, who found their political and financial support and military training.[81] In April 1958, Ghana hosted the Conference of Independent African States, and in December of the same year, the All-African People's Conference, to which representatives of nationalist movements from all over the continent were invited. In this way, the Ghanaians accumulated much political capital among anti-colonial activists in making their state "the Mecca of African nationalism",[82] but the relations with the West went to a hard test. The British were trying to bring about a

77 As quoted in R Schuknecht, *British colonial development policy after the Second World War: The case of Sukumaland, Tanganyika* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2010), p. 192.

78 As quoted in Rooney, *The political kingdom*, p. 133.

79 K Nkrumah, *I speak of freedom. A statement of African ideology* (London: Heinemann, 1961), p. 107.

80 TNA, DO 35/9408, Snelling to Home, Despatch N° 40, 5 December 1959, pp. 1-2. See also, Gerits, *The ideological scramble for Africa*, pp. 159-175.

81 See e.g. M Grilli, "Southern African liberation movements in Nkrumah's Ghana", *Oxford Research Encyclopedia, African History,* https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.736, accessed 16 October 2022.

82 WS Thompson, *Ghana's foreign policy 1957 – 1966: Diplomacy, ideology, and the new state* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. xvii.

gradual decolonisation that would take into account both the natives and the settlers' points of view, while pan-African nationalists like Nkrumah pushed for the end of colonialism in Africa as quickly as possible on the basis of the "one man one vote" principle. The issue of South Africa and its racist form of government remained an international source of conflict until the end of apartheid in 1994 but became less acute for Anglo-African relations when, in 1961, South Africa ended its own Dominion status, became a republic, and left the increasingly multi-ethnic Commonwealth in order to avoid a looming expulsion.[83] In its colonies in Central, Southern and Eastern Africa, London tried to get hold of the complicated situation, among other things, spurring federations of colonies that it hoped would hold the neighbouring states together – and racial relations in balance – after independence. One of these experiments in political regroupings was the Central African Federation (CAF), also known as the Federation of the Rhodesias (i.e. Northern and Southern Rhodesia, today's Zambia and Zimbabwe) and Nyasaland (today's Malawi), which was established in 1953 and dissolved ten years later.

In August 1959, Nkrumah came on an official visit to London and met with Prime Minister Macmillan and Lord Home, head of the CRO. Both tried to win Nkrumah's sympathy for their decolonisation plans for Africa, especially for their experiment with the CAF. A Foreign Office preparatory note suggested that Britain's goal should be, "to canalise the efforts of Dr. Nkrumah into channels as little harmful to our interests as possible"; at the same time, the diplomats warned that, "unless moderation and forbearance can be exercised *on both sides* [italics added] this will bring Ghana and the U.K. into collision on issues of colonial and racial policy in places on the African continent remote to Ghana".[84] This warning is consistent with what the British High Commissioner observed from Accra, namely that so far, Britain's West African policies had won Ghana's sympathy, yet not those in Central and Southern Africa, where they appeared to be aimed at maintaining the privileged status of the white minorities: in order to win the Cold War in Ghana, he appealed to London, "our African policies must be and be seen to be, fundamentally non-racial."[85]

As a matter of fact, during the meeting, Macmillan and Home basically tried to convince Nkrumah of their good intentions. Home said that he had been working on a declaration about the United Kingdom's Africa policy which he wanted to show Nkrumah. Speaking of the Federation of the Rhodesias, Macmillan said that the main problem was, "how to keep ordered

83 Hyam, *Britain's declining empire*, pp. 317-326.

84 TNA, FO 371/138173, Draft Brief for the Secretary of State to talk to Dr. Nkrumah on Pan-Africanism, p. 1.

85 TNA, DO 195/4, UK High Commissioner in Ghana to CRO, "Ghana: A Policy for Anglo-Ghanaian Relations", 1 December 1960.

arrangements going in a multi-racial society," and that he hoped, "it would not be necessary to draw attention to the difficulties", which clearly was a hint at Nkrumah's public rhetoric.[86] The British were also wary of Nkrumah's insistence on "fixing dates" for the decolonisation of the remaining African colonies, which is why Macmillan made this point, too.[87] In his plea for the cause of the "multi-racial society", Macmillan even quoted Algeria as an example of successful European colonialism in Africa, to which Nkrumah retorted that the French colonial system was, "very reactionary whatever General De Gaulle's own policies might be".[88] Overall, the minutes of the meeting recorded long speeches by the hosts and quite a few utterances by the guest.

The ideological distance between London and Accra was widening, but in this phase, Nkrumah was still interested in keeping an open dialogue with Britain, in view of the negotiations of the Volta Dam Scheme,[89] but also of the long announced visit of the Queen to Ghana.[90] Nkrumah also needed Britain's backing with regard to the support Ghana was giving Guinea in order to save the neighbouring country from financial collapse and chaos.[91] As of 1960, however, Ghana embarked on a foreign policy centred on vocal advocacy of political rights for the oppressed peoples of Africa and Asia.[92] Ideological principles expressed in impassioned speeches and high-sounding declarations were one of the cornerstones of this policy. There was, at that time, "an underlying inclination towards radicalism" in the new nationalist élites,[93] which, at least at the rhetorical level, clearly favoured the socialist East compared to the capitalist West in the relationship with Africa. For their part, the British, with their anti-communist, pragmatic outlook, were often out of touch with the nationalist leadership of the new Africa.[94] The activism of the Afro-Asian countries, encouraged by Moscow and Beijing, culminated in the "Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples" at the General Assembly of the United Nations on 14 December 1960, which condemned, "the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation,

86 TNA, FO 371/138173, Record of a conversation at 10, Downing Street, on Monday, 10 August 1959. Present: Prime Minister, Lord Home, Dr. Nkrumah, Mr. De Zulueta, p. 3.
87 TNA, FO 371/138173, Record of a conversation, 10 August 1959, pp. 3-4.
88 TNA, FO 371/138173, Record of a conversation, 10 August 1959, pp. 4-5
89 TNA, DO 35/9427, Some notes on Ghana's financial position with special reference to the Volta River Project and the Second Development Plan, 10 June 1960.
90 For the Queen's visit, see PRAAD, RG 17/1/102 as well as 192.
91 TNA, FO 371/146811, Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and Dr. Nkrumah at 10, Downing Street at 3 p.m. on Monday, May 2, 1960, p. 1.
92 TNA, DO 195/4, Accra to CRO, Despatch N° 170, "The Lurch to the Left in Ghana", 23 May 1960
93 V McKay, *Africa in world politics* (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 23.
94 Nielsen, *The great powers and Africa*, p. 73.

domination and exploitation" as a "denial of fundamental human rights," and most important — a serious blow to any gradualist approach to decolonisation — stressed that, "inadequacy of political, economic, social or educational preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence".[95]

The last high-level attempt at agreeing on some kind of common British-Ghanaian line in international policy was the meeting between State Secretary Duncan Sandys and Nkrumah in October 1961 against the background of the incipient state visit of the Queen. The meeting produced a joint press statement, in which Sandys obtained by Ghana's President some words of appreciation for the granting of independence to nearly six hundred million people by Britain since World War Two, while Nkrumah nonetheless reiterated the need to fix "an early target" for the release of the remaining African colonies into independence.[96] As of 1962, the dialogue between London and Accra on African policy abated, as the British considered Nkrumah "blind to reason" with regard to the Federation of the Rhodesias and were expecting to become, with the French leaving Algeria, "the main butt of the African nationalists" along with the Portuguese.[97] In November 1964, Nkrumah sent his Foreign Minister, Kojo Botsio, over to London to meet the new Prime Minister, Harold Wilson. Botsio carried with him a letter addressed to Wilson, as well as a memorandum on Ghana's foreign policy.[98] In these documents, Nkrumah stressed once again that Ghana's main foreign policy goals were the establishment of a continental unity government for Africa and the liberation of the continent from colonialism. He tried to win over Britain's support with the argument that only a unified Africa could provide a stable enough market for British products.[99] Wilson received Nkrumah's letter but failed to react. By that time, considering Ghana's isolation in Africa in this regard and the failed experiment of the Ghana-Guinea-Mali Union, the British viewed Ghana's quest for pan-African unity basically as, "Nkrumah's pipe dream".[100]

The issue of racial conflicts in Southern Africa eventually provided the *casus belli* for the diplomatic break-up between Accra and London. The spectre of an independent racist regime in Rhodesia had been haunting Black Africa's leaders for years. Ghana and other African countries suspected that the British were preparing to grant Rhodesia full independence without

95 United Nations General Assembly, 947th Plenary Meeting, 14 December 1960.
96 TNA, DO 195/7, "Joint Statement Signed by President Nkrumah and Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations Mr. Duncan Sandys on October 4th".
97 TNA, DO 195/11, "Some Thoughts on Ghana", pp. 4-5.
98 TNA, FO 371/176525, "Notes on Some Aspects on Ghana's Foreign Policy. A document prepared as a basis for conversations during the Foreign Minister's visit to London-November 21st-24th 1964".
99 TNA, DO 195/265, Nkrumah to Wilson, letter, 19 November 1964.
100 TNA, DO 195/265, Ghana's Foreign Policy - Mr. Botsio's Visit, undated note.

previously eliminating the privileges of the white minority, despite the official policy, "no independence before majority rule".[101] The matter was raised by Ghana in 1963 at the Security Council of the United Nations, forcing Britain to one of its rare employments of the veto right.[102] As time passed by, it became clear that while London and its allies condemned the position of the settlers, this was not one of those issues on which the Western countries were willing to resort to strong-hand tactics – as it had, for instance, been the case in the Congo.[103] As a result, Ghana's government-controlled press felt free to pull out all rhetorical stops in condemning Western double standards.[104] When, in October 1965, the Ghanaians hosted the summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), they considered Britain's attitude towards Rhodesia deserved radical condemnation and advocated the use of force to quell the rebellion and prevent the looming UDI. Nkrumah had a quick talk with Harold Wilson at Accra airport, where the latter was passing through on his way back from negotiations in Salisbury, which, however, brought little understanding on the matter.[105]

Ghana's hard stance at the OAU allowed Nkrumah to present himself again as the leader of the radical wing.[106] However, most of the other African states chose not to go the radical path, fearing Rhodesia's mighty armed forces. As Malawi's President Hastings Banda stressed, "within a week [...] the Rhodesian army could conquer the whole of East and Central Africa and the armies and air forces of Ghana and Nigeria could do nothing to prevent it".[107] In the end, neither Britain nor the OAU were able to avoid Rhodesia's UDI on 11 November 1965. Although it had established the African Liberation Committee to support the anti-colonial nationalist movements, the OAU decided not to support an African, UN-backed military expedition against Rhodesia and to go instead the way of sanctions – ironically, the same the British would choose to deal with the matter. All member states were invited to break off relations with Britain as the legally responsible colonial power to protest against London's failure to prevent the UDI. As one of the most vocal critics of neocolonialism, Ghana could not, at this point, refuse to abide by the OAU's decision. One month later, Nkrumah told Wilson that Ghana would

101 TNA, PREM 11/4821, Statement by H. E. Mr. Kwesi Armah, 24 February 1964.
102 Thompson, *Ghana's foreign policy*, p. 391.
103 P Gleijeses, "'Flee! The white giants are coming!': The United States, the mercenaries, and the Congo, 1964–65", *Diplomatic History* 18 (2), 1994, pp. 207-37. http://dh.oxfordjournals.org/content/18/2/207 accessed 23 December 2021.
104 TNA, DO 195/239, Smedley to CRO, telegram, 2 November 1965.
105 Thompson, *Ghana's foreign policy*, p. 391.
106 Grilli, *Nkrumaism and African nationalism*, pp. 323-330.
107 K Armah, *Peace without power: Ghana's foreign policy 1957 – 1966* (Accra: Ghana University Press, 2004), p. 82.

break off diplomatic relations with Britain and also leave the Commonwealth – because, "Ghana's continued membership […] is being exploited in an attempt to set up rival blocs in Africa which if not checked could defeat the objectives of African Unity" – if Britain had not taken "positive and effective action" by 15 December to quell the Rhodesian rebellion.[108] Then he changed his mind, though, with regard to the withdrawal from the Commonwealth, allegedly after having learned of the oil embargo against Rhodesia.[109] Britain, however, had no intention to resort to the use of force in Southern Rhodesia. In terms of Ghanaian-British relations, the threat of severing diplomatic relations was particularly ineffective since the British expected a regime change soon in Ghana anyway.[110] High Commissioner Smedley commented venomously, "The Ghanaians clearly got caught on the hop. They wanted to use the [OAU] meeting to advance the President's ideas for African unity and the use of force but instead have been impaled on a nasty, barbed hook",[111] meaning that in his view, they were forced to a step that ran against their own interests.

Eventually, Nkrumah, albeit reluctantly, carried out this last gesture of rupture with the former colonial power on 16 December 1965, along with Tanzania. Although the fragility of Ghanaian-British relations had been pondered on in British diplomatic circles for years, interestingly, the acting High Commissioner came to the conclusion that "the extremists in Africa, especially among the non-Commonwealth States, forced Ghana in breaking relations with Britain"[112] as if fearing Britain might overreact, he felt he had to speak in defence of Ghana. However, the British Cabinet agreed that harsh measures that might look retaliatory should be avoided.[113]

108 TNA, DO 195/246, Nkrumah to Wilson, 11 December 1965, letter.
109 TNA, DO 195/246, Lagos to CRO, telegram, 22 December 1965.
110 TNA, DO 195/239, Minutes of a meeting with Mr. Smedley Held in Mr. Chadwick's Room at 4 p.m. Thursday 6 May 1965.
111 TNA, DO 195/246, Smedley to Chadwick, 11 December 1965, letter.
112 TNA, DO 195/239, Tesh to CRO, 10 February 1966.
113 TNA, 195/246, Extract from minutes of a meeting of the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee held on 22 December 1965.

6. CONCLUSION

Looking back, the break in relations between Ghana and Great Britain in 1965 was, on the one hand, surely the outcome of contingent political dynamics and tactical considerations by Nkrumah during the Rhodesian crisis, as it has typically been interpreted.[114] On the other, as this paper has tried to show, it was the final result of Ghana's and Britain's year-long drifting apart, which weakened the bilateral relationship as well as, although to a lesser extent, the Commonwealth link. One point that has been so far underemphasised in literature is the significant extent to which disappointed expectations played a role in this estrangement. During its first years of independence, Ghana raised high hopes not only all over Africa but also in the United Kingdom. British public opinion thus reacted strongly as soon as Ghana seemed to become an embarrassment for the Commonwealth and interfering with Britain's plans for decolonisation in the rest of Africa. Britain could have played its cards better to keep Ghana more Western-friendly by wielding influence where it was still possible, such as in the economy or in the military field. Chances were lost, though, and eventually, Nkrumah's interest in the British connection abated. More research would be needed, especially on the post-Nkrumah period, to fully assess the impact of British policies on Ghana's political and economic development. It is safe to say, however, considering the way they dealt with Nkrumah, but also Ghana's long experience with autocratic and military regimes between 1957 and 1992, that the British were not able to pass on to their former colony solid democratic institutions and the principle of non-interference by the armed forces in politics, and failed to live up to their own expectations in this respect, although nowadays Ghana is considered an anchor of stability in West Africa.

114 Thompson, *Ghana's foreign policy*, p. 392-394. See also, A Biney, *The Political and social thought of Kwame Nkrumah* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 151-154.