

“The Greatest Gathering of World Leaders”:  
Decolonization and Competing Visions of Internationalism at the United Nations

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## I. Introduction

On December 9, 1960, U.S. Secretary of State Christian Herter met with Mamadou Dia, the prime minister of the newly established Republic of Senegal. Dia—whose socialist leanings would in two years precipitate a grave power struggle with the comparatively moderate Senegalese President Léopold Senghor and, consequently, his own fall from power—was in Washington to extract technical and economic assistance from the United States government. Dia confided in the Secretary his fear of Africa’s vulnerability to new forms of imperialism and stressed the vital importance of development to preserving the continent’s newfound independence. Herter assured him that in the U.S. dealings with such “new nations” as Senegal, “we do what we can to help them.” The United States, he continued, harbored “no desire for territorial domination” but only the hope that “all may live independently and in peace.” Dia replied that he was glad that “we are on the same wave length.”<sup>1</sup>

If, for a moment, there appeared to be consensus between the two statesmen, it proved short-lived. Earlier, Dia had spoken with an intransigent President Dwight D. Eisenhower about the resolution on ending colonialism placed before the United Nations by twenty-six African and Asian countries less than two weeks ago. Now, as he brought up the matter again with Herter, he was to find that the Secretary, too, thought the resolution difficult to swallow. It was “badly worded... wrapped in unfortunate phrases,” and its vagueness rendered it susceptible to “misinterpretations.”<sup>2</sup> When Herter entertained the possibility of abstaining on the resolution and won-

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<sup>1</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation,” December 9, 1960, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1958–1960, vol. XIV, Africa, eds. Harriet Dashiell Schwar and Stanley Shaloff (Washington, DC, 1992), doc. 88, 246-248.

<sup>2</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation,” 248.

dered aloud if Senegal would back the U.S. on the decision, Dia refused to answer directly. Herter had not known this at the time, but Senegal was actually one of the original sponsors and most ardent supporters of the resolution that would become the landmark *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*.<sup>3</sup>

The exchange between Herter and Dia captures the conflicting impulses between American elites and postcolonial leaders, the U.S. Cold War imperative of courting the Third World, and the reshaping of power in the international system at a moment of profound global transformations. As newly decolonized nations in Asia and Africa joined the United Nations General Assembly en masse in the late 1950s and early 1960s, they attempted to shift the terms of the debate in that body from East-West to North-South issues. In seeking to rewrite the Cold War narrative, these actors advanced a global agenda privileging anticolonialism, economic development, transnational racial solidarities, and nonalignment over—and in response to—the dominant discourses of Washington and Moscow. Consequently, the multilateral organization—originally conceived as an extension of European imperial rule and American hegemonic power in the immediate post-World War II years—became a platform for postcolonial nation-states to challenge the existing political and economic structures of international society and express alternative vision(s) of internationalism.<sup>4</sup>

More specifically, Herter and Dia's meeting took place against the backdrop of the fifteenth session of the General Assembly, a landmark meeting in the Year of Africa during which sixteen African nations were inducted into UN membership. As crises of decolonization raged

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<sup>3</sup> Editorial footnote, "Memorandum of Conversation," 248.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 191-213.

concurrently in the Congo, Algeria, and southern Africa, among other regions, debates on the future of the Third World dominated the General Assembly agenda. The new member states were determined to capitalize on their newfound influence to not only define the UN's position vis-à-vis the volatile situations in decolonizing Africa but to shape a postcolonial order conducive to the interests of smaller nations in the developing world. In the context of a massive sea-change propelled by structural changes in the international system, then, the stakes of the colonialism resolution extended far beyond its immediate ramifications to constitute a starting point for the broader political and ideological struggle between the metropolises and the periphery. The UN, by virtue of being the center of international society where the interplay between the Cold War and decolonization stood out in sharp relief, became the stage upon which many such debates would play out over the course of the decade.

Prior to the end of the Cold War, American policy in the Third World received scant scholarly attention, its significance eclipsed by the East-West conflict and U.S. outreach to Western Europe. Only in the past two decades have historians begun to investigate U.S.-Third World relations as a crucial component of Washington's Cold War vision. Within this burgeoning literature, there has been a fundamental preoccupation on the part of diplomatic historians with American strategic imperatives. Relying predominantly on Western sources, these earlier works have been inclined to treat the developing world as client states and sites of proxy wars orchestrated by the superpowers.<sup>5</sup> More recently, a new generation of scholars have gazed beyond the intel-

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<sup>5</sup> See Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1992); Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

lectual confines of this framework to decentralize the U.S. in the study of international affairs and restore agency to subaltern actors throughout the Southern Hemisphere. Buoyed by the transnational turn and new research opportunities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, this shift toward “new” international history has produced a host of Third World-centric studies that posit anticolonial and postcolonial leaders as central players to Cold War developments.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, as the historian Odd Arne Westad has contended, nowhere were American and Soviet interventionist policies more potent than in the contested battlegrounds of the Third World. “The most important aspects of the Cold War were neither military nor strategic, nor Europe-centered,” he elaborates, “but connected to political and social development in the Third World.”<sup>7</sup> Westad’s observation is paralleled by a growing body of scholarship on the origins and effects of U.S. modernization efforts in Cold War hot spots.<sup>8</sup> These works have described modernization theory as a renewed projection of Western power at a time when formal colonialism was viewed as *dépassé*. Yet if the superpower competition left its deepest imprint in the embryonic and impressionable societies of the decolonizing world, it also provided the first generation of nationalist leaders unprecedented opportunities to reshape the international order. The bipolar

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<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 396.

<sup>8</sup> Recent studies on modernization include Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2000); David C. Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2004); David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

conflict, Jason Parker has argued, “presented both threats and opportunities to those in the Third World during...a crucial moment in ‘North-South’ relations.”<sup>9</sup> As a number of historians have demonstrated recently, such revolutionary groups as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the anti-apartheid movement, and the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) devised increasingly sophisticated strategies and campaigns to exploit and stoke Cold War tensions and rivalries to further their own ends.<sup>10</sup>

Collectively, these works have unearthed the diverse and idiosyncratic visions of post-colonial governments and nationalist movements. Underpinning Third World collectives like the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Afro-Asian bloc, and the Group of 77 (G77) were cavernous fault lines separating, broadly speaking, the countries of Asia from Africa, the so-called “radicals” from the “moderates”, and the Arab world from sub-Saharan Africa. Meanwhile, the quest for leadership and the hegemonic ambitions of Egypt’s Gamal Abdel Nasser, Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah, India’s Jawaharlal Nehru, and Indonesia’s Sukarno exacerbated these ongoing divisions. The “Third World” was, at best, a tenuous alliance, characterized as much by discord as it was by consensus, by nationalist allegiances as well as internationalist impulses, by visions

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<sup>9</sup> Jason Parker, “Cold War II: The Eisenhower Administration, the Bandung Conference, and the Reperi-odization of the Postwar Era,” *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 5 (November 2006): 867. See also Matthew Connelly, “Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (June 2000): 739-769.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Ryan M. Irwin, *Gordian Knot: Apartheid and the Unmaking of the Liberal World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

of justice and the realities of power politics.<sup>11</sup> Yet it is precisely because of its paradoxical nature that its interstate and transnational dimensions warrant further study. Indeed, what is most remarkable about the Third World movement was not its built-in fissures but that there was an alliance at all. How did the language of Third World internationalism become the *lingua franca* among an incipient class of postcolonial elites? And what was the nature of the relationship between the rise of the Third World and the growth of international society in the twentieth century? Without dismissing the historical specificity of national experiences, this thesis seeks to shed light on these questions by focusing on decolonization as a *supranational* process whose most profound impact was in the realm of global governance institutions and international norms.

Accordingly, this paper advances three interconnected arguments. Firstly, UN membership enabled the abstract contours of an emerging Third World ideology to crystallize into concrete policy commitments and demands. “Third Worldism,” Jeffrey Byrne has explained, “was a framework created by political elites in order to achieve political goals... a doctrine for pragmatic and practicable foreign policies.”<sup>12</sup> Cognizant of the political power of Third World solidarity and collective action, postcolonial leaders developed a deliberate and concerted strategy to advance their common interests on the world stage. Secondly, and relatedly, the drafting and passing of the *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples* constituted the opening act of a second phase of the United Nations. By incorporating their objec-

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<sup>11</sup> See Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007); Christopher J. Lee, introduction to *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010); Mark Atwood Lawrence, “The Rise and Fall of Nonalignment,” in *The Cold War in the Third World*, ed. Robert McMahon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey Byrne, “Beyond Continents, Colours, and the Cold War: Yugoslavia, Algeria, and the Struggle for Non-Alignment,” *The International History Review* 37, no. 5 (2015): 913.

tives in the General Assembly agenda, postcolonial elites institutionalized anticolonial discourses and sentiments, challenging American and Soviet Cold War discourses with their own set of universalist and teleological claims. Finally, and paradoxically, if the postcolonial moment witnessed the coming of age of the Afro-Asian coalition, its transition from insurgents to incumbents also defined the parameters of the anticolonial struggle. The reality of diplomatic lobbying on the floors of the United Nations necessitated such negotiations and compromises that the final resolution ultimately eluded the radical overcoming of longstanding structural constraints. Channeling their aspirations into the UN thereby framed and, by turns, limited and inflated postcolonial nation-states' perceived horizon of choices.

## **II. The Road to New York**

Between 1955 and 1960, forty nations—the majority of which were in the Southern Hemisphere—joined the ranks of the UN General Assembly. The numerical preponderance of the Third World coalition paralleled the transnational political alignments inaugurated at the Afro-Asian conference in Bandung, Indonesia in April 1955. United in their opposition to European colonialism and white rule, twenty-nine Asian and African nations gathered in the tropical Southeast Asian city to propound a set of beliefs in economic and cultural cooperation, national sovereignty, human rights, and world peace. The conference roster was diverse, ranging from former imperial powers like Japan to Communist China to African regions still under colonial rule, as well as such towering postcolonial leaders as Nasser, Nehru, and the host Sukarno. The practical and ideological divisions among the attendees were equally stark, reflecting the constel-

lation of disparate causes and aims that would characterize the Third World movement in the late colonial and early postcolonial eras.<sup>13</sup>

The crowning achievement of the Afro-Asian conference was the emergence of a “Bandung Spirit,” or, as the historian Christopher Lee has described, “the *feeling* of political possibility presented through this first occasion of ‘Third World’ solidarity.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, for Western observers, the conglomeration of representatives from countries with a total population of 1.5 billion people signaled the rising salience of Third Worldism as an appealing alternative to allying with the Western or Eastern blocs for emerging nations.<sup>15</sup> While the Nonaligned Movement (NAM) would not be formally institutionalized until its founding conference in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1961, the final communiqué issued by the delegations at Bandung had already begun to articulate the contours of a postcolonial vision of international society that challenged the bipolar Cold War order. Harnessing the human rights language embedded in the UN Charter, the document held self-determination to be “a pre-requisite of the full enjoyment of all fundamental Human Rights” and racial discrimination to be a “gross violation of human rights...[and] the dignity of man.”<sup>16</sup> More tangibly, the conference participants advocated universal disarmament, urged the international community to provide the underdeveloped nations with foreign aid and

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<sup>13</sup> “Final Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference of Bandung,” *Asia-Africa Speaks from Bandung* (Jakarta: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 1955), 161-169.

<sup>14</sup> Italics in original. Christopher J. Lee, introduction to *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 15. See also Prashad, *Darker Nations*, 77-78.

<sup>15</sup> Jason Parker, “Small Victory, Missed Chance: The Eisenhower Administration, the Bandung Conference and the Turning of the Cold War,” in *The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the Globalization of the Cold War*, eds. Kathryn Statler and Andrew Johns (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> “Final Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference of Bandung,” 166.

technical assistance, and affirmed the importance of the United Nations in bringing about these changes.<sup>17</sup>

For the African delegates, the first All-African People's Conference (AAPC) in 1958 and the 1958 and 1960 Conferences of Independent African States (CIAS) in Addis Ababa and Accra further consolidated a uniquely African point of view, or what Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah called the "African Personality." Anchored by self-determination, anticolonialism, and antiracism, this worldview posited African decolonization as a collective expression of independence and unity on the international stage.<sup>18</sup> For the Ghanaian leader, the two concepts were deeply intertwined; independence was a precursor of unity, and the Pan-African movement—bolstered by the "common background and basic common interests" shared by African states and nationalist movements—was "an expression of African nationalism."<sup>19</sup> Part and parcel of the broader Third World ideology, Nkrumah's ideas about African freedom and unity both echoed and supplemented the precepts articulated at Bandung to posit anticolonialism as a precondition for peace and development.

In the years since the Afro-Asian conference, Nkrumah's understanding of Africa's newfound role in the international arena had gained currency among the continent's new elites. The transfer of power in Ghana had inspired other popular nationalist movements in the region. By the end of the decade, Accra had become "a central staging ground for anti-colonial activists, exiles, and asylum seekers" from such revolutionary hotspots as Algeria, Angola, and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 165-168.

<sup>18</sup> Alex Quaison-Sackey, *Africa Unbound: Reflections of an African Statesman* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 35-58.

<sup>19</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), 132-137.

Tanganyika.<sup>20</sup> As the prime minister (and later president) of “the first...colony to obtain self-government” in sub-Saharan Africa, Nkrumah himself enjoyed unparalleled influence in anti-colonial and Pan-African politics, and he harbored grandiose “hopes to lead the anti-colonialist movement which bubble just beneath the surface all over Africa.” These hopes reconciled his inflated personal ambitions as Ghana’s—and Africa’s—*Osagyefo*, or “redeemer,” with the practical recognition that Africa’s ability to be a leading voice in the United Nations ultimately hinged on its cohesiveness, as “Ghana alone is too small to make [a] sufficient impact.”<sup>21</sup> Within days of Ghana’s independence celebrations in March 1957, Nkrumah was already discussing with the African leaders present the possibility of hosting the first CIAS in Accra.<sup>22</sup>

In the months leading up to the Accra conference, British officials glumly anticipated that “attacks of ‘colonialism’ at the United Nations will be stepped up.”<sup>23</sup> For the U.S., however, the CIAS constituted an opportunity. “The eyes of the world will be on Accra,” the State Department predicted, “A constructive and statesmanlike approach to African problems at this first meeting of the independent African states will have world-wide beneficial effects.” Foggy Bottom, wary of Nasser’s Soviet ties and aspirations for African leadership, hoped that Nkrumah’s Ghana would serve as a moderating force and discourage the Egyptian delegation from “sponsoring

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<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey S. Ahlman, “Road to Ghana: Nkrumah, Southern Africa and the Eclipse of a Decolonizing Africa,” *Kronos: Southern African Histories* 37 (November 2011), 27.

<sup>21</sup> “A New Leader in Africa,” March 21, 1957, CO 936/576, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter TNA).

<sup>22</sup> Inward Telegram from U.K. High Commissioner in Ghana to Commonwealth Relations Office, April 18, 1957, CO 936/576, TNA.

<sup>23</sup> Inward telegram to Commonwealth Relations Office from the United Kingdom High Commissioner in India, May 3, 1958, CO 936/576, TNA.

emotional and destructive declarations.”<sup>24</sup> To this end, the American ambassador to Ghana, Wilson Flake, urged Washington to “show a friendly interest without trying to influence specific discussions.” Convinced that Nkrumah’s goal of hosting a “statesmanlike conference without rancor” was in line with the U.S. objective of countering recent Soviet inroads in Africa, Flake was confident that “there is a good chance the Conference will be a net gain for the United States.”<sup>25</sup>

Flake’s optimism proved to be a premature miscalculation. Upon learning that members of the Algerian FLN were attending the CIAS as part of the Tunisian delegation, the State Department eschewed the idea of Eisenhower sending a message to Nkrumah in favor of a lukewarm one by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. The Accra conference, when it commenced in December 1958, was, as one Indian newspaper observed, “a warning to the world that African nationalism has struck its tents and is on the march.”<sup>26</sup> While African representatives had been largely sidelined at Bandung, organized by the so-called “Colombo Powers,” the CIAS was orchestrated to “match Bandung on an African scale with Asians as observers.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the interlude between Bandung and Accra had revealed divergent understandings of “nonalignment” among postcolonial leaders. For rising powers like India, a cautious and less confrontational approach to international affairs was preferable. Nehru, confident that it was only a matter of time before India attained great-power status, was convinced that “the moment we enter into the

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<sup>24</sup> “U.S. Policy and Objectives,” March 29, 1958, CO 936/576, TNA.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in “U.S. Policy and Objectives,” March 29, 1958, CO 936/576, TNA.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in inward telegram to Commonwealth Relations Office from the United Kingdom High Commissioner in India, May 3, 1958, CO 936/576, TNA.

<sup>27</sup> Ryan Irwin, *Gordian Knot: Apartheid and the Unmaking of the Liberal World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 45.

sphere of strong language and condemnation, we cease to have any real effect.”<sup>28</sup> As Nasser’s Egypt and Nkrumah’s Ghana pursued increasingly “agitational” tactics of Third World solidarity, therefore, Delhi continued to tread carefully on the most volatile crises of decolonization. Reluctant to antagonize the West, Indian policymakers refused to extend diplomatic recognition to African liberation movements like the Algerian FLN and the Congo’s rebel government.<sup>29</sup>

While affirmations of the UN Charter demonstrated rhetorical continuities between Bandung and Accra, then, a broader seismic shift in the Third World’s conception of nonalignment was also beginning to take place. In his welcome speech, Nkrumah, who presided over the CIAS meetings, set the tenor of the conference by urging independent African states to adopt a policy of “positive nonalignment,” establish trade missions, and promote cooperation. Echoing his hope that “Africa counts for something in world affairs, particularly in the United Nations,” African leaders discussed “the necessity of seeking some means for co-ordinating their efforts” in the international organization.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, later that year, African delegations to the UN proposed the creation of an African Group as part of yet distinct from the existent Afro-Asian bloc.<sup>31</sup> With representatives of nationalist movements in Algeria and Angola as regular participants, these meetings blurred crucial distinctions between sovereign states and non-state actors and, by im-

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Mithi Mukherjee, “‘A World of Illusion’: The Legacy of Empire in India’s Foreign Relations, 1947-1962,” *International History Review* 32, no. 2 (June 2010), 253-271.

<sup>29</sup> Jeffrey Byrne, “Beyond Continents, Colours, and the Cold War,” 915-920.

<sup>30</sup> “A New Leader in Africa,” March 21, 1957, CO 936/576, TNA. Thomas Hovet, Jr., “The Role of Africa in the United Nations,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 354 (July 1964): 124.

<sup>31</sup> “The African Group at the United Nations General Assembly, September-December 1959,” Folder “Africa (1960-1962),” Box 72, US Mission to UN, Record Group 84, The National Archives at College Park (hereafter NACP).

plication, undermined the Westphalian system of interstate relations underpinning the UN Charter. Further, due to the budgetary constraints new nations confronted, few had established embassies abroad. The African Group thus served as a point of interaction between the continent's leaders and a forum for them to overcome their differences, debate strategy, and present a united front before the General Assembly.<sup>32</sup>

By 1960, the African Group constituted “the most closely knit group in the Assembly” and was “[calling] the tune in matters which they regard as of particular concern to Africans.”<sup>33</sup> This troubled Western observers, not least because the massacre in the South African township of Sharpeville in spring of that year and escalating violence in Algeria and the Congo were driving postcolonial leaders like Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere of Tanganyika further to the political left. Disillusioned by these developments, they jettisoned the relatively peaceful models of decolonization exemplified by Ghana and Tanganyika in favor of more “extreme policies in colonial matters.”<sup>34</sup> Nkrumah, too, started penning his most polemical denouncement of Western neocolonialism in Africa, *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*.<sup>35</sup> One immediate ramification of the African Group's radical turn was India's loss of influence among the Afro-Asians and, relatedly, the delegitimization of the *status quo* international order Delhi had sought to uphold. “[India's] position of leadership in the Afro-Asian group...has been damaged if not entirely destroyed by the emergence of the African bloc,” noted one British diplomat, “and the relatively

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<sup>32</sup> Hovet, Jr., “The Role of Africa in the United Nations,” 124-126.

<sup>33</sup> Sir Hilton Poynton to Charles Johnston, September 29, 1960, CO 1015/2515, TNA.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1965).

moderate policies which they have often followed in the past would tend, in present circumstances, to weaken their leadership still further.”<sup>36</sup> On the eve of the fifteenth session of the UN General Assembly, the African bloc, by dint of its numbers and cohesion, was the dominant voice of the Afro-Asian coalition. Nkrumah’s Ghana, which the U.S. had just three years prior counted on to exert moderating influence, was now in the vanguard of the radical wing of the Third World movement.

### **III. All the World’s a Stage**

When Nkrumah took the stage to address the General Assembly on September 23, 1960—the first-ever African statesman to do so—he catapulted the ideals that had percolated at Third World conferences in the years since Bandung to the world stage. More crucially, he spoke as the “Voice of Africa” for whom Third Worldism was informed by the tenets of Pan-Africanism. Nkrumah, W. E. B. Dubois reflected later, “more nearly than any other living man...expresses the thought and the ideals of the dark continent and that this continent is stepping to the forefront in world affairs.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, while the Ghanaian President addressed universal concerns of self-determination, antiracism, and general disarmament—codified, to an extent, in the UN Charter and reaffirmed at Bandung—he was, above all, preoccupied with problems unique to Africa. On the question of European settler minorities in Africa, for instance, Nkrumah declared that:

Justice, they say, must be done to this group [of European settlers] irrespective of whether it means that injustice continues to be done to the remaining inhabitants...No effective solution, however, can be found, if political thinking in regard to a solution begins with

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<sup>36</sup> Sir Hilton Poynton to Charles Johnston, September 29, 1960, CO 1015/2515, TNA.

<sup>37</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, introduction to Osagyefo at the United Nations, October 25, 1960, <http://www.nkrumah.net/un-1960/kn-at-un-1960-cvrfn.htm>.

the rights of the three per cent and only considers the rights of the ninety-seven per cent within the framework which is acceptable to the rest.<sup>38</sup>

Implicit in Nkrumah's anticolonial diatribe was a critique of older, imperial notions of justice, rights, and sovereignty, and an appeal to the international community to interrogate these categories anew. What he was essentially advocating was not just formal independence but the toppling of the very structures of colonial power. Pitting a powerful minority against a fledgling majority would constitute an enduring theme in the broader Third World challenge.

Nkrumah's speech would not have been as troubling for Western officials if it had not been followed by a similar denunciation of imperialism by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. "The facts," Khrushchev thundered in his address to the General Assembly, "show that the liberation of nations and peoples under colonial domination leads to an improvement in international relations, an increase in international co-operation and the reinforcement of world peace..."<sup>39</sup> The Soviet leader's rhetorical alignment with anticolonial nationalism cannot be divorced from escalating Cold War tensions. The Paris Summit in May 1960 had soured U.S.-Soviet relations, dampening the prospects of "peaceful coexistence" between the two blocs.<sup>40</sup> Indignant at the apparent lack of remorse on the part of the U.S. over the U-2 spy plane incident earlier that month, Khrushchev had "[torpedoed] the conference" and rescinded his invitation to Eisenhower to visit

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<sup>38</sup> Osagyefo at the United Nations, September 23, 1960, <http://www.nkrumah.net/un-1960/kn-at-un-1960-cvrfm.htm>, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, UN General Assembly, September 23, 1960, *Official Records, Fifteenth Session*, 68-84.

<sup>40</sup> Nikita S. Khrushchev, "On Peaceful Coexistence," *Foreign Affairs*, October 1959.

Moscow, much to the latter's dismay.<sup>41</sup> In his General Assembly speech, Khrushchev lambasted the U.S. for "treacherously [invading] the air space of the Soviet Union." The incident, he continued, was a manifestation of "the sinister forces which profit from the maintenance of international tension" and threatened the "peaceful principles" pronounced at Bandung.<sup>42</sup> By alluding to the Afro-Asian conference and casting the conflict in decidedly moral terms, Khrushchev's speech was an unmistakable appeal to the newly independent states.

As decolonization transformed the General Assembly into an arena in which the Cold War "battle for the minds and allegiance of the uncommitted peoples is being fought," Secretary of State Herter feared Khrushchev's attempt to turn his visit to New York into a "spectacular propaganda circus."<sup>43</sup> In the weeks leading up to the opening of the Assembly, the State Department had also anticipated that the Soviet delegation would exploit the UN meeting to "promote [the] concept of an affinity of interests" between the Afro-Asian countries and the Soviet bloc.<sup>44</sup> Determined to capitalize on the United States' home-field advantage, the State Department sought to confine Khrushchev and the new Cuban prime minister, Fidel Castro, to Manhattan under the guise of "safety precautions."<sup>45</sup> In retaliation, Castro famously checked in at the histor-

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<sup>41</sup> "Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Events in Paris," May 25, 1960, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1960-1961* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961), 437-445, especially 441.

<sup>42</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, UN General Assembly, September 23, 1960, *Official Records, Fifteenth Session*, 68-84.

<sup>43</sup> "Circular Instruction From the Department of State to Certain Diplomatic Missions," August 4, 1960, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. II, doc. 145, 273. "Memorandum From the Secretary of State to the President," September 2, 1960, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. II, doc. 151, 305.

<sup>44</sup> "Circular Instruction From the Department of State to Certain Diplomatic Missions," August 4, 1960, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. II, doc. 145, 276.

<sup>45</sup> "All-Star Cast," *New York Times*, September 18, 1960, pg. E1.

ically black Hotel Theresa in Harlem, where he held meetings with Khrushchev, Nasser, and Nehru and rubbed elbows with such prominent Harlemites and outspoken pro-Castroites as Langston Hughes and Allen Ginsberg.<sup>46</sup> Castro, as the historian Thomas Paterson has suggested, sought to contribute to the Third World imaginary by demonstrating that “even a small country in the shadow of the United States can defeat the powers of reaction and imperialism.”<sup>47</sup> He therefore situated Cuba unequivocally on the side of the revolutionary and nationalist movements in his provocative General Assembly speech: “The case of Cuba is that of all the under-developed and colonized countries.” The U.S., on the other hand, “cannot be on the side of the colonies... because it is allied to the colonizers.”<sup>48</sup>

Khrushchev and Castro’s attempts to co-opt the colonialism issue reflected the changing political realities at the United Nations and portended the dominance of the debates on decolonization at the session. More alarmingly for the United States, on the same day as Khrushchev’s address, the Soviets proposed for inclusion in the General Assembly agenda a draft declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples, which demanded the “immediate and complete elimination of the colonial system in all its forms and manifestations.”<sup>49</sup> The adoption of the declaration as a resolution—a looming possibility in light of the anticolonial majority—would impel the UN to take a more affirmative position toward the situations in decolonizing Africa, delegitimize colonial rule as an acceptable form of governance, and represent a

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<sup>46</sup> “Cuban is Cautious on Issues at U.N.,” *New York Times*, September 23, 1960, pg. 17.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 257-258.

<sup>48</sup> Fidel Castro, UN General Assembly, September 26, 1960, *Official Records, Fifteenth Session*, 122-135.

<sup>49</sup> UN Yearbook 1960, Part I, Section 1, Chapter 5 “Declaration on Granting Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples,” 44.

Soviet victory in what was essentially a zero-sum game. By appearing at the forefront of the battle against imperialism, Khrushchev undoubtedly hoped that his stance would pay dividends for Soviet relations with the Third World over the long haul.

The effusive reaction of the Soviet delegates to Nkrumah's address prompted the United States to suspect "collusion between the two" delegations.<sup>50</sup> American fears of a Soviet-Third World alliance in the General Assembly were alleviated to an extent when members of the Afro-Asian bloc rejected Khrushchev's declaration on ending colonialism in favor of drafting their own version in early November. Though inspired in part by the Soviet draft, the Afro-Asian drafting committee—made up of Iran, Guinea, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Senegal—decided to forgo the forceful language embedded in the Soviet declaration. Khrushchev had demanded the immediate eradication of Western colonies, military bases, and such unincorporated territories as the Panama Canal Zone. The comparatively mild resolution proposed by the postcolonial caucus, by contrast, focused exclusively on colonies, including those harbored by the Soviet Union, and did not impose a deadline for the end of colonialism.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, the Afro-Asian declaration was both more narrowly defined and more universal. From a strategic standpoint, the modifications were conducive to acquiring the two-thirds majority required to pass the resolution.

The competing resolution—introduced by forty-two Afro-Asian delegations—constituted a broader repudiation of the Soviet attempt to "take over the anti-colonialist crusade" and sub-

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<sup>50</sup> "Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs (Satterthwaite) and the Ghanaian Representative at the United Nations (Quaison-Sackey)," September 24, 1960, *FRUS*, vol. XIV, doc. 302.

<sup>51</sup> Resolution 1514 (XV), UN General Assembly, 947th plenary meeting, December 14, 1960. "U.N. Bloc to Ask End of Colonies: Asians and Africans Draft Proposal," *New York Times*, November 3, 1960, pg. 1.

sume it under Cold War discourses, or to “keep the Cold War out of Colonialism.”<sup>52</sup> “[If] this debate took on an east-west, partisan, ideological character,” the Tunisian ambassador to the United Nations warned, “we should be liable to get off the Subject, to introduce emotion and to make the question a propaganda issue.”<sup>53</sup> The Cold War competition had rendered both the Western and Eastern blocs more receptive to Third World grievances but now threatened to overshadow them. Moreover, the Afro-Asian countries—as former colonies themselves—saw it as “our sacred duty...to be in the forefront of this battle.”<sup>54</sup> While some of the sponsoring states recognized the Soviet initiative during the debate, they nevertheless viewed the act of introducing such a resolution as a prerogative exclusive to Third World delegates. After all, it was perceived as a natural outgrowth of the tenets enunciated in Bandung, Accra, and Addis Ababa. The current draft resolution, Ethiopia’s representative explained, was “a consolidation of the ideals and principles which the African-Asian countries have proclaimed and supported ever since 1955.”<sup>55</sup> The frequent references to these regional conferences made by other delegates demonstrates that the current draft resolution was the culmination of the fundamental principles articulated at Bandung.

Yet the period between Bandung and the fifteenth session of the UN General Assembly was characterized as much by ruptures as it was by continuities. For the Third World coalition’s

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<sup>52</sup> “Reflections on Mr. Khrushchev’s attendance at the Fifteenth Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations,” PREM 11/4563, TNA; Inward telegram to Commonwealth Relations Office from Delhi to New York, January 2, 1961, FO 371/160902, TNA.

<sup>53</sup> Mongi Slim, UN General Assembly, 929th meeting, November 30, 1960, *Official Records, Fifteenth Session*, 1046.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 1045.

<sup>55</sup> Haddis Alemayehu, UN General Assembly, 928th meeting, November 30, 1960, *Official Records, Fifteenth Session*, 1020.

more radical faction, the end of colonialism was not an end in itself but the means to several interlocking ends. On a symbolic level, the passing of a declaration on decolonization—drafted and negotiated by Afro-Asian members—would cement the stature of new nations at the United Nations. As Alex Quaison-Sackey, Ghana’s UN representative, recounted, “the Declaration of 1960...made it quite clear that Africa had taken her rightful place...in the United Nations.” It was, in this sense, “as important to Africa as the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”<sup>56</sup> More concretely, the declaration introduced to the General Assembly agenda countries like Ghana’s more ambitious goals of development and economic sovereignty. While “[the] first objective of this resolution is to secure self-government and independence for peoples who still live under alien rule,” Sackey contended, the ultimate goals of the “anti-colonial revolution” were to “destroy...[the] sad legacy of colonialism” and “work for the type of a world economic system which will enable all peoples to enjoy a widely diffused and a high material and cultural standard of living.”<sup>57</sup> For the resolution’s sponsors, political and economic liberation occupied two sides of the same coin, and both were necessary for the triumph of self-determination.<sup>58</sup> By widening the scope of anticolonialism to encompass international race and economic relations, the Afro-Asian declaration essentially constituted a proposed amendment to or reinterpretation of the original UN Charter to reflect the sweeping aspirations of the emergent anticolonial majority.

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<sup>56</sup> Alex Quaison-Sackey, *Africa Unbound: Reflections of an African Statesman*, 139-140.

<sup>57</sup> Alex Quaison-Sackey, UN General Assembly, 927th meeting, November 29, 1960, *Official Records, Fifteenth Session*, 1009.

<sup>58</sup> Sékou Touré, 896th meeting, para. 16, quoted in Josef Winiewicz, UN General Assembly, 928th meeting, November 30, 1960, *Official Records, Fifteenth Session*, 1024.

If the resolution were to pass unanimously in the General Assembly, the logic went, it would not only universalize the abolition of colonialism but also, by association, other questions under the decolonization umbrella. In flux as national sovereignty, human rights, and related concepts were at this juncture, the “universal” endorsement of the resolution would represent a significant victory for the Afro-Asian vision of the United Nations—or, at least, the optics of such a victory. The imperative of universalizing the anticolonialism cause clearly weighed on the minds of the postcolonial delegates as they lobbied the other members of the General Assembly. On the drafting of the declaration, the Cambodian ambassador explained that “we have tried...to find formulas and solutions which we hope will be acceptable to...the entire General Assembly.”<sup>59</sup> Quaison-Sackey echoed this sentiment when he observed that “[this] is not a document that should give rise to any partisan rancour.” By invoking the American Revolution and such revolutionary leaders in the Western Hemisphere as George Washington and Simón Bolívar, whose “deeds...have been sources of inspiration,” Sackey sought to appeal to Western and Latin American states.<sup>60</sup>

Yet their quest for universality came at a price. Couching the declaration in the language of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and eschewing a fixed deadline for the end of colonialism undercut the potency of the avowed principles. As Mongi Slim, Tunisia’s ambassador to the UN, lamented, “[we] should...have liked this draft to define more closely the methods of negotiation... We should have liked the draft to fix as short a time limit as

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<sup>59</sup> Nong Kimny, UN General Assembly, 935th Plenary Meeting, November 28, 1960, *Official Records, Fifteenth Session*, 989-990.

<sup>60</sup> Alex Quaison-Sackey, UN General Assembly, 927th Meeting, November 29, 1960, *Official Records, Fifteenth Session*, 1009.

possible for the attainment of complete independence by all peoples who are still...under foreign domination.”<sup>61</sup> He captured the tensions underpinning the Afro-Asian endeavor when he concluded that “[we] have confined ourselves to stating indisputable principles, which do not seem to us to offer any grounds for controversy.”<sup>62</sup> Indeed, the proposed resolution was an unambiguous compromise, reflecting the aspirational abstractions of the UN Charter rather than the provocative tenets of anticolonialism.

Refracted through the lens of American policymakers, the realization that the resolution was more of “a declaration of conscience than...an operating resolution” was cause for relief.<sup>63</sup> The U.S. delegation had proposed for inclusion in the resolution Soviet satellite countries in Eastern Europe but had been rebuffed by the Afro-Asian countries, who viewed it as yet another attempt to imbue the declaration with Cold War discourses and whose understandings of “colonies” were limited to those in the Third World.<sup>64</sup> Secretary of State Herter thus continued to find the draft resolution unpalatable. Even so, he, along with the American delegation, were in favor of voting for it. The alternative would erode the U.S. ability to influence the situations in decolonizing Africa, especially concerning the Algerian question, and provide fodder for Soviet

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<sup>61</sup> Mongi Slim, UN General Assembly, 929th meeting, November 30, 1960, *Official Records, Fifteenth Session*, 1046.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 1046.

<sup>63</sup> “Telegram From the Department of State to the Mission at the United Nations,” November 30, 1960, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. II, doc. 251, 450.

<sup>64</sup> “U.N. Bloc to Ask End of Colonies: Asians and Africans Draft Proposal,” *New York Times*, November 3, 1960, pg. 1.

attacks. Perhaps more tellingly, Herter recognized that “it is a declaratory resolution and does not call upon the respective states to do other than abide by the Charter provisions.”<sup>65</sup>

The U.S. delegation’s conviction notwithstanding, Eisenhower ultimately acquiesced to British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s appeal to “stand together” and abstain. “We are making a tremendous effort...to get peaceful development in Africa and to keep Communism out,” Macmillan pleaded, “[this] vote on behalf of the American people, if it is given, will have a most discouraging effect upon all our people here and overseas who are working so hard for progress.” The Afro-Asian resolution was a “nauseating document” and had “no connection with reality.”<sup>66</sup> In response to Macmillan’s last-minute intervention, Eisenhower reversed his previous position five days before the vote took place, explaining that “the wording of certain paragraphs makes it impossible for us to vote in favor of the resolution.”<sup>67</sup> If the White House’s about-face pleased Macmillan, it “shocked and disheartened” UN Ambassador James Wadsworth, who was in charge of the rather thankless task of explaining the American vote to an astonished and hostile General Assembly.<sup>68</sup> Tunisia’s representative deplored that “it is sickening to see you in the same camp as Portugal,” while the Nigerian delegate asked incredulously, “[are] you trying to commit political suicide?”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> “Memorandum From the Secretary of State to the President’s Staff Secretary,” December 8, 1960, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. II, doc. 255, 454.

<sup>66</sup> Telegram No. 5894, From Prime Minister to President, December 9, 1960, PREM 11/5183.

<sup>67</sup> Telegram from Embassy of the United States in London to the Prime Minister, December 10, 1960, PREM 11/5183.

<sup>68</sup> “Telegram From the Mission at the United Nations to the Department of State,” December 14, 1960, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. II, doc. 258, 458. For the U.S. explanation, see James Wadsworth, UN General Assembly, 947th meeting, December 14, 1960, *Official Records, Fifteenth Session*, 1283-1284.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in “Telegram From the Mission at the United Nations to the Department of State,” December 15, 1960, *FRUS*, doc. 260, 460.

Even without the support of the U.S., resolution 1514 was, on the face of it, a resounding success for the Afro-Asian bloc. Adopted without dissent on December 14, it enjoyed almost universal approval but for nine abstentions, which included the colonial powers, Australia, South Africa, and the United States. Its lack of binding force notwithstanding, the more lasting legacy of the declaration was the avalanche of covenants that it helped give rise to in subsequent UN meetings. The followup resolution 1515, which upheld “the sovereign right of every state to dispose of its wealth and its natural resources,” the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the 1974 establishment of the landmark New International Economic Order (NIEO) all constituted legislative afterlives of the declaration on ending colonialism.<sup>70</sup> Yet it also revealed the limits of UN processes as they were transposed onto the broader canvas of the international arena and its attendant political realities. Soberingly, as postcolonial elites basked in their success at the United Nations headquarters, the Algerian question remained woefully unresolved, and the imperiled Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba was weeks away from being transferred to the resource-rich state of Katanga, where he would be executed by the Belgian-backed secessionists in January 1961.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In the end, the passing of resolution 1514 turned out to be a limited victory. If its institutionalization signaled a tectonic shift in the international community’s tolerance for colonialism (or the lack thereof), it is also a story about postcolonial elites’ conformity to the dictates of the UN system, and, by implication, the endurance of the insurgent Third World’s subsidiary rela-

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<sup>70</sup> Resolution 1515 (XV), December 15, 1960, UN General Assembly.

tionship to the established world order. Longing for a radical transformation of international affairs, newly independent states sought to appropriate the United Nations for the realization of their common goals. Yet projecting their anticolonial sentiments into the UN necessitated that they substitute the provocative with the legible. As they repurposed the international institution for the Third World movement, so, too, did they allow the former to define the acceptable range of outcomes. That their vision of internationalism remained diametrically opposed to the conceptions of Cold War internationalism as propounded by the United States and the Soviet Union further discounted the potency of Third World achievements within the UN. The drafting and passing of the declaration thus altered the form, though not necessarily the function and content, of international society.

With the benefit of hindsight, the debate on ending colonialism both epitomized and augured the challenges, tensions, and contradictions that would characterize the Third World's engagement with the United Nations for the rest of the decade. Yet if the declaration's practical impact on international developments was murky, the symbolism of the quasi-universal adoption of resolution 1514 was very real. In essence, its passing encapsulated the jubilation accompanying the postcolonial moment when Third World leaders harbored truly utopian ambitions of remaking the international order. Anchored in the universal language of self-determination and human rights, the anticolonialism cause allowed them to circumvent the realities of power to shape international norms, albeit in a limited way. As they channeled the "Bandung Spirit" into the UN General Assembly, postcolonial elites reconceptualized what had hitherto been amorphous and disparate into a coherent strategic vision. In all likelihood, the operationalization of the "Third World" on the global stage was resolution 1514's crowning achievement.

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