

CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN AFRICA,
1945-1968

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StB	Czechoslovak State Security
UN	United Nations
UNIP	United National Independence Party (of Northern Rhodesia)
UPC	Union of Peoples of Cameroon
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VRP	Volta River Project
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZB	Zbrojovka Brno

Introduction

In the April 1963 issue of *World Politics*, Curt F. Beck, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Connecticut, told readers about communist Czechoslovakia's deep involvement with the newly decolonized continent of Africa:

The water is safe to drink in Alexandria and Cairo, Egypt, thanks to a water filter station established by Czechoslovak engineers. A shoe factory in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia is being built by Czech technicians. Across the frontier, in Somalia, Czechs are building a technical institute to teach some young Somalis the techniques necessary to staff modern factories. Across the continent in Conakry, Guinea, airport inscriptions are in Czech as well as in French and English to accommodate the many Czechs arriving on the direct Prague-to-Conakry airline. In the smaller villages of Ghana special trucks are delivering Czech beer to the local inhabitants. In Mali journalists are being trained by Czechs in the establishment of their own press agency. And in Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia, there are numerous Africans among the more than 2,000 students from Africa, Asia, and Latin America enrolled at Czech state expense in institutions of higher learning. To say that Africa has assumed a role of real importance for the Czechs is an understatement.¹

What is most noteworthy about Beck's article is that it was the first—and until this book, only—scholarly account of Czechoslovakia's involvement with Africa published in English. The purpose of this present book is not only to update Beck's 50-year-old article with research based on archival material from the Czechoslovak and US governments, which was unavailable at the time, but also to challenge Beck's assertion that "One must make clear at the start that in her African policy Czechoslovakia fulfills a task that she has been given by the Soviet Union."²

Since the end of the Cold War and subsequent opening of government archives in Eastern and Central Europe, the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) and other scholars have been able to obtain important documents from the other side of the Iron Curtain which have reshaped our understanding of the foreign policies of Soviet bloc countries as well as the internal dynamics of the relationships between

Moscow and its junior allies.³ In an article in *Diplomatic History* at the turn of the century, Tony Smith developed the idea of “pericentrism” in which he argued that junior allies on the periphery of the Cold War often pulled the super powers into new areas of conflict.⁴ Following along these lines, scholars such as Hope Harrison and Piero Gleijeses published groundbreaking studies based on archival materials from East Germany and Cuba which demonstrated that these two junior allies had pulled the Soviet Union into the building of the Berlin Wall and proxy wars in Angola and Ethiopia.⁵

I do not make quite as ambitious of a claim in this book. Prague did not pull Moscow into Africa. It was the Soviet Union, in 1955, under Nikita Khrushchev, which made the decision to expand Soviet bloc foreign relations into the so-called Third World of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.⁶ What I do argue is that, contrary to the accounts of current historiography, the US government at the time, and Professor Beck in 1963, Czechoslovakia had significantly more autonomy from the Soviet Union in conducting its foreign relations with Africa than has previously been presumed. The US government viewed the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (ČSSR) as “the most firm parrot of the Soviet line.”⁷ US officials did not even contemplate the possibility that Czechoslovakia might have had an independent foreign policy in Africa. State Department analysts never made a stand-alone examination of Czechoslovakia’s Africa policy, instead lumping Prague’s activities with those of the Soviet Union or the Soviet bloc. Moreover, the United States was oblivious as to the level of involvement that the ČSSR had with Africa.⁸

In reality, Czechoslovak involvement in Africa occurred before it was a Soviet satellite, and even pre-dated World War II. Therefore, it is difficult to sustain an argument that communist Czechoslovakia only became involved with Africa at the behest of Moscow, when Prague had already developed ties to nearly every region of the continent before Czechoslovakia became communist, and at a time when the Soviet Union completely ignored Africa (and before most of Africa became self-governing, for that matter). Moreover, at the beginning of 1960, while the Soviet Union only had formal diplomatic relations with two states in sub-Saharan Africa (Guinea and Ghana), Czechoslovakia had already established relations with five (Guinea, Ghana, Congo, Ethiopia, and South Africa)—and Prague would continue to have more embassies in Africa than Moscow during the period covered in this study.

Prague pursued its Africa policy for four distinct reasons. The most important reason was economics. Africa had played an important role in Czechoslovakia’s economy since the 1920s. At that time, as a newly created state, Czechoslovakia needed to develop trading partners as markets for its manufactured products and as a source for raw materials in order

to grow its export-oriented economy. Czechoslovakia’s main exports to Africa were small arms (mostly pistols, semi-automatic assault rifles, and hunting rifles), airplanes and other aviation-related equipment, automobiles, trucks, mining equipment, pharmaceuticals, glassware, textiles, shoes, miscellaneous smaller consumer goods, and its famous beer. By the late 1950s, Africa’s potential importance to the Czechoslovak economy was intensified by the fact that its currency, the koruna, much like the Soviet ruble, was worthless on the international market. Exports to other states within the Soviet bloc were either bartered for or traded for currency that also held no value outside of the communist world. Prague badly needed hard, internationally convertible cash with which to buy products from outside of the Soviet bloc, and exporting manufactured products to Africa provided this. Such trade arrangements also allowed Czechoslovakia to import African products, such as tropical fruits and raw materials, at reduced cost.

Its alliance with Moscow was a second reason that Prague became so heavily involved with Africa. From 1948 to 1968 Czechoslovakia was one of the most steadfastly loyal satellites of the Soviet Union. It relished the opportunity to turn its past experience with Africa into an asset for Soviet foreign policy in the Cold War. Prague did not need to be cajoled by Moscow into increasing its involvement in Africa because it was eager to do so. In terms of its involvement in Africa, Prague did not sit back and wait for marching orders from the Kremlin. Instead, it proactively sought opportunities to expand its influence, and by extension, the influence of international communism, throughout the continent.

Thirdly, relations with Africa brought the Czechoslovak state a fair amount of prestige and respect within the international community, and particularly within the developing world. Nearly every month a visiting dignitary from Africa visited Prague to thank Czechoslovakia for its friendship with his country. This helped the communist regime build both domestic and international legitimacy. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) took satisfaction in informing its citizens that non-communist countries were calling upon its assistance and had chosen aid from Czechoslovakia, rather than Western countries, as proof that the communist system in Czechoslovakia was respected abroad. It proudly publicized the fact that thousands of Africans were now learning to speak the Czech language—previously one of the least-spoken languages in the world. In short, Czechoslovakia’s involvement with Africa allowed it to play an important role in international affairs and strengthened the KSC’s domestic legitimacy.

Finally, many Czechoslovak authorities involved with African policy genuinely believed in the moral correctness of what they were doing in Africa. In their minds, they were helping oppressed Africans free themselves

from colonial rule and capitalist exploitation from the West. Many had no doubt in the virtue of communism *vis-à-vis* capitalism and its neo-colonial cousin. As Foreign Minister Václav David stated in April 1961, "The basic problem of newly independent states in Africa is to eliminate the remnants of economic and political domination of colonialism, to strengthen their national independence and sovereignty. Czechoslovakia sees its main task as rendering all-round assistance to the African nations in their effort to achieve this aim."⁹ Ideology aside, Czechoslovakia also pursued numerous humanitarian efforts across the continent such as providing clean drinking water, education, and medical services. In fact, from 1955-66, it may have supplied the greatest amount of per capita foreign assistance in the world.¹⁰

Czechoslovakia was uniquely positioned among the states of the Soviet bloc to shoulder the burden of expanding communist influence in Africa. It, alone among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, could draw upon a long tradition of its nationals exploring the interior of the continent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as significant diplomatic and economic relations with Africa prior to the Second World War. Just as importantly, Czechoslovakia, by far the most industrialized country in the Soviet bloc, had the prerequisite skills and experience to assist newly independent African states establish industrial factories, airlines, and hospitals, as well as train engineering and manufacturing technicians and aviation and medical personnel. Furthermore, as a smaller state, Czechoslovakia often enjoyed more favorable conditions in Africa than did the Soviet Union, which was suspected by many Africans of having hegemonic intentions. For this reason, Prague was able to establish certain relationships in Africa that Moscow could not. Viewing Prague as one of its most trusted allies, Moscow astutely understood that it could draw upon the Czechoslovaks' contacts and experience with Africa, and therefore, entrusted its junior ally with the task of spearheading the communist cause on the African continent.

One should not confuse this to mean that Prague's foreign-policy toward Africa in the 1960s was as independent as Cuba's was in the 1970s.¹¹ I was unable to find a single instance in which Czechoslovakia directly opposed the Kremlin's wishes in conducting its relations with Africa. Moreover, Prague frequently consulted with Moscow prior to making major policy decisions or launching new initiatives on the continent.¹² There were, however, also many occasions when the Czechoslovaks acted on their own, and then informed Moscow of their actions after the fact. Far from being the puppet that Beck's quote would suggest, Moscow gave Czechoslovakia a fair amount of independence in this endeavor, and in some instances, Prague drove communist-policy in Africa. The Kremlin seemingly approved of this arrangement because it

was confident in Prague's loyalty to the Soviet bloc and was willing to defer to Czechoslovakia's expertise in African matters of lesser importance to Moscow. However, on issues of greater significance to the Soviet Union, such as relations with Ghana or the Congo crisis, Moscow took greater involvement, and Prague followed its lead.

ORGANIZATION OF STUDY

This work is not intended to be a comprehensive history of Czechoslovakia's bilateral relations with any given country. Rather, its goal is to demonstrate the breadth and diversity of Prague's relations with Africa from 1945-68 by summarizing its relations with a wide spectrum of African states. The book is organized into three roughly chronological chapters on Czechoslovakia's relations with various African countries separated by two thematic chapters.

The introduction provides contextual background information on the evolution of communist Czechoslovakia's pro-Soviet foreign policy orientation; the shift in Soviet foreign policy that made Africa a priority for the Soviet bloc; and an overview of the Czechoslovak institutions involved with African policy. Chapter 1 covers Czechoslovakia's relations with conservative African states from 1945-62. States covered in this chapter are Ethiopia, Egypt, Morocco, Somalia, Nigeria, the Belgian Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Dahomey (Benin), Niger, Tanganyika (Tanzania), Uganda, Kenya, and South Africa.

Chapter 2 details Czechoslovakia's relations with the radical states from 1957-62. Included in this chapter are case studies of Prague's relations with Guinea, Ghana, Mali and post-independence Congo. Some readers will question Egypt being included with the conservative, rather than radical, states. This was done partially because relations with Egypt began much earlier than Czechoslovakia's involvement with the other radical states, and therefore, the Egyptian case study fits better within the narrative of chapter 1. More importantly, however, is the fact that although most contemporary historians would likely group Nasser's Egypt as having been a "radical" state, Czechoslovak officials at the time viewed his regime as rather conservative and as a result made a much less concerted effort to form relations with Cairo than it did Conakry, Accra, Banako or Stanleyville.

The third chapter examines Czechoslovakia's arms exports to the continent, with particular attention being given to the notorious arms deal with Egypt in 1955, military aid given to both the aforementioned radical states and national liberation movements (such as the FLN in Algeria, UPC in Cameroon, PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau, FNLA and MPLA in Angola, ANC in South Africa, and ZAPU in Rhodesia), and Prague's involvement

in the Nigerian Civil War. Chapter 4 discusses Czechoslovak aviation assistance to Africa, both the extensive development of Czechoslovak State Airlines routes to Africa and Prague's assistance in the development of national airlines in the radical states. The final chapter details 1962–68, when Czechoslovak involvement in Africa was in decline in nearly every country on the continent as a result of failed economic projects, the fall of Khrushchev in the Soviet Union (which resulted in a change in Soviet foreign policy toward Africa), and the overthrow of Prague's key allies on the continent in Ghana, Mali, Congo, Kenya, and Algeria. This study ends with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring. After the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Prague's involvement with Africa was greatly reduced and mostly limited to providing arms for the Soviet side in the proxy wars in Angola and Ethiopia in the 1970s.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S PRO-SOVIET ORIENTATION

High above the northern banks of the Vltava River, sits the picturesque Letná Park, where in 1955, after more than five and a half years of construction, the KSČ unveiled a massive 50-foot granite statue of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. The world's tallest statue of Stalin stood on a pedestal overlooking the historic city center of Prague enjoying arguably one of the world's most beautiful views—the Gothic, Baroque, and Renaissance architecture of the “golden city of spires.” With its placement in Letná Park, the Stalin statue had symbolic meaning as well: the Soviet leader and his country stood watching over its communist junior ally.

The statue was also emblematic of Czechoslovakia's pro-Soviet orientation, which was uniquely different from the other Soviet satellite states in Eastern and Central Europe. Unlike the majority of other ethnic groups in what would become the Soviet bloc, Czechs and Slovaks had not had historical animosity against Russia or Russians. In the nineteenth century, the Czechs and Slovaks had responded to Austro-Hungarian hegemony with the idea of pan-Slavism and looked upon Russia as a potential protector.¹³ Most Czechoslovaks were also grateful to the Soviet Union for having liberated them from Nazi occupation in 1945. Most could not understand why the advancing US army stopped its advance in Plzeň, forcing the people of Prague, who had rose up against the German occupation, to wait for help from the Soviet Red Army to arrive. They remembered how in 1938 both France and Great Britain had abandoned them to the clutches of Hitler in the Munich Agreement—preferring to sacrifice Czechoslovak autonomy to risking war with the Nazi war machine. Moreover, after the Nazis occupied Czechoslovakia in 1939, the Bank of England transferred over 23 metric tons of gold which the Czechoslovak

state held in reserve in the bank to the Germans, who then used it to fund their war effort.¹⁴ After the war, the Americans, British, and French gained control of Nazi gold reserves but refused to return any of it to the new Czechoslovak government.¹⁵ In the face of such recent history of bad experiences with the United States, France, Great Britain, Austria, Hungary, and Germany, it seemed natural for Czechoslovaks to view the Soviet Union as their best choice for a post-war alliance to preserve their future security.

Prague's decision to gravitate into the Soviet orbit was also practical, given the fact that the Red Army occupied the region and thus held predominant military influence. I have emphasized the word “decision,” because it is also important to note that to a greater degree than the other states of Eastern and Central Europe, Czechoslovakia itself opted to join the Soviet bloc. This is not to say that Moscow did not try to coerce the Czechoslovak leadership into the decision, but the fact that a democratic post-war government led by President Edvard Beneš and Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk chose to ally with the Soviet Union, as opposed to the other states who were forced into the alliance by the Soviet occupation of their countries and Moscow's imposition of communist party rule, is an important distinction to make in understanding the relationship between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, and the subsequent trust that Moscow would give to Prague in allowing it autonomy in its African policy. In fact, unlike most of the Soviet bloc states, no Soviet troops were stationed in Czechoslovakia until 1968, after the Red Army invaded following the Prague Spring. Czechoslovakia's autonomy was owed in part to the fact that Moscow hoped to use the country, with its location bordering Western Europe and its democratic tradition, as a showcase to make communism and alliance with the Soviet Union appear attractive to the people of Western Europe.¹⁶

When the KSČ eventually took full control of the country in February 1948, that, too, served to further strengthen ties between Moscow and Prague. The top KSČ party leaders—its chairman, Klement Gottwald, and its general secretary, Rudolf Slánský—had both been closely connected to the Communist International (Comintern), lived in the Soviet Union during the war, and were strongly pro-Soviet. The KSČ knew that it could not have come to power without Moscow's support, and therefore held a natural allegiance to the Soviet Union, encapsulated by the motto, “*Se Sovětským svazem na věčné časy*” (With the Soviet Union forever!) Furthermore, Antonín Novotný, the general secretary of the KSČ from 1953–68, was able to consolidate his absolute control over the leadership of the country by outflanking President Antonín Zápotocký and Prime Minister Viliam Široký through backing from Moscow. In 1957, Novotný took over the presidency of Czechoslovakia, while continuing

to be general secretary of the communist party, which essentially made him the unquestioned dictator of Czechoslovakia during the period of its intensive relations with Africa. Because of Moscow's role in his rise to power, Novotný would remain staunchly loyal to the Soviet Union throughout the period of his rule.

In the early 1950s, the KSČ leadership had opportunities to demonstrate its fidelity to the Soviet Union through political show trials, which purged party members who were allegedly disloyal to Moscow (the most famous being against Slánský in 1952).¹⁷ Czechoslovakia also became a founding member of Soviet-sponsored organizations such as the economic organization, Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), and the military alliance, the Warsaw Pact. Prague further proved its devotion to Moscow in 1956, when it supported the Soviet Union after two of its satellite states, Hungary and Poland, sought to take advantage of the Khrushchev Thaw to attempt to gain some autonomy from Moscow, prompting Soviet President Kliment Voroshilov to declare, "The Czechoslovak Communist Party members are the best, the closest, and the dearest friends of... the Communist Party of the Soviet Union."¹⁸ Similarly, French diplomat Claude Bréart de Boisanger remarked in May 1957, "I've always thought that the Czechoslovak government is more pro-Soviet than the Soviets."¹⁹

In recognition of this loyalty, in July 1960 Czechoslovakia became only the second state in the Soviet bloc (after the Soviet Union) to be promoted from a "people's democracy" to a socialist republic. Renamed the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (ČSSR), this honor indicated that the Kremlin viewed the KSČ as having elevated the country along the road of becoming a full-fledged communist society as defined by Marx, Engels, and Lenin. De Boisanger's comment that Czechoslovakia was more pro-Soviet than the Soviet Union may hold some truth, as the country was slow to accept Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign, and the statue of Stalin atop of the hill in Letná Park was not dismantled until 1962.

SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY RESPONDS TO THE WINDS OF CHANGE

Under Stalin the Soviet Union showed little interest in the Third World, and even less interest in Africa. The one partial exception was Libya, where, seeking a warm-water port on the Mediterranean, Moscow sought joint governance of the country during the Potsdam conference at the conclusion of World War II. Failing in this endeavor, Stalin—distrusting the "bourgeois nationalism" of African elites—would again ignore the continent for the next decade. At the time of Stalin's death in March 1953, Moscow did not operate a single embassy on the African continent.

By January 1955, Nikita Khrushchev had consolidated his hold on power in the Kremlin to become Stalin's uncontested successor and began to chart a new course for Soviet foreign policy. Unlike Stalin, Khrushchev recognized the power of Third World nationalism and attempted to court it to Moscow's side in the Cold War. Four events that year would combine to change Moscow's outlook toward Africa: the Bandung conference, reconciliation with Yugoslavia, the East-West Geneva summit, and the infamous arms deal between Czechoslovakia and Egypt.

In April, representatives from 29 Asian and African states met in Bandung, Indonesia. This marked the first time independent Afro-Asian states had met to coordinate a common strategy to fight colonialism and counteract Cold War military alliances. Moscow adroitly tried to align itself with the sentiments of Bandung and co-opt its message to enhance the Soviet position in the Third World. As a result of Bandung, Moscow now understood that Third World nationalism was anti-imperialist, rather than a preserve of imperialism, as Stalin had believed, and henceforth, it began to try to court leaders of the conference, such as Sukarno of Indonesia and Nasser of Egypt.

The gradual process of reconciliation with Tito's Yugoslavia, following Stalin's death, culminated in the signing of the Belgrade Declaration in June, which acknowledged that there could be separate paths to socialism. Prior to this, the Soviet Union had been dogmatic in requiring its allies to rigidly follow their model of building communism. The Belgrade Declaration, however, indicated that the Soviet Union would now be more flexible in allowing their allies to pursue a separate roadmap, toward constructing a socialist society, and this change in mindset would allow Moscow to accept as allies so-called revolutionary democratic states such as Indonesia and Cuba, or in Africa, Guinea, Ghana, and Mali.

Khrushchev also sought a policy of "peaceful coexistence" with the United States and other Western powers in order to reduce international tensions. This led to a four power summit—the Geneva conference—in July. As a result of the "spirit of Geneva" both the United States and Soviet Union mutually agreed that neither state could win a nuclear war. This change in the dynamics of the superpower relationship convinced Moscow that it could now attempt to expand its political influence in sub-Saharan Africa without risking nuclear war with the United States. Peaceful coexistence meant that competition with the United States could move away from the military field (where the Soviet Union was clearly in an inferior position compared to the United States) to the economic sphere, where the Kremlin leadership believed that the Soviet socialist economic model would prove to have more appeal to Africans than Western capitalism.

Finally, with the Egyptian-Czechoslovak arms deal in September, the Soviet Union initiated relations with an African state for the first time (the Soviets partially negotiated the deal). After the arms deal relations between Moscow and Cairo would rapidly develop, spurred on by the Soviet Union's agreement to help fund the Aswan Dam after the United States and British pulled their funding for the project (in response to the Egyptian-Czechoslovak arms deal and Egypt's recognition of communist China). Coming at the expense of American and British influence in the region, the Soviet Union's expanding relations with Egypt gave Moscow its first geostrategic ally in Africa and was a Cold War victory for Moscow, which increased its desire to expand its influence beyond the Sahara Desert.

In the final months of 1955, Khrushchev would kick-start his outreach to the Third World by embarking on a highly-publicized trip to India, Burma and Afghanistan. The Soviet premier's trip to Asia also signaled the start of an ambitious new African policy. In 1956, the Soviet Union recognized the independence of Morocco, Tunisia, and Sudan, and unsuccessfully attempted to initiate diplomatic relations with Liberia.²⁰ It developed relations with Ghana and Guinea within the next two years as well. Along with Mali, these three West African states would be key to Khrushchev's plan to export socialism as a development model. According to historian Alessandro Iandolo, "West Africa in the mid-1950s acquired a disproportionate importance in Soviet thinking about the third world, in spite of the small size of the countries in the region and their lack of relevant strategic or economic resources."²¹ The new Soviet policy toward Africa (and the Third World more broadly) emphasized supporting national liberation movements in order to take advantage of decolonization, to make it the Achilles heel of the West. On January 6, 1961, Khrushchev made a speech in which he said it was the "historical mission" of world communism to assist "wars of national liberation" in an attempt to end colonialism.²² "A remarkable phenomenon of our time is the awakening of the peoples of Africa... Communists are revolutionaries, and it would be unfortunate if they did not take advantage of new opportunities and did not look for new methods and forms that would best achieve the ends in view."²³

Czechoslovakia would stand ready to help the Soviet Union implement this new strategy.

CZECHOSLOVAK INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED WITH AFRICAN POLICY

The KSČ dominated all aspects of Czechoslovak state and society, and foreign policy was no exception. Organizationally, Czechoslovakia

followed the Soviet model of governance, in which the central committee of the KSČ-directed party and government activities in between party congresses. In terms of conducting foreign policy, there were four particularly important parts of the central committee: the general secretary, the politburo, the secretariat, and the international department.

The general secretary of the KSČ was the key figure in the communist power apparatus. Antonín Novotný held the position for the majority of the time covered in this study (1953-68). Novotný exercised control over foreign policy in a number of important ways. Most importantly, as head of both the party and the state, Novotný had the most direct contact with African heads of state, as well as Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. Additionally, he chaired the meetings of the politburo, largely determining their agendas, and played a large role in selecting who served in the top positions in the politburo, secretariat, international department, and the relevant ministries. Although Novotný took an active role in politburo discussions regarding Africa policy, met with visiting African heads of state, and himself made state visits to Ethiopia and Egypt, it is difficult to ascertain how involved or interested he was in the development of Czechoslovakia's African policies.

The politburo (referred to as the "presidium" from 1954-62) of the KSČ was the most important body in the governance of Czechoslovakia's political decision-making. Politburo members were elected by the central committee and constituted the top echelon of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. The politburo only discussed and voted on major foreign policy decisions or initiatives, such as whether or not to continue to maintain diplomatic relations with South Africa, and therefore did not have much involvement with the day-to-day conduct of foreign policy.

The secretariat was the key administrative body of the KSČ. Its members were also formally elected by the central committee of the party. Its foreign policy responsibilities included administrative personnel tasks such as the appointment of ambassadors and embassy staff and approving visas for Czechoslovak journalists or technicians who were employed abroad.

The international department was the fourth segment of the communist party with significant involvement in foreign affairs. The international department oversaw relations with the communist or "revolutionary democratic" parties in foreign countries, as well as with the international organizations based in Czechoslovakia, and managed the visits of foreign dignitaries and foreign students. The international department was also given the assignment of making sure that the more pragmatic reports from the ministries of foreign affairs or foreign trade were infused with sufficient ideological content before being forwarded to the politburo for consideration.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MZV)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MZV) experienced a high level of turnover following the communist coup of 1948. Most experienced Czechoslovak diplomats went into exile, and a great many of those who opted to stay in their positions were within a year or two fired from the MZV if they were not deemed loyal enough to the communist cause. The continuity of the ministry was further shaken by the Stalinist purges of the late 1940s/early 1950s, of which the first foreign minister of communist Czechoslovakia, Vladimír Clementis (1948-50), among others, was a victim. From 1948-54, the MZV, generally speaking, was quite ineffective and incompetent. Its employees were chosen strictly by their loyalty to the party, and few had the requisite skill set (or even desire) to be professional diplomats. This did not, however, greatly hamper Czechoslovak foreign relations, since during this period, the country had an insular foreign policy as a result of slavishly following the Stalinist line emanating from Moscow. Change in the MZV stemmed from the Khrushchev Thaw and a desire for Czechoslovakia to pursue a more activist foreign policy, particularly in Africa. An October 1956 report and meeting of the politburo discussed past deficiencies of the MZV and ways to improve its operations and professionalism. The report produced for this meeting also emphasized the importance for Prague of renewing its relations with the developing world as a result of decolonization.²⁴

Václav David, foreign minister from January 1953-April 1968, was the head of the MZV for the majority of the period covered in this study. David, with a background as a payroll clerk, and without the ability to speak a Western language, was an unorthodox choice to be foreign minister. According to Czech historian Jan Zidek, he lasted in his position at the MZV for so long for three reasons: his close friendship with Novotný, his loyalty to the Soviet Union, and his unaggressive and unambitious personality—which allowed him to avoid making enemies within the KSČ leadership.²⁵

Organizationally, until the end of 1959, African policy was dealt with by the Afro-Asian department at MZV. In November 1959, a separate African department, named the "tenth territorial division" was created to exclusively cover relations with the states of sub-Saharan Africa. The countries of North Africa (minus Algeria) were assigned to be part of the ninth territorial division, which covered the Near East, while Algeria remained part of the fourth territorial division, which was in charge of France. The impetus for creating a separate department devoted to Africa was intensifying relations with Guinea and Mali and the pending independence of soon-to-be-decolonized Francophone Africa.

At the time of the creation of the tenth territorial division, Prague had embassies in Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea, Morocco, and Tunisia, as well

as consulates in South Africa and Congo. Within a few years, the number of Czechoslovak embassies in Africa had more than doubled by the opening of missions in Algeria, Ghana, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, and Togo. Like the United States under the Eisenhower administration, Czechoslovakia also accredited its ambassador in these countries to other less important neighboring countries as well. For example, Prague's ambassador to Guinea, Milos Vorja, operated out of the embassy in Conakry but was also accredited as ambassador to Sierra Leone, where the Czechoslovaks did not operate an embassy.

Ministry of Foreign Trade (MZO)

In communist Czechoslovakia, all large businesses were nationalized, and foreign trade was monopolized by the state. The MZO, therefore, played a large role in Prague's relations with Africa, as it handled all export-import agreements and was tasked with finding suitable markets for Czechoslovak manufactured goods. Czechoslovakia's main export to Africa was small arms, and therefore, the unit of the MZO involved with weapons, *blavní technická správa* (main technical administration, or HTS), which is discussed in greater depth in chapter 3, probably had the most direct involvement with Africa. Another important arm of the MZO was the company Technoexport, which was founded in 1953 and specialized in the sale of complete industrial projects and installations abroad and promoted the acceptance of Czechoslovak manufactured goods in developing countries.

Ministry of National Defense

The ministry of national defense was headed by Bohumír Lomský from 1956-68. Lomský fought alongside the Soviet Red Army as a member of the Czechoslovak Infantry Brigade during World War II, and at the conclusion of the war, studied and graduated from the KJ Voroshilov Military Academy in Moscow. Under Lomský, the ministry of national defense played an important role in Czechoslovakia's foreign policy toward Africa. The weapons which were sent as military aid to Africa, although negotiated by HTS, typically came from the stocks of the ministry of national defense. More importantly, officers from the ministry of national defense were assigned to train African soldiers and liberation fighters in how to operate Czechoslovak weaponry. Such training was conducted both in Czechoslovakia and Africa and was intensified in 1962 by the opening of a department within the Antonín Zápotocký Military Academy of Technology that specialized in providing such training to foreign students.²⁶

Czechoslovak State Security (StB)

Státní bezpečnost (State security or StB) was a unit of the ministry of the interior that functioned as Czechoslovak intelligence and played an important role in the conduct of Prague's foreign relations. Following the KSČ's seizure of power in February 1948, Soviet advisors helped organize the structure of the StB, and intimate relations between the Soviet and Czechoslovak intelligence services would persist throughout the Cold War. By the mid-1950s the StB's reach covered nearly the entire world. In some countries, an estimated 70–80 percent of Czechoslovak embassy employees were covert StB agents, and all foreign ministry employees (including the ambassador) were subordinate to the StB chief of station. In 1950, the StB employed approximately 100 agents. This had increased to 360 in 1953, 520 in 1957, 930 in 1961 and 1,236 by 1968. By 1968, the StB operated 41 outposts in 39 African countries.²⁷

Meeting in Prague in July 1960, Czechoslovak Minister of the Interior Rudolf Barák and Soviet KGB Chairman Alexander Shelepin signed an agreement in which the intelligence services of the two countries vowed to coordinate their activities throughout the world. In Africa, joint cooperation focused on Egypt, Guinea, Mali, the Congo, Ghana, Angola, Sierra Leone, and Zanzibar.²⁸ The StB's three primary responsibilities on the continent were reducing the influence of the Western powers (through subversion or propaganda), training and coordinating with the intelligence services of radical states such as Guinea and Mali, and assisting national liberation movements. StB activities in Africa included organizing preparation for a coup against the pro-Western Ghanaian military government and planning a rescue operation for Antoine Gizenga in the Congo. Additionally, from 1959 to 1968, Czechoslovak intelligence organized 31 courses to train African intelligence personnel from radical states or national liberation movements. The students in these courses came from 11 different countries. Their training consisted of state security techniques, military or guerilla training, organized political work, and communist ideological indoctrination. Additionally, 13 Czechoslovak intelligence experts served in Africa as permanent consultants to the security services of Guinea, Mali, Congo-Brazzaville, and PAIGC (the national liberation movement from Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde).²⁹

Other State and Transnational Institutions

An assortment of other state institutions played significant roles in Czechoslovakia's relations with Africa. The Czechoslovak state airline, *České Státní aerolinie* (ČSA), serviced one of the most extensive route maps in Africa and also assisted several African countries in establishing their own national airline. Over two thousand African students studied,

free of charge, at the University of the 17th of November in Prague. The *Česká tisková kancelář* (Czechoslovak News Agency or ČTK) operated an international school of journalism that trained photographers, editors, and journalists from Africa in the art of state propaganda through media. Similarly, the State Bank of Czechoslovakia (SBCS) created an international banking school where foreign students (a disproportionate amount of which were from Africa) were trained to become workers in the financial sector of developing countries.³⁰ On the other side of academia, an African studies program was developed at Charles University to train Czechoslovaks about African languages and culture, and the Research Institute for Foreign Trade (VUZO) was founded to study the economic challenges of recently decolonized and developing countries.

Finally, many international communist organizations were headquartered in Prague. These included the International Union of Students, the International Organization of Journalists, the World Federation of Democratic Youth, and the World Trade Federation. Through these organizations, the Soviet bloc provided moral and material assistance to nationalist organizations in Africa.

At the outset of the 1960s, in an attempt to attain middle power status, Czechoslovakia sought to develop both economic and diplomatic relations with nearly every independent state on the African continent. During this period, Czechoslovakia operated more embassies in Africa than did the Soviet Union. It developed close economic, cultural, and political ties to many African states, which led to the opening of Czech cultural centers, Czech movie weeks, and the study of the Czech language throughout Africa. Over two thousand African students studied at Czechoslovak universities free of charge. Prague gave significant amounts of military aid to newly established national armies of independent African states, as well as to national liberation movements still fighting against European colonialism—and even influenced the fashion choices of Africa's most famous revolutionary. It assisted African countries to develop their own national airlines. The amount of Czechoslovak trade with, and humanitarian assistance to, Africa was significant. From 1954–68, Czechoslovakia dedicated a greater percentage of its GDP to bilateral economic assistance to Africa than did the United States and devoted more than double of its GDP to Africa than did the Soviet Union.³¹ Czechoslovakia's involvement in Africa was massive in scale, when its small population and size of its national economy is considered. Prague's per capita involvement in Africa during these years was likely unsurpassed by any other state. This book tells the untold story of Czechoslovakia's intense involvement with Africa during the years 1945–68.