

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

CM-14
Dream Dialogues

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Dear Dick:

Several weeks ago - the night after visiting the Volta Dam in Ghana - I had a dream. Kwame Nkrumah and Gamal Abdul Nasser, chiefs of state respectively of Ghana and the UAR, met in a small village just south of the Sahara and just north of black Africa.

PRESIDENT NKRUMAH: "Gamal, I hear that Chairman Khrushchev is coming to Egypt to help you dedicate one stage of the Aswan Dam. What a fine thing for Africa. I congratulate you."

PRESIDENT NASSER: "This is a great project; greater than the building of the Pyramids of Giza. The power we generate will help our industrialization. Irrigation from the Dam would nearly make us self-sufficient in food if we could just get the birth rate down. Maybe electric lights will help solve that problem.

"But you have a great project underway in Ghana. When will the Volta Dam be finished?"

NKRUMAH: "Not for another year or so. I am already building a grid that will carry the power to many parts of my country. There may be some delay in getting my aluminum project started as the Americans seem to be stalling.

"Incidentally, how did you manage to get the Russians to help you build the Aswan Dam?"

NASSER: "Well, it took some doing. At one time we thought we had the Americans committed to help build the Dam. But then John Foster Dulles got angry with us because we exchanged cotton for military equipment from Russia. He refused to go ahead with financing the Dam so we took over the Suez Canal. Then we pointed out to the Russians that they had a wonderful opportunity to show their generosity and to prove to the underdeveloped world that their aid didn't have political strings attached to it. They were glad to help, though their terms were high - two and one-half percent interest, with the principal repayable twelve years after the Dam is finished.

"But the Americans are helping you build the Volta Dam. How did you manage that?"

NKRUMAH: "It was quite easy, especially after the Russians came to your help on the Aswan. What else could the Americans do? They were afraid that if they didn't help me, the Russians would. They were afraid that the Russians would then have a foothold in West Africa as well as in North Africa. American interest rates are lower and they are giving us forty years to repay the principal."

NASSER: "Will you have President Johnson participate in the dedication of your dam?"

NKRUMAH: "I hope not. I am not giving any publicity to America's role in building my dam.

"I say, have you found that the Russians are giving you trouble? Are they trying to dictate your policies?"

NASSER: "No, they haven't put much pressure on us. Of course this is partly attributable to the fact that the Americans are now back on the job again. They are giving us large amounts of food, but I don't want that publicized - except in Russia. As a matter of fact, in a couple more years the value of the aid I will have received from Russia and from the United States will be about equal. I never thought I would admit it, but I think competition is a good thing - as long as the competition is between Russia and the United States.

"But what about Ghana - have the Americans put pressure on you?"

NKRUMAH: "No. I have had much the same experience as you have had, only in reverse. Partly because the Americans came to my help in building the Volta Dam, the Russians have increased their aid. We are doing quite well. I agree, competition between the United States and Russia is a wonderful thing; especially if one knows how to encourage it.

"I haven't looked at the figures lately, but I suspect that our two countries have received as much aid from Russia and the United States in the last five or six years as all the rest of Africa put together. It really pays to play both sides of the street. Sukarno and Nehru have done pretty well also. It could really be rough if the Russians and Americans ever got together.

"Right now we are getting a little low in our foreign currency reserves, but I am sure the Americans will help us out because if they don't I will ask the Russians for help."

NASSER: "But what if the Russians don't have resources enough to help you? You know they have been having some trouble with their agriculture and they have recently made me a new offer."

NKRUMAH: "I have thought of that. But I'm not too worried. I have toned down my anti-American attacks in the last few weeks and I think they'll come through. After all, they won't abandon the investment they have already made in Ghana. As a last resort, of course, I could always turn to China. While they don't have much in the way of financial resources, a good sizeable Chinese mission would probably scare some more aid out of the Americans, the Russians, or both."

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I wakened in a cold sweat.

A few days later while the Nkrumah-Nasser dream conversation was still fresh in my mind, I had another dream. President Johnson and Chairman Khrushchev met quite by chance at a place that must remain nameless; no press was present and no communiques were issued.

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PRESIDENT JOHNSON: "What a pleasant surprise, Mr. Chairman, to see you again. I don't believe we have met since you visited the United States several years ago. You met with the Foreign Relations Committee. It is strange our paths haven't crossed because we both have done a good deal of traveling. Do you enjoy travel?"

CHAIRMAN KHRUSHCHEV: "Nyet. Do you enjoy being President?"

JOHNSON: "Yes, But the job has its frustrations."

KHRUSHCHEV: "I know. I read about your frustrations - DeGaulle, Goldwater, your Congress, discrimination, your dog lovers, poverty, Viet Nam, and now Laos. Your press coverage is so good that I get the impression you are in deep trouble."

JOHNSON: "You seem to have your problems also - Mao, Ulbricht, Castro, agricultural production, African students, our discovery of your listening devices, and your allies in Eastern Europe seem a little restive. I have even noticed that some of your citizens are worried about the size of your aid programs and the expense of your space program. We have much in common."

KHRUSHCHEV: "All great powers have problems, except maybe France. And if DeGaulle has problems, he doesn't admit them."

"How much money will you get for foreign aid this year?"

JOHNSON: "I wish I knew. It's a very expensive business and our Congress is getting tired of the cost.

"How much will you spend this year on foreign aid?"

KHRUSHCHEV: "Well, that depends partly on how much you spend. If your Congress keeps cutting your aid programs I may be able to reduce ours."

JOHNSON: "That's an interesting observation. For many years our programs have been large because your programs were large."

KHRUSHCHEV: "I wonder what would happen if we both reduced the size of our aid programs - especially our military aid programs. Perhaps if you would stop giving military assistance to Pakistan and India we could stop giving military assistance to India. That might reduce the chance of war in the subcontinent."

JOHNSON: "That would hardly be a fair trade. What would happen if China should attack India again?"

KHRUSHCHEV: "I suppose we would both come to the assistance of India, although that would give me some problems because of our treaties with China. But if China keeps on its present course there is danger she may precipitate a world war we would both like to avoid. China just doesn't seem to understand the dangers of nuclear war and the necessity of peaceful coexistence.

"Do you realize that we are probably the two most powerful men in the world today?"

JOHNSON: "Yes, I do. It is a sobering thought. A misstep by either of us might destroy our nations and a good part of the rest of the world. I sometimes think that we may hold in our hands the last clear chance to create a world safe from destruction by war. We should reason together - right after the election, that is."

KHRUSHCHEV: "I agree with you. Competition may be all right but we must keep it within reasonable grounds. We should emphasize peaceful coexistence instead of competition. Otherwise we may find that the power of decision has been taken from us by other states less conscious of the dangers of promoting irresponsible competition between us.

"We should talk more often."

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I awakened briefly, turned over, and went to sleep.

Sincerely yours,

Carl Marcy
Carl Marcy