

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

IMW-23
The Coastal Strip

The Two Fishes
Ukunda, Kenya
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Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Most Kenyans think of the coast in terms of a holiday at the sea for there must be few places in the world with such beautiful blue-green water and uniformly warm climate. But this doesn't apply to the Arab minority of 37,000 who live here. Dark complexioned and often indistinguishable from their African neighbors, they are at the moment strongly agitating for local political autonomy.

No one knows the future which the British Government has in mind for the Coastal Strip, more properly known as the Kenya Protectorate. The Strip is a narrow belt of land extending from the coast inland for ten sea miles. Its southern extremity lies on the Tanganyika border and it extends north for about 200 miles to Kipini, about two-thirds of the way to the Somalia border. It also includes the islands of the Lamu Archipelago lying off the northern end of the Strip. None of the boundaries have ever been demarcated on the ground, however, and so the inland border is somewhat vague.

This area, although administered by Britain through the Kenya Government, has a separate legal status as a protectorate (the rest of Kenya is a colony) and forms part of the dominions of the Sultan of Zanzibar. In 1895 the Sultan agreed that the administration of his possessions, other than Zanzibar and Pemba, should be entrusted to "officers appointed direct by Her Britannic Majesty's Government, to whom alone they shall be responsible".



In taking over the administration of the Strip, the British Government agreed to pay the Sultan slightly less than \$50,000 annually which they continue to pay to this day. Thus while it is now possible for the British Government to administer the Strip, Kenya's attainment of internal self-government, not to mention independence, will create a new situation.

Today there are about 392,000 people living in the Strip, of which approximately 300,000 are African, 37,000 are Arab, 48,000 are Asian, and 7,000 are European. About half live in or around the port of Mombasa. Economically the Coastal Strip's real strength lies in this port, the largest in East Africa, which supplies not only almost all of Kenya's needs but Uganda's as well. There is a small amount of light industry, and sisal, cotton, cashew nuts and sugar are the main agricultural products. The Strip, however, can't be regarded as self supporting, the difference between revenue and expenditure being on the order of \$2,800,000.

With such a hodge-podge of different races living closely together (there are even small Chinese Buddhist and Jewish communities), it is not surprising that there are several different points of view about what the Strip's future should be. The only real manifestation of the Sultan's sovereignty on the coast is his flag which flies everywhere on the Strip as well as a few places outside it. He has no authority affecting the administration of the Strip and his sovereignty is little more than a vague sentimental idea. The Sultan is said to want only that solution which would benefit his people on the Coast.

The Arab and Muslim residents of the Strip are almost unanimous in their desire for some form of local political autonomy, although there is a difference as to whether the Sultan's sovereignty should continue. They all oppose integration with the Colony, fearing the domination of up-country Africans.

The African political leaders oppose any arrangement that would lead to separatist tendencies and regard the Protectorate and Colony as a single whole. Apparently the majority of Zanzibaris aren't terribly interested, although they see the possibility that any change in the 1895 Agreement would bring them considerable financial gain.

It was to find a solution for the problem of the Coastal Strip that Sir James Robertson was appointed in September 1961 to report on "the changes which are considered to be advisable in the 1895 Agreement...as a result of the course of constitutional development in East Africa". He submitted his report last November. In it he stated the problem quite succinctly:

- 1) To maintain the status quo would be contrary to Kenya's interests;
- 2) To abrogate the Agreement would transfer the administration of the Strip to Zanzibar, and
- 3) To change or terminate the agreement would be

opposed by many of the residents in the Coastal Strip and Zanzibar.

His recommendations were as follows:

1) The Coastal Strip should be integrated administratively with Kenya before self-government and independence takes place.

2) H.M. Government should abrogate the 1895 Agreement and a new agreement on similar lines to the old and retaining the Sultan's sovereignty over the Strip should be concluded between the Sultan's Government and the Kenya Government.

3) Should this prove impossible, the Sultan "should be invited to renounce his sovereignty" and the Strip should be annexed to Kenya. In such circumstances H.M. Government should pay the Sultan \$280,000 compensation.

4) Safeguards for the Coastal people should be incorporated in the Kenya Constitution regarding human rights, the maintenance of religious law, the appointment of Muslim administrators, land and education.

5) For compensation the Zanzibar Government should be paid \$700,000 by the Kenya Government and \$1,300,000 by the British Government.

In Kenya his recommendations were generally welcomed as sage advice. Although many African politicians objected to Kenya's paying compensation, they approved of his suggestion that the Strip should remain part of Kenya. The whole question, however, was due to be discussed at a special conference to be held in London at the same time as the Kenya Constitutional Conference, namely in March of 1962. The Robertson Report was clearly an attempt to present alternatives upon which the Coastal Strip Conference could decide. Everyone expected that the problem would be decided once and for all, and so before the delegates left for London there was intensive politicking by the exponents of each viewpoint.

The Kenya Constitutional Conference quickly became deadlocked, however, and since no decisions were taken there that



(Photos courtesy T.I.S.)

directly influenced the Coastal Strip, it was thought better to defer a decision until the moment when Kenya actually approached self-government. Thus it remains today. In fact it appears there is little chance of complete independence for the Strip, but there is a good possibility it may form one of the regions so strongly advocated by the minority party in the present coalition government, the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU). Sir James Robertson foresaw this contingency and advised against it on the grounds that a plethora of regions with considerable local autonomy must be detrimental to the unity of a country. The degree of tribal antagonism within Kenya may nevertheless make it advisable at this stage of her development.

Nothing will be decided until Kenya's next full-scale constitutional conference which is due soon after the forthcoming elections which will be held sometime in the beginning of 1963. Until then it will continue to be a thorn in the flesh of the struggling African Government, albeit one on which both parties have a similar viewpoint.

Very sincerely yours,



Ian Michael Wright

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