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NATIONALIST ENCOUNTERS

Nehru's India, Nasser's Egypt, and Nkrumah's Ghana

In 1958, one year after his country gained independence from Great Britain, Ghanaian prime minister Kwame Nkrumah traveled to the United States. In addition to meeting with President Eisenhower and senior U.S. officials, Nkrumah delivered a major address at the prestigious Council on Foreign Relations in New York. As the leader of the first sub-Saharan African country to secure its freedom from imperial control, Nkrumah urged the United States to take a stronger stand in favor of decolonization. He also argued that to achieve genuine self-determination Ghana and its neighbors would have to pursue a course of dramatically accelerated development. "The hopes and ambitions of the African people," he declared, "have been planted and brought to maturity by the impact of Western civilization.... Now comes our response. We cannot tell our peoples that material benefits and growth and modern progress are not for them. If we do, they will throw us out and seek other leaders who promise more. And they will abandon us, too, if we do not in reasonable measure respond to their hopes. Therefore we have no choice. Africa has no choice. We have to modernize."

Nkrumah's sense of ambition and urgency was widely shared by a growing cohort of postcolonial elites around the world. For figures like Nkrumah, India's Jawaharlal Nehru, and Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, development was not merely a goal. It was an imperative. Independence, they all agreed, brought new opportunities and new demands. As Nkrumah put it, political freedom created the "atmosphere for a real effort of national regeneration," but it did not "supply all the economic and social tools." After finally breaking the shackles that locked their countries into subservience to Europe, postcolonial leaders now sought to transform their societies. They wanted to achieve economic growth, promote industry, stimulate agricultural productivity, fight poverty, deliver health care, and improve education. They also believed that the legitimacy of their governments and their own political survival depended on meeting those goals. "The leaders are now expected," Nkrumah explained, "to work miracles. . . . If independence is the first aim, development comes straight on its heels, and no leader—in Asia or Africa—can escape the pressure." To succeed, he insisted, the postcolonial world would need a great deal of external help.[1]

Many U.S. policymakers, social scientists, and opinion leaders responded to those appeals with enthusiasm. The leaders of the "emerging nations," they believed, were defining their goals in ways that clearly resonated with U.S. expectations. The idea of helping to fight global poverty and promote postcolonial freedom fired the ambitions of progressive-minded liberals. Modernization, they expected, could now go forward rapidly. In collaboration with a rising generation of nationalist leaders, an infusion of Western capital and technical knowledge could drive the new states of the world from the backward conditions of traditional society into a prosperous, thriving modernity. After years of ambivalence and suspicion regarding the prospects for anticolonial nationalism, the United States might finally seize the moment to align itself with the needs, hopes, and desires of a newly awakened yet deeply impoverished world.

At the height of the Cold War, working alongside postcolonial leaders on a great modernizing project also seemed a strategic necessity. During the 1950s, Moscow's "economic offensive" in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East had alarmed U.S. observers, and Nikita Khrushchev's 1961 pledge to support global "wars of national liberation" heightened U.S. fears that the USSR would seek to exploit conditions of poverty and instability in the developing regions. "Nobody," the Soviet leader declared, "appreciates and understands the aspirations of the peoples now smashing the fetters of colonialism better than the working people of the socialist countries and the Communists of the whole world." By the early 1960s, U.S. policymakers believed that the future of the decolonizing world hung in the balance. A massive effort to guide postcolonial change, they hoped, might ensure that liberal, capitalist solutions prevailed.[2]

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, India, Egypt, and Ghana were important sites for U.S. engagement. While the United States promoted modernizing policies in a broad range of geographic locations, Nehru, Nasser, and Nkrumah were key regional leaders in South Asia, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa, respectively. U.S. officials expected that ensuring modernization in India, Egypt, and Ghana would dramatically demonstrate the U.S. commitment to postcolonial development. Far more importantly, they also hoped to channel the nonaligned and nationalist aspirations in these countries in more clearly pro-Western directions.

Those ambitions were largely frustrated. Despite the great economic resources and technical expertise that the United States and Western international lending bodies offered, Nehru, Nasser, and Nkrumah remained firmly committed to nonalignment as a policy and a philosophy. They rejected the system of military and economic alliances that the United States sought to construct, strongly criticized U.S. interventions in the Cold War flash points of Vietnam, Cuba, and Congo, and continued to play the superpowers off against each other. By insisting that imperialism represented a greater danger to the postcolonial world than communism, they also challenged the ideological vision of the United States. Although U.S. development assistance for India, Egypt, and Ghana may have helped prevent closer ties between those countries and the Soviet Union, their governments remained wary of making any concessions that would infringe on their newfound sovereignty, regional ambitions, and nationalist agendas.

Moreover, as U.S. social scientists and Kennedy administration officials would discover, modernization itself was deeply contested ground. At one level, postcolonial leaders like Nehru, Nasser, and Nkrumah shared some core assumptions with U.S. officials and experts about the process of modernization. Like U.S. policymakers, they believed that a "big push" of investment and sharply increased levels of domestic savings would be necessary for their economies to break out of stagnation and "take-off" into self-sustaining growth. They also shared the U.S. assumptions that modernization required technological advances to raise productivity, the diversification of exports, the education of a trained workforce, and integrated, national development planning. On another level, however, their diverse visions of development did not fit easily into the more rigid U.S. conceptions of modernization. U.S. social scientists and officials understood modernization as an integrated process in which step-by-step advances in capitalist structures, psychological transformations, and political reforms would reinforce each other. Postcolonial elites, however, proved far more willing to "skip stages," experiment, and combine elements of American and Soviet experience. Where U.S. advisers promoted the construction of market-based economies and liberal states along the lines of the New Deal in the United States, postcolonial leaders often turned in more avowedly socialist directions. While glad to receive U.S. aid, they often found Soviet models of development appealing. Instead of limiting the role of the state to the formation of development plans and the promotion of foreign and domestic investment, they frequently stressed the crucial role of a strong central government in controlling a large public sector. In contrast to U.S. recommendations for carefully "balanced growth" in agriculture and manufacturing, they aimed for more rapid progress through comprehensive industrialization. Where U.S. leaders and analysts tended to speak of modernization as inevitable, natural, and uniform, in India, Egypt, and Ghana it became the subject of intense political contestation and negotiation.

India, the United States, and Development Planning

On April 12, 1948, Indian prime minister Nehru visited the eastern Indian state of Orissa to inaugurate the construction of the massive Hirakud Dam. India's first river valley project after independence and ultimately the longest major earthen dam in the world, it was designed to provide flood control, irrigation, and vast amounts of hydroelectric power to support industrial enterprises in the surrounding region. In a letter written a few days later, Nehru recalled his tremendous excitement on that occasion. "All this," he reflected, "is a fascinating vision of the future which fills one with enthusiasm. As I threw in some concrete which was to form the base…a sense of adventure seized me and I forgot for a while the many troubles that beset us."[3]

Since the 1930s, Nehru and his Congress Party colleagues had understood centrally planned development as an essential part of their nationalist campaign. British imperial policy, they argued, had exploited the peasantry and destroyed Indian manufacturing. Genuine independence, therefore, would require a comprehensive, scientific restructuring of social and economic life. In 1938, Nehru became chair of the Congress Party's National Planning Committee, a body assigned the task of drafting a development policy for the day when the British would finally withdraw. Their ambitious targets for gains in nutrition, health care, housing, agriculture, and industry were all, in Nehru's words, aimed at the objective of "national self-sufficiency." While export-driven agriculture would be redirected to feed India's own population, new factories would provide employment for surplus workers in the countryside, produce goods for domestic markets, and help the country avoid the "whirlpool of economic imperialism." Planning by disinterested experts, Nehru believed, would transcend the "squabbles and conflicts of politics" for the "benefit of the common man, raising his standards greatly, giving him opportunities of growth, and releasing an enormous amount of latent talent and capacity."[4]

Industrialization played an especially large role in the thinking of Nehru and his associates. In contrast to the Gandhian emphasis on cottage industry and local handicrafts, they maintained that the route to Indian independence and prosperity lay in the production of steel, iron, machine tools, chemicals, and electric power. Figures like Congress Party president Subhas Chandra Bose argued that the Soviet focus on heavy industry and an expanded state role at the "commanding heights" of the economy provided an example for India. Late industrializing states, Bose and Nehru insisted, required a level of state intervention that had been unnecessary earlier. Bose warned in 1938 that there was "no escape from the industrial revolution." "We can at best determine," he observed, "whether this revolution that is industrialisation will be a comparatively gradual one, as in Great Britain, or a forced march as in Soviet Russia. *I am afraid that it has to be a forced march in this country.*"[5]

After India gained its independence in 1947, those ideas returned to the forefront. At that point, 85 percent of the country's population lived in rural areas, and the agricultural sector was desperately poor. Grain consumption amounted to only about nine ounces per person per day, nearly a quarter of the population owned no land at all, illiteracy stood at 84 percent, lethal diseases like smallpox, malaria, and cholera were common, and the country's mortality rate was among the world's highest. India's First Five-Year Plan, launched in 1951, sought to respond to these crises. Partly made up of projects inherited from the colonial era, it was largely focused on the need to increase agricultural production and deliver social services in order to feed and care for the country's rapidly growing and predominantly rural population. By 1954, however, India's leadership turned toward a much more ambitious vision of rapid, comprehensive, state-led development. With Nehru's firm backing, the Cambridge-trained physicist and statistician Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis began to draft a new plan with two core objectives. As Mahalanobis explained to the Indian Planning Commission, the new approach would seek "a rapid growth of the national economy by increasing the scope and importance of the public sector and in this way to advance to a socialistic pattern of society." It would also "develop basic heavy industries for the manufacture of producer goods to strengthen the foundation of economic independence." Launched in 1956, India's Second Five-Year Plan was a bold venture. Total spending was projected at $14.7 billion, more than double that of the first plan. Resources for agricultural production and social services were also sharply reduced in favor of much greater public investment in capital goods production and industrialization to replace the need for imports.[6]

U.S. policymakers and social scientists watched India's development efforts with great interest. As a newly independent state and the world's largest democracy, India stood out as a crucial arena in the Cold War struggle for the postcolonial world. As early as 1949 the State Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff argued that the United States should promote "economic development in South Asia . . . to provide the foundations for more stable and democratic governments" and "contribute to economic recovery in the Far East and throughout the world." In 1954, the Eisenhower administration decided to establish a military alliance with Pakistan, India's regional rival, in hopes that arming that country would deter any possible Soviet incursion in the region. But U.S. officials soon began to emphasize the modernization of India as a crucial strategic goal in its own right. In 1954 the Soviet Union's pledge to build and finance India's massive Bhilai steel mill worried Washington. A year later, Khrushchev offered increased development aid, expanded bilateral trade, and aircraft sales. Concerned that the Soviets might now direct the course of Indian economic planning, CIA chief Allen Dulles warned that Moscow's economic initiatives threatened "political penetration in disguise."[7]

By the end of the decade, an Indian economic crisis and growing strategic fears led to a greatly expanded U.S. commitment. Indian planners had expected that the country's food requirements would double over ten years due to rapid population growth, but in their quest for a new industrial drive they had provided insufficient funding to increase agricultural productivity. The problem of deploying technical inputs like fertilizer, mechanized irrigation, and farm machinery to millions of small peasant plots made it hard to increase the yield of Indian farmland, and the opposition of landed elites undermined agrarian reform policies that could have put more acres under cultivation. As shortages appeared in Indian cities, and food prices began to climb, the prospect of famine grew. The costs of capital equipment, needed for India's industrial projects, also began to rise. By 1957, India's agricultural woes were compounded by a massive deficit in the foreign exchange holdings needed to pay for vital imports.[8]

The prospect of an Indian economic collapse worried U.S. policymakers on several levels. Instability and growing poverty, they feared, might open the door for radicalism to gain ground in India. In desperation, the Indian government might move closer to Moscow in search of badly needed development funds. A collapse of democratic India might also have global psychological ramifications. "No thoughtful citizen can fail to see our stake in the survival of the free government of India," Senator John F. Kennedy warned in 1958. "India," Kennedy declared, "stands as the only effective competitor to China for the faith and following of the millions of uncommitted and restless peoples." The Eisenhower administration agreed. With the president's strong backing, the total level of U.S. aid to India climbed from $92.8 million in 1956 to $364.8 million in 1957. In 1958, the United States also worked with the World Bank to organize an international consortium of aid donors for India, pooling increased U.S. funds with contributions from Britain, Germany, Canada, and Japan.[9]

The increased U.S. aid to India aroused significant U.S. domestic dissent. Nehru's resolute policy of nonalignment, his refusal to join military alliances or allow foreign military bases in India, and his commitment to "peaceful coexistence" with all nations challenged U.S. arguments about the moral imperative of fighting communism. Nehru's criticism of the "neocolonial" dangers inherent in global capitalism, his frequently expressed admiration for Soviet economic accomplishments, and his attacks on U.S. intervention in Vietnam and Cuba also alienated influential U.S. officials and opinion leaders. His apparent lack of gratitude for U.S. help, finally, made him appear arrogant, unrealistic, and self-righteous. The veteran diplomat and journalist William C. Bullitt's rendering of Nehru as "an exquisite and ineffectual dragonfly flashing his iridescent wings above a swamp" captured the impression of many U.S. officials. In the U.S. Congress, aid for India also met fierce resistance. When U.S. ambassador to India Chester Bowles appeared before the Senate, Texas Democrat Tom Connally rejected his arguments for aid by declaring: "You know good and well that the more money we give them the more they want." Since Nehru was "not friendly to the United States," Connally told reporters, he did not deserve U.S. help. Iowa's Republican senator Bourke B. Hickenlooper argued that financing Indian development was like "taking a squirt gun and trying to put out a warehouse fire," while Senate majority leader William Knowland of California warned Eisenhower that "it would be bad if the impression got around that we reward neutralism." Styles Bridges, a New Hampshire Republican sitting on the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee, attacked Nehru for looking east as well as west. The Indian leader, he argued, was "playing both ends against the middle."[10]

Conservatives attacked U.S. policy, but the belief that the United States should help modernize India was strongly held in academia, philanthropic foundations, and the government. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, many U.S. social scientists, particularly economists and anthropologists, viewed India as a kind of laboratory, a great experimental site for the study and promotion of modernization. Their work, moreover, reflected a wide variety of different means and approaches. Some figures, like the architect and urban planner Albert Mayer, plunged into community development. In the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, Mayer launched a "pilot project" in which Indian "village-level workers" were trained to demonstrate new technologies and promote self-help initiatives in the countryside. Rapidly expanded into a major Indian government program with support from U.S. Point Four funds and Ford Foundation grants, Mayer's project aimed to produce psychological transformations as well as economic ones. The goal, Mayer explained, was to gain "entry into the people's minds, into their feelings, into their own expectations and needs." Only then would peasants pass through the "initial stages of awakening" to embrace a new "systematic planning and organization, village outlook, [and the] practice of effective human relations, self-reliance and resourcefulness, and teamwork." Unlike many American modernizers, Mayer did not view tradition and modernity as opposing historical poles. Modern practices, he argued, could be promoted within older forms of local community and in harmony with traditional religious and cultural practices. The objective, however, remained historical acceleration. "The most immediate, pressing, and pervasive problem of the underdeveloped countries," Mayer contended, was "to catch up with centuries of arrears, and to do it much more rapidly than the Western countries." To the question "Why so much faster?" Mayer responded: "Because theirs is a race with chaos."[11]

The hope to produce a rapid, modernizing "take-off" also led to a close and ultimately troubled collaboration among the Indian government, U.S. officials, and the MIT Center for International Studies (CIS). As explained in chapter 2, CIS stood at the nexus between social research and government policymaking. Among the foremost proponents of modernization theory, the CIS experts were also deeply interested in India and the process of economic planning there. Their experience revealed that while Indian and U.S. social scientists and government officials shared a common desire to raise economic growth rates and living standards, they disagreed profoundly over which means would best achieve that end. As much as Indian and U.S. experts defined development as an objective and scientific process, their collaboration did not survive the growing political strain that emerged between U.S. Cold War ideology and Indian commitments to independence and nonalignment.

From 1954 through 1964, CIS received a series of grants from the Ford Foundation and became deeply engaged in India's planning effort. When India's Second Five-Year Plan ran into difficulty, CIS staff lobbied hard for greater U.S. development assistance by sending reports to Congress, supporting Senator Kennedy's calls for an international aid effort, and meeting with Eisenhower administration officials. But CIS wanted to do more than study and report on Indian development. The MIT group also wanted to participate in shaping its ultimate direction. With the support of Pitamber Pant, Nehru's planning secretary, CIS economists developed a working relationship with the Indian Planning Commission and the Indian Statistical Institute. They also gained full access to the Indian government's data regarding the nation's economy, productivity, and population. Two CIS researchers, Louis Lafeber and Richard Eckhaus, then began a critical analysis of India's Third Five-Year Plan, which had started in 1961. Like the Second Five-Year Plan, it too put a strong emphasis on rapid industrialization, devoting roughly twice as much of its total outlays to industry and electricity as to agriculture. Using a new, computer-based economic model, Lafeber and Eckhaus soon concluded that this plan, like the previous one, was likely to produce further economic turmoil.[12]

Lafeber and Eckhaus considered their work part of a careful, social scientific project. In the minds of many U.S. economists, long-term development required "balanced growth." A "big push" of investment was necessary to drive an economy into high gear, but funds had to be allocated across domestic manufacturing and agricultural sectors so that growth in each area would be reinforced by the creation of complementary markets in others. As farm productivity rose, peasants would enjoy higher incomes enabling them to purchase newly produced manufactured goods. Factory workers based in urban areas, meanwhile, would become the consumers of new agricultural bounty. While many analysts agreed that the weak private sector of developing economies made centralized, state planning a temporary necessity, they also viewed government ownership of industry as inefficient at best and trending toward Soviet-style oppression at worst. As Rostow argued in a 1955 article titled “Marx Was a City Boy,” the Stalinist and Maoist programs of crash industrialization were coupled with the brutal collectivization of peasant agriculture. Yet even totalitarian controls across the countryside proved unable to produce sufficient food to feed the Soviet and Chinese populations. Investment in agriculture, however, could help reinforce gradual industrialization in a democratic system based on popular consent.[13]

Nehru, Mahalanobis, and many Indian economists saw the matter in very different terms. Without rapid industrial expansion, Indian planners argued, the ceiling for overall economic growth would remain low. The application of new technology to government administered steel, iron, and machine tool plants, however, could trigger gains in productivity and generate revenue for reinvestment. A large public sector, particularly in heavy industry, they expected, would create jobs, promote India’s commitment to self-sufficiency, and catalyze a sweeping advance. In contrast to Rostow and his colleagues, many Indian planners were also enthusiastic about the history of Soviet economic performance. “It is now accepted,” Mahalanobis declared, “that economic planning in the USSR…has led to a far more rapid rate of industrialization than had been achieved in Western Europe and the United States in the past.”[14]

In claiming that India’s plan overemphasized industry, therefore, the MIT researchers made more than an economic judgment. When Lafeber and Eckhaus presented their research to the Indian planning officials, they knew they were challenging India’s ideological stand. Although one Indian expert jokingly suggested that the CIS economists should be put under house arrest, Lafeber still hoped that it might be possible to “muddle through” the controversy, “particularly if nothing happens which could turn the question into a *cause célèbre.*” Before long, however, serious problems did arise. B. K. Nehru, the Indian ambassador to the United States and a cousin of the prime minister, learned about the CIS model, conferred with economists Max Millikan and Paul Rosenstein-Rodan at MIT, and recommended to the Planning Commission that they allow CIS to analyze a draft of the next development plan “for the purpose of reconsidering the targets.” While B. K. Nehru was apparently willing to consider revising the

Indian approach, his colleagues were not, and they deeply resented what they considered to be an attempt by CIS to subvert the planning process.[15]

When the links between MIT's Center for International Studies and the U.S. government were exposed, moreover, Indians perceived a covert U.S. attempt to subvert their nation's independent developmental course. After Eckhaus and Millikan briefed U.S. ambassador Chester Bowles about the model's results, Bowles contacted Planning Commission officials and pressed for a new approach that would emphasize agriculture and consumer goods more strongly. A grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development, it also turned out, had funded the creation of the CIS model, hardening the Indian impression that while the U.S. economists claimed to be objective scholars, they were in fact agents of U.S. foreign policy. Finally, in December 1964, an Indian newspaper publicized the long-standing connection between MIT's Center for International Studies and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. Earlier that year a book published in the United States had revealed that Millikan had previously worked for the CIA and that the agency had supported CIS's studies of Soviet society. Indian journalists now argued that CIS was "an extended arm of the CIA research division, even if under a more respectable garb." CIS's India project, they insisted, was nothing more than "a deliberate attempt…to sabotage the country's long-term development programme" by challenging "the major postulates of Indian planning." In the aftermath, Indian officials severed their connections with CIS staff and terminated the relationship between the Planning Commission and CIS. While the specific charges leveled against CIS's India project were exaggerated, the CIS relationship to the U.S. government certainly undermined the economists' claims to apolitical expertise.[16]

The controversy also marked a turning point in the U.S.-Indian relationship. Although the Kennedy administration continued to call for development assistance to India, and total U.S. aid climbed to a peak of $465 million in 1962, relations between the two countries remained tense and uneasy. Nehru's continued criticism of U.S. military aid to Pakistan, resistance to U.S. attempts to mediate the Indo-Pakistani dispute over Kashmir, and protests over U.S. intervention in Vietnam disappointed Kennedy's hopes for closer ties. As critics claimed that "socialist" development projects violated essential U.S. commitments to free enterprise and individual liberty, U.S. economic aid to India fell by more than 50 percent over the next five years. After Nehru's death in May 1964, U.S.-Indian relations continued to decline. In 1966, after Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi publicly criticized the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam, Lyndon Johnson suspended U.S. food shipments to India, despite Indian food shortages and a severe drought. In 1971, when war broke out between India and Pakistan over the creation of Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, the Nixon administration condemned Indian support for the Bengali revolt and canceled virtually all U.S. economic assistance. Although India still received aid through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the U.S. attempt to direct the country's modernization through bilateral aid effectively ended.[17]

At the height of the Cold War, the U.S. vision of modernization ultimately proved incompatible with the Indian approach to development. For U.S. cold warriors, modernization was integrally linked to a strategy of global containment. It was intended to steer the development, economies, and policies of postcolonial nations in clearly pro-Western directions. The Indian government, however, strongly resisted those efforts. Determined to protect his country's political independence, Nehru reacted with hostility to U.S. attempts to redirect India's developmental course. Many U.S. observers also misread Nehru's fundamental goals. For Nehru and his colleagues, industrialization and increased state control over the economy were vehicles for the promotion of nonaligned self-sufficiency, not steps down the path toward communism. Soviet economic models were attractive as routes to rapid industrialization, not as blueprints for the construction of a totalitarian state. Nehru's ambivalence about liberal capitalism and apparent ingratitude for U.S. aid, moreover, reflected a determination to prevent control of his nation's economy by foreign donors and investors, not a turn toward Moscow. Though both Americans and Indians spoke of the need to accelerate national progress on the road toward development, they had fundamentally different methods and destinations in mind.

Nasser, Kennedy, and Egyptian Modernization

In 1953, one year after he led a group of "Free Officers" to seize power, Nasser declared that British imperialism had thrust Egypt into a turbulent historical stream: "Torrents of ideas and opinions burst upon us which we were, at that stage of our evolution, incapable of assimilating. Our spirits were still in the Thirteenth Century though the symptoms of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries infiltrated in their various aspects. Our minds were trying to catch up with the advancing caravan of humanity." According to Nasser, independence would require accelerated progress in both human and material terms. In order to complete its historical transition, Egypt would need to pass through "two revolutions." The first, already under way, involved realizing the "right for self-government" and the removal of foreign occupying forces. The second, still to come, would be "social" in nature, a prolonged struggle for "justice for all countrymen." A few years later, Nasser expanded on that agenda. British monopolies, high taxes, foreign privileges, and the concentration of land ownership among elites had stunted Egyptian development. Overcoming imperialism now demanded "national reconstruction," including central planning, industrialization, agrarian reform, and education. Only then would it be possible to "restore human dignity in Egypt."[18]

Though he did not use the term, central elements of Nasser's rhetoric resonated clearly with U.S. concepts of modernization. As they sought to understand the nature of change in the Middle East, many U.S. scholars and policymakers envisioned a process in which ancient societies, dominated by "traditional" culture, were upended and destabilized by the force of Western imperialism. Like Nasser, they understood Egypt as a nation in the midst of a dramatic and pivotal drive toward modernity. The acceleration and ultimate direction of that process, they also concluded, was of utmost importance to the United States.

Some U.S. commentators viewed Egypt's prospects with a skeptical eye. In *The Passing of Traditional Society* (1958), his popular account of Middle Eastern modernization, sociologist Daniel Lerner described Egypt as a land of jarring contrasts and limited prospects. The narrow, "green strip of fertile Nile valley," he wrote, was surrounded by "vast deserts that roll endlessly away beyond the horizons." High birthrates and limited cropland drove poor peasants into crowded urban areas. In Egypt's cities, Lerner lamented, "camels stall Cadillacs as the human mass afoot dominates the roads and regulates the tempo." "By raising expectations among Egyptians," Nasser himself also risked explosive resentment. "Higher hopes," Lerner warned, required "higher payoff," and Egypt's prospects for rapid, concrete advances remained dim. As modernization stalled, and elites confronted the gap between promise and performance, Lerner predicted that they would try to turn public resentment away from themselves and toward the West.[19]

Others took a more sympathetic stance. Among them was former State Department analyst and Princeton political scientist Manfred Halpern. In his influential book, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa* (1963), Halpern emphasized the rise of a progressive middle class. "The traditional Middle Eastern elite of kings, landowners, and bourgeoisie," he argued, was losing its authority to a new "class of men inspired by non-traditional knowledge…clustered around a core of salaried civilian and military politicians, organizers, administrators, and experts." Placing Nasser within that emerging cohort, Halpern praised the Egyptian leader's sincere attempt to replace the "hollow" and "corrupt forms of the past" with "a disciplined, enthusiastic political organization able to come to grips with the problems of social change and willing to account for its actions to the Egyptian constituency." Halpern did not downplay Egypt's economic and social problems. Like many Middle Eastern societies, Egypt belonged to the "domain of Alice's Red Queen, where everyone will have to run very fast if he is merely to stand still." But Halpern also maintained that modernization was the best alternative to "the politics of despair that leads to communism, neo-Islamic totalitarianism, or ultra-nationalism." The real challenge for the United States, Halpern advised, was "to recognize the full scope of the revolutions now transforming the Middle East and to help nationalists cope successfully with rapid change."[20]

Like many liberal policymakers, Kennedy and his advisers shared the more optimistic perspective that Halpern expressed. They also believed that the Eisenhower administration had pursued a failed strategy in responding to Arab nationalism and in dealing with Egypt in particular. Washington policymakers had originally perceived Nasser's government as a force that might provide greater stability than the fragile monarchy it had overthrown. But Nasser's opposition to U.S.-backed regional military alliances, continued hostility toward Israel, recognition of the People's Republic of China, and repeated insistence that imperialism represented a greater danger for the Middle East than communism all alarmed Dulles and Eisenhower. After Egypt accepted a shipment of arms from Czechoslovakia in 1955, the United States canceled its offer to finance the construction of the Aswan High Dam, a project that Nasser believed was crucial to Egypt's development efforts. That step, in turn, contributed to Nasser's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal, a move that precipitated the Suez Crisis and the invasion of Egypt by Britain, France, and Israel in 1956. Although the United States forced its allies to withdraw from Egypt, the crisis enabled the Soviets to cast themselves as the defenders of Egyptian sovereignty. After Egypt and Syria announced the formation of the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1958, U.S. analysts remained uncertain of Nasser's ultimate goals in the region. The Eisenhower administration's deployment of 14,000 U.S. Marines to Lebanon in an attempt to keep Nasser's conservative, pro-Western rival, Camille Chamoun, in power, finally, alienated Arab public opinion and deepened Egyptian hostility to the United States.[21]

At that point, the prospects for U.S.-Egyptian reconciliation appeared dim. Nasser's pan-Arabic convictions, in particular, worried Washington. While the United States sought to line up a coalition of resolutely anti-Communist Arab states, aimed to preserve Western access to Middle Eastern oil, and hoped to protect its ally Israel, Nasser challenged all of those objectives. All Arabs, he argued, were part of a single people with a shared historical destiny, and it was imperative for them to formulate a common policy against the dangerous threats of Western imperialism and Zionism. To attain real independence and social justice, Arab states would also need to transform their societies and promote development. In particular, they would need to reject the corrupt monarchical regimes put in place by imperialists, redistribute wealth and political power, and nationalize resources, including oil reserves. Finally, they would have to maintain a “positive neutrality” in the Cold War’s ideological struggle, refusing alliance with either superpower. Equally disconcerting to U.S. officials was Nasser’s conviction that Egypt’s nationalist revolution should provide an essential model and source of support for anticolonial radicals throughout the Arab world.[22]

In late 1958, however, the Eisenhower administration started to change course. Nasser’s opposition to a Soviet-backed revolutionary regime in Iraq, his crackdown against the Communist Party in Egypt and Syria, and his tremendous popularity in the region led influential Washington officials to recommend an accommodation with him. Although they still worried about Nasser’s pan-Arabism and his hostility toward the conservative, pro-Western states of Jordan, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia, U.S. experts now began to see the Egyptian leader as a potential barrier to the dangers of Communist incursion. As the National Security Council concluded in November of 1958, to keep the Soviets out of the region and preserve Western access to its oil, the United States would have to “work more closely with Arab nationalism” and “deal with Nasser as head of the UAR on specific problems and issues, area-wide as well as local, affecting the UAR’s legitimate interests.” As Soviet-Egyptian relations cooled, and a frustrated Nikita Khrushchev called Nasser a “hot-headed young man who has taken on a lot more than he can manage,” the United States provided Egypt with development assistance in the form of surplus food sales, export guarantees, and support for a loan of $56 million from the World Bank.[23]

Kennedy administration strategists believed that these steps were long overdue. They also believed that forthright U.S. support for Egyptian modernization could reorient Nasser’s priorities and ultimately help create a major political and structural change throughout the Middle East. As John F. Kennedy himself contended in 1959, the Eisenhower administration’s intolerance for nonalignment and its tendency to deal with the region “almost exclusively in the context of the East-West struggle” had led it to ignore the real significance of nationalism and economic development. The crucial question, Kennedy insisted, was “not whether we should recognize the force of Arab nationalism, but how we can help to channel it along constructive lines.” Promoting Egypt’s modernization, Kennedy reasoned, would help close the door to Soviet subversion and encourage Nasser to focus his enormous energies and ambitions in internal directions. It could lead him to downgrade his campaign against Israel and suspend his ongoing conflict with his Arab rivals in favor of meeting the demands for rapid social and economic progress at home. A program of Western-sponsored modernization in Egypt, the Kennedy administration hoped, would also set an example for the rest of the Arab world.[24]

The conditions for such an initiative also appeared favorable. In September 1961, the Syrian government fell to a coup and seceded from the United Arab Republic, an event that U.S. analysts expected would dampen Nasser's regional ambitions and increase his concern about Egypt's own political stability. Kennedy agreed with that assessment, and in mid-October he approved a National Security Council directive to "create opportunities for bettering U.S.-Egyptian relations via development assistance." Over the course of the year, Egyptian ambassador to the United States Mustapha Kamel also raised U.S. hopes by declaring that his country was now ready to put the Arab-Israeli conflict "in the refrigerator." In meetings with Deputy National Security Advisor Walt Rostow in November, Kamel specifically linked the conflict between Egypt and Israel to questions of development, suggesting that "the possibilities for a more basic settlement would gradually emerge as domestic progress was made by all parties."[25]

Encouraged by those overtures, Kennedy responded favorably to Nasser's request for a new U.S. commitment to Egyptian development. In the late 1950s, the Eisenhower administration had offered deliveries of surplus U.S. food to Egypt on a short-term basis. Nasser now asked for a large, long-term, multiyear commitment through the U.S. Public Law 480 (PL-480) program, which allowed for the delivery of surplus grain at very low costs. Such a step, Kamel argued, would assist Egyptian economic development planning by allowing the government to divert its scarce foreign exchange holdings from food imports to industrial investments. In response, Kennedy recommended a three-year, $500 million package of PL-480 aid, and U.S. officials began discussing the creation of an international development aid consortium for Egypt as well. Some U.S. officials, including AID director William Gaud, protested those moves, arguing that long-term commitments gave away vital U.S. leverage over Egyptian behavior. But Kennedy and his closest advisers were determined to push forward, hoping to make Nasser "turn a little inward" and be "more interested in Egyptian development and less interested in fomenting revolutions." As Kennedy's roving ambassador Chester Bowles put it, the goal was to lead Nasser "to forsake the microphone for the bulldozer" and "assume a key role in bringing the Middle East peacefully into our modern world."[26]

Egypt was also pursuing an ambitious development agenda. Starting in 1952, land reform laws and a state campaign against "feudalism" had addressed staggering inequalities in the countryside. Limits on the size of private landholdings, subsidies for consumer goods, and lowered land rental values had helped to rectify a situation in which the majority of the rural population owned no property while a tiny elite of less than 6 percent of all landowners held more than 64 percent of Egypt's land area. The creation of a system of mandatory, state-run cooperatives, through which peasants received agricultural credit, purchased tools, and made payments on the land they obtained from the government, also provided Nasser with a base of rural support and raised revenue for investment. In the industrial sector, the government created a bank to lend investment capital and provided funding for electricity, infrastructure, and oil projects. After the Suez Crisis in 1956, the state also began to expand its authority by nationalizing foreign oil, tobacco, pharmaceutical, banking, insurance, and concrete firms, all of which were eventually placed in the public sector under a new Economic Development Organization. In 1960, Egypt put forward its First Five-Year Plan, and a year later the country's new "Socialist Laws" increased state control over finance, transportation, and commerce. Progressive tax policies, an increased minimum wage, and greater spending on health care, meanwhile, reinforced a commitment to improved social welfare.[27]

Although many Western observers criticized the statist approach and doubted that it could have long-term success, the Kennedy administration remained committed to providing assistance. In March 1962 Kennedy sent Harvard economist and development expert Edward S. Mason to evaluate Egypt's plans. Mason reported back that Egypt's goal of an 8 percent annual growth rate in real national income was too ambitious. The country's low investment levels and expensive social programs would make that target impossible to hit. Mason warned as well that Egypt's lack of foreign exchange might require it to cut back on imports of capital equipment, slowing industrial production, and that a partial crop failure had temporarily stalled the economy. Yet Mason also argued that a solid 5 percent growth rate was indeed possible, particularly with PL-480 aid from the United States. Strongly recommending U.S. aid, Mason predicted that it would promote Egyptian development and prevent Nasser from turning to the Soviets.[28]

The Kennedy administration took that advice. In addition to confirming the PL-480 deliveries, U.S. policymakers met with Egyptian officials to discuss the possibility of much greater U.S. and multilateral support through the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. By the summer of 1962, U.S. officials viewed their relationship with Egypt in nearly euphoric terms. As one State Department assessment put it, a "new stage" in U.S.-Egyptian relations had started. The Egyptian desire to join "the rather exclusive development consortium club" gave the United States an unprecedented opportunity "to reduce [the] suspicions, phobias, complexes and frustrations" that had previously driven Egypt in anti-Western and pro-Soviet directions. The appeal of U.S.-sponsored development had led Egypt to resist Soviet interference in its internal affairs, keep "the Palestine problem 'in the icebox,'" drop its support for the Cuban Revolution, improve relations with Europe, and pursue a "much more balanced" form of nonalignment. Over the long term, such a policy could produce the "modernization of the [Egyptian] economy and society; and eventually progress toward democracy." It could also foster a "willingness to live and let live with Israel" and ultimately lead Egypt into "firmer membership in the Free World."[29]

Those illusions, however, were soon shattered. U.S. policymakers expected that, in the face of modernization, Egypt's domestic and foreign policies would be essentially malleable. Their reduction of Nasser's anti-Western and pan-Arabic policies to psychological "suspicions, phobias, complexes and frustrations" also fostered the idea that his policies were transitory manifestations of a childlike immaturity that would disappear as Egypt moved into a higher developmental stage.

Enthralled with their own concept of modernization, U.S. policymakers misread the depth of Nasser's ideological commitments. That fact became clearer when a civil war suddenly erupted in Yemen, a country that bordered Saudi Arabia and the British protectorate of Aden on the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula. In September 1962, a group of army officers led by Colonel Abdullah al-Sallal overthrew the government following the death of the country's ruler, Imam Ahmad Hamid al-Din. Inspired by Nasser's commitment to fight against the twin dangers of Western imperialism and entrenched conservative elites, Sallal declared the creation of the Yemen Arab Republic, promised comprehensive development, and demanded that Britain withdraw from Aden. In response, the late imam's son, Mohammed al-Badr, organized a royalist guerrilla force in an attempt to restore the monarchy under his rule.[30]

The Yemeni civil war quickly widened into a regional struggle. Worried that a revolution in Yemen might inspire a Nasserist uprising within their own militaries, the conservative Saudi Arabian and Jordanian monarchies began to finance and arm al-Badr's forces. Nasser, however, moved quickly to recognize Sallal and the Yemen Arab Republic. Syria's secession from the UAR had thwarted Nasser's regional ambitions, but a revolutionary state in Yemen could increase Egypt's influence on the Arabian Peninsula and bolster Nasser's prestige throughout the Arab world. When Sallal asked for help, therefore, Nasser took the dramatic step of sending in the Egyptian army. Covert Soviet air transport facilitated the deployment, and by November 1962 at least 10,000 Egyptian combat troops were fighting alongside Sallal's soldiers, the first contingent of a force that would ultimately number 70,000 men.[31]

The prospect of a widened inter-Arab conflict deeply troubled the Kennedy administration. By promoting Egyptian modernization, Kennedy and his advisers hoped to turn Nasser's focus inward and curb his revolutionary goals. It now appeared, however, that Nasser was unwilling to forsake his broader political agenda. Reluctant to abandon a strategy he had so eagerly embraced, and worried that U.S. opposition to the Yemeni revolution would push Egypt closer to the Soviet Union, in December 1962 Kennedy decided to recognize Sallal's regime.

Hoping to contain the growing conflict, the United States also tried to broker a mutual disengagement of Egypt and Saudi Arabia from the Yemeni war. The Saudi government, however, refused to stop aiding the royalist forces and pushed back by demanding that Aramco, the U.S. oil consortium based in Dhahran, give up two-thirds of its huge concession and pay sharply higher taxes. Britain, Jordan, and Israel also criticized the U.S. decision, arguing that Nasser had violated a misplaced U.S. trust.[32]

Under pressure, the Kennedy administration finally began to reverse course. In early January 1963 State Department Middle East experts argued that the United States still had "enough strings in our diplomatic bow to blunt or divert any UAR thrust" that would endanger U.S. interests in the Middle East. But Nasser's escalation of the crisis by increasing the deployment of Egyptian troops, using poison gas against Yemeni royalist forces, and launching air strikes against Saudi Arabian border towns suggested otherwise. In mid-January, Kennedy personally warned Nasser that his policies were endangering the U.S.-Egyptian relationship. Nasser's response, however, was noncommittal. Angered by Egyptian intransigence and worried about possible damage to U.S. oil interests, President Kennedy finally decided to turn toward Saudi Arabia. In exchange for a Saudi agreement to stop its support of the Yemeni royalists, Kennedy sent a U.S. Air Force squadron and a team of military advisers to Dhahran. Although the aircraft remained under U.S. control, the step marked a clear commitment to the defense of Nasser's enemy.[33]

The United States' relationship with Egypt soon collapsed altogether. As Egypt's engagement in the Yemeni civil war spiraled upward, defense spending drew precious resources away from the economic development programs on which the Kennedy administration had based its hopes. In November 1963, two weeks before Kennedy's death, the U. S. Congress also repudiated the administration's strategy. By a vote of 65 to 13, the Senate cut off all U.S. development assistance to Egypt by passing an amendment prohibiting U.S. aid for any country that was "engaging in or preparing for aggressive military efforts" against the United States or any of its allies. Over the next year, Nasser responded by welcoming hundreds of millions of dollars in Soviet military aid, pressing the Libyan government to expel British and U.S. forces, and pledging to fight the U.S.-backed regime in Congo. In December 1964 Nasser gave full vent to his anger, warning that neither the carrot of U.S. aid nor the stick of U.S. sanctions would ever lead him to "sell Egyptian independence." "Those who do not accept our behavior," he declared, "can go drink from the sea."[34]

While the Egypt-Israeli conflict remained temporarily "in the icebox," Nasser proved unwilling to abandon his goal of promoting radical change throughout the Middle East. His willingness to intervene in Yemen, moreover, brought him into direct conflict with the conservative monarchies that the United States depended on for access to vital Western oil supplies. U.S.-Egyptian relations also continued to deteriorate. Lyndon Johnson viewed Nasser as bent on dominating the Arab world, and in 1964 the State Department warned that he was committed to the "export of revolution" in Libya, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. Nasser's pledge to train Palestine Liberation Organization guerrillas, his decision to assist radicals in Congo, and his permission for the Vietnamese National Liberation Front to open an office in Egypt further alienated Washington. After protestors burned the U.S. Information Agency library in Cairo, and Nasser refused to apologize, Johnson also terminated the PL-480 agreement that Kennedy had established. By 1967, moreover, war between Egypt and Israel further limited the chance for reconciliation.[35]

Reflecting on Kennedy's approach to Egypt a decade later, Rostow described Nasser as one of the era's "Romantic Revolutionaries" and lamented his "inability to focus [his] efforts on economic and social development." That perspective failed to recognize the deeper problem at hand. Nasser was sincerely committed to Egyptian development, but he did not view it solely in internal, domestic terms. Egypt's revolution, he believed, was ultimately inseparable from the wider, regional campaign against the forces of reaction and imperialism that continued to dominate the Middle East. In this light, Kennedy's former U.S. ambassador to Egypt, John Badeau, came closer to the mark. In 1968 Badeau observed: "[For Nasser] the struggle in Yemen was viewed in terms of its effect on the modernizing of the Arab world, the success of the revolutionary regime and system, and the credibility of a U.A.R. commitment to a sister revolutionary state." In the early 1960s a common interest in improved economic growth and social welfare brought the United States and Egypt closer together, but Nasser's own objectives were not nearly as malleable as the Kennedy administration expected. As Badeau eventually realized, Nasser's radical vision of development was also fundamentally incompatible with the kind of modernization that the United States wanted to promote.[36]

Ghana, the United States, and the Volta Project

On March 4, 1957, Ghana became the first sub-Saharan African state to gain independence. Like Nehru and Nasser, Ghanaian prime minister Nkrumah argued that British imperialism had severely damaged the prospects for his country to advance in the realms of education, agriculture, and industry. Freedom from foreign control was surely a cause for celebration, he explained in his autobiography, but it was only the first step on a much longer road. "The economic independence that should follow and maintain political independence," he emphasized, would require nothing less than a "total mobilisation" of every resource available. "What other countries have taken three hundred years or more to achieve," Nkrumah declared, "a once dependent territory must try to accomplish in a generation if it is to survive. Unless it is, as it were, 'jet-propelled,' it will lag behind and thus risk everything for which it has fought."[37]

Nkrumah's call for rapidly accelerated development was a familiar one among postcolonial elites in the late 1950s and early 1960s. His criticism of unfettered capitalism, preference for "socialistic" solutions, commitment to nonalignment, and anti-imperial convictions had much in common with the views of leaders of countries as diverse as Indonesia, India, Algeria, and Egypt. Ghana's independence, Nkrumah also argued, was "part of a general world historical pattern," and it was his country's duty to promote decolonization abroad. "Our task is not done and our own safety is not assured," he warned, "until the last vestiges of colonialism have been swept from Africa."[38]

Though averse to socialist solutions, and wary of Nkrumah's anticolonial, pan-African ideals, U.S. policymakers also believed that Ghana's independence marked an important historical moment. Sub-Saharan Africa, considered an economic and political backwater, had long remained a very low strategic priority for U.S. officials. By the late 1950s, however, Cold War anxieties led U.S. policymakers to view the region's anticolonial movements with much greater interest. Continued European influence, they believed, was necessary to preserve stability and prevent subversion, and their racial views often made them doubt that black Africans were capable of real self-government. But Ghana's independence presented U.S. policymakers with an accomplished fact and an important challenge. John Foster Dulles characterized Ghana's achievement as one of the "most significant events of contemporary Africa." The continent's other "emergent peoples," he advised, would "follow with particular attention the degree of interest and sympathy which the United States accords these developments." The Eisenhower administration, Vice President Nixon agreed, should "follow most closely the evolution of this state, realizing that its success or failure is going to have a profound impact on the future of this part of Africa."[39]

By the late 1950s, U.S. policymakers began to turn toward a policy of development assistance. Ghana, U.S. analysts argued, was moving through a crucial transition, and U.S. aid could have a powerful impact. As one White House briefing paper put it in 1958, "Ghana's policies and institutions are still in a formative state, and their future character can be affected substantially by the attitude and actions of the United States." Helping Ghana establish "an adequate framework of government dedicated to democratic principles and capable of maintaining political stability and progress in improving the productivity and living standards of the people," another aid assessment argued, would counter Communist attacks and "provide a concrete demonstration of the benefits of association with the West."[40]

Nkrumah also eagerly sought U.S. assistance, particularly for the Volta River project. In a letter to Eisenhower written in November 1957, he emphasized his aim to secure "the political and economic development of [his] country." Ghana, Nkrumah explained, was too heavily dependent on the export of cocoa, its primary crop. As prices for that commodity fluctuated on a volatile world market, the economy went through unpredictable cycles of boom and bust that made long-term development planning impossible. Major structural change, he acknowledged, took time, but the Volta River project held out the potential for "a really big immediate economic advance." Hydroelectric power generated by damming the Volta, Nkrumah believed, would promote diversification and allow for the creation of many new industries. A smelter powered by electricity from the river, meanwhile, would enable Ghana to process its vast deposits of bauxite into aluminum, providing another valuable export. In language that recapitulated the core assumptions of modernization theory, Nkrumah asked the United States to provide the essential "stimulus and drive" needed to catalyze economic development and "strengthen the political independence" of Ghana.[41]

In many ways, the ideal of rapid development provided a framework through which Ghana and the United States found a mutual interest. While Ghana needed U.S. development funds, the United States hoped to shape Ghana's political and economic trajectory, demonstrate its commitment to new African states, and counter Communist appeals. In the summer of 1958, Nkrumah accepted Eisenhower's invitation to visit the United States, and both parties took conciliatory positions. Nkrumah disavowed any interest in communism and, one year after the conflict over school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas, even suggested that the issue of U.S. racial discrimination had "often been exaggerated deliberately by those who hoped to bring the [United States] into disrepute." U.S. officials, in turn, ignored Ghana's new "preventive detention law," which allowed for the incarceration of political opponents for up to five years without legal due process. Ghanaian democracy, in any event, was not really a pressing U.S. concern. One State Department analysis noted, paternalistically: "[In a] country where passion, superstition, and rumor play such a large part in political activities, it is most difficult for a new Government faced with the problem of modernization of a backward state to allow complete freedom of action to dissident elements." While promising to study the Volta project, the Eisenhower administration provided Ghana with technical assistance for agricultural development and geophysical surveying and delivered modest amounts of food aid. Over the next two years, Washington also tolerated Nkrumah's decisions to purchase Soviet aircraft, negotiate with the USSR for industrial aid, and allow China to open an embassy.[42]

The civil war in Congo, however, presented a far more contentious problem. In June 1960 Congo gained its independence from Belgium, and within weeks the country plunged into violence. The southern province of Katanga, rich in strategic minerals, seceded with support from Belgian troops and mining interests. Congolese prime minister Patrice Lumumba then requested that the United Nations intervene to end the rebellion. The UN authorized a peacekeeping mission and requested that the Belgians withdraw, but much to Lumumba's dismay it took no action regarding Katanga's secession. Fearing the breakup of the country, Lumumba then accepted Soviet military aid in his attempt to put down the separatists.

U.S. and Ghanaian officials viewed the Congo conflict in starkly contrasting terms. For its part, the Eisenhower administration was convinced that Lumumba was likely to align himself, and his country's uranium reserves, with the Soviets. The United States had tried unsuccessfully to block Lumumba's election, and CIA director Allen Dulles considered him "a Castro or worse." As the war intensified in the fall of 1960, Washington also launched plans to assassinate Lumumba, and then watched with relief as Congolese soldiers under the pro-American general Joseph Mobutu captured Lumumba and transferred him to Katangan forces who finally tortured and murdered him.[43]

Nkrumah, however, considered Lumumba an anticolonial ally and a pan-Africanist protégé. Along with the representatives of thirty-five other liberation movements, the Congolese leader had attended the 1958 All-African People's Conference in Accra, and the two men had remained in close contact. When the fighting in Congo began, Nkrumah raced to help Lumumba by deploying more than two thousand Ghanaian troops to serve in the UN forces. When the UN declined to stop the rebellion and took no action against Belgium, Nkrumah was outraged by the failure to confront what he considered clear evidence of imperial aggression. In September 1960, in an hour-long speech at the UN General Assembly, Nkrumah condemned Belgium for promoting "a system of calculated political castration in the hope that it would be completely impossible for African nationalists to fight for emancipation." He also pointed toward the Congo as clear evidence of the persistence of Western imperialism, rejected Katanga's secession, and recommended that the UN withdraw in favor of an all-African force. In response, an adamant U.S. secretary of state Christian Herter publicly accused Nkrumah of "very definitely leaning toward the Soviet bloc." What Nkrumah considered the defense of African unity, nationalism, and nonaligned sovereignty, U.S. officials viewed as complicity with Soviet expansionism.[44]

Despite the breach in relations with the United States, Nkrumah still hoped that it might be possible to secure Western support for the Volta project. In 1959, a consortium of private firms, including Kaiser Industries, Reynolds Metals Company, Olin Mathieson, the Aluminum Company of America, and the Aluminum Limited Company of Canada, agreed to take on the construction and engineering tasks. By August 1960 Nkrumah had also lined up loan commitments of $20 million from the United States, $14 million from Britain, and $40 million from the World Bank. After the rift over Congo, however, the project's prospects looked dim, and when Nkrumah requested an appointment to discuss the Volta plans with Eisenhower in late September the U.S. president refused to meet with him.[45]

Worried that a U.S. decision to withdraw would jeopardize the entire undertaking, Nkrumah hoped it might be possible to mend fences with the incoming Kennedy administration. During the 1960 election campaign Kennedy had criticized the long-standing pattern of U.S. indifference to Africa. "Although Africa is the poorest and least productive area on earth," Kennedy lamented, "we have done little to provide the development capital which is essential to a growing economy." Only a "bold and imaginative new program for the development of Africa," he argued, would fend off communism and put the United States on the side of the continent's nationalists. But the Volta project faced fierce political opposition in the United States. Critics in Congress and the business world condemned Nkrumah as a left-leaning, pro-Soviet radical. To support him, they insisted, would only bolster anti-Americanism in Africa. The CIA also launched a hostile campaign of its own, ridiculing Nkrumah as an immature, shortsighted "showboy, and a vain opportunist . . . a politician to whom the roars of the crowd and the praise of the sycophant are as necessary as the air he breathes."[46]

Kennedy, however, decided to support the Volta project. Although Nkrumah continued to attack U.S. policy in Congo, accusing Washington of supporting "puppet regimes" and collaborating in Lumumba's murder, Kennedy believed that to withdraw support would damage U.S. credibility among Africa's new states. It would also, he feared, open the door to Soviet intervention by repeating the mistake the Eisenhower administration had made when it canceled funding for Egypt's Aswan Dam. More importantly, Kennedy and many of his advisers also believed that the fundamental premises of modernization still applied. Promoting rapid economic development in Ghana, they expected, would alleviate the poverty and desperation in which radicalism was most likely to take root and grow. It would also help drive Ghana through the destabilizing transitional period and lead that country in more liberal, capitalist, pro-Western directions. As Walt Rostow recalled, in Ghana the Kennedy administration ultimately decided that "long-run rather than short-run U.S. political interests should guide aid allocations."[47]

In June 1961, Kennedy personally notified Nkrumah that the United States would provide its share of the Volta project funding. Over the next few months Nkrumah angered Washington officials once more by taking a long tour of Communist states, sending Ghanaian troops to the USSR for training, calling for UN recognition of China, and advocating Western acceptance of a permanently divided Germany. Worried about the political fallout of Nkrumah's actions, Kennedy tried to pressure him in the fall of 1961 by leaking a story to the press that the United States was reconsidering its support for the Volta project, and sending emissaries to Accra to demand a public commitment to nonalignment. After Nkrumah professed his "sincere neutralism" and willingness to accept "all forms" of economic development, Kennedy went forward. Although some close advisers, including Attorney General Robert Kennedy, argued against it, Secretary of State Dean Rusk defended the idea of "attempting to turn Nkrumah on a reasonable course." In December 1961, the president finally approved a $37 million loan to Ghana and an additional $96 million loan and $54 million investment guarantee to the aluminum companies working on the project.[48]

The U.S. attempt to influence the direction of Ghanaian development soon failed. In 1959, Ghana had initiated a five-year plan largely designed by the economist and future Nobel laureate W. Arthur Lewis. An influential critic of command economies and an advocate of blending market forces with moderate planning to raise living standards and promote long-term growth, Lewis called for Ghana to seek a sharp increase in foreign investment from public as well as private sources. The plan also advocated a limited government role in industrialization, emphasized the need to build commercial infrastructure, and devoted substantial resources to the Volta project. Supported by foreign capital and designed in collaboration with private foreign business, the Volta project was expected to produce electricity, improve irrigation, and help create the foundation on which industrialization might eventually be pursued.[49]

In late 1961, however, Nkrumah made a sharp turn to the left. Departing from the liberal, capitalist approach, his government scrapped Lewis's plan in favor of a new seven-year "Programme for Work and Happiness." Inspired by Nkrumah's study of Soviet development policy and shaped largely by the Hungarian economist Joszef Bognor, the new program explicitly embraced central planning, state management of the economy, and "scientific socialism." The state-run Ghana National Trading Corporation became the dominant importer of consumer goods, and the government moved quickly to set up a vast array of state-owned enterprises ranging from steel mills to distilleries, tire companies, pharmaceutical firms, and bakeries. Nkrumah's government also created state farms relying on machinery imported from Eastern Europe, denied private entrepreneurs the commercial licenses necessary to stay in business, and mandated that foreign firms reinvest 60 percent of their net profits in Ghana. "[The] domestic policy of my government," Nkrumah boldly declared, "is the complete ownership of the economy by the state."[50]

Washington policymakers were deeply dismayed by this turn of events. Nkrumah had driven his nation's economy down a road most clearly identified with Soviet models. Suspecting that Ghana functioned as an intermediary in arms traffic between Communist states and Congolese radicals, U.S. officials also worried that Ghana would become a haven for left-wing subversives across Africa. By 1964, U.S.-Ghanaian relations were rapidly deteriorating. As Ghana's economy suffered from falling cocoa prices, bureaucratic inefficiency, declining productivity, and rampant corruption, U.S. newspapers and politicians lamented that Ghana had "gone Communist." Although the Volta project went forward on terms very favorable to the U.S. and Canadian aluminum companies, foreign investment in 1964 amounted to only one-tenth of what Ghana's seven-year plan called for. By 1965, the United States also took active steps against Nkrumah's government. Hoping that the growing economic crisis would weaken him and lead to his downfall, the United States refused to provide any additional foreign aid. The CIA also kept in close contact with forces plotting against Nkrumah, and the Johnson administration watched with satisfaction when he was overthrown by a military coup in February 1966.[51]

Worlds Apart

For Nehru, Nasser, and Nkrumah, the idea of rapid development was strongly appealing. It would give their governments political legitimacy, meet the needs of their populations, and redress the damage done by imperial rule. The concept of accelerated development also provided them with a vocabulary that was attractive to U.S. policymakers, and it was an effective language through which to request the funds and technical assistance that they needed. But their understanding of the methods and goals of development, defined in a nationalist, postcolonial context, did not easily fit within the far more rigid U.S. framework of modernization. While Nehru, Nasser, and Nkrumah agreed with U.S. policymakers on the value of national development planning to promote economic growth and raise living standards, serious conflicts ultimately emerged over both the *forms* and the *purposes* of development. Where these postcolonial leaders most desired a leading government role in the economy and a rapid industrial drive, U.S. officials preferred a greater attention to market forces, capitalist incentives, and "balanced growth." Where Nehru, Nasser, and Nkrumah aimed to solidify their domestic political control, achieve full economic independence, and provide the foundation for a genuinely nonaligned stand in the world, U.S. policymakers sought to guide the future trajectory of their countries in ways that would repel communism and demonstrate Western superiority in the Cold War's ideological struggle. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the dream of economic growth and accelerated progress enabled the United States to find common interests with India, Egypt, and Ghana. By the mid-1960s, however, the growing divide between postcolonial understandings of development and U.S. commitments to modernization also helped drive them apart.

As postcolonial leaders continued to criticize U.S. Cold War policies, accepted aid from Communist nations, and pursued diverse approaches to development, Washington officials perceived them as manipulative, ungrateful, and unreliable. Impatient with stubborn nationalists and ambivalent about popular democracy, U.S. policymakers promoted more repressive forms of modernization in countries like Guatemala, South Vietnam, and Iran. Modernization, in that regard, lent itself to policies of ruthless coercion as well as international cooperation.

Worried that modernization might be derailed, U.S. officials and experts also sought more powerful tools to intervene directly in foreign societies. Technological solutions, they hoped, would transcend political barriers and allow them to address the deeply rooted structural problems that might generate revolutionary threats. Among the most pressing and fundamental of these, they believed, were the effects generated by human reproduction itself.

NOTES

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2. Nikita Khrushchev, Speech of January 6, 1961, in *The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts,* ed. Jussi Hanhimäki and Odd Arne Westad (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 358, 360.

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4. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New York: John Day, 1946), 402–3, 405.

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