

FORUM: Historical

TOPIC: The Issue of the Ghanaian Coup (26th Feb 1966)

STUDENT OFFICER: Caitlin Farrell

POSITION: Assistant Chair

NOTE: As this is a Historical Committee, delegates will need to research the policy of their country (in whatever form that may be) as of 26th February 1966. No material published after the specified date may be used.

Introduction

Ghana has been an independent nation since its peaceful break from British rule as the Gold Coast in 1957; it was the first British colony in Africa to do so. The Prime Minister at the time of independence, Kwame Nkrumah, remained in power, but as time went on his monopolisation of power in Ghana and communist allegiances made him deeply unpopular. In 1966, he was deposed in a coup.

General Overview

Kwame Nkrumah, raised in a poor rural family in southern Ghana (then the Gold Coast) but educated by Jesuits and then at the Universities of Pennsylvania and London, had held power in Ghana since his Convention People's Party (CPP) won the 1957 elections. Nkrumah was a strong African nationalist, supporting pan-African unity, and was keen to encourage economic and social prosperity in Ghana. His economic policies in particular were radically different to what Ghana had previously experienced under British rule, so to ensure they were implemented rapidly he set about removing all his political opposition and forming relationships with communist nations including the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. He was even awarded the Soviet Union's Lenin Peace Prize in 1962.

Although many of Nkrumah's reforms, including making primary education compulsory for everyone and establishing the African Women's Congress, were excitingly progressive and liberal, his control of Ghanaian society became increasingly authoritarian. His government legalised the imprisonment of enemies of the regime without trial (the Preventative Detention Act) in 1958, and in 1964 the CPP were decided, by a majority of 99.91%, to be the only legal political party in Ghana. It was this act which allowed Nkrumah to imprison his most outspoken critic, J.B. Danquah, who died in prison in 1965. Nkrumah's government controlled the media, school curriculum, and the country's (command) economy. Nkrumah's government was also strong enough to spend large sums of money on infrastructure projects, the most famous of which was the Volta Dam, a hydroelectric dam on the Volta River completed in the January of 1966 with American financial support.

However, as time went on and the radical reforms continued to place the Prime Minister and his party in a position of almost uncontested power, Nkrumah became more and more unpopular with his people despite the cult of personality which had sprung up around him. Ghana was falling into

economic crisis and food was scarce, whilst the government's highest positions were increasingly occupied by corrupt and self-serving individuals. The military and police forces in particular were dissatisfied: they had been reorganised along party lines after an assassination attempt on Nkrumah, so many people had been dismissed, and as the economic crisis worsened, military salaries became almost worthless due to inflation, meaning the army did not have money for uniforms or equipment. The army was also anxious that Nkrumah would enter Ghana into a bloody war against the white rebels of Rhodesia; they interpreted his condemnation of British Prime Minister Harold Wilson's decision not to intervene as an implicit threat to intervene himself. This move, they thought, would have been naïve and reckless, and would have detracted military attention from the gold miners who had been on strike, on and off, since 1961.

When Nkrumah was on a state visit to communist Northern Vietnam and China in February 1966, the national military and police forces, backed by the Ghanaian Civil Service, overthrew the government in a coup d'état and established the National Liberation Council, a new military government. It was suspected that powerful western nations, including the USA's Central Intelligence Agency and the UK under Wilson, were involved in the coup, but this may have been based on falsified documents shown to Nkrumah by the KGB.

Timeline of Key Events

1957: Ghana declared independence and peacefully broke away from the British Empire. Kwame Nkrumah became Prime Minister when his party, the CPP, won the free elections. He aimed to make Ghana a modern, industrial, and economically prosperous nation.

1958: The Preventative Detention Act - the first of Nkrumah's controversial steps towards authoritarianism - was implemented.

1961: Ghanaian state tour through Eastern Europe to proclaim solidarity with communist nations. J.B. Danquah, who ran against Nkrumah in the presidential election of 1960, imprisoned under the Preventative Detention Act.

1962: Nkrumah awarded the Lenin Peace Prize by the Soviet Union.

Late 1962: Bomb attempt on Nkrumah's life, prompting a reorganisation of the military and police forces along CPP lines.

1964: Outlawing of other political parties, making Ghana a one-party state.

1965: Death of J.B. Danquah in captivity.

February 1966: Nkrumah leaves for a state tour of Northern Vietnam and China, Ghana's communist allies.

24th February 1966: Violent coup led by the police and military forces in Ghana deposes the

Nkrumah government and implements the National Liberation Council, a military dictatorship

Definitions Of Key Terms

Coup d'état: when a government is overthrown illegally by the military or other forces

Pan-Africanism: the idea that all African nations should unite politically and culturally

Nationalism: an extreme form of patriotism encouraging superiority over other countries

The Gold Coast: the British colonialist name for Colonial Ghana

Tribalism: state organisation based on small ethnic groups rather than a central government

Convention People's Party (CPP): Nkrumah's political party, initially intended to represent the Ghanaian people but eventually an authoritarian force

Communism: the ideology, practised most significantly in the Soviet Union, that all property should be common and a country should be run for the benefit of the population by a single party

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA): the USA's foreign intelligence (spying) service

Organisations Involved

- **Ghana's police and military forces**, backed by the **civil service** - they planned and carried out the coup, and established the new government
- The **Convention People's Party (CPP)** - Nkrumah's party, which the coup removed from power
- The **Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)** - thought to be linked to the coup due to their disapproval of Nkrumah's communist allegiances and worry that it would affect the western capitalist sphere of influence
- The government of the **United Kingdom** under Harold Wilson - also thought to be linked to the coup due to political and economic ambitions in Africa even as the British Empire disintegrated
- The Soviet foreign and domestic intelligence service, the **Committee for State Security (KGB)** - supporters of the authoritarian regime in Ghana who possibly showed Nkrumah falsified documents claiming western involvement in the coup
- The **National Liberation Council** - the Ghanaian military leadership established after the coup

Potential Solutions

Western Capitalist Countries

- This is a key chance for you to expand your sphere of influence and ensure no other countries fall to communism!
- How will you fill the power vacuum?
- Will you send UN forces to ensure peace until elections can be held? Will you support the Liberation Council, or will you appoint a new temporary Ghanaian leader and arrange free elections straight away?
- How will you prevent Ghana from relying on its old communist allies?
- What will happen to the military?
- How will you encourage economic stability in Ghana, especially given their economic issues before the coup?

Eastern Communist Countries

- This is also a key chance for you to expand your sphere of influence and prevent capitalist imperialists, who controlled much of Africa in the past, taking hold of Ghana, a communist ally!
- How will you ensure a similar government to the Nkrumah regime is implemented? Perhaps you'll support the Liberation Council, or maybe you'll reinstate Nkrumah himself? Will you send communist troops to Ghana, or encourage the UN to send peacekeepers to maintain stability?
- How will you ensure it remains an ally?
- What will happen to the military?
- How will you stabilise the economy and ensure it remains nationalised?

African Nations

- This is very significant for you because Nkrumah was a crucial supporter of pan-African unity - what will happen to the African Congresses now?
- What will happen to your governments if they become similarly unstable? How will you ensure they don't?
- What if there is a refugee crisis sparked by the change in governments? How will you prevent this?
- Will you invoke the UN or will a pan-African group deal with Ghana's issues?
- Will you work with the east or west, or neither?

Conclusions

- Ghana is in a position of serious instability due to the deposed government and the beginning of the National Liberation Council's military dictatorship
- The eastern communist world does not want to lose an important African ally, whilst the western capitalist nations are attempting to regain a foothold in Africa after losing significant influence with the disintegration of the British Empire
- How will the member states of the UN work collaboratively to ensure that Ghana's power vacuum is not filled by a dictatorship, and that the people of Ghana are allowed to live in freedom and peace?

Bibliography

- The background to the coup:
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- Summaries of the events of the coup:
 - <http://citifmonline.com/2018/02/23/24th-february-1966-ghanas-day-liberation-article-2/>
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- Biographies of Kwame Nkrumah:
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kwame_Nkrumah
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 - <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/dr-kwame-nkrumah>
 - <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/nkrumah-kwame>
 - If you have the time, I highly recommend David Birmingham's short biography of Kwame Nkrumah; ISBN: 0821412426
- Definitions of some of Nkrumah's key policies:
 - <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pan-Africanism>
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_nationalism

