

WINDS OF CHANGE

We may think of 1957 as the twilight of empire.

More like late afternoon, actually.

Remember, even then, there were 45 imperial possessions under the control of the Colonial Office.

Keep in mind that in 1957, the Commonwealth was still dominated by five states, all of them white—

Britain
Australia
New Zealand
South Africa
Canada

It's true that India, Pakistan and Ceylon were new members, and they weren't white. But they certainly were in the minority.

Even in 1957, when Ghana joined them.

You could find British governors on every continent.

The Colonial Service wasn't winding up its business.

It still was busy recruiting young men from the universities.

It still foresaw them having long careers in the Empire.

All of this, though, changed, and a lot faster than anyone had a right to expect.

Here's why.

In the years after Suez, five winds of change were blowing:¹

1. changes in the relationship with America
2. Changes in defense policy
3. changes in Britain's approach to Europe
4. changes in colonial policy
5. the split of the Soviet Union with China.

All of them had some connection to Suez; all were made stronger and changed the world in which British policy makers had to operate.

1. America

From now on, Britain wasn't seen as a rival.
It wasn't in the game.

It might be a patient, or a senile old father, retired from the business, with the son chairman of the board.

From here on out, advice from London was welcome – but whatever decisions were taken for the Western Alliance came strictly from Washington.

All of this meant a lot of friendly fence-mending.

And Macmillan, whose mother was American, was just the man to do it.

He and Ike got along famously.

¹ For the five winds, see William Jackson, **Withdrawal from Empire: A Military View**, 167-85.

From here on out, the United States called the tune in the Middle East.
It didn't watch Britain do it, and go kibitzing.

That's the real meaning of the Eisenhower doctrine in 1957

– a determination to block Soviet expansion into the Middle East and towards the pipelines.

And its tokens were made plain at Lebanon.

... when there seemed a good chance of a coup, like that which had just killed the royal family in Iraq.

Long closed off, Britain and America renewed their sharing of nuclear information.

2. defense

British defense policy had needed an overhaul for a long time, what with the coming of nuclear weapons and delivery systems.

Each side could obliterate the other.

So nuclear war in Europe was becoming unthinkable.

Europe was less in danger of Russian attack.

The real pressure-points would be the Middle East and Far East.

At the same time, Britain's economy was hurting.

And Anthony Eden saw a link to an overstretched British defense set-up.

... a smaller army. Because Britain wasn't likely to go to war all alone. And conventional war was not the future. Nukes were.

Missiles to replace manned combat aircraft

A smaller army, but with transport aircraft and helicopters, to make it more mobile.

In other words, concentrate on speed and flexibility.

And who needs the Navy? A nuclear war will last a few days. Nothing more than that.

The Navy would have no role to play.

Why build ships for another battle of the Atlantic – when there will never be another battle of the Atlantic?

Instead of 600,000 men in the army, make it 165,000.²

In five years, defense spending had gone from 10% of GNP to 7%.

National Service had ended.

From now on, there simply wasn't an army able to wage colonial wars or even rear-guard actions.

² Lawrence James, **The Rise and Fall of the British Empire**, 592-93.

Go to Cyprus. In the 1950s, the British had held on – using draftees.

Now, where were the draftees? There weren't any.

3. colonial policy

Decisions to push forward in making a multi-racial
Commonwealth and speed up independence.

There were lots of reasons for this.

One was the feeling that it was sure to happen, anyhow.

Now that England's weakness had been exposed to the world,
the insurgents would take heart... not to mention guns.

If you wanted these places as allies and trading partners, it was a lot
better not to let them TAKE their independence...

but to give it to them.

More important, if you didn't want the Soviet Union to turn Africa into
a cluster of satellites, the time to set these colonies free was
now.³

So in country after country, the authorities *bought off* the revolutionaries
by letting them *buy in*.

³ Ritchie Ovendale, "Macmillan and the Wind of Change in Africa, 1957-1960," **Historical Journal**, 38 (June 1995): 455-77.

They became the up and coming leaders.

Elections, scheduled for years in advance, were sped up and rushed through.

4. opening the door to Europe

Treaty of Rome, 1957 –

made clear the real danger of not being part of a European union, economically.

And started the British towards a friendlier view of cooperation with France and Germany.

What had the need to join the Common Market to do with empire?

Just about everything.

England was webbed and tied to the colonies by preferential trade deals, worked out in the 1930s.

As long as it kept those, and didn't let European nations share the same deals, there was no fairness to it.

Trade with western Europe went from important to all-powerful.

In 1960, Britain exported 31.7% of its goods to western Europe.

By 1980, it would be 56.9%.

In 1960, it imported about 30.7% of its goods from there.
And, twenty years later, 55.7%.

Trade with the Empire – or ex-empire – just didn't matter anywhere
near so much.

5. China vs. Russia

China occupies Tibet in 1959

Fouling its relations with India

Indeed, there was an invasion of India in Oct. 1962, a
punitive expedition, to humiliate Nehru.

Russians irritated by Chinese arrogance and border clashes in Mongolia

The monolithic world of Communism fell apart, 1961 at the 22d Party
Conference, with a Chinese walkout.

This meant an increase in instability everywhere outside of the Mediterranean,
Europe and Atlantic.

I. THE SCRAMBLE *FROM* AFRICA

A. Profits of Decolonization?

To hear some people tell it, Colonization was a businessman's plot.

And so was de-colonization.

The City, and the financial and commercial interests of London, who lost interest in empire, saw that the big money was now to be made in Europe and North America. That's where the hot investment opportunities would be.

And did they have clout!

1. Many a business leader sat on legislative and executive councils in the colonies.

2. when advisory panels were set up at home and abroad, businessmen sat on those, too, to administer and run the transfer of power.

3. if the colonial state wouldn't give an ear to a businessman... well, there was always Whitehall. The mandarins on the Board of Trade, and at the Treasury and in the Bank of England and in the Colonial Office were always friendly. Their doors were always open.⁴

⁴ S. Stockwell, "British Business, Politics, and Decolonization in the Gold Coast, c. 1945-60," Ph. D. dissertation, Oxford University, 1993) ; N. J. White, *Business, Government, and the End of Empire: Malaya, 1945-1957* (Kuala Lumpur, 1996), 34-36, 100-01.

4. Go to the Tory back benches, and you find a whole network of imperial businessmen – a positive web of them.⁵

And many a government official retired from public life – straight onto a company board of directors.

When empire went, at least in the short run, British business continued to pull the strings.

In Malaya, on the gold Coast, in Kenya, the independent regimes remained part of the sterling area.

They needed foreign investment, and they did what it took to get and keep it.

Other places, the state took a strong role in remaking the economy. But even there, British commercial banks and import-export firms and shipping lines, kept their top-dog roles in the economy.

⁵ P. Murphy, *Party Politics and Decolonization: The Conservative party and British Colonial Policy in Tropical Africa, 1951-54* (Oxford, 1995), 89, 91, 92, 100; N. J. White, *Business, Government, and the End of Empire*, 36-38.

There's just a few things wrong with the thesis.

1. businessmen and politicians had very different ideas about decolonization and development.

In fact, businessmen really were scared of decolonization – even under pretty clear controls.

Because, once you open the door partway, how do you keep it from being opened the rest?

Look at what's happened in Egypt ... and in Iran.

Give them a little slack – and they nationalize the Suez Canal!

they nationalize the oil industry!

This could happen to your exporting firm!

Or your oil wells in Nigeria!

At the very least, a businessman is going to go in strong for more cops, more troops – more order.

Lock up the troublemakers, throw away the key!

But that's not how an empire can operate.

Often you have to make deals with the MOST troublesome people... people with criminal records, even.

And the opposition to de-colonialization is strongest among businessmen on the spot ... the big financial wallahs in Kenya, say, or on the Gold Coast.

That's why one of the first things you see when decolonization starts is businessmen voting with their bank accounts.

They start gittin', and gittin', quick.

Sell out, bargain rates.

Call in a lot of your loans.

Get out with your shirt before it turns nasty.

Oh, they may change their mind later.

Not every dark cloud brings a hurricane with it.

But the first fears are what tell the real story.⁶

And if de-colonialization comes, if it has to come, the one thing a lot of businessmen wanted was weak central governments.

⁶ Nicholas J. White, "British Decolonization in the Twentieth Century," *Economic History Review*, 53 (August 2000): 551.

Federalism. You can do business easier with a local governor.

Less chance of government takeovers of your business.

Less chance of a dictator nationalizing the industry.

And a local governor is cheaper to buy.

So if businessmen had had their way, there wouldn't have been a Ghana... or a Nigeria.

There'd have been a federation of Ghana provinces.

There'd have been a group of Nigerian states.

2. businessmen didn't agree among themselves, and neither did politicians, about what was best to be done; it was all a muddle.

Every business movement had laggards and slackers.

The big voice of business interests in the Gold Coast was the AGC

the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation.

When it drummed, other companies line up.

.... but Shell Oil didn't.

It wasn't going to join any crusade against the nationalists.⁷

⁷ Nicholas J. White, "British Decolonization in the Twentieth Century," *Economic History Review*, 53 (August 2000): 556.

Go to Malaya. The tin-mining interests speak loud and clear.

Well, maybe loud. But not so clear, because there are two groups, and they're both speaking at the same time so you can't hear what the other one's saying.

Big firms and small 'uns.

The big ones are controlled by the London Tin Corporation.

The small 'uns run themselves.

The big 'uns think they can live with trade unions, and with Multi-racial parties. The small 'uns won't stomach either. White men have to run things.⁸

In Egypt, here's the Suez Canal Company, and it says: keep the troops on the ground. Don't close down British bases.

And here's Shell's subsidiary, Anglo-Egyptian Oil, saying:
Tommyes, go home!⁹

It all sounds very confused. Now take a visit to the government buildings.

There's the confusion there, too.

⁸ Nicholas J. White, "British Decolonization in the Twentieth Century," *Economic History Review*, 53 (August 2000): 556.

⁹ Nicholas J. White, "British Decolonization in the Twentieth Century," *Economic History Review*, 53 (August 2000): 556.

The Bank of England listens to the city financiers.

Together, they agree that the Gold Coast needs to provide more gold.

And why not? England needs more gold, to back up its gold reserves.

Tax breaks for gold mine owners will do the job.

They agree that Malaya rubber producers need a government insurance policy, what with civil war going on.

Ooooookay.... except that the Colonial Office won't agree to either one. It's looking at the political picture...

– you want more riots on the Gold Coast?

This is definitely the way to do it.¹⁰

–

3. there were other motives for imperial policy, and they didn't have much to do with money.¹¹

¹⁰ Nicholas J. White, "British Decolonization in the Twentieth Century," *Economic History Review*, 53 (August 2000): 557-58.

¹¹ Nicholas J. White, "British Decolonization in the Twentieth Century," *Economic History Review*, 53 (August 2000): 546-66.

Oh, Commonwealth status certainly would be a good thing for keeping London the main financial and commercial center of what used to be its empire.

But it had another reason, much more important.

Commonwealth countries aren't Communist countries.

You want to keep them in the Western camp.

You want a sign of what happens if you don't take pains that way?
You get Burma.

Friendly to the Reds, neutralist, shut off.

Yes, the vested interests in Malaya would love to see its tin and rubber industries developed.

Sure they could make money by it.

But to the people in London, the real story is:

Lose Malaya, you lose Singapore.

You lose the straits of Malacca

In Communist hands, that's a strategic loss almost as big as losing the Suez Canal.

Australia is much harder to defend.¹²

¹²Nicholas J. White, "British Decolonization in the Twentieth Century," *Economic History Review*, 53

Or if you go to Ghana.

There's plenty of bauxite there.

You could make big money smelting it.

Aluminum – thousands of tons of aluminum, all produced
within the Commonwealth.

But to the government, that is never the big issue.

The big issue is keeping the leader of Ghana,
Kwame Nkrumah

on YOUR side, not on the Soviet side.

And if businessmen's profits take the back seat, well,

that's just the way it's got to be.¹³

As for India... anybody who thinks that the first thing on Mountbatten's mind was, how do I protect the sterling trading area?

has to be nuts.

His first thought was: how do we get out of India without a bloodbath?

And everywhere – Nigeria – Kenya – that question: how do you get out without a bloodbath – becomes the #1 concern.

The striking thing wasn't how fast the Empire went.

It was how peacefully.

Compare it to France.

The struggle to keep Indochina led to a 9 year war.

¹³ Nicholas J. White, "British Decolonization in the Twentieth Century," *Economic History Review*, 53 (August 2000): 559.

As for Algeria, it meant another war.

A million French colonists ran the country, and at all cost, they couldn't let the French government leave.

Many million Moslems were determined to leave.

400,000 soldiers could not keep order.

The fourth Republic collapsed.

The French army had a big mutiny.

There were riots in Paris

Algerian French settlers went in for major terrorism

Or what about Portugal?

There, from 1960 to 1976, 135,000 Portuguese soldiers were used to battle down partisans in Mozambique and Angola

At home, the costs led to a revolution that overthrew the dictatorship and set up a parliamentary system again.¹⁴

It may be the first time that the colonies' revolution ever set the Mother Country free!

¹⁴ Lawrence James, **The Rise and Fall of the British Empire**, 589.

Or Belgium

to the very end, resolved to hold onto its African colony.

convinced that Africans, like children, needed to be treated fairly
but firmly, and kept away from anything that could hurt
their poor little minds –

Higher education, for instance.

every skilled job went to some 100,000 Belgians in the Congo

Nobody voted – not even the white settlers.

Any Congolese who got to Europe was kept from going home.

A mind contaminated with European ideas could
be disastrous.

And then, when the winds of change began to blow, Belgium tumbled over
itself to escape from the Congo.

Eighteen months later, the Republic of the Congo had come
into being.

What would you expect?

No professional classes...

No business structure...

No political institutions ...

No sooner had the Congo been freed than it fell into
anarchy and civil war.

White settlers were butchered.

Nothing like this happened with Britain.

It carefully kept out of wars it could not win.

Its armies did not mutiny to protest decolonization.

White settlers in southern Rhodesia and Kenya didn't set off bombs in
London's streets, the way they did in Paris.

Why not?

One reason is that the British empire had, for two generations,
PROMISED self-government to the colonies.

And time and again, it had delivered...

to Canada
to Australia
to New Zealand
to Ireland

Another is that decolonization wasn't a party issue.

Labor Cabinets were for it; and so were most Conservatives

Were there some Conservatives still haunted by the romance of Empire?

Oh, yes. More than a couple.

They gave hearty defenses of white settlers in East and Central Africa.

They gave a soapbox to the former colonial civil servants, many of whom didn't like the nationalists, and sympathized with the tribal rulers, who were getting a short shrift.

From their newspapers came cries about elections on the Gold Coast carried by "spells, witch-doctors" and fetishes.

Or replacing the name of God in the Lord's Prayer there with the name of Nkrumah.¹⁵

The Blimps had their own organization, the League of Empire Loyalists, made of old retired military officers upset at the decline and fall of practically everybody.

¹⁵ Lawrence James, **The Rise and Fall of the British Empire**, 590-91.

They didn't want Asians or Africans ruling themselves.
They very much didn't want darkies coming to England.

They hated the United Nations...
the Jews
the United States
the Conservative party

and Harold Macmillan.¹⁶

But that was because the Conservative leadership wasn't at all Blimpish – and certainly not Prime Minister Harold Macmillan.

In his six years at the top, he gave independence to...

the Gold Coast
Malaya

Cyprus
Nigeria
Somaliland
Sierra Leone
Cameroons
Jamaica
Trinidad
Tobago
Tanganyika
Uganda
Kenya
Gambia

¹⁶ Lawrence James, **The Rise and Fall of the British Empire**, 591.

... and started the machinery running to give independence to
Northern Rhodesia
Nyasaland –

the future Zambia and Malawi

... which happened in 1964.¹⁷

This wasn't just his doing. Give credit to Iain Macleod, of the Colonial Office.

He was, bar none, the most radical Conservative holding that place since
Joseph Chamberlain's day.

There would be no more paying attention to white settlers in Kenya and
balancing off impossible interests.

And this, Macleod thought, was true conservatism.

You may not be able to keep the British flag flying in African states.

But you can protect British interests there.

The best way is, get out gracefully.

No parting shots.

¹⁷ Lawrence James, **The Rise and Fall of the British Empire**, 591-92.

No raw power-plays.

That means a policy that goes in an orderly fashion
and leaves something orderly behind.

It also means keeping the British military bases
there.

You conserve Britain's strategic interests.

Macmillan could get away with it because he swapped Empire for other
trappings of Great Power status.

In 1957, Britain set off its first nuclear bomb¹⁸

It started deploying long-range missiles.

It opened the British isles to American missile silos (the Thor missile)
and to Polaris-equipped nuclear subs on the Clyde River.

In fact, Macmillan saw to it that the United States gave Britain

¹⁸ At Christmas Island, in the western Pacific ocean.

some Polaris missiles all its own.¹⁹

Perhaps a little to Britain's surprise, losing the Empire didn't cost it much in the way of jobs or investments.

Britain continued to export to the Commonwealth...
and a little more each year.

But, then, it didn't need it so much – the amount it sold to Europe was going up much faster and was much more important.

That said, the story of the Scramble from Empire is brutally sordid.

Colonialism left several poisoned legacies.

1. an economy of dependence

Nowhere had Britain done anything to build up a robust, self-sufficient economy.

¹⁹ Lawrence James, **The Rise and Fall of the British Empire**, 594.

Its colonies were part of a closed system.

They provided raw materials; the Mother Country provided the finished goods.

This was all very well within empire.

But what could African states make, now that they were free?

Let loose on the world markets, they could not compete.

Their industries were young, weak, puny.

Robust American and European businesses could undersell them.

The infrastructure that they needed was still unbuilt.

Where was that trans-Saharan line?

Where the Cape to Cairo road that Cecil Rhodes envisioned?

It was as if sixth-graders were set free to play football – against the NFL.

Industries didn't expand. Set free from imperial protection, they were smothered

Globalization was death to most of them.

All that Africa had was all that it had ever had...

raw materials for others to take.

Here, there might have been some chance of many states prospering ...

If they could get a good price.

But to get a good price takes more than strong demand from elsewhere.

It takes institutions...

Strong local governments

Sturdy national authorities

Unions

Corporations – all of which can control the raw materials
... how they are produced, how much, and how they
are marketed —

an OPEC for diamonds or rubber or cocoa.

And none of these had the British authority built up.

It had wanted no rivals – and when the African countries lost British
rule, they found themselves helpless to protect themselves.

2. democratic institutions

More than just about anywhere, the British had talked the talk ...

Self-government

Autonomy

Uplift

What they HADN'T done was ready themselves for the day when
Empire would end.

Of course freedom would take preparation.

A new governing class would need to be schooled.

Experts in law and authority would have to be trained.

A healthy respect for government institutions and for rule by law
didn't come like the decoder ring, in a Crackerjack box.
It had to be experienced, and learned.

But as late as 1950, freedom seemed unimaginably far off.

A generation ... two ... three.

There was no hurry.

And there continued to be no hurry until there was no time.

All at once, it became clear that colonial rule had five years – maybe ten – maybe
only one or two to run.

No time to build up the institutions of a healthy democracy.

No time to build up traditions like respect for law.

No time to train the tens of thousands of graduates that a civil
service needed ... or the teachers or the engineers or
the businessmen.

What Britain did was all it could do:

a crash program

Or, Instant-Independence

It couldn't spend time figuring out how the special conditions here ...
the unique ethnic mix there ... might take a special kind of
government or set of institutions.

One size had to fit all.

Every place would get a constitution –

borrowed from somewhere else or written from
scratch.

Parliaments popped up fast as mushrooms – and just about
as durably.

Prime Ministers of today were Prison Graduates of yesterday

In fact one of them, President Nkrumah of Ghana
had the letters PG monogrammed on his
suits.

And everywhere, England made the model on itself ...

an English-looking Parliament
a Speaker in a wig

a Speech from the Throne

sessions opening with a procession, with the Mace-bearer
leading the way

But is the Gambia River the Thames?

And there's the other point: WHO ASKED YOU?

These constitutions set the pattern.

They weren't made by calling constitutional conventions in Gambia and Nigeria.

They weren't ratified by a vote of the people.

The people weren't consulted at all.

It was done in the same old Imperial way.

You HAND DOWN Democracy.

Bureaucrats and power-brokers write the documents.

They TELL the Africans what rights they are going to have.

It was a pattern that would be followed from then on.

If rulers could write a constitution, they could tear it up.

Or they could make a new one – and often did.

Or, if you wanted to do it more discreetly, the ruler would set up a

Commission

Conference

Committee

... and they would write it up.

The people who manned those commissions – and the word is “manned,”

because no women served –

were nice safe leaders ... lawyers, experts, politicians.

There'd be nothing messy like debate or discussion.

And if the public was given a choice of voting, it wasn't to amend.

It'd be an all-or-nothing proposition.

Take it or leave it.²⁰

3. the unworkable map

There was a third legacy of colonization, and it was so obvious that nobody thought about it.

The new countries weren't countries.

They were lines on a map, drawn in Europe to fit Europeans' needs.

They jumbled together people who had never thought of themselves as the Chinese did – as Chinese; or the Vietnamese – as Vietnamese.

²⁰ Victor T. Le vine, "Constitutionalism in West Africa," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 35 (June 1997): 203-05.

They thought tribally; they thought religiously.

They had nothing in common.

Yet the same artificial countries that Empire had designed were the boundaries of a free Africa.

When Britain ruled two dozen African colonies, the system was almost workable. One colony could provide the goods another one needed.

But what now?

What chance does a country have that's 200 miles long and just 20 miles wide? (Think of a country not much wider than Fayette county!)

But that's what Gambia was.

What chance did a country like Nigeria have? Oh, it was big; it was compact.

It had a seventh of all the people in Africa ... 31 million people in 1953.

But those 31 million spoke 200 different languages.

The rich farmland of the coastal strip had never had a thing in common with the wild interior.

They never thought as one.

Set free, they never WOULD think as one.

What legacy could this leave but civil war?

III. HEART OF DARKNESS (FREE TRANSLATION)

What did freedom mean for the African Commonwealth?

Democracy certainly didn't translate across into this new order.

The "independence constitutions" came and went almost immediately.

They weren't a contract between the ruler and the ruled.

They became fronts, for dictators to hide behind.

Oh, the institutions were there —

But there was only one political party allowed.

The legislature still met.

But all it did was rubber-stamp what the president did.

Military commanders overthrew the governments.

And then wrote new constitutions to suit themselves.

In each case, with a strong president and a weak legislature...
sometimes no legislature at all

And judiciaries with all the spine of rag-dolls.

Sometimes the military gave a constitution to the people –

and then, when the people starting using it, took the constitution
back again.²¹

New constitutions were written, re-written, remade, suspended,
abrogated, and sometimes just discarded.

Go to West Africa ... French and British – and in 26 years, they drew up
50 constitutions to replace the ones they'd been given.

Ghana had five
Nigeria had five
Sierra Leone had four.
Gambia had two.²²

1. Ghana – in 1966, an army coup overthrew Kwame Nkrumah, who had to flee into
Guinea.

Once treated as the father of his people, Nkrumah had proved to be a

²¹ Victor T. le Vine, “The Fall and Rise of Constitutionalism in West Africa,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 35 (June 1997): 190-91.

²² Victor T. Le Vine, “Constitutionalism in West Africa,” 189.

corrupt dictator, who had robbed his people of millions.

Democracy returned in 1969, but of the weakest kind.

Nor did it last. The 1970s saw a series of military coups.

And in 1979, just to clean up a messy history, Flight-Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings had three former heads of state put to death, plus sundry other officials.

It was a small comfort that he promised to hold free elections, and held them, bringing in a new civilian government.

2. Nigeria – the biggest Commonwealth country in West Africa

became the site of civil war.

Tribal quarrels ... Ibos of eastern Nigeria, Hausas of the north, Yoruba of the west.

The federal government was overthrown.

The Ibo seceded and set up the nation of Biafra.

Col. Gowon, the new military dictator of Nigeria, then destroyed Biafra ... slowly and with horrific civil war and starvation

Not only could Britain do nothing. In the end Biafra was snuffed out.

Over the next ten years, the military held power most of the time – and no civilian government came into power till 1979.

3. East Africa – Kenya was in turmoil and half civil war

In 1969, it became a one party state.

The one opposition party was outlawed.

Tanzania became a one party state, too.

So did Malawi.

So did Sierra Leone.

4. Central Africa – Kenneth Kaunda’s government in Zambia outlawed political parties, to end the tribalism that defined them.

He was tyrant by 1969 with full powers over everything.

In 1972, the constitution was fixed to set up a one party state.

The economy was in ruins;

but then, its main product was copper, and copper had gone into a deep slump on world markets

5. Uganda was every bit the worst.

There, the president, Milton Obote, was overthrown by the army, and General Idi Amin came to power.

Of course, Obote had got the presidency in 1966 by unconstitutional means himself.

Amin was a savage and a bigot.

He couldn’t read or write.

He believed in witchcraft and portentous dreams.

And so, it is not at all surprising that when a medicine man told him that the one way to avoid being killed as president was to eat the heart of his best-loved son, Idi Amin did so.²³

For years his people went without soap ...
without salt...
without sugar.

The schools had no ink for pens ...
no books ...
no chalk

The public transport system went to pieces.

But there were plenty of cars, commanded by Amin's soldiery and gangsters, all driving at high speed, and no matter who they ran down.

One building in Kampala was well supplied. The State Research Center.

It sounds very scholarly, doesn't it?

But the "research" it did was getting information...

like how long can you make somebody Amin didn't like
scream, before the pain kills him?

And how many blows from a sledge-hammer will it take
to finish this one off?²⁴

²³ George Ivan Smith, **Ghosts of Kampala: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin** (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 111-112.

²⁴ The system works like this. You take two prisoners, and tell one of them that the only way to save his life is if he bashes out the brains of the other. Terrified, having committed no crime himself, he does so. Then another captive is brought in and told: if you want to save YOUR life, you have to beat in the skull of the first person. And so on. It's like a row of dominoes. George Ivan Smith, **Ghosts of Kampala: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin** (New York:

Don't worry! There's plenty more when he dies.

Hundreds, maybe thousands of victims were beaten to
death or starved to death in the State Research Center.

You can tell who works there.

They drive big black Toyotas.²⁵

Amin let it be known that he and his officers would often taste the blood of their victims, and sometimes eat their livers.

It wasn't some kind of strange Nubi rite.

It was for the same reason that he had his wife dismembered with surgical instruments –

as he did others who got in his way:

to terrorize.²⁶

The money went into arms, by the millions of pounds...

MIG fighter aircraft

Sheds and sheds of new rifles and ammunition

Spare engines for helicopters.

For Amin's ambition was to build himself an empire.

When he was overthrown, it wasn't the Commonwealth that did it.

²⁵ George Ivan Smith, **Ghosts of Kampala: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin** (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 116-117.

²⁶ George Ivan Smith, **Ghosts of Kampala: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin** (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 34.

It was a war he fell into with Tanzania.

A war would divert people from how bad things were at home.

Amin invaded in 1978 to grab some disputed area.

He bombarded banks, to open the safes for looting.

Whole villages were wiped out.

The troops came back with more than 2000 women and children, to lodge in concentration camps.

After waiting for five months for the UN to do something, Tanzania found that it was on its own.

It marched into Uganda.²⁷

Amin had tanks and armored troop carriers.

He had battalions of Libyan troops to man them.

At desert warfare, they were primo.

Too bad for them Uganda is swamp and jungle.

If the Tanzanians had only stayed on the roads, they would have been walloped.

But Tanzania's soldiers weren't crazy. They walked through the forests and jungles.

They destroyed Amin's force without losing

²⁷ George Ivan Smith, **Ghosts of Kampala: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin** (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 178-82.

a dozen men.

By the time they got to the capital city at Kampala,
the Tanzanians didn't have to fight at all.

The people threw open the gates to let them in.

Amin fled the country into exile.

His soldiers stole cars, looted from people, and ran for
the border any way they could.

They stopped a train, ordered the passengers off,
shot them all, and took that.²⁸

When the country held its first democratic elections in 1980, Milton Obote
returned to power.

The price of abandoning empire in the Subcontinent was a high one, too.

The partition of India had drastic effects on Pakistan.

Now it must provide for its own defense – and not just against China and
the Soviet Union, but against a neighbor with far larger manpower
and a much bigger army than its own.

Defense spending wasn't just a first priority. It was the only priority.

In the early years after independence, fully 70% of all the

²⁸ George Ivan Smith, **Ghosts of Kampala: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin** (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 185-86.

money the government spent went for defense.

And some years it was 88%!

A country desperately poor, desperate for development, pours just about every rupee into guns and brass-hats.

Is it any wonder that, unlike India, Pakistan has had so much unrest...
growing poorer every year?

And that its government is regularly turned out by the military and generals take charge?²⁹

²⁹ Ayesha Jalal, "India's Partition and the Defence of Pakistan: An Historical Perspective," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 15 (May 1987): 289-90.