Routes to Independence in Africa
Jim Jones, 2010

Four Examples

This Web page contains a brief overview of the different paths to independence in Africa, plus detailed information about four case studies: Algeria, Egypt, Gold Coast, and the Congo.

OVERVIEW

The first colonies to become independent were located in North Africa. They included Libya in 1949 (granted by the UN), Egypt (and Sudan) in 1952, Morocco and Tunisia in 1956, and Algeria in 1962. Only Algeria had a substantial European settler population, and only there did independence require a war.

In West Africa, the independence of AOF and AEF provided examples of one of the basic problems facing African independence leaders: what size should the independent African state be? Should it be based on ethnic boundaries, geographic boundaries, colonial boundaries, territorial boundaries or a new relationship within the existing empire?

The countries in East Africa fall into two categories: those that were British colonies and all of the rest. The British colonies form a coherent group because there were many plans to combine them into an East African Federation at independence.

Independence in southern Africa was substantially different from that of other regions thanks to the presence of large white settler populations in Southern Rhodesia and South Africa, and the presence of enormous mineral wealth in the Katanga region of the Belgian Congo. Of all the areas in Africa that were under European rule, this was the area that Europeans wanted least to give up. Consequently, independence struggles were long, drawn-out affairs.

Example 1: Algeria, a settler colony
In the constitution of the 1946 Fourth Republic, Algeria was considered to be a *département* of France, with the same legal status as the Vaucluse or Upper Alsace, and not just a colony. Roughly one million people of French ancestry lived in Algeria, among a population of about ten million Arabs, Berbers, M'zabs, Khabylie, etc. The two groups were divided by land ownership, religion, legal system and language.

Because France had envisioned Algeria as a permanent part of the French nation, they invested much more in education and infrastructure, and there was a higher percentage of westernized Algerian elites than in sub-Saharan French Africa. They embraced a range of opinions towards independence, with the majority favoring a peaceful route to independence.

In February 1943 (a year before the Brazzaville conference), a pharmacist from Sétif named Ferhat Abbas drafted a "Manifesto," signed by 55 other Moslem politicians, that called for an end to colonial rule. After French military rule was established under Generals De Gaulle and Catroux on 1 June 1943, the French authorities rejected anything other than "French Algeria." On 14 March 1944, Ferhat Abbas formed the "Friends of the Manifesto and of Liberty" with support by Messali Hadj and the Muslim *Ulema*. In September, they founded an opposition newspaper, "Égalité," and campaigned openly for an end to colonialism, the creation of a federation of independent Algeria and France, and the end to special privileges held by white settlers.

On 8 May 1945, during the French celebration of VE day in Sétif, an Algerian procession carried nationalist flags. French police tried to stop them, then opened fire, and a riot broke out. According to official figures, 22 died and 48 were wounded. The news spread to other towns and during the next several days, the death totals ranged from 1500 (official) to 15,000 (nationalist).

After this, political opponents of the French became increasingly radical, and began to prepare a revolution. The insurrection began in 1954 in the Ouarsenis Mountains southeast of Algiers, but quickly spread to
urban centers. They used terrorist attacks against French civilians and moderate Algerians.

Representatives of various rebel groups met at Soummam to form the National Council of the Algerian Revolution (CNRA) on 20 August 1956. The Soummam Congress took the existing paper organization (soldiers, partisans, guerillas, supporters, sympathizers) and created military ranks, six administrative districts (wilayas) and divided participants into three categories, mujahidin (combatants), musabilin (partisans), or fidayin (terrorists).

The Soummam Congress also established a military command structure for the Army of National Liberation (ALN). The ALN was intended to coordinate the revolutionary activities of numerous small, armed bands that developed during the previous two years. The ALN was controlled by the military department of the Executive Coordinating Committee of the CNRA.

The French government responded to the revolt with force and destroyed the main urban cells of the ALN by 1958. However, Morocco and Tunisia became independent in the interim, and they became safe havens and conduits for supplies to ALN forces in the rural areas. Algerians-in-exile created a provisional government in Tunis in September 1958, called the Front pour la Libération Nationale (FLN).

In 1958, public opinion in France became so divided over Algeria that there was an attempt by army generals to overthrow the government. Instead, Charles De Gaulle agreed to take charge and called for a new constitution. The result was the Fifth Republic which, among other things, redefined the relationship between France and the African colonies.

A power struggle ensued between the ALN (inside Algeria) and the FLN (outside Algeria, based in Tunis and Oujda). The constitution of the FLN created a ministry to supervise military activity. At the December 1959 CNRA Congress in Tripoli, the external military command (based in Ghardimaou, Tunisia and Oujda, Morocco) was combined under a single general staff headed by Houari Boumedienne, the Algerian military commander in Tunisia. In January 1960, the military command
was placed under an Interministerial War Committee that included Belqasim Karim, plus Abdelhafid Boussouf and Lakhdar Bentobbal.

Although the Soummam Congress affirmed the primacy of the interior and the military over the exterior and the political, the fortunes of war made that unrealistic. As the French countermeasures grew effective by 1958, effective control of the revolution passed to the exterior forces, where the general staff concentrated on building a conventional army for the invasion of Algeria. Inside the country, there was a tendency for authority to fragment.

By the end of the war, there were roughly 35,000 soldiers in the exterior army (25,000 in Tunisia and 10,000 in Morocco), 15,000 *mujahidin* in Algeria and between 50,000-100,000 *musabilin* and *fidayin* inside Algeria, out of a total population of about 11 million. The FLN military officers became the rulers of independent Algeria in 1962.

**Example 2: Egypt, a modernized colony**

Words: ulema, Faruk, Wafd, Nahas Pasha, Mohammed Naguib, Gamal Abdel Nasser, United Arab Republic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1942 (Oct)</td>
<td>After the Prime Minister Aly Maher tried to maintain Egyptian neutrality, the British forced King Faruk to call new elections, which were won by the WAFD party. Nahas Pasha became the Prime Minister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944 (Oct)</td>
<td>The British withdrew support from the Nahas Pasha government. New elections showed the political splits within Egyptian society between military officers, the Ulema, and the nationalists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Egypt joined the Arab League with British support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947 (March)</td>
<td>Anti-British riots in Cairo because Britain was still unwilling to withdraw from Egyptian soil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>First Arab-Israeli War increased opposition to British and to Faruk government, which depended on British support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Faruk called new elections. WAFD got 2/3 of vote.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Faruk ignored UN Resolution concerning Israeli right to navigate in Suez Canal. Egyptian Parliament ordered the British to withdraw from the Canal Zone, and ended treaties governing the Sudan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952 (Jan 25)</td>
<td>&quot;Black Saturday&quot; in Egypt, riots, Cairo burns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1952 (June)       | First revolution by military officers leads to Naguib government. Describe the "class of
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1937*</td>
<td>Including Nasser, Mubarak, Sadat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952-4</td>
<td>Land Reform Act limits ownership to 208 acres. Monarchy abolished. Sudan became independent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954 (Feb)</td>
<td>Conflict between Naguib and younger officers led by Nasser. Nasser outmaneuvered Naguib by announcing the &quot;end of the revolution&quot; and Egyptian workers went on strike.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954 (Oct)</td>
<td>Nasser got the British to agree to withdraw from Suez by June 1956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954 (Nov)</td>
<td>Nasser has Naguib arrested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956 (July)</td>
<td>Suez crisis after Egypt recognizes Communist China receives envoy from Russia, and US halts funding for the Aswan High Dam. Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal. UN forbade Anglo-French invasion, so they tried to get Israel to do it for them. Result: UN peacekeeping force in the Sinai.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Nasser forms United Arab Republic with Yemen and Syria.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Egyptian military officers who attended the military academy at Abbasieh, Egypt, in 1938 became co-conspirators at independence. One of them, Gamal Abdul Nasser, was posted to Khartoum in the Sudan in 1939-1942. At the time, Egyptian nationalists considered the Sudan to be a part of "Greater Egypt" while most collaborating Egyptians viewed the Sudan as a desolate place where one was transferred as punishment (the prime posts were located in Alexandria and Cairo).

Between 1940 and 1943, Egypt became a WWII battlefield. The Egyptian Prime Minister, Aly Maher, tried to keep Egypt neutral, but British occupation of the Suez Canal and other strategic points made that impossible.

In February 1942, the British government forced King Faruk (a nephew of Tewfik) to accept a new prime minister and government, known as the **Wafd**, under Nahas Pasha. As a result, King Faruk lost considerable prestige among the Egyptian people, and he offered only weak opposition to Egyptian nationalists once the war was over.

On 8 October 1944, the Nahas Pasha government (Wafd) fell after the British government withdrew its support. King Faruk recalled Aly Maher to form a new government. Faruk ultimately depended on the British to support his throne, but he tried to reduce internal unrest by making shifting alliances with the three factions in Egyptian internal politics: the Muslem **ulema**, nationalist political parties, and army officers in Egypt.
On 22 March 1945, only two weeks after WWII ended in Europe, Egypt joined the Arab League to foster pan-Arab ties and end European colonial domination. The Arab League had British support, at least at first, because it represented a movement towards independence by "known quantities" that was preferable (to the British) to the unknown quantities of Marxism and Muslim fundamentalism.

Violence: Riots broke out in Cairo in March 1947 and the British decided to withdraw all of their troops from the main cities, leaving garrisons only in the Canal Zone. Then the 1948 withdrawal of the British from Palestine ignited the first Arab-Israeli War, leading King Faruk to declare martial law and polarizing Egyptian politics into pro-British and anti-British positions. The Arab defeat increased resentment within the Egyptian military and the fundamentalist clergy. The continuation of martial law increased resentment against Faruk's government.

Consequences of increasing unrest in Egypt: Facing mounting pressure from his opponents, Faruk ignored a 1951 UN Resolution that required Egypt to open the Suez Canal to Israeli vessels as part of the freedom of the seas. (Later, Nasser ignored the UN Resolution in 1954.) Even earlier, in 1950, Faruk accepted the need for an election to bolster support for his rule. The Wafd received more than 2/3 of the votes, but still faced enormous opposition from within and from outside the government, particularly from a group known as the Muslim Brotherhood. In an attempt to increase its popularity, the Parliament repealed the treaties binding the Sudan to Egypt in 1951, and tried to order the British to withdraw from the Canal Zone. Violent riots and sabotage against the British followed.

The first Egyptian Revolution: On January 25, 1952, a day which became known as Black Saturday to Egyptians, British forces disarmed an Egyptian police battalion at Ismailia (Suez), and riots broke out in Egypt's major cities, leading to a major fire in Cairo on the following day. Faruk reorganized the government five times in the next six months, but was unable to satisfy his opponents.

Finally, on July 22, 1952, a group of military officers calling themselves the "Free Officers" overthrew the Faruk monarchy. They selected an older officer, General Mohammed Naguib (alternate spelling = Neguib),
as both president and prime minister of the new government in September 1952.

The Naguib government ruled Egypt for slightly more than two years. In September 1952, they passed a Land Reform Act that limited land holdings to 208 acres (but allowed a landowners to give up to 100 acres to each of two children, and compensated the landowners with government bonds for the loss of any other land. They abolished the Egyptian monarchy in June 1953. The British government accepted the change in government and even tried to strengthen Naguib's position by signing an agreement in 1953 that opened the way for the independence of the Sudan.

However, the continued British presence in Egypt was unacceptable to Egyptian nationalists and to many military officers. In February 1954, Naguib resigned to protest the influence wielded by his deputy prime minister, Nasser. This move split the army, and Nasser backed down, so Naguib resumed his offices. But a month later, with elections already scheduled for June 1954, Nasser announced that the revolutionary council of officers would disband after the election, and would present no candidates of its own. In other words, Nasser announced that the revolution was over and that Egyptians would have to follow Naguib's lead in choosing a new government from among the political factions--Muslim fundamentalists, Marxists, and old landowners.

The Egyptian reaction to the "end of the revolution" was negative. Transport workers went on strike, the navy threatened to mutiny, and the nationalist press condemned the "sell-out" of the revolution. The Revolutionary Council issued a statement that it would heed the will of the Egyptian people and remain intact. Anyone who had supported the disbanding of the revolutionary council was arrested and deprived of the right to engage in further political activity.

Meanwhile, Nasser reached an agreement with the British on October 19, 1954, wherein the British pledged to remove all of their forces from Egyptian soil within 20 months (by June 1956) and accepted a period of seven years during which they could return if they felt that their interests were threatened. By November 14, 1954, Nasser and the other
members of the Revolutionary Council felt strong enough to remove Naguib and place him under house arrest.

Independent Egypt under Nasser: One of Prime Minister Nasser's first foreign policy moves was to sign an agreement with Czechoslovakia in 1955, exchanging Egyptian cotton for arms. Meanwhile, Nasser sought Western funding for the Aswan High Dam, which would provide water for an increase in the amount of arable land for Egypt's growing population.

The 1956 Suez Crisis began when the USA voted to withhold funding for the Aswan Dam on 15 July 1956. Britain and the World Bank followed suit. This followed Egyptian recognition of China in May 1956, and a visit from a Russian envoy in June 1956. On 26 July 1956, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal and Franco-British stockholders protested to their governments. The British and French entered into negotiations while secretly preparing to invade the Canal Zone, but were deterred by the opposition of the USSR and USA in the UN Security Council. Instead, they backed an Israeli assault on the Canal that began on 29 October 1956 and ended with a Franco-British proposal for both sides to withdraw so that a "peace-keeping force" could occupy a 20-mile buffer strip based along the Canal. Instead, a UN peacekeeping force occupied the Zone.

Nasser continued to promote Arab independence and in 1958, Nasser formed the United Arab Republic of Egypt, Yemen and Syria. That lasted until 1961, when the Baath Revolution in Syria led to Syria's withdrawal.

**Example 3: Gold Coast, a non-settler colony**

Words: Kwame Nkrumah, Convention People's Party, Accra, Sekondi-Takoradi

The Gold Coast progressed gradually towards independence with a series of constitutional revisions that granted increasing local authority. The British claimed that this was done in recognition of the Ghanaians increasing ability to rule themselves, while Kwame Nkrumah claimed
that it was the result of increasing pressure brought to bear on the British by the Convention People's Party (CPP).

Prior to independence, the Gold Coast was divided socially between the more traditional, Muslim, agrarian Northern Territories (Tamale, Mali cattle & fish trade, kola), and the wealthier central region (Asante, Kumasi, gold) and the more industrialized coastal region (Accra, Sekondi-Takoradi, railroads). In the coastal towns of Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi, African labor unions controlled the ports and railroads of the colony.

Immediately after WWII, under the governorship of Sir Gerald Creasy (1948-1949), the British encouraged local lawyers and traditional elites to run for seats in the Gold Coast Legislative Council, an advisory body to the colonial governor.

However, the Gold Coast had changed as a result of the war, and pre-war methods of indirect rule were no longer successful. Wartime inflation had hurt the westernized sector, which was larger in the Gold Coast (thanks to mining) than elsewhere in West Africa. 30,000 Ghanaians had served with the British in Burma, fighting against the Japanese (veterans).

At the end of February 1948, the "Christianborg riots" broke out in Accra after a British policeman fired on an African veteran's protest march. Trading company stores were looted (United Africa Company & Union Trading Company), foreigners assaulted, and 29 Africans killed, with 237 wounded. Strikes and demonstrations by youth and social organizations followed.

Kwame Nkrumah (1908-1972) was the main leader. He returned to the Gold Coast in December 1947 after twelve years in the USA where he received degrees in education, sociology and theology at Lincoln University and University of Pennsylvania. While in the USA, he supported himself with odd jobs (fish market, soap factory) and got involved in a variety of political movements. He preached in an African Baptist Church in Philadelphia and led a pan-African student movement at UPenn, the African Students Association. (He must have also observed American race relations firsthand.)

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Nkrumah went to London in 1945 and attended the 6th Pan-African Congress. There, he encountered the political themes that became the basis for his program: positive action, anti-communism, anti-imperialism, non-alignment.

Nkrumah went to the Gold Coast in 1948 in response to an invitation to become the Secretary-General of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), an organization of wealthy lawyers and traders who abstained from the February 1948 riots. He left that group after it supported the British Coussey committee's recommendations for constitutional reform following the February 1948 riots, and began to seek support from the large number of poorer, but educated commoners, who were found mostly in the coastal cities.

Nkrumah formed his own party, the Convention People's Party (CPP) on June 12, 1949 in Accra, at the largest popular assembly in Ghana's history (60,000). Its plans differed from those of the UGCC mainly in the timing of independence, "shortest possible time" versus "now." The CPP denounced the constitutional reforms suggested by the Coussey Committee and urged the population to prepare for "positive action."

On January 6, 1950, the Gold Coast Trade Unions Council declared a general strike. The government arrested all of the union and CPP leaders on January 21, 1950. The strike failed and Nkrumah served a year in jail, but the CPP dominated local elections two months later. The British assisted Nkrumah to run for colonial office while he was still in prison, and in the 1951 election, the CCP won a majority and formed a legislative council under the Coussey constitution. Nkrumah won almost all the votes in Accra Central.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Estimated population</th>
<th>Eligible voters</th>
<th>Registered voters</th>
<th>Percent of eligible voters who registered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colony</td>
<td>2,153,310</td>
<td>1,095,190</td>
<td>350,525</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asanti</td>
<td>784,210</td>
<td>398,590</td>
<td>220,658</td>
<td>55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipalities</td>
<td>290,230</td>
<td>141,480</td>
<td>90,275</td>
<td>64.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,227,750</td>
<td>1,635,260</td>
<td>661,458</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Although the CPP controlled the colonial legislature, the British controlled economic affairs through the Cocoa Marketing Board, established in 1948, and the oligarchy of 13 British companies, led by the UAC (Unilever), that controlled Ghana's export trade. They left only the smallest sectors of trade to Ghanaian businessmen, and transportation of the cocoa crop to the coast to Ghanaian transport entrepreneurs.

Control over the marketing board became the central issue in colonial politics. Africans opposed to the CPP organized the Ghana Congress Party (wealthy cocoa planters) and the National Liberation Front (NLM, based in Asanti), both of which opposed the CPP's use of the marketing board to finance other endeavors with cocoa profits (world prices soared in the 1950s). The other parties claimed that the CPP was communist while the CPP charged the other parties with representing tribal interests at the expense of national unity.

The CPP narrowly won the 1956 election. Less than a month later, the Legislative Assembly called for political independence. On March 4, 1957, Britain granted independence to the Gold Coast, following riots by groups opposed to the CPP. For the next year, the CPP passed laws that strengthened the state in order to suppress its political opposition.

Ghana's independence, the first in sub-Saharan Africa, inspired Africans throughout the continent. Residents of western Togo, the former German colony (by then, a UN Mandate under French control) voted to join the Gold Coast in 1957.

On March 13, 1966, Nkrumah was overthrown by an army coup.

**Example 4: The Belgian Congo, a colony unprepared**


The Belgium government (and public) received all of its information about African public opinion from the big Belgian companies (Union Minière du Haut Katanga, for example) and missionaries, and neither group was particularly perceptive. Despite all the turmoil of the 1930s
and 1940s, it was not until 1954 that a reform government allowed a few Congolese to study in Belgium. Belgium made almost no plans for independence in the Congo. In 1956, only 120 Congolese held the carte d'immatriculation out of a population of 13 million, and there were only thirty university students from the Belgian African colonies (Congo, Rwanda, Burundi). There was no African soldier with a rank higher than sergeant.

The formation of the French Fifth Republic in 1958, the independence of Guinea, and political activity in other French colonies like Congo-Brazzaville stimulated political activity in the Belgian Congo. In addition, members of the Congolese elite attended the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels as part of the Belgian delegation, where they met other Africans, including some from independent countries.

A civil servant from Stanleyville named Patrice Lumumba formed the first nationalist political party, the Mouvement National Congolais (MNC), in 1958. He faced opposition from parties organized along regional or ethnic lines, including the largest, ethnic group, the Association pour la Sauvegarde de la Culture et des Intérêts des Bakongo (ABAKO).

Riots in Leopoldville in January 1959 and October 1959 led to a hasty decision by the Belgian government to grant independence on June 30, 1960. Patrice Lumumba won an election that took place only one week before independence, and tried to form the first government. The Force Publique rebelled against their officers on July 8, 1960, killing some and inciting thousands of Europeans to flee the Congo. The next day, Katanga province seceded from the Congo and asked for Belgian military assistance.

Lumumba and the national government interpreted this as an attempt by Belgium to retain control of the richest part of the country. On July 13, 1960, the Congolese government asked for UN assistance to expell the Belgians. The USA refused to participate, but did not block it in the Security Council, and a multi-national force headed by Ghana, went to the Congo. The UN occupied Leopoldville and prevented the Katangan secession, but failed to protect Lumumba from his political enemies. The government collapsed and Lumumba was captured by Katangan
authorities and executed, although his family reached safety in Nasser's Egypt.

By the end of 1960, Joseph Mobutu, Lumumba's personal secretary and an army sergeant during the colonial period, took control of the Congo.