

FEBRUARY 25, 1965

Washington and Africa

While most eyes are on Vietnam, Washington is in a state of quiet gloom about Africa. There is a feeling there that virtually all news will be bad news. At the same time every crumb of comfort is seized upon in the way of apparent African rebuffs to the Chinese, or, for instance, the conference held at Nouakchott from February 10th to 12th, at which 13 French-speaking African states, surprisingly including Congo-Brazzaville, affirmed their support for the legitimate government of the Congo-Leopoldville. Among some officials there persists a remarkable degree of sympathy for leaders such as presidents Nyerere and even Nkrumah.

The reason for this moderation in the midst of gloom is plain: to take a tough line might mean adding further African commitments to the appalling burden that Asia already imposes. As so often, the differences of opinion between Washington officials reflect the differences of responsibility. The State Department's African experts have to think of getting along with Africa; the President and others have to think both of the world as a whole and of internal American opinion.

The lines of thought on key issues run thus:

1. *Tshombe and the Congo.* By and large Washington believes that acceptance of Mr. Tshombe as a fact of life by the Organisation of African Unity would be the first step toward getting rid of those things the OAU most dislikes about him, such as his white mercenaries. But it is doubted that the OAU will come round to this view. There is the usual hawk-dove dispute about what should be done about it: the State Department doves, headed by Mr. Mennen Williams, the assistant secretary for African affairs, like to encourage themselves with the thought that things may after all be on the upturn. The supply of arms to the rebels is believed to be drying up; it is surmised that the Sudanese and Ugandans may have decided the price is too high if it means fighting near their own borders, or the possibility of arms falling into the hands of malcontents in their countries. Some officials believe the rebels are now split among themselves and are losing the popular support in the eastern Congo that they formerly enjoyed. It is also suggested that Mr. Kasavubu rather than Mr. Tshombe may after all prove to be the strong man of the Congo, and that, Tshombe or no Tshombe, Kasavubu will eventually make things up with the OAU.

This line of thought suggests a policy of moderation (and the alleged involvement of the CIA in arms shipments to Africa has increased the unhappiness of those who think the United States is already too closely identified with Tshombe). But to some extent it depends on the continuance in his present post of Mr. Williams, who may be called back to Michigan to try to recapture that state from its present Republican governor, Mr. George Romney. The hawks argue that the United States should be less tender toward the OAU and hang the consequences. The OAU leaders have not endeared themselves by attacks on American imperialism, not only in Africa but in Vietnam too. The latter, a sore point right now, might tip the scales in favour of a policy of toughness.

2. *Tanzania.* State Department officials were not inclined to blame Mr. Nyerere too harshly for the expulsion of American diplomats from Dar-es-Salaam last month. Not that they considered the charges against the Americans were justified, but that they admitted that his fears—about Congolese fighting (and therefore white mercenaries) near his borders, about communist and imperialist plots and counter-plots—are genuinely felt, if exaggerated. The American retaliation, the expulsion from Washington of a Tanzanian diplomat, which led the Tanzanians to withdraw their ambassador as well, was directly contrary to the advice of these officials.

3. *The Chinese.* Perhaps optimistically, it is now felt that the Chinese may not be as much of a menace in Africa as was earlier feared. Their expulsion from Burundi was an encouragement, and was much played up in the American press. More recently the public attacks made by prominent French-speaking Africans on Chinese intervention in African affairs, notably in regard to Niger, have given Washington satisfaction. As for the Russians, it is still felt that so long as Washington is not too deeply involved, for instance with Tshombe, the Russians will avoid giving aid to rebels of various colours in the Congo and elsewhere.