This chapter introduces the major external actors in Africa during the periods of decolonization and the Cold War, examines their motives for intervention, and summarizes the book’s case studies. The primary foreign participants in the decolonization process were the European imperial powers: France, Britain, Portugal, and Belgium. Italy, which lost its colonies in the aftermath of World War II, played a lesser role. The key players during the Cold War were the United States, the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and Cuba.

Imperial Actors

As anticolonial agitation swept across Africa in the postwar period, the major imperial powers – France, Britain, Belgium, and Portugal – were forced to respond. Their strategies and policies varied, depending largely on their political and economic circumstances. All the colonial powers faced nationalist resistance, and none agreed without internal pressure to grant independence to their colonies. Most anticolonial movements used nonviolent tactics, although some waged armed struggles for national independence. During the first postwar decade, France and Britain responded to political challenges with repression. Armed uprisings in Madagascar, Tunisia, and Cameroon were brutally suppressed by the French, as were anticolonial activities in Côte d’Ivoire and other overseas territories. Britain employed draconian methods to end the Mau Mau insurgency in Kenya and did enormous
harm to the civilian population that lived in rebel-controlled areas. Under duress, both France and Britain ultimately acceded to African demands for independence, confident in their ability to transfer political power to African governments that would protect their economic and political interests.

Weaker colonial powers, in contrast, tended to protect their interests by military means. Incapable of maintaining economic dominance without political control, Portugal fought lengthy wars to resist decolonization. Fearful of losing economic clout and influence, Belgium intervened militarily in the newly independent Congo. The presence of white settlers changed the dynamics of all independence struggles and generally resulted in prolonged wars of national liberation. Such was the case in French Algeria, Portuguese Angola and Mozambique, British Rhodesia, and Afrikaner-dominated South Africa and Namibia. Decolonization conflicts opened the door to Cold War intervention by other powers. The most dramatic Cold War interventions were in territories and nation-states where colonial powers had been the weakest.

British officials recognized the power of African nationalism – and its logical consequences – long before their counterparts in other countries. Given its diminished political and economic stature in the post-war period, and increasingly aware of the high costs of repression, Britain realized that it was more advantageous to concede governing power to trusted African collaborators than to attempt to maintain political control. By the 1940s, the Colonial Office assumed that it was preparing British subjects for eventual self-rule – albeit at some indefinite time in the future. In anticipation, the government instituted programs to reshape African societies in ways that promoted the interests of Britain and the Commonwealth, intending to turn over the reins of government to carefully selected Anglophile elites. Only in Kenya, where an armed insurgency threatened the lives and property of white settlers, did Britain pit the imperial army against the African civilian population.¹ Otherwise confident in its ability to maintain influence in the Commonwealth of sovereign independent states composed of the former constituents of its empire, Britain was less worried than other

¹ In the case of Rhodesia, Britain opposed the declaration of independence by the white-settler regime, which refused to concede the principle of future majority rule. Because it failed to follow the British decolonization plan, London did not support the settler cause militarily (see Chapter 5).
imperial powers about its ability to fare well in a free-trade system stripped of protective tariffs. Although the new nations could conceivably choose new economic and political partners, it was highly unlikely that most would reject their imperial mentor.

The government of France, in contrast, was convinced that the maintenance of empire was critical to ensuring the country’s standing among the world’s great powers. France fought protracted wars against nationalist movements in Indochina and Algeria to prevent their secession. Implementing colonial reforms in the face of war and political unrest, France renovated the empire in an attempt to save it. In the 1950s, Paris conceded the principle of local self-government within the empire but never considered political independence to be a legitimate option. The 1958 French constitution, which laid the foundations for the Fifth Republic, dissolved the great federations of French West and Equatorial Africa in order to divide the transterritorial nationalist movements. Demands for independence remained strong, however, and in 1960, France was forced to yield political independence to most of its African territories. Concerned that it would lose power and influence in the free flow of the market, France negotiated political, economic, and military agreements that guaranteed a strong French presence in the newly independent states.

Belgium and Portugal were even less willing than France to grant political independence to their colonies. They had provided only rudimentary levels of social and economic development in the colonies, and the vast majority of their subjects had little, if any, formal education. As a result, when independence came, the African populations were ill prepared for self-rule. It was not until 1959, when popular unrest forced its hand, that Brussels seriously considered independence for the Congo. In January 1960, the government scheduled Congo’s independence for June 30 – with fewer than six months to prepare. Like France, Belgium was determined to maintain control of the political and economic processes before and after independence, guaranteeing its continued access to the Congo’s enormous mineral resources. In the months before June 30, Brussels transferred the lucrative holdings of colonial state-run companies to private Belgian concerns. After independence, Belgian administrators remained to protect their country’s economic interests, and 1,000 Belgian army officers took charge of the Congolese army. Like Belgium, Portugal had no intention of relinquishing control of its lucrative colonies. An impoverished, partially industrialized country, Portugal could not
withstand the competition of the world market. It was determined to maintain political control of its African colonies in order to ensure access to cheap raw materials and markets for its manufactured goods. As a result, it fought long, costly wars against liberation movements in Angola, Mozambique, and Portuguese Guinea, which led to the toppling of Lisbon’s authoritarian regime in 1974.

Unlike the other imperial powers, Italy was forced to relinquish its empire as a result of its defeat in World War II. The Italian East African empire, comprising Eritrea, Italian Somaliland, and Ethiopia – which Italy occupied between 1936 and 1941 – was conquered by Britain in 1941. Libya fell to Britain and its colonial and Commonwealth forces in 1943. After the war, the Allies forced Italy to renounce all its colonial claims. France, Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union – and from 1949, the UN – determined the fate of the Italian colonies. France and Britain took a special interest as the dominant imperial powers in North Africa and the Middle East, while the United States and the Soviet Union positioned themselves for their insipient Cold War competition. Although Moscow lobbied to control a portion of Libya as a UN trust, London and Washington feared the establishment of a Soviet naval base on the Mediterranean, and American Secretary of State James F. Byrnes worried that a Soviet presence in Libya would threaten Western control of the distant Belgian Congo, which had provided the uranium for the first atom bomb. Dominated by the Western powers, the UN thwarted Soviet aims and left Libya under French and British tutelage until 1951, when growing anti-colonial sentiment forced the UN to concede Libyan independence. Ethiopia was administered by Britain from 1941 to 1952 and then returned to the feudal stewardship of Emperor Haile Selassie. The UN transferred the Italian colony of Eritrea to Ethiopia for administration, despite significant popular sentiment in Eritrea for independence. The international body was under tremendous pressure from the United States, which was determined to keep the strategic Red Sea coast under the control of a faithful Western ally. Federated to Ethiopia in 1952 as a semiautonomous unit, Eritrea was annexed outright a decade later. At the behest of France, Britain, and the United States, Italian Somaliland was placed under Italian trusteeship for ten years – despite protests from Somalis and opposition from the Soviet Union. Italian Somaliland was joined with British Somaliland in 1960 as the independent nation of Somalia. The United States again intervened to ensure that the disputed Ogaden territory was turned over
FOREIGN INTERVENTION IN AFRICA

to America’s Ethiopian ally, despite the fact that it was inhabited primarily by ethnic Somalis.

**Cold War Actors**

Conflict and instability during the African decolonization process provided an opening for Cold War competition. The United States was the most powerful of the external actors whose ideology and interests shaped Africa’s Cold War contests. America’s interests and involvement varied across time and space, and its actions were influenced by the concerns of the former imperial powers. Many in Washington preferred that European countries take the lead in their former colonies. Hence, the United States followed Belgium in its determination of a Congo policy and took its cue from Britain on Rhodesia. France remained a formidable force in Francophone Africa and resisted American intrusion in its sphere of influence. Thus, U.S. actions were constrained not only by America’s Cold War rivals but also by its allies.

From the end of World War II until the collapse of communism in the early 1990s, the promotion of free market capitalism and opposition to communism were dominant features of American foreign policy. As European nations lost their empires after the war, the United States hoped to gain access to the raw materials and markets previously controlled by the colonial powers. Washington also saw a chance to promote American political and economic ideologies in the newly established nations. Although Europe, Asia, and Latin America were more central to American policy concerns, Africa received considerable attention from successive presidential administrations. High-level officials in the Eisenhower administration, which took office as African nationalist movements gained momentum, viewed nationalism with suspicion, considering anticolonial movements to be the product of external communist subversion. Although in general the United States expected Britain, France, and Belgium to take the lead in ensuring stability and pro-Western governments in their traditional spheres of influence, it broke ranks when – as in the 1956 Suez Crisis – the former imperial powers, by discounting the power and legitimacy of nationalist aspirations, threatened to bring about a major Cold War conflagration. Inside the Kennedy, Johnson, and Carter administrations, minority voices in the State Department stressed the importance of
responding to nationalist concerns and befriending the governments of the future. They advocated forging an anticommunist coalition under American leadership that would press for gradual social and political change. However, even these officials opposed political movements that the United States could not control. The maintenance of good relations with European allies and the containment of radicalism remained paramount. In the end, even liberal Democratic administrations backed away from any actions that might threaten these fundamental objectives. The Nixon, Ford, and Reagan administrations were less nuanced in their understanding. Republican administrations were less likely than their Democratic counterparts to court African alternatives. In general, they viewed Africa through the prism of white-minority rights and the Cold War and considered radical nationalist movements to be Soviet proxies.

Despite their differences, Democratic and Republican presidential administrations pursued many common objectives in Africa. All of them sought relations with pro-Western governments that were friendly to American business and foreign policy interests. Because poverty and instability provided fertile ground for communist ideas, successive American administrations strove to thwart communism through economic development. Political stability and governments that favored American economic models were considered prerequisites for success. From the mid-1950s until the end of the Cold War, the United States engaged in a massive transfer of foreign aid to developing countries. It offered assistance to leaders who adopted free-enterprise models, opened their countries to American investment and trade, and agreed to the export of profits on generous terms. In addition, the United States provided military and security assistance to its protégés – to protect them from both domestic insurgencies and international communism.

Although useful for the purposes of analysis, generalizations about Democratic and Republican policies must be employed with caution, as they fail to highlight divisions within the government at any given time. Policy options are contested and debated within and between governmental branches. The final determinations are the product of struggle, representing the victory of one set of concerns over others. Democrats and Republicans in Congress may be at odds, and the legislative branch may be pitted against the executive. Within the executive branch, the National Security Council; Central Intelligence Agency (CIA); and Departments of Defense, Commerce, Treasury,
FOREIGN INTERVENTION IN AFRICA

and State may challenge one another. Within the State Department, the Bureau of African Affairs is often more sympathetic to African perspectives than offices operating under different mandates.

Because the balance of forces changes over time and according to circumstances, the United States has pursued contradictory Africa policies. On the one hand, as an early proponent of decolonization, which would open the door to American influence, the U.S. government rhetorically championed freedom, democracy, and self-determination. On the other hand, factions in the government have sympathized with the concerns of white settlers, and at times, their voices were dominant. Pervasive anticommunism in some quarters often led to a misunderstanding of nationalist movements. Radical nationalism was frequently confused with communism – or viewed as an equal threat to Western interests. Fear of communism – real or imagined – led the U.S. government to support many unsavory dictatorships. Although the dictatorships were pro-Western and anticommunist, they did not promote the freedom and democracy that Washington claimed to endorse. In the case of Southern Africa, a region valued for its strategic location and minerals and home to a significant population of white settlers, conflicting American interests led the United States to reinforce, rather than oppose, colonialism and white-minority rule.

The U.S. government’s support for European and settler agendas was a contentious issue during the Cold War, as the status quo was challenged by opponents both inside and outside the government. Policy-makers in Washington, who generally hailed from elite, all-white-male backgrounds, often felt more comfortable with European allies and representatives of white-minority regimes than with African nationalists. They shared a common view that sovereignty within a country’s borders precluded the interference of international bodies in determining how governments should treat the people residing within them. They were usually supportive of the notion that European colonial powers would pass the torch of their “civilizing mission” to the United States, which would assume the “white man’s burden” – fostering Western civilization and economic development – and, in a natural progression, take the lead in fighting communism. During the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, prominent American officials had no qualms about expressing their beliefs in white superiority and racial segregation. Prosegregation advocates dominated the foreign policy establishment and the most powerful congressional committees. However, during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, African
Americans, who constituted about 11 percent of the U.S. population in 1965, increasingly linked the struggle for civil rights at home to black liberation and national independence abroad. Many were vocal proponents of African decolonization. Simultaneously, a growing number of liberals in the foreign policy establishment argued that racial discrimination at home and support for white-minority and colonial regimes abroad eroded America’s moral high ground. How could the United States expect to win friends among newly independent African nations when black Americans were treated like second-class citizens? How could it avoid charges of hypocrisy in its claim that it represented a more humane and democratic society than those of communist states? New power dynamics emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, as the growing number of black elected officials established the Congressional Black Caucus and explicitly linked African and African American struggles for equality and justice. These efforts, which culminated in the African American–led Free South Africa Movement of the mid-1980s and the passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act in 1986, were part of a broad and diverse anti-apartheid movement that engaged millions of Americans.

After the United States, the Soviet Union was the second most important Cold War actor in Africa. Washington and Moscow had very different concerns after World War II. While the American economy had been bolstered by the war, the Soviet Union had lost twenty million people and almost half its economic capacity. Far from being bent on world conquest, the Soviet Union was primarily concerned with securing its perimeters and surrounding itself with compliant regimes that would forestall future invasions. However, the country also took an interest in Third World decolonization, which offered the possibility of new alliances in the struggle against Western imperialism. Arguing that the “backwardness” of emerging nations was the result of capitalist exploitation, Moscow deemed the removal of colonial capitalism necessary for Third World advancement, and the triumph of national liberation over imperialism a precondition for the victory of socialism over capitalism. In keeping with this view, Nikita Khrushchev, who held power from 1953 to 1964 first as Communist Party leader and then as premier, initiated diplomatic and economic relationships with anticolonial and anti-imperialist regimes in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Khrushchev’s goal was not to establish communist states but simply to increase Soviet influence in the new nations and to diminish that of the West. The Soviet Union’s involvement in Africa generally occurred in response to the interference of former
colonial powers or the intensified activities of the United States or China. When Western powers spurned or undermined African governments with pronounced anti-imperialist rhetoric or programs, the Soviet Union offered economic and military aid. Such was the case in Egypt (North Africa); the Congo (Central Africa); Guinea, Ghana, and Mali (West Africa); and Somalia (Horn of Africa). None of these regimes was communist. In the Horn, Moscow was motivated as much by strategic as by ideological concerns when it came to the aid of Marxist Ethiopia, which was threatened by socialist Somalia.

In the early 1970s, under Communist Party leader Leonid Brezhnev and Premier Alexei Kosygin, Soviet policy entered a new phase. In Southern and West Africa, the Soviet Union began to provide substantial amounts of military aid to Marxist liberation movements fighting intransigent colonial powers such as Portugal (in the case of Angola, Mozambique, and Portuguese Guinea) and white-settler regimes (in the case of Rhodesia, South Africa, and South African–occupied Namibia). In the strategically located Horn of Africa, the United States had long sustained Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie’s imperial regime, while the Soviet Union supported the socialist-military regime of Mohamed Siad Barre in Somalia. However, after a military coup toppled the emperor and established a Marxist government in Ethiopia, Moscow and Washington swapped partners. Although the Soviet Union established commercial agreements with most African countries and helped build hundreds of industrial and other facilities, it was in the realm of military assistance to radical regimes and national liberation movements that the Soviet contribution was most decisive.

In their competition for Third World allies, the United States and the Soviet Union offered two very different development models. Promoting the free-enterprise capitalist system, the American model depended on the slow accumulation of capital through profits generated by the market. The Soviet model, in contrast, was premised on centralized economic planning. It focused on the collectivization of agriculture, the development of heavy industry, and the advancement of large infrastructure projects. In the eyes of many Third World leaders, development according to the American model would take far too long. The Soviet Union provided an attractive alternative. It had moved rapidly from an agrarian to an industrial society. Its strong state and centralized economic plan had enabled it to engage in a massive redistribution of wealth. All of this was extremely appealing to many Third World nationalists.
Besides its seductive economic example, the Soviet Union had another advantage. Because the Soviet Union did not have extra-continental colonial possessions, African countries did not associate it with exploitative European colonialism. Conversely, the United States, closely aligned with Western European nations, was linked to the powers that had dominated both Africa and Asia. America’s continuation of French colonial wars in Indochina and its own history in Latin America provided little reassurance. Thus, many in Africa associated the United States with the poverty and oppression they experienced under the colonial capitalist system, whereas the Soviet Union evoked no such connotations.

The third Cold War actor in Africa was the People’s Republic of China. Like the Soviet Union, China saw the African continent as an arena in which to challenge imperialism. However, during most of the Cold War, China and the Soviet Union supported rivals in the struggle for power. Despite Soviet support for the Chinese Communist Party during China’s 1945–49 civil war, and the friendship treaty that provided Beijing with critical Soviet technology and economic assistance, the two countries struggled over both ideology and policy and competed for allegiances in the Third World. Between 1959 and 1965, the alliance broke apart as the Soviets criticized Mao Zedong’s leadership and policies while Mao decried Khrushchev’s goal of “peaceful coexistence” with the West as counterrevolutionary and challenged Soviet political and economic models. In 1959, Khrushchev abrogated an agreement to provide China with modern military technology. In 1960, he recalled more than 1,000 Soviet scientists and industrial specialists from China, while Beijing declared its independence from Soviet international and domestic policies and sought new allies among emerging Third World nations. By 1965, the Soviet Union openly considered Chinese activities in Africa and Asia to be a threat to its interests, and China publicly declared its independence in both domestic and international affairs. The Sino-Soviet split was complete, and the scramble for allies began.

Chinese interest in Africa emerged publicly at the Conference of Asian and African States in Bandung, Indonesia, a decade before the Sino-Soviet split. At the April 1955 conference, representatives of twenty-nine Asian and African nations and territories, as well as those of numerous liberation movements, agreed to oppose all forms of colonialism and imperialism and to promote economic and cultural cooperation. The participants voiced particular support for decolonization
and national liberation in Africa. China played an important role in the conference and moved to strengthen ties to other developing countries – in what was dubbed the “Third World.” Its early focus on Africa was in the Bandung spirit of African-Asian solidarity and cooperation. From the early 1960s until the mid-1970s, China sent tens of thousands of “barefoot doctors,” agricultural technicians, and solidarity work brigades to African countries that had declared their opposition to imperialism and neocolonialism. It offered grants and low-interest loans for development projects in Egypt, Algeria, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Tanzania, and Zambia. Beijing also provided military training, advisors, and weapons for African liberation movements. Maoist ideas were prominent in Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) doctrines during the struggle against white-minority rule in Rhodesia. Mozambique’s Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) benefited from Chinese military training and employed Maoist guerrilla strategies to attain independence from Portugal. (FRELIMO also welcomed Soviet aid, embraced Soviet development models, and remained strictly neutral in the Sino-Soviet conflict.)

Although Soviet aid to African liberation movements and nations was more substantial, Chinese ideology often had greater allure. Soviet ideology, following the orthodox Marxist position, posited that the level of development of the productive forces determined whether a society was feudal, capitalist, socialist, or communist. A higher social form could not be attained if a society’s productive forces were not sufficiently developed. Mao, in contrast, argued that human ideas, will, and actions were the most important factors in historical change. He believed that societies could skip quickly through stages of material development if the people’s consciousness was suitably evolved. China and the Soviet Union also differed in their views of the revolutionary capacity of the peasantry. Whereas the Soviet Union adhered to the Marxist-Leninist perspective that had little regard for the rural populace and claimed that the urban proletariat would spearhead the socialist revolution, Mao argued that the rural peasantry, with its innate wisdom and natural revolutionary consciousness, would lead a country to socialism. This notion dovetailed with Mao’s claim that a high level of industrialization was not necessary for the march to socialism. All that was required was a revolutionary peasantry. Maoism, with its emphasis on rapid industrialization and the revolutionary capacity of the peasantry, had significant appeal in emerging African nations, where populations were predominantly rural and colonial powers had done little to develop the productive forces.
Rivalry with China, as well as the United States, became an important stimulus for Soviet involvement in Africa. During the anticolonial struggles of the 1960s–1980s, the Soviet Union and China generally supported competing movements. After the Nixon administration’s rapprochement with China in 1972, the United States and China often assisted the same faction, finding common cause in their mutual opposition to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union aided the struggle of the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) against white-minority rule in Rhodesia, while China assisted ZANU’s breakaway movement. In Angola, the Soviet Union supported the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), while China and the United States supported the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

Cuba was the fourth Cold War actor in Africa. Although considered a Soviet surrogate by the United States, Cuba followed an independent foreign policy in Africa, often straining its relationship with the Soviet Union. Fidel Castro and his associates believed that Cuba could serve as an example to oppressed peoples in Latin America and Africa. The tiny Caribbean island had thrown off an exploitative dictatorship and stood up to the United States in the process. In January 1966, Cuba hosted the Tricontinental Conference, at which the Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America was founded with the pledge to support national liberation and economic development on the three continents. Cuba’s subsequent involvement in Africa was very much in keeping with the revolutionary vision articulated at the Tricontinental Conference.

Although Cuba’s African focus stemmed from the belief, shared by all the Cold War powers, that decolonization provided a new arena for the struggle between socialism and capitalism, this was not the whole story. Like African Americans in the United States, Cuba also had an emotional link to Africa. Approximately one-third of all Cubans could boast some African blood. Many were inspired by the desire to liberate their African brothers and sisters from colonialism and imperialism and to share the fruits of the Cuban Revolution with them. In consequence, tens of thousands of Cuban health, education, and construction workers, and tens of thousands of Cuban soldiers, served in more than a dozen African countries during the periods of decolonization and the Cold War – all expenses paid by the Cuban government. Africans were generally impressed by Cuba’s willingness to donate military, medical, and educational assistance without expectation of future reward.
The Case Studies

The six Cold War and decolonization case studies featured in this book include countries from each of Africa’s five geographic regions. They represent territories formerly controlled by the four major imperial powers and demonstrate a range of motivations for foreign intervention. Chapter 2, which focuses on Egypt and Algeria from 1952 to 1973, examines decolonization in North Africa, where the British and French imperial powers were the key external actors. Instability in this strategic region, which Britain and France could no longer control, stimulated the involvement of the American and Soviet Cold War powers, while Israel’s involvement in the 1956 Suez War was sparked by regional political concerns.

Chapter 3 examines decolonization in the Central African nation of the Congo from 1960 to 1965. As the former colonial power with significant economic interests in this strategically located, resource-rich country, Belgium was the primary external actor. Although Brussels intervened shortly after Congolese independence, primarily to protect Belgian mining interests, Belgian settlers, and their property, the situation was far beyond Belgium’s capacity to control. Threatened by the radical nationalism of the new government, which Washington viewed as pro-Soviet, the United States was quickly drawn into the imbroglio, which in turn galvanized the Soviet Union and Cuba. The UN, at that time dominated by American foreign policy interests, was also an important actor.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine decolonization and the Cold War in Southern Africa, where the presence of white settlers and/or a weak colonial power prolonged the decolonization process, led to greater postcolonial conflict, and opened the door to intervention from external Cold War powers. The fourth chapter, covering the period 1961–75, focuses on the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique (as well as Portuguese Guinea in West Africa), where a weak imperial power fought to maintain the political control of territories it could not dominate through neocolonial economic mechanisms. The presence of Portuguese settlers in both Angola and Mozambique further complicated the situation. National liberation wars implicated Portugal’s NATO allies – notably, the United States – and wars of destabilization before and after independence drew in other external actors. The United States, the Soviet Union, South Africa, and Cuba took sides in the Angolan wars, while South Africa waged postcolonial
wars of destabilization in both Angola and Mozambique (explored in Chapter 5).

The fifth chapter examines the white-minority regimes of Rhodesia, South Africa, and South African–occupied Namibia from 1960 to 1990. As white settlers fought to retain control of the countries they considered theirs to rule as they saw fit, they were opposed by African liberation movements that received military aid from the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China – as well as humanitarian support from Nordic countries and nongovernmental organizations like the UN and the World Council of Churches. As the former colonial power, Britain framed the Western response to the rogue regime in Rhodesia. Although the United States generally followed Britain’s lead on Rhodesia, its policies toward South Africa and Namibia were governed by both Cold War and domestic political concerns. Along with Britain and the United States, France and Israel provided significant support to South Africa’s apartheid regime, even as they publicly criticized its racial policies.

Chapter 6 focuses on the Horn in East Africa from 1952 to 1993. Following Somalia’s independence in 1960, Britain and Italy departed, and Ethiopia stood alone as the region’s last imperial power. Having conquered and ruled territory inhabited by Somalis and other ethnic groups and annexed the former Italian colony of Eritrea, Ethiopia was challenged by internal rebellions, an independence war, and armed conflict with neighboring Somalia. Regional strife took on a Cold War hue as the United States, the Soviet Union, and Cuba became embroiled in the conflagrations.

Chapter 7 focuses on French involvement in its colonies and former colonies, primarily in West and Central Africa, from 1947 to 1991. After independence, economic and military agreements bound the new nations to the former imperial power. This chapter stands apart from the others in that it examines the aftermath of decolonization with relatively little reference to the Cold War. In fact, France’s involvement in the affairs of its onetime protégés was unique. No other imperial power remained as deeply entrenched in the postindependence politics of its ex-colonies or engaged with such frequency in military interventions to prop up or overthrow African governments. Only Cuba, a major Cold War player, had more troops on the continent during the postwar periods of decolonization and the Cold War.

These case studies represent only a fraction of the many instances of foreign intervention in Africa during the years 1945–91. Rather than
offering a comprehensive overview, they provide evidence of patterns that transcended time and space. Although they constitute some of the most significant cases with the broadest ramifications, they are by no means the only ones of consequence. Space constraints preclude a more thorough examination of other critical cases, such as Britain’s military intervention in Tanganyika, Kenya, and Uganda in January 1964, following mutinies in all three national armies and a popular revolt on the neighboring island of Zanzibar; the role of foreign governments and private interests in the Nigerian Civil War of 1967–70, which prolonged the war and contributed to the deaths of some two million civilians; and the role played by Israel in the 1971 military coup that brought Idi Amin to power in Uganda and the support given by Israel and Britain to his brutal eight-year dictatorship.

Suggested Reading

A number of readings referenced in the introduction are also included here.


For superpower attitudes toward African anticolonial movements and intervention in Africa, see Zaki Laïdi, *The Superpowers and Africa: The Constraints

For broad assessments of U.S.-Africa policy during the Cold War, see Peter J. Schraeder, United States Foreign Policy toward Africa: Incrementalism, Crisis, and Change (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Gerald J. Bender, James S. Coleman, and Richard L. Sklar, eds., African Crisis Areas and U.S. Foreign Policy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

