

REVOLUTION AND UNION: BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY IN NEWLY INDEPENDENT ZANZIBAR, 1964

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Clara Lopez Prunonosa is a recent International Relations & History graduate from the London School of Economics. She has always been passionate about East Africa and decided to focus her undergraduate dissertation on what really happened behind the scenes in the aftermath of decolonisation. Zanzibar provides an interesting and surprising answer to that question, and Clara hopes this paper will make other students rethink the way we study African politics.

INTRODUCTION

The events that took place in Zanzibar during its brief existence as an independent state, between December 1963 and April 1964 prove crucial to understanding the challenges facing newly independent African states. The resulting union between Zanzibar and Tanganyika became a symbol of Pan-Africanism as a voluntary union between two republics. However, there is little research on the role played by the former colonial power, Britain, and to what extent it shaped the course of events. The few works available, like Anthony Clayton's *The Zanzibar Revolution and its Aftermath*, were written before key War Office documents were released. The lack of research is surprising, given that at the time Zanzibar was seen as having a unique political landscape within the Commonwealth, and Britain was still debating how to manage imperial decline.¹

Zanzibar became independent from Britain on the 10th of December 1963. The political party that was to govern under the auspices of the Sultan, the Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP), drew its main support from the Arab minority, winning 19 out of 31 seats in the legislature in the 1963 July elections.² Despite the ZNP having a majority of seats, it was the opposing Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), backed by African mainlanders and the Shirazi population, which won the

¹ Anthony Clayton, *The Zanzibar, Revolution and Its Aftermath*, (Hamden, 1981), 104.

² Colin Legum & G. R. V. Mmari, "The Union with Zanzibar." *Mwalimu: The Influence of Nyerere* (London, 1995), 35-6.

majority of votes with 54.3%.³ This was resented by a large section of the Zanzibari population, who felt that the British upon leaving had established a 'multiracial' system, instead of 'majority rule,' which perpetuated Arab rule over the African majority.⁴ On 12 January of the following year, the resentment escalated into a coup that overthrew the Sultan and placed Abeid Karume, the leader of the ASP, as the head of the Revolutionary Council that was to rule Zanzibar. This event came to be called the Zanzibar Revolution and while it is still unclear who carried it out, evidence points to a small group composed of ASP Youth League members and peasants, led by John Okello, a Ugandan worker.⁵ Karume, whose leadership took communist overtones at times, enjoyed popular support while presiding over a tumultuous political period. Karume's reign culminated in the merger of Zanzibar and Tanganyika to form the country Tanzania, which Britain greatly welcomed after months of instability.

Britain became involved in the complex Zanzibari scene of 1964 after the rapid rule changes in the political system. The Cabinet of then Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home had to formulate policy in order to react to the quick succession of events in East Africa. This policy was greatly influenced by internal, East African and international contexts. Domestically, Home inherited Harold Macmillan's Cabinet and his policy objectives, which included an attempt to preserve a British sphere of influence in East Africa with stable, pro-Western governments.⁶ The African Committee of the Cabinet had formulated these aims in a report in 1959 called "Africa: The Next Ten Years." It emphasized the danger of Soviet involvement in the region and the importance of maintaining strong ties with the former colonies.⁷ The desire to preserve the British sphere of influence and to prevent the growth of communism became two of the long-term goals guiding policy towards Zanzibar.

The changing political landscape in East Africa also shaped policy. New nationalist parties in power, like President Nyerere's Tanganyika African Nationalist Union (TANU) and President Jomo Kenyatta's Kenya African National Union (KANU), wanted a visible

³ Ibid.

⁴ L. J. Butler. "Winds of Change." *Britain and Empire: Adjusting to a Post-imperial World* (London 2002), 154-156.

⁵ John Okello, *Revolution in Zanzibar* (Nairobi 1967), 27-35.

⁶ Butler, *Britain and Empire*, 153.

⁷ Ibid., 148.

break from the old regime.⁸ They sought a policy of non-alignment and promoted Pan-Africanism, the idea that African peoples are fundamentally united by a shared history and culture and should thus should strive for a broader political union.⁹ Because of this, British policymakers viewed parties like TANU, KANU, and Milton Obote's Uganda People's Congress (UPC) as part of a general East African trend, compelling policymakers to view East Africa as a block whole.¹⁰ This perspective helps to explain why British policy makers thought political events in one country could potentially spillover to the rest, so they therefore attached greater strategic importance to Zanzibar. When it became apparent that members of the new Revolutionary Cabinet in Zanzibar, such as External Affairs Minister Mohammad Babu, exhibited communist tendencies, policymakers feared that communism would spread to the other young and weak governments in East Africa.

The international context of the Cold War also impacted the development of Britain's policy. In the polarized world of the Cold War era, Britain felt compelled to preserve their influence in East Africa. Macmillan, and Douglas-Home thereafter, sought to create a Commonwealth that would be equipped to play a major role in the Cold War¹¹ if necessary and wanted to prevent Lord Casey's prediction of a Commonwealth "fad[ing] out through inaction."¹² At the same time, he sought to ensure that Britain was seen as a modern, liberal state and not as one stubbornly holding on to its empire. This would in turn positively feed its 'special relationship' with the US, something the Conservatives were especially keen to do. Furthermore, the expansion of the UN to include newly independent African states meant that support in the Security Council depended on how Britain acted towards its former colonies.¹³ Zanzibari political leaders eventually challenged these principles, seeing the tension between Britain's desires to both reverse the political trends in Zanzibar while seeming to respect Zanzibar's newly acquired sovereignty.

British foreign policymakers had three main motivations or aims when directing policy towards Zanzibar. Their first, immediate

⁸ K. Mathews, *Foreign Policy of Tanzania: 1961-1981 : A Reader* (Dar Es Salaam, 1982), 36-37.

⁹ Joseph S. Nye, *Pan-Africanism and East African Integration* (Cambridge, 1965), 10-11.

¹⁰ Butler, *Britain and Empire*, 154.

¹¹ Butler, *Britain and Empire*, 150.

¹² Robin W. Winks, "The Commonwealth." *The Oxford History of the British Empire*. Vol. V. (Oxford, 1999) 563-64.

¹³ Butler, *Britain and Empire*, 152.

aim was to protect the lives and property of British subjects on the islands while violence and instability lasted. The second aim was long-termed, and it was to prevent the strengthening of communism in Zanzibar and its spread to the mainland. As the situation deteriorated, correspondence between the British High Commissioner (BHC) and the Commonwealth for Relations Office (CRO) acquired a more urgent tone, and both real and imagined communism were a constant source of unease. The third aim was concerned with the maintenance of good relations with former East African colonies – seen as critical to strengthen the Commonwealth in the context of the Cold War. These three aims all influenced Britain’s approach to foreign policy with Zanzibar, though the protection of lives took priority in the immediate aftermath of the Zanzibar Revolution.

This essay will demonstrate that Britain tried to influence the course of events in Zanzibar in various ways but failed to do so meaningfully, making Britain’s role in the build-up of the union merely secondary. The British role will be analyzed chronologically, and within the context of the historiographical debate concerning the creation of Tanzania.

BRITISH CONFUSION AND HESITATION – JANUARY

The first stage in the British reaction to the Zanzibar Revolution was characterized by confusion and hesitation. The immediate goal was to protect the lives and property of the British on the islands, who numbered no more than 500, but held key posts in the administration and hospitals.¹⁴

The revolution started in the morning of 12 January, 1964. Okello’s ‘Revolutionary Army’ quickly disarmed the Sultan’s loyal troops in key posts and within hours, the Sultan had fled and his former Cabinet was arrested.¹⁵ Violence ensued and the inhabitants of Zanzibar woke up in confusion to a deposed regime and to the killing, arresting and looting of Arabs and their property.¹⁶ That same day, Okello made his first provocative radio broadcast, triumphantly claiming that a revolution had just succeeded in seizing power and asking Karume, who knew nothing of the revolt, to return from his

¹⁴ Donald Petterson, *Revolution in Zanzibar: An American's Cold War Tale*, (Boulder, 2002), 88.

¹⁵ Okello, *Revolution in Zanzibar*, 27-35.

¹⁶ Petterson, *Cold War Tale*, 47-71.

brief exile to lead the new government.¹⁷ The British mission to Zanzibar was no more informed of events occurring than Karume himself. Timothy Crosthwait, the British High Commissioner in Zanzibar, was unable to share much information with the Commonwealth for Relations Office (CRO) immediately. The first telegram to the CRO in London was sent at 0600 Zanzibar time (0900 London time). It did not mention Okello, who had not yet revealed his identity, and described his army as a ‘mob’ that had seized control of the police headquarters and had taken all the arms.¹⁸ The telegram stated that while the Zanzibari Prime Minister had attempted to organize a counter force and had asked Nyerere and Kenyatta for police reinforcements, there was little chance of success. Despite this, Crosthwait asked the CRO to “reinforce these appeals urgently,” indicative of an early attempt by the British to leverage third parties to influence events in Zanzibar.¹⁹

Just a couple of hours after receiving Crosthwait’s telegram, the CRO requested that the Middle East Command, stationed in Egypt, send frigate *HMSS Owen* to Zanzibar. The purpose of the mission was to facilitate a quick removal of British citizens from the islands, should their lives be in grave danger. It was made clear, however, that British troops should only land as a last resort and would wait for Tanganyika and Kenya’s response to Zanzibar’s request for reinforcements – suggesting that the British saw value in being seen as working with other East African governments to legitimize their intervention.²⁰ The British High Commissioner in Kenya, Sir Geoffrey de Freitas, actively tried to convince Murumbi, the Kenyan Minister of State in the Prime Minister’s Office, to support an intervention in Zanzibar in the emergency cabinet meeting of that same day. However, by 1300 UK time, the Ministry of Defense (MoD) had drafted a situation report warning that “if British units are used it must be demonstratively clear that they are not intervening in the internal situation in Zanzibar” – shunning military intervention.²¹

In the Kenyan Emergency Cabinet meeting, the Ministers decided it was an internal matter, and that there should be no interference in the

¹⁷ Ibid., 69; Amrit Wilson, *US Foreign Policy and Revolution: The Creation of Tanzania* (London 1989), 12.

¹⁸ Crosthwait to CRO, ‘Cypher’, 12/01/64, NA DO 161/485, 2.

¹⁹ Crosthwait, 12/01/64, 3.

²⁰ CRO to Crosthwait; MidEast, ‘Cypher’, 12/01/64, NA DO 161/485, 7.

²¹ MoD to Crosthwait, ‘Zanzibar Situation Report No.7’, 12/01/64, NA DO 161/485, 7.

affairs of Zanzibar.²² By night, the rebels had completely taken over, the Prime Minister had resigned, and the Sultan and his entourage had left Zanzibar aboard his yacht *Seyyid Khalifa*.²³ There appear to be two main reasons for Britain's unwillingness to act unilaterally at this point. First of all, it was not until 14 January that policymakers knew of what had just occurred in Zanzibar, and it was seen as unwise to counteract a coup carried out by unknown people with unknown intentions. Perhaps more importantly, as shown by the aforementioned correspondence, it seemed politically unviable for Britain to take action without the approval of East African governments. Political concerns together with lack of information meant that Britain was hesitant to act unilaterally at first, contributing to the success of the revolution.

On 14 January the CRO had received from Crosthwait a complete report on Zanzibari politics and the profiles of some of the politicians. This provides the earliest reference to the framework the British then used to analyze events on the islands until the union. In it, the British saw that the new politicians were divided between communists such as External Affairs Minister Babu, "fellow-travelers" such as Prime Minister Kassim Hanga, and moderates such as President Karume and Othman Shariff, the Education Minister.²⁴ Already, the British were constructing an 'other' as a means of legitimizing action in the future - and this 'moderates' versus 'communists' framework would guide and obscure British policy formulation.

That week, the British government received two letters demanding recognition of the Z a n z i b a r government, casting doubts on who was really in power. The first one, signed by "Field Marshal John Okello," was sent on 12 January and asked for recognition of the new "Revolutionary Republican Government."²⁵ The second one was signed by Karume, stating that since order and stability had been secured after a brief period of violence, Britain should at once recognize his new government.²⁶ This led to confusion in London concerning the role of Okello, who was at first believed to be a communist.²⁷ In an attempt to clarify who was in charge of the

²² De Freitas to CRO; Zanzibar; Washington, 'Cypher', 12/01/64, NA DO 161/485, 8.

²³ William Edgett Smith, *Nyerere of Tanzania*, (Harare, 1981), 98.

²⁴ Crosthwait to CRO, 'Cypher', 14/01/64, NA DO 213/182, 13.

²⁵ Crosthwait to CRO, 'Cypher', 13/01/64, NA PREM 11/5207, 22.

²⁶ Karume to British Prime Minister, 'Recognition', 13/01/64 NA CAB 21/5524, 2.

²⁷ Helen-Louise Hunter, *Zanzibar: The Hundred Days Revolution*, (Santa Barbara, 2010), 58.

new government, Sandys wrote a personal letter to Kenyatta, asking him to ‘assess the situation regarding communism and Okello for me.’²⁸ This was probably intended as a tactical move to assess Kenyatta’s views on Zanzibar, but it also evidences Britain’s lack of understanding of the situation and partly explains the consequent confusion.

To untangle these questions, Crosthwait met on 15 January with the Revolutionary Council for the first time. He was assured at the meeting that British lives were in no danger, and that Okello’s army had strict instructions not to harm Westerners.²⁹ He later wrote that Karume wanted British officials to stay, including H. Hawker, the Permanent Secretary for Finance, and that he hoped for recognition from the British soon.³⁰ The tone of Crosthwait’s report is optimistic and he seemed to believe the new government was one Britain could work with, stating that ‘they seemed a rather more intelligent crowd than the previous government.’³¹

Despite Crosthwait’s report, some British citizens were evacuated in January, although those deemed vital for the well-functioning of the public services remained.³² Twenty-eight people had already left Zanzibar on the Sultan’s boat and a further 160 people boarded *HMSS Owen* on the 17th of January.³³ This reduced British presence on the islands almost by half, making the need to safeguard British lives less pressing. Furthermore, Tanganyika, at Zanzibar’s request, had sent over 300 policemen to help reestablish order.³⁴ The presence of the police force along with Karume’s assurances convinced Crosthwait that British lives were not at risk and that normality would soon return to the islands.

While the situation seemed to stabilize in Zanzibar, a series of mutinies suddenly turned attention back towards the mainland of East Africa. The first mutiny began with the Tanganyika Rifles on 20 January,

²⁸ Personal Message from Sandys to Kenyatta, ‘Cypher’, 16/01/64, NA DO 185/59, 5.

²⁹ Crosthwait to CRO, ‘Cypher’, 15/01/64, NA PREM 11/5207, 34.

³⁰ Personal Letter from Hawker to the Secretary for Technical Cooperation London, ‘Cypher’, 24/01/64, NA DO 185/59, 21.

³¹ Crosthwait to CRO, ‘Cypher’, 15/01/64, NA PREM 11/5207, 34.

³² Crosthwait to CRO, ‘Cypher’, 13/01/64, NA PREM 11/5207, 6.

³³ De Freitas to CRO, Reception of evacuees from Zanzibar’, no date, NA DO 185/59, 14.

³⁴ Smith, Nyerere of Tanzania, 109.

and sent Tanganyika into chaos.³⁵ Violence ensued, and the mutineers managed to take control of numerous key posts. Sadleir, a British colonial officer present during the events, describes the country as one in chaos, where no one seemed to know what was happening or who was in charge.³⁶ Mutinies in Uganda and Kenya followed Tanganyika, on the 22nd and 23rd of January respectively, effectively creating the first serious challenge to internal security and stability since independence.

To quell the revolt, Uganda, Kenya and eventually Tanganyika requested British military assistance. Military aid proved very successful, and while some believed the mutinies were in fact coup d'états, order was quickly restored.³⁷ The British were at first alarmed at what appeared to be a concerted campaign of 'external subversion against East Africa,' as it seemed too coincidental that the revolution had occurred just a few days before the mutinies.³⁸ The British therefore saw these events as confirmation that in East Africa, events in one country had a direct impact on its neighbors, making fears of possible communism more pressing. While London eventually realized that there was no connection between the events in Zanzibar and the mainland, which appeared to be a manifestation of disaffection within the army, the mutinies added further to the general confusion.³⁹

Britain was initially glad that East African countries had requested British help, hoping Zanzibar would be compelled to follow their neighbors' example. However, this attitude changed when Nyerere requested consultation with members of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU), created in 1963, on the matter of British troops in Tanganyika. While the OAU endorsed Tanganyika's decision, some publicly criticized Nyerere, claiming he was being used by British imperialists.⁴⁰ This reportedly made Nyerere extremely wary of relying on Britain again for, as newly independent states like Tanganyika wanted to break from their colonial past.⁴¹ Tanganyika became even

³⁵ Tony Laurence and Christopher MacRae, "Mutiny at Colito Barracks." Introduction. *The Dar Mutiny of 1964: And the Armed Intervention That Ended It*. (Bloomington, 2010), 5.

³⁶ Randal Sadleir, "Revolution in Zanzibar and Army Mutiny, 1963-64." Tanzania, *Journey to Republic* (London, 1999), 268.

³⁷ BHC in Dar to CRO, 'Cypher', 17/01/64, NA DO 185/59, 11.

³⁸ De Freitas to Sandys, 'Summary of Nairobi, doc 17, 26/02/64, NA DO 185/59, 52.

³⁹ Okwudiba Nnoli, "Crisis of Early Diplomacy." *Self Reliance and Foreign Policy in Tanzania: The Dynamics of the Diplomacy of a New State, 1961 to 1971*. (New York, 1978), 108.

⁴⁰ Smith, *Nyerere of Tanzania*, 129.

⁴¹ *Ibid*.

less receptive to British demands to act in Zanzibar.

The Zanzibar revolution violently and suddenly replaced one regime with another, and Britain's response to the chaos was initially marked by confusion and hesitation. The mutinies of armies in Tanganyika, Kenya, and Uganda and the overall chaos in East Africa further fueled the uncertainty of the British. Britain answered these countries' requests for military help and decided, for the time being, to allow the revolution in Zanzibar to run its course. Once the lives and property of British citizens had been secured, the CRO moved to analyze the new contestants for power in Zanzibar.

BEHIND-THE-SCENES DIPLOMACY, FEBRUARY - EARLY APRIL

Two weeks after the revolution, the signs of communism were growing, and so was concern in London. Karume seemed to be losing control of the situation, as evidenced by the unchecked excesses of Okello and his army and the increasing influence of 'communist' Babu in the Cabinet. Karume felt the need to strengthen his position.⁴² This situation called for a more nuanced strategy from the British, one that could reconcile the tension between overtly opposing the regime and letting events unfold. The former could lead to a severing of relations with East Africa, while letting events unfold could lead to the creation of a communist state. To this end, the CRO and the MoD designed sophisticated plans to restore law and order, which included military intervention and a coordinated effort with all embassies in East Africa to persuade Karume, both directly and indirectly, of the need to ask for outside help.

The first military plan, 'Operation Parthenon', was drafted by the Middle East Command and its first records appear on 3 February, 1964. It called for an airborne assault on the airfield at Zanzibar, and it identified Okello and his army as the "enemy," and the aim: "to restore law and order."⁴³ This shows that Britain was prepared to take drastic measures to reverse the course of events in Zanzibar, which was consistent with both their short-term aim to protect British citizens, and their long-term one to prevent the spread of communism.

While the MoD saw Okello as the enemy, Crosthwait completely disagreed and argued that it was not Karume that was subservient to Okello but, on the contrary, it was Karume using him as a

⁴² Sir Saville Garner, 'Report on Zanzibar', 28/01/64, DO 185/59, 45.

⁴³ Air Forces Middle East, 'Operation Parthenon', 03/02/64, NA WO 276/372, REF 105/16/Air, 19.

shield from Babu.⁴⁴ Interestingly, these two different views are not contradictory but complementary. Crosthwait had made it clear to the revolutionary government that until law and order had been restored, there could be no question of recognition.⁴⁵ By extension, Okello, the ‘destabilizing’ element, had to go before it could be granted. Consequently, it is not unthinkable that Okello was just an excuse to buy time in the hope that the government would be overthrown before the British had to decide whether to recognize the country. Further, since plans were being drafted to intervene militarily in Zanzibar, it is plausible that the British working in Zanzibar hoped that an excuse would arise to justify a military intervention. Unfortunately, no documents explicitly make reference to this and certain files from the CRO and the MoD have been destroyed, making it difficult to prove this claim.

There are other factors that help to explain Britain’s hesitation to recognize the new government. Historian Anthony Clayton argues that there existed no precedent in the Commonwealth’s history of a violent revolutionary movement that overthrew an elected government overnight and enjoyed the support of the majority of the population. It was feared that immediate recognition of the regime would create a dangerous precedent, and Britain would then seem to be compelled to recognize numerous revolutionary governments.⁴⁶ This fear was not unfounded, for that same month the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia visited London to demand independence.⁴⁷ Britain was reluctant to grant independence to a white minority and it was politically unviable to recognize Zanzibar straight away while not responding to the white minorities’ appeal in Southern Rhode’s request over the summer. Fear of creating a precedent with unknown ramifications also prevented early recognition of Karume’s government.

The Foreign Office realized the impossibility of intervening in Zanzibar on behalf of the Zanzibari government given that it had not been recognized by Britain, and therefore while Parthenon was being drafted, the CRO attempted to induce Karume into asking for help.⁴⁸ The first instances of this came right after the mutinies in East Africa. In an undated telegram, Sandys requested that the acting BHC in Tanganyika convince Nyerere to make the Tanganyikan police forces

⁴⁴ Crosthwait to CRO, ‘Cypher’, 03/02/64, NA DO 213/130, 23.

⁴⁵ Crosthwait to CRO, ‘Cypher No.45’, 19/01/64, NA PREM 11/5207, 36.

⁴⁶ Clayton, *The Zanzibar Revolution*, 104.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴⁸ Foreign Office to Washington Embassy, ‘Cypher No.16000’, 31/01/64, NA

return. Sandys explains that, if the Tanganyikan police are removed, a power vacuum will be left and, fearing further unrest, Karume might be persuaded to request British troops.⁴⁹ However, to the embarrassment of Sandys, Nyerere sent him a letter deploring hypothetical outside intervention in the affairs of Zanzibar and urged Britain to recognize Zanzibar's government.⁵⁰ Britain's first attempt to indirectly convince Karume to ask for help failed – and widened the gap between Britain and Tanganyika.

The same tactic was tried with Kenyatta and Obote. On 16 January 1964, de Freitas asked Kenyatta to discuss with Obote the possibility of Kenya and Uganda offering to send policemen to Zanzibar.⁵¹ Kenyatta refused, arguing that this would infringe upon Zanzibar's sovereignty and only agreed to talk to the Ugandan government. Obote was even less receptive to the idea and made sarcastic comments about the real intentions of the British and Americans off the coast of Zanzibar.⁵² Both Kenya and Uganda clearly did not regard Zanzibar as a threat, as shown by the fact that they were the first to recognize the government the day after the revolution.⁵³ Initially, British attempts to influence Karume through Kenya and Uganda failed.

In the meantime, Crosthwait tried to improve relations with Karume. On 25 January, 1964, when the names of members of the Revolutionary Council had been made public,⁵⁴ Crosthwait met with Karume and asked him whether he expected additional aid from either Tanganyika or Kenya, carefully avoiding mentioning British assistance.⁵⁵ Karume refused it in such a convincing way that Crosthwait was left with the conclusion that “appeal to British help will not happen until it is crystal clear that his [Karume's] own efforts will not succeed.”⁵⁶

The deteriorating situation in Zanzibar also worried the United States. Dean Rusk, President Johnson's Secretary of State, wrote that same day in a memorandum that “Zanzibar despite its small size is

⁴⁹ Personal telegram from Sandys to Miles, ‘Cypher’, no date, NA DO 213/130, 7.

⁵⁰ Nyerere to Sandys, ‘Cypher’, 06/02/64, NA DO 213/130, 21.

⁵¹ De Freitas to CRO, ‘Revolution and Mutiny in East Africa narrative Account’, no date, NA DO 185/59, 14.

⁵² De Freitas, ‘Revolution and Mutiny’, *ibid*, no date, 14.

⁵³ Kenyan government press handout, no title, 13/01/64, NA DO 185/59, 5.

⁵⁴ Zanzibar Official Gazette, ‘25th January’, 25/01/64, NA CO 68963, 30.

⁵⁵ Crosthwait to CRO, ‘Cypher’, 25/01/64, NA DO 213/130, 4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

important to us politically because of its proximity to Tanganyika and Kenya and because of the presence in the island of ‘Mercury’, a NASA-manned flight installation.”⁵⁷ Rusk considered the station ‘essential’ for the American space program and believed that, were the islands to ‘fall’ into communist hands, there was potential for future spill-over.⁵⁸ Therefore, it was imperative that the US try to stop communism from developing in Zanzibar with the British, who were in a better position to influence events in East Africa, due to the country’s historical ties. Rusk expressed these sentiments in a telegram sent to the US Embassy in London, to be repeated in the CRO, hoping that ‘the British will be willing to take the lead.’⁵⁹

Britain also felt compelled to reply to an anxious US. In early February, Sandys met with the American Ambassador to London to discuss Zanzibar. Sandys explained that intervention was only possible under the pretext of protection of British lives or if Karume directly asked for help, both of which were unlikely, but which Britain was still contemplating.⁶⁰ Crosthwait sent a memo to the CRO on 3 February advising that ‘we must be careful not to let US obsession with Okello...cloud our judgment’ – suggesting that the US was more worried about the situation in Zanzibar than the British. Nonetheless, British diplomats and policy makers seemed to care about how they appeared to be taking matters into their own hands, so as to please the US, and Crosthwait had to therefore increase its diplomatic efforts with the Revolutionary Council.

Unfortunately for Britain, members of the Revolutionary Council were actively avoiding Crosthwait. Karume would not meet the British High Commissioner if Babu was not present and Salim Rashid, former Secretary of Babu’s UMMA Party and convinced communist, would always attend Karume’s meetings.⁶¹ This put in jeopardy efforts to influence decision-making in the Council and was also a reflection of the Council’s deep distrust of the British. There were rumors about Britain’s imminent invasion and some, like Okello, feared they were planning to bring the Sultan back,⁶² something that in fact Britain never

⁵⁷ Wilson, US Foreign Policy and Revolution, 11.

⁵⁸ Wilson, US Foreign Policy and Revolution, 11.

⁵⁹ Ibid.,21.

⁶⁰ Note on a meeting on Zanzibar held at Mr. Sandy’s Residence with the American Ambassador, ‘Cypher’, 01/02/64, NA DO 213/130, p 20.

⁶¹ Crosthwait to CRO, ‘Cypher No.186’, 26/01/64, NA DO 213/130, 5.

⁶² Okello, Revolution in Zanzibar,165.

contemplated.⁶³

This distrust finally materialized when, after days of expecting a recognition that was not forthcoming, Karume notified Crosthwait that he would be expelled from the islands. A concerted diplomatic effort by both the British and Americans attempted to stop the expulsion, by appealing first to Karume and then to Nyerere.⁶⁴ Despite this, on 20 February, Karume made it clear that his decision would not be reversed and he was under pressure from his 'people' to ask for the departure of the Foreign Office.⁶⁵ The Foreign Office disagreed that pressure came from his 'people,' but rather from communist elements, like Assistant Minister Moyo or Babu.⁶⁶ This further reinforced the idea amongst the British of a communist 'infiltration' in the Cabinet, intentionally acting against British interests. Crosthwait was expelled on 20 February, effectively leaving Britain without diplomatic representation in Zanzibar.⁶⁷

One of the long-term aims of British leaders was to maintain close ties with governments in what they considered to be their sphere of influence, and they saw Crosthwait's expulsion as an indication that they would need to change their tactics if they wanted to maintain their influence. Britain thus decided to recognize Zanzibar's independence two days after the expulsion, for recognition provided more opportunities to pursue open-door diplomacy to try to influence the Revolutionary Council. The British sought mainly to warn Karume of the growing communist presence on the islands. Crosthwait's return on 5 March and Sandys' goodwill trip to East Africa provided an opportunity for this. The Minister of the CRO visited Zanzibar on 11 March, and met with Karume, Babu, Twala and Hanga. This meeting was described as 'polite but restricted...to courtesies' and in the private talk with Karume, neither Sandys nor Crosthwait were able to deliver their warning message about the perceived communist threat.⁶⁸ Britain, despite having granted recognition, failed to establish closer ties with the government. As British influence waned, that of the Eastern Bloc and other communist states' grew.

The Soviet Russia, the People's Republic of China, Cuba, North

⁶³ J.K. Watkins (Secretary of Chiefs of Staff Committee) to CRO and Chief of Defense Staff, 'Report', 19/02/64, NA DO 213/130, 26.

⁶⁴ Petterson, *Cold War Tale*, 144.

⁶⁵ Embassy to FO, 'Cypher No.735', 20/02/64, NA PREM 11/5208, 165.

⁶⁶ Millard (FO) to Killick (Washington Embassy), 'Cypher', 02/04/64, NA FO 371/176601, 64.

⁶⁷ Petterson, *Cold War Tale*, 144.

⁶⁸ Notes on G.E.Millard, 'Zanzibar', 11/03/64, NA FO 371/176601, 26.

Korea, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia all recognized the government of Zanzibar by 19 January.⁶⁹ They sent financial aid, advisers, and technicians to the islands. Fifty Soviet advisers and technicians, together with 20 Chinese, and some East Germans helped the government with telecommunications.⁷⁰ They also were involved with the army, as Soviets trained security forces at Mijimbani.⁷¹ The Chinese gave £185,000 in aid just days after the revolution, and would announce in June a £16m loan agreement.⁷² The USSR agreed to buy 500 tons of cloves, Zanzibar's main export.⁷³ Communist states were extending their support in concrete deeds, courting Karume's support to the detriment of the British.

The British Cabinet was worried about the situation in Zanzibar, which they nonetheless did not regard as crucial. On the 17th, a meeting of the Overseas Policy Committee, which included Douglas-Home, discussed the risk that Zanzibar would become a communist-dominated state, from which subversion of the mainland countries of East Africa would be organised. The Cabinet members also stressed that 'Zanzibar was receiving considerable help in money, arms and men from Communist countries, particularly the USSR and East Germany.' However, the meeting also emphasized that since "there were no substantial British interests in Zanzibar itself, we should have no standing to intervene unless we were invited to do so by Karume."⁷⁴ This argument was in line with the CRO's, and it was therefore imperative to continue to approach Karume and others to obtain a request for intervention. Despite this, the Cabinet had other foreign policy priorities, as emphasized by the fact that in the 19 meetings that took place between the revolution and the union, Zanzibar was mentioned 7 times, while other countries, like Cyprus, were mentioned 11 times.⁷⁵ While the Cabinet took Zanzibar seriously, there were other more

⁶⁹ Crosthwait to CRO, 'Cypher No.45', 19/01/64, NA PREM 11/5207, 36.

⁷⁰ BHC Dar es Salaam to CRO, 'Tanganyika/Zanzibar union', 24/04/64, NA WO 276/370, 66.

⁷¹ BHC Dar es Salaam, 'ibid', 24/04/64, Np 66.

⁷² CRO Report, 'Tanzania' The Tanzanian Imbroglio: Some thoughts on British Policy', 19/03/65, NA LAB 13/1968, 77.

⁷³ Memorandum from Hawker to CRO, 'Cypher', 26/02/64, NA DO 185/59, 61.

⁷⁴ Meeting minutes of the Overseas Policy Committee, '17th Meeting', 08/04/64, NA CAB 148/1, 45.

⁷⁵ Cabinet papers and Overseas Policy Committee, analysis from January 12th to April 29th, NA CAB 148/1.

pressing foreign policy challenges.

The Cabinet's reluctance somewhat changed when the Americans demanded more assertive measures by the British. On March 30th, President Johnson of the USA wrote a private telegram to Douglas-Home, warning him that "...if we do not take strong action, we are going to be faced with a center of communist infection off the East Coast of Africa which will give us endless trouble, expense and danger."⁷⁶ Exactly what 'strong action' meant was not specified, but from mid March to May, military plans proliferated. These were extremely detailed and included the exact forces and bases that would be used and at least two operations, BORIS and Finnelly, were drafted before the union.⁷⁷ The Middle East Command was not concerned with executing the plan: "intervention in Zanzibar presents no problems, providing the operation can be mounted from Kenya."⁷⁸ These suggest that contrary to what historian Ian Speller argues, the British were willing to intervene militarily in Zanzibar.⁷⁹ Britain considered very carefully intervention in operation BORIS, especially as US pressure mounted in March and April because they required Kenyan bases. Nevertheless, the British decided against intervention due to the lack of East African political backing.

Kenyan support was notably lacking. After the mutinies, Kenyatta was wary and distrustful of British troops in East Africa. In a note written by Kenyatta himself to de Freitas, he expressed that authorization to move troops in and out of the country would never be granted to the movement of troops to be used in Zanzibar.⁸⁰ Hereby, it was clear to Britain that Kenya would never agree to the use of bases on its soil to mount an operation in Zanzibar, and only then was the operation aborted and replaced by Finnelly, as it did not require Kenyan bases.

While military plans were drafted, Britain also prepared a 'soft power' approach in the form of financial aid. The amount of aid worked out in the CRO amounted to £1.395m, which the Sultan had agreed to just days before being overthrown. Britain hoped this sum would strengthen the late recognition announcement, would prevent the government from seeking money from communist countries and would

⁷⁶ President Johnson to Douglas-Home, 'Cypher No.4488', 30/03/64, NA CAB 21/5524, 65.

⁷⁷ MoD papers, 'Plans for Zanzibar', 20/05/64, NA DO 213/130, 120.

⁷⁸ CINC MidEast to MoD, 'MIDCOS 93', 18/03/64, NA DO 213/130, 68.

⁷⁹ Ian Speller, 'An African Cuba? Britain and the Zanzibar Revolution, 1964', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol 35, No. 2, (2007), 3.

⁸⁰ De Freitas to CRO, 'Revolution and Mutiny in East Africa narrative Account', no date, NA DO 185/59, 14.

bolster the position of moderates.⁸¹ In a document from the East African Economic Department, the British author argued that the provision of financial aid would show Americans that they were doing what “they could” to bolster Karume.⁸²

However, Zanzibar was much less interested in this aid than expected, to Britain’s dismay. The Revolutionary Council had not inquired about the aid promised to the previous government, and in Crosthwait and Sandy’s meetings, neither Babu, Karume or the finance minister mentioned this issue.⁸³ To completely disregard such a substantial amount of money was noteworthy, suggesting the Zanzibari government had in fact no desire for British money. It preferred to accept Eastern Bloc aid, in an attempt to cut ties with the former colonial master, as Babu would claim in later years, or to please its new communist benefactors, who had promised further aid.⁸⁴ Even financial aid failed to put the British in a position to influence the new government of Zanzibar.

Britain attempted to influence Karume’s government through diplomatic means while secretly devising military plans for an invasion. These however did not yield results and Zanzibar increasingly turned to the East for assistance and guidance. The Americans demanded more assertive measures and by April 1964, the CRO’s only strategy was to increase its diplomatic efforts.

THE UNION AND BRITISH FAILURE

At the end of April, Zanzibar and Tanganyika agreed to unite and create the Republic of Tanzania. A popular understanding in the historiography of the Republic of Tanzania and British decolonization is that Britain played a primary role in the formation of the union. This perspective does not take into account that it was primarily the actions of the East African countries and internal political concerns that drove Nyerere and Karume to agree to the union.

Tanganyika announced the surprise merger on 23 April, at a time when Britain had run out of ideas and military intervention seemed increasingly attractive. That it was sudden is not to say that it was completely unexpected, however, as Nyerere had expressed his

⁸¹ Brief from the Secretary of State, ‘Zanzibar: Financial Settlement’, 27/02/64, NA DO 185/56, 22.

⁸² Secretary of State, *Ibid.*, 27/02/64, 22.

⁸³ Crosthwait to East Africa Economic Dpt, ‘Cypher’, 18/03/64, NA Do 185/56, 31.

⁸⁴ Wilson, *US Foreign Policy and Revolution*, 4.

willingness to create an East African Federation a month before in a summit with Kenya and Uganda.⁸⁵ Despite this, the leaders could not agree on the terms of a merger and the possibility of an East African Federation was dropped then. It seems that the idea began six weeks before the announcement,⁸⁶ and on 22 April, Nyerere flew to Zanzibar for the first time since the revolution, presumably to have the final articles of the union signed by Karume.⁸⁷ The next day, the union was announced and within four days both the Tanganyikan Parliament and the Revolutionary Council had ratified the articles.

The union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar caught the British by surprise, although they quickly recognized its advantages. In a telegram from the East Africa Department to the MoD just nine days before the announcement, the author declares that “there is no real prospect of a Federal solution,” demonstrating Britain’s lack of awareness of the situation.⁸⁸ Despite this, the move delighted the British, who saw the union as a way to neutralize communist elements in Zanzibar. The British Cabinet had in fact identified a merger between the two countries as a possible solution to the growing communist influence in Zanzibar as early as 10 February.⁸⁹ The idea had been taken to Nyerere, who had rejected it. For this reason, London wanted further information on how the unexpected union had come about. A telegram from the BHC in Dar es Salaam to the CRO portrays the union as the result of a hardening in Tanganyika’s attitude to the regime in Zanzibar and the threat to withdraw the police, in an attempt to show Karume “the precariousness of his position.”⁹⁰

The BHC’s analysis portrays what would become the orthodox view within the historiographical debate, describing the union as the product of Bloc interference in a Cold War theatre. There are two different arguments within this dominant strand: one contends that Western countries directly lobbied Tanganyika to bring about the union;⁹¹ the other contends that Bloc interference caused the union by making Nyerere fearful that Zanzibar would become the site of an East-West confrontation. Historian Helen-Louise Hunter argues that

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁸⁶ Brief from the Secretary of State, ‘Zanzibar: Financial Settlement’, 27/02/64, NA DO 185/56, 22.

⁸⁷ Smith, Nyerere of Tanzania, 126.

⁸⁸ Report by J.K.Hickman, ‘Political Action Following Intervention in Zanzibar’, 14/04/64, NA DO 213/130, 143.

⁸⁹ De Freitas to CRO, ‘Cypher No.327’, NA CAB 21/5524, 27.

⁹⁰ Crosthwait to CRO, ‘Cypher’, 24/04/64, NA LAB 13/1968, p 16.

⁹¹ Legum and Mmari. Mwalimu, 173.

Nyerere genuinely worried that Karume would be easily manipulated by communist countries and would eventually lose control, threatening Zanzibar's non-alignment.⁹² Nyerere said in private to Leonhart, the American *Charge d'affaires* in Tanganyika, that 'the Chinese' threat is not only of subversion but they could make a success for Zanzibar. Then what happens to what I stand for in Tanganyika?'⁹³ This suggests that Nyerere worried that communist countries could either manipulate Zanzibar or make the Zanzibari experiment work, thus threatening Tanganyika's economic and political model. On the other hand, Nyerere also had political reasons for supporting the union: it enhanced his prestige as a materialization of pan-Africanism.⁹⁴ The Union would serve as a way to ensure Zanzibar did not become 'a second Vietnam,'⁹⁵ and also provide a great popularity boost at a time when Nyerere's leadership was being questioned.⁹⁶

Others present at the events, such as Al Noor Kassum, emphasize historical, cultural and ideological ties between the two republics as the overarching driver behind the union. While it cannot be denied that such links between Zanzibar and the mainland existed, their role as the main drivers is seriously contestable. As Hunter has shown, the union was not popular in Zanzibar and both the ASP Youth League and the leaders of the newly created Trade Union opposed the move.⁹⁷ Furthermore, the majority of the members of the Revolutionary Council were opposed to the idea; it was only ratified because the union was never discussed with the full council.⁹⁸ Babu himself was in Asia, making it even more probable that the decision was made when Karume's political rivals were unavailable.⁹⁹ While cultural and historical ties certainly existed between the two republics, they were not the main driving factors behind the union, but rather a justification.

A more post-revisionist view, put forward by Shivji, describes the union as a political deal between the two leaders. Shivji argues that the union was the means for Karume to achieve political survival in the face of strong domestic opposition.¹⁰⁰ Before the revolution, the ASP

⁹² Hunter, *The Hundred Days Revolution*, 96.

⁹³ Petterson, *Cold War Tale*, 155.

⁹⁴ Hunter, *The Hundred Days Revolution*, 96.

⁹⁵ Smith, *Nyerere of Tanzania*, 128.

⁹⁶ Hunter, *The Hundred Days Revolution*, p. 96; Smith, *Nyerere of Tanzania*,

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

⁹⁸ Shivji, *Pan-Africanism or Pragmatism?*, 90.

⁹⁹ Hunter, *The Hundred Days Revolution*, 67.

¹⁰⁰ Shivji, *Pan-Africanism or Pragmatism*, 98.

had split in two factions, one supporting Karume and the other supporting Othman Sharif, and tension remained between the two, making Karume's position less secure.¹⁰¹ Babu was perhaps an even bigger threat. First of all, he was the main point of contact for some of Zanzibar's major donors and it was known that the PRC was especially keen on upholding Babu's position, as the regular cash extensions to him showed.¹⁰² Furthermore, Babu was a close associate of Ali Mafudh, who controlled the security force and, after Okello's departure, the People's Liberation Army.¹⁰³ The only loyal force able to counterbalance Babu was Tanganyika's 300 policemen; however, it seems that in early April, Nyerere, in private, pressured Karume to choose Tanganyika policemen.¹⁰⁴ The merger was likely agreed to by Karume to secure his own political position – which is supported by the fact that both Babu and Hanga were transferred to the mainland to the new Tanzanian Cabinet between having a union or having him remove the with much less influential positions.¹⁰⁵

It has been established that the main reasons for the union were political: a mix of Karume securing his political power and Nyerere trying to avoid Zanzibar drifting farther into the hands of the East. The role of Britain, then, was very minor in bringing about the union, which was actually mainly African in origin.¹⁰⁶ The superpowers and the PRC played a bigger, yet indirect role, through their greater involvement in Zanzibari politics, which drove Nyerere to see the union as important for reducing their influence. Britain's biggest contribution to the union is perhaps harming Nyerere's prestige when quelling the army mutiny, thus making the president more inclined to make a drastic decision to bring the situation in Zanzibar under control.

Britain therefore failed for the most part to advance their aims when trying to influence Zanzibar policy between the revolution and the union. Britain's biggest threats, including Hanga and Babu, were removed from the political scene by Karume and Nyerere and not by Crosthwait and Sandy's diplomacy or the MoD's military plans. The current historiography barely deals with Britain's efforts to influence events in Zanzibar, much less why these failed. One of the more specific studies, from Ian Speller, argues that Britain failed because

¹⁰¹ Petterson, *Cold War Tale*, 154.

¹⁰² Wilson, *US Foreign Policy and Revolution*, 54.

¹⁰³ By Stockwell (Commander Air Force East Africa), 'Minutes Commander's Committee East Africa', 25/04/64, NA DO 185/51.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, *Nyerere of Tanzania*, 129.

¹⁰⁵ Shivji, *Pan-Africanism or Pragmatism*, 83.

¹⁰⁶ Hunter, *The Hundred Days Revolution*, 100.

their actions were constrained by Cold War thinking.¹⁰⁷ This is a one-sided and simplistic view of events in early 1964 because while Britain acted, East Africa also did so to greater effect. Rather than Britain failing because it was constrained, they failed because East African politicians chose to ignore British diplomatic pressures. According to Speller, Britain did not proceed with its military plans because serious disorder was simply absent and it was difficult to gain international approval for unilateral action.¹⁰⁸ But only one of the operations devised by the Middle East Command had as its main aim the rescue of British citizens. Most of them were designed to remove either Okello or the Liberation Army and take over key targets like the airport while Karume purged the Revolutionary Council of communist elements.¹⁰⁹ These operations were not aimed at situations of 'serious disorder' but rather at the situation as it was then, and therefore this cannot be the reason why Britain did not intervene.

Rather than lack of international approval inhibiting military action, it was lack of East African cooperation that prevented it. All of the military plans developed prior to the union required bases in Kenya, and Kenyatta had explicitly forbidden Britain from moving troops to Zanzibar.¹¹⁰ Speller is right to suggest that Britain had concerns about the international reaction to an invasion, as evidenced by CRO documents that discuss the possibility of African governments taking the matter to the UN.¹¹¹ However, if Britain's concerns for the UN had been so great, the War Office would not have drafted four different plans for invasion, including, after the union, one which excluded Kenyan bases. Kenyan permission was crucial because Eastern Bloc countries, and especially the PRC, were gaining strength and Britain regarded as their national interest, namely to preserve British presence in East Africa. Consequently, it was East African opposition rather than international constraints that prevented Britain from pursuing its military plans.

Diplomatic efforts also failed to yield results. Two related factors inhibited Britain's diplomatic influence in Zanzibar: East Africa's mistrust of Britain and Britain's inability to understand the politics of their former colonies. Having been excluded from political power under the British, many of the first wave of black African leaders

¹⁰⁷ Speller, 'An African Cuba?', 27.

¹⁰⁸ Speller, 'An African Cuba?', 27.

¹⁰⁹ NA WO 276/370 and NA WO 276/372.

¹¹⁰ MoD papers, 'Plans for Zanzibar', 20/05/64, NA DO 213/130, 120.

¹¹¹ Report by J.K.Hickman, 'Political Action Following Intervention in Zanzibar', 14/04/64, NA DO 213/130, 143.

wanted to demonstrate to the world that they were capable of governing their own states. Zanzibar's diplomatic recognition of East Germany, the first country outside the Eastern Bloc to do so, was an example of such a desire to exercise sovereignty on the international stage.¹¹²

Mistrust also stemmed from the way Britain had handled decolonization. The ASP believed they had lost the elections because of the electoral laws arranged by Britain upon leaving. Furthermore, Britain had at first opposed several political parties that eventually came to power, including KANU and TANU, which by 1964, had not been completely forgotten.¹¹³ Kenya reacted negatively to the arrival of a British ship in Zanzibari waters, a move, the leaders felt, that was 'entirely an internal matter in a sovereign state.'¹¹⁴ It is unsurprising therefore that attempts to warn East African leaders of the dangers of a communist subversion were met with hostility. When Sandys wrote to Nyerere about moving Tanganyikan police troops back to the mainland after the mutiny, he replied that 'outside intervention in the affairs of Zanzibar would be unfortunate' and 'embarrassing as this may be for Britain, there is more hope of Zanzibar fitting into the total African development now than there was when it had a minority government.'¹¹⁵

Further, Britain's lack of understanding of the new political realities in East Africa meant that their ploy to convince Karume into requesting outside help, and convincing neighboring countries to pressure Karume on this matter, meant failure from the start. In his memoirs, Petterson calls Sandys arrogant, and claims that 'continuing to believe it possible to get Karume to ask for British military intervention indicates he was badly misreading the Zanzibari leader.'¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, the British on the ground were not completely oblivious to this mistrust. In a personal letter to Sandys, Crosthwait explains that there would be no chance whatsoever of Karume requesting British intervention, as he has violent resentment of any act which can constitute interference by the 'White Man.'¹¹⁷ This letter dates back to January 24th, making it surprising that the CRO formally adopted that very tactic. Such a discrepancy suggests that the differences between the British High Commissioner and the CRO hindered Britain's diplomatic effectiveness.

In late April, a somewhat unexpected union created Tanzania,

¹¹² Mathews, *Foreign Policy of Tanzania*, 27.

¹¹³ Butler, *Britain and Empire*, 158-159.

¹¹⁴ Kenyan government press handout, no title, 13/01/64, NA DO 185/59, 5.

¹¹⁵ Nyerere to Sandys, 'Cypher', 06/02/64, NA DO 213.130, 21.

¹¹⁶ Petterson, *Cold War Tale*, 185.

¹¹⁷ Crosthwait to Sandys, 'Cypher No. 65', 24/01/64, NA DO 213/130, p 5.

bringing hope to the British that communism would at last be contained. This moment also highlighted Britain's failure to change the course of events in a region that was to become even more hostile to them.

CONCLUSION

This essay has sought to contribute to the still young historiographical debate on British policy in Zanzibar. Britain, as the former imperial power, was involved in the islands from the revolution until the union with Tanganyika. They sought first of all to protect British lives and property in the wave of violence that followed the revolution, in a moment of total confusion, and their inaction led to the consolidation of the revolution.

After this initial period, the British realized the dangers of a buildup of communism and sought to reverse it. The tactics used included planning a military intervention, with operations like Parthenon, BORIS and Finnelly, and overt and covert diplomacy to try to convince Karume to request British intervention. Since Karume seemed unresponsive to these diplomatic efforts, and as pressure from the US to act mounted, the CRO sought to persuade East African governments to impress the danger of his situation on the Zanzibari president. This was done in the hope that Karume would be compelled to request British help, like Tanganyika, Uganda and Kenya had done during the army mutinies of January.

These plans failed and by the time the union was announced, British influence on the islands had waned dramatically. While their short-term aim, namely the protection of British lives and property, had been achieved, most British citizens were either evacuated or expelled by July 1964, reducing British presence on the islands and its diplomatic weight.¹¹⁸

Britain's long-term aims were achieved in an even smaller measure, for the influence of communism grew and British presence on Zanzibar hit its lowest point.¹¹⁹ While communism did not spread to the mainland, these states became even more hostile to Britain; Tanzania in fact officially broke diplomatic relations in 1965.¹²⁰ The

¹¹⁸ Speller, 'An African Cuba?', 7-28.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

¹²⁰ Ministry of Info and Tourism, 'Tanzania Today', pamphlet, (Dar es Salaam, 1968), 87.

influence of the Eastern Bloc and the PRC became prevalent and even the USA was forced to dismantle Mercury station and decrease the size of its diplomatic mission.¹²¹

Very little historiography exists on the aims behind British policy and the reasons for the failure of the policy to achieve their goals. Four interlinked factors explain this end result. First, there was unwillingness to intervene unilaterally in Zanzibar because it was seen as politically costly. While Britain certainly had the military capacity to do so, the ramifications could have been multiple and could have touched the Commonwealth itself – it was concluded that ‘it would give a splendid weapon to those who dispute our motives in the ex-imperial world at large.’¹²²

Since unilateral military intervention was not a possibility, Britain sought endorsement from East African states and Karume himself, leading to the second factor: East African political elites’ mistrust of the British. These were deeply rooted in the recent past and as these states became independent, they sought to fundamentally redefine their foreign policies away from the former imperial power. Because of this, East African states were not likely to endorse intervention in the affairs of Zanzibar, and never did.

Unfortunately, Britain did not fully appreciate this, which leads to the third factor: British lack of understanding of the complexities of the new political landscape in East Africa. Had they been aware of the political situation, there perhaps they would have devised a more realistic policy that was not based on the mistaken assumption that Karume would ever request British assistance.

While it is a secondary factor, it must be remarked that Zanzibar was not the biggest foreign policy concern of the Douglas-Home administration, who viewed other issues like Cyprus as more pressing. Furthermore, perceptions were different among those officials back in London and those on the ground. While the CRO was concerned with Okello and wanted an intervention request by Karume, the High Commission in Zanzibar regarded Babu as the biggest threat and was more aware of Karume’s anti-imperialism.

The Zanzibar revolution marked a situation without precedent for the British in the aftermath of African decolonization. The study of it is important to understanding the possibilities and limitations Britain faced when dealing with states in a region traditionally considered within

¹²¹ Wilson, *US Foreign Policy and Revolution*, 59.

¹²² J.T. Manfield in the MoD, ‘Report on pros and cons of British Military Intervention’, 03/02/64, NA CAB 21/5524, 14.

its sphere of influence. The 1960s and 70s would present similar dilemmas when formulating policy towards Africa, and Zanzibar's study sheds light on the difficult interaction between Britain and the new political elites in their former colonies.