



Elisabeth Stennes Skaar

Great Britain's Policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War (1978-9)

A profound lack of confidence as a major power?

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Acknowledgements

Dawn breaks and the birds have just awoken as I finish my master's thesis in the early hours of 15 May 2015. I have been longing for this moment for some time, but now that it has arrived, it does not feel exactly as I had expected; although thoroughly elated that I am about to hand in my master's thesis and get a life, I am also a little sad that it is all over. But before I can let go of this thesis, some gratitude must be expressed to those who have helped me create it.

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List of abbreviations

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

DOP – Defence and Overseas Policy Committee

EAC – East African Community

EAD – East African Department

ECGD – Export Credits Guarantee Department

EEC – European Economic Community, precursor to the European Union

FCO – Foreign and Commonwealth Office, a department of the British government

HMG – Her Majesty's Government

IMF – International Monetary Fund

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

OAU – Organisation of African Unity, precursor to the African Union

UN – United Nations

UNLF – Uganda National Liberation Front

Chapter 1

Introduction

The latter half of the 1970s is most frequently portrayed in the literature as the moment when British decline reached its nadir, marked by further retreat from existing commitments under the pressure of intractable domestic political and economic difficulties. Britain's defining characteristic in this period was a profound lack of confidence as a major power, dependent on its nuclear deterrent for residual status and influence.¹

Great Britain was not the same in 1978 as it had been before 1945. Britain was now merely a great power in a superpower system and had transformed from empire to nation-state; it could no longer stand alone in 'splendid isolation' and had joined the European Economic Community (EEC); and its economy was deteriorating. Historical narratives about Britain in the late 1970s tend to focus on the domestic economic and social problems plaguing the government, culminating in the infamous 'Winter of Discontent'² in 1978-9 that led to the fall of Prime Minister James Callaghan's Labour government (1976-9) and 18 consecutive years of Conservative Party rule in Britain.

While the Winter of Discontent demanded the government's full attention and Britain supposedly suffered 'a profound lack of confidence as a major power',³ the Uganda-Tanzania War (1978-9) broke out. Unlike other major African conflicts at the time, the Uganda-Tanzania War was a purely inter-African war without direct origins in the Cold War.⁴ It began on 30 October 1978, when Uganda invaded Tanzania and annexed part of its territory, and ended on

¹ Ann Lane, «Foreign and Defence Policy», in Anthony Seldon and Kevin Hickson (eds.), *New Labour, Old Labour. The Wilson and Callaghan Governments, 1974-79*. London 2004: 154.

² The winter of 1978-9 is often referred to in Britain as the 'Winter of Discontent'. The Winter of Discontent started when the trade unions refused to accept the Labour government's suggestions for continued incomes policy and a 5% limit on pay rises in order to combat inflation. The winter of 1978-79 was extraordinarily cold and saw a series of trade union strikes by crucial professionals such as nurses, refuse collectors and, famously, the Liverpool grave diggers. The strikes were largely over by February 1979, but the resulting dissatisfaction contributed significantly towards the Labour Party's loss in the May 1979 general election. For more information about the Winter of Discontent, see chapter 2.1.

³ Lane 2004: 154.

⁴ The Cold War was a conflict in which the United States and the Soviet Union vied for geopolitical and economic world dominance between 1947 and 1989. The Cold War was also an ideological conflict about the organisation of society, in which the Soviet Union and its allies sought the spread of statist communism while the United States and its allies promoted liberalism and capitalism. Thanks to nuclear deterrence direct military conflict between the superpowers never erupted, although indirect confrontation did occur in the form of proxy wars. For more information about the Cold War, see Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Understanding International Conflicts: An introduction to theory and history*. New York 2009: 116ff.

11 April 1979, when a Tanzanian counter-invasion overthrew the Ugandan regime of President Idi Amin and peace was restored.

The objective of this thesis is the study of Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War. The conflict was of potential interest to Britain for several reasons: East Africa⁵ was considered geo-strategically important in the Cold War, and Britain feared Communist dominance⁶ in the region; the war broke out between two of Britain's former colonies in which it still retained considerable interests and wanted to increase its influence; Britain had broken diplomatic relations with Uganda and wanted its regime overthrown; and the conflict erupted close to Southern Africa, where Britain's African interests and vulnerability were strongest. Still, as the Uganda-Tanzania War did not threaten British territory and was not essentially a Cold War conflict, Britain could have chosen to ignore it. It did not, and the study of Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War will show us just how far Britain was willing to go to protect or further its interests in remote parts of the globe in 1978-9, thus allowing us to discuss whether the literature is correct in assuming that Britain lacked the ability and confidence to pursue its global political interests.

1.1 Historiography

Academic interest in Britain's foreign policy and international status in the latter half of the 20th century has been intense, and an extensive body of historical work exists on the subject.⁷ The most influential narrative expressed in these works has been a story of decline in which Britain, a former great power, struggled to retain some of its former global power⁸ while facing a

⁵ The term 'East Africa', as defined by the United Nations, constitutes 20 countries located on the eastern side of Africa. For the purposes of this thesis, the term 'Central East Africa' will be used to describe the smaller region consisting of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. Although they are part of Central East Africa and populous for their minuscule size, Rwanda and Burundi were not involved in the Uganda-Tanzania War and are therefore of minor importance for this thesis as opposed to Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

⁶ Britain feared that it would lose influence and access to African markets if the communist countries were able to win Africa's 'hearts and minds'. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'communism' as 'A theory or system of social organization in which all property is owned by the community and each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs.' Source: Oxforddictionaries.com, Communism (accessed 25 March 2015). Britain feared that it would lose influence and access to African markets if the communist countries were able to win Africa's 'hearts and minds'.

⁷ See David Childs, *Britain since 1945: A political history*. London 2006; David Sanders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role. British Foreign policy since 1945*. London 1990; Mark Curtis, *The Ambiguities of Power: British Foreign Policy since 1945*. London 1995; Norman Lowe, *Mastering modern British history*. Basingstoke 2009; Brian Harrison, *Finding a role? The United Kingdom 1970-1990*. Oxford 2010.

⁸ The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'power' as 'The capacity or ability to direct or influence the behaviour of others or the course of events'. Source: Oxforddictionaries.com, Imperialism (accessed 20 March 2015).

changing international order, relative economic decline and the loss of its empire. Writes James Mayall:

British pre-eminence, never in any case as secure as it can be made to look in the after-glow of nostalgia, has long departed the international scene, and with it has gone the self-confidence and the framework of foreign policy.⁹

Many historians have taken issue with this pessimistic narrative, and taken it upon themselves to present a more nuanced view of British history since 1945. They demonstrate that Britain's influence was not lost, but transformed; as its traditional projection of military power was becoming too expensive and also increasingly perceived as morally unacceptable, Britain had to change its foreign policy, replacing hard power with soft.¹⁰ They uphold that Britain, although outranked by superpowers the United States of America (US) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union), remained a key international actor in 1978 and that domestic gains in welfare, standards of living and civil rights argue against the portrayals of unequivocal British decline after 1945.¹¹

The Callaghan government (1976-9) is among the least-researched British governments in the latter half of the 20th century. Prime Minister James Callaghan has not garnered much academic interest, and has fostered few biographies besides his own autobiography, *Time and Chance*.¹² His immediate predecessor as Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, has garnered much more attention from scholars and biographers, as has his successor, Margaret Thatcher. Studies of the Callaghan government's policies usually appear as smaller parts of more general works on British political history after 1945, and the few monographs on the subject deal with the Callaghan government together with the preceding Labour government of Harold Wilson (1974-6) as if they were one government.¹³ Studies of the Callaghan government is nearly

⁹ James Mayall, «Britain and Anglophone Africa», in Amadu Sesay (ed.), *Africa And Europe. From partition to independence or dependence?* London 1986: 52.

¹⁰ As defined by Christopher Hill in *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy*. Houndsmills 2003: 135: 'Hard power is that which is targeted, coercive, often immediate and physical. Soft power is that which is indirect, long-term and works more through persuasion than force. [...] Whereas hard power focuses on the target itself, soft power seeks primarily to change the target's environment.'

¹¹ See T.O. Lloyd, *Empire, Welfare State, Europe*. Oxford 2010; Keith Robbins, *The Eclipse of a Great Power*. London 1994.

¹² These are Kenneth O. Morgan, *Callaghan. A life*. Oxford 1997; Paul J. Deveney, *Callaghan's Journey to Downing Street*. Basingstoke 2010; Harry Conroy, *James Callaghan*. London 2006.

¹³ It is telling that one of the very few monographs devoted exclusively to the study of these two governments, is titled *The Labour Government, 1974-79*. This reflects the perceived oneness of these two governments as well as the lack of interest in studying the Callaghan government by itself.

always on Britain's poor economic performance, the social unrest and the difficulties of controlling a minority government while there were serious divisions within the Labour party.¹⁴

Little scholarly attention has been paid to other aspects of the Callaghan government's policies, and very little has been written about its foreign policy. It is revealing that Callaghan's Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, David Owen (1977-79), is hardly mentioned in the literature; his absence becomes especially conspicuous when compared to the more extensive scholarly attention that has been given to other Foreign Secretaries, more controversial Labour personalities or even those of Callaghan's ministers leading economic departments. This asymmetry in the literature may lead the reader, as stated by Ann Lane in the introductory quote to this chapter, to conclude that the domestic issues were all-encompassing and prevented the Callaghan government from engaging in foreign policy. Among the few foreign policy issues studied in connection with the Callaghan government are Britain's relationship with the EEC, its 'special relationship' with the United States, the troubles in Northern Ireland, Cold War issues and the Rhodesia crisis.¹⁵ None of these issues were particular to the Callaghan government, further contributing to the perception of the Callaghan government as passive on foreign policy. Ann Lane, one of the few who have examined the foreign policy of the Callaghan government, disagrees with this portrayal, and finds that '[f]ar from being the end of an era in British decline, this period marked the first hesitant beginnings for a renewed British engagement with the rest of the world, albeit defined within more modern parameters.'¹⁶ She claims that Callaghan himself shaped Britain's foreign policy, first as Harold Wilson's Foreign Secretary and later as Prime Minister, and that he laid the foundations for many of the foreign policy successes that would later be attributed to Margaret Thatcher, among them Britain's intimate relationship with the US, its 'middle position' in the Cold War and the resolution of the Rhodesia crisis.¹⁷

¹⁴ See Martin Holmes, *The Labour Government, 1974-79. Political Aims and Economic Reality*. London 1985; Anthony Seldon and Kevin Hickson (eds.), *New Labour, Old Labour. The Wilson and Callaghan governments, 1974-79*. London 2004.

¹⁵ Rhodesia was a British colony in Southern Africa led by a white minority government. It had issued a unilateral declaration of independence in 1965, a provocation that Britain could not tolerate. As it could not attack its own citizens, and the Rhodesian whites rejected any settlement allowing for a transition to black majority rule, Britain was left politically paralysed and unable to resolve the situation. Britain received much criticism in the Commonwealth and the United Nations over the Rhodesia conflict and were eager to reach a negotiated settlement so that they might keep a modicum of influence in Rhodesia and avoid further criticism. For more information about the Rhodesia crisis, see chapter 2.2.

¹⁶ Lane 2004: 168.

¹⁷ Lane 2004: 168. This claim is supported by Dominic Sandbrook: 'there was rather more continuity between Margaret Thatcher and her avuncular predecessor, 'Sunny Jim', than we often think – even though it would pain both left and right to admit it.' See Dominic Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle for Britain, 1974-1979*. London 2012: xxi.

If the Callaghan government's general foreign policy has garnered little academic attention, even less has been given to its policy towards Britain's former colonies. Although Callaghan's belief in multilateral institutions led to closer contact with the Commonwealth of Nations, there is consensus in the literature that as the Commonwealth was flooded with newly-independent nations, it ceased to be the intended tool for British influence and became instead an arena where former colonies could admonish Britain for what they perceived as imperialist behaviour,¹⁸ especially over South Africa and Rhodesia.¹⁹ Little has been written of Britain's relationships with its former African colonies apart from the Rhodesia conflict, which, according to Ann Lane, 'by 1978-9 was totally dominating the Foreign Secretary's time'.²⁰ Works on Britain's Africa policy in the late 1960s and 1970s – although these are few and far between – point out that Britain relied increasingly on economic tools and aid in order to influence Africa, and that British military intervention on the continent became increasingly unlikely;²¹ Christopher Clapham portrays Britain as 'simply uninterested in mobilising (or paying for) a clientele of African states. [...] Few if any senior British politicians had any serious interest in Africa.'²² James Mayall, who perhaps comes closest to defining a British Africa strategy, describes Britain's Africa policy in these years as 'damage limitation' and writes that its aim was to 'transform the legacies of pre-eminence and Empire from liabilities into assets.'²³ Britain's strategy focused primarily on East and Southern Africa due to their conceived geo-strategic importance and the strength of British interests in these regions.²⁴

Historical studies of the Callaghan government's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War are almost non-existent. Given the low interest in the Callaghan government's foreign policy towards Africa, this is hardly surprising. What is perhaps more surprising is the near total lack of academic historical research into the Uganda-Tanzania War itself. The war is absent from most general works on African history, and is only mentioned in passing even in books about

¹⁸ The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'imperialism' as 'a policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonizaion, use of military force, or other means'. Source: Oxforddictionaries.com, Imperialism (accessed 20 March 2015).

¹⁹ Examples of works expressing this view are Brian Harrison, *Finding a role? The United Kingdom 1970-1990*. Oxford 2010; Crawford Young, «The Heritage of Colonialism», in John W. Harbeson and Donald Rothchild (eds.), *Africa in World Politics. The African state system in flux*. Houndsmills 2000; Paul Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy. Background Influences of British External Policy, 1865-1980*. London 1981; David Sanders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role. British Foreign Policy since 1945*. London 1990.

²⁰ Lane 2004: 166.

²¹ Crawford Young, "The Heritage of Colonialism", in John W. Harbeson and Donald Rothchild (eds.), *Africa in World Politics. The African state system in flux*. Boulder 2000: 31.

²² Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the international system. The politics of state survival*. Cambridge 1996: 87

²³ Mayall 1986: 53.

²⁴ Ibid: 62.

the history of Central East African countries. Historian George Roberts has written an article on the Uganda-Tanzania War, but although he uses British government sources from the National Archive, his focus is on the African actors rather than British policy.²⁵ P. Godfrey Okoth has written an article about the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and its reaction to the Uganda-Tanzania War.²⁶ Outside the field of history, a few scholars from the social sciences and law studies have used the war as a case-study for testing theories.²⁷ Journalists Martha Honey and Tony Avirgan have written a book about their reporting on the Uganda-Tanzania War.²⁸ It is a valuable contribution containing much information about the war, but as their sources are largely unknown and the book is clearly biased in favour of Tanzania and its President Julius Nyerere, the use of this book in academic research is at best problematic. However, Avirgan and Honey include a few sentences about Britain and the Uganda-Tanzania War:

Britain now began playing an active behind-the-scenes role. Basically the Callaghan government decided that the time was ripe to remove Amin, even if in doing so Tanzania violated the OAU principle of territorial sanctity. [...] It gave several million pounds, ostensibly to help rehabilitate the Kagera Salient, but

²⁵ George Roberts, «The Uganda-Tanzania War, the fall of Idi Amin, and the failure of African diplomacy, 1978-1979», in *Journal of East African Studies*, Volume 8, issue 4. 2014.

²⁶ P. Godfrey Okoth, «The OAU and the Uganda-Tanzania war, 1978-79», in *Journal of African Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3. 1987. The Organisation of African Unity was established in 1963 with the purpose of furthering unity and peace between the newly independent African states. The OAU promoted principles such as ‘i. Equality of all the member-states with each other; ii. Non-interference in the internal affairs of member states; iii. Respect for the existing frontiers of member states; and iv. Peaceful settlement of all disputes between member states.’ The principles of territorial integrity (iii) and non-interference (ii) are of particular relevance to the Uganda-Tanzania War as the two countries invaded each other and Tanzania overthrew Uganda’s government. As such, and especially because Uganda’s attempted annexation of the Kagera salient was the attempt of an independent African state to annex the territory of another, the Uganda-Tanzania War represented an important test for the OAU’s ability to mediate between and discipline its members. For more information about the OAU and its guiding principles, see Toyin Falola, *Key Events in African History. A Reference Guide*. London 2002: 239ff.

²⁷ See Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers. Humanitarian Intervention in International Society*. Oxford 2000; Daniel G. Acheson-Brown, «The Tanzanian Invasion of Uganda: A Just War?», in *International Third World Studies Journal and Review*, Volume XII. 2001; Noreen Burrows, «Tanzania’s Intervention in Uganda: Some Legal Aspects», in *The World Today*. 1979; Olajide Aluko, «African Response to External Intervention in Africa since Angola», in *African Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 319. 1981.

²⁸ Tony Avirgan and Martha Honey, *War in Uganda. The Legacy of Idi Amin*. Dar-es-Salaam 1982. Tony Avirgan and Martha Honey were American journalists based in Dar-es-Salaam, and had great knowledge of Central East Africa. After months of restricted access to information about the war, Avirgan and Honey were allowed to travel with the Tanzanian army during the siege of Kampala. Their book therefore provides valuable first-hand information about this siege, but all information relating to events before April 1979 has been collected by the journalists after the fact (and often from anonymous sources) and is therefore of a less reliable nature. It was on the orders of President Nyerere that they were finally allowed access to the war front, and their bias towards him is obvious – in fact, they even thank him in the book’s preface for not censoring the book. Nevertheless, *War in Uganda* remains a very important source of information about the war.

knowing that the money might find its way into the war effort. It also put some rather ineffectual pressure on British oil companies, urging them to cut supplies to Amin. This the companies were willing to do for only a couple of days. Most importantly, Britain acted as a messenger between the Kenyan and Tanzanian governments. Specifically, Britain forcefully conveyed to Nyerere Kenyan fears that Tanzania was attempting to install Obote. Nyerere evidently heeded these concerns and in turn used Britain to help explain Tanzania's position to the Moi government.²⁹

This thesis is the first academic work to confirm Avirgan and Honey's claims of British intervention, although it takes issue with their assessment of Britain's pressure on the oil companies as ineffective, and there are aspects of the intervention that they have not recorded. Some former African soldiers and African politicians have mentioned the war in their memoirs, but these works can hardly be considered reliable and are of little use in this context.

Finally, a few words on the position of this thesis on the views presented in the literature. This thesis states that Britain's transformation from wealthy empire and great power into an economically troubled nation-state in a superpower system had cost it some of its relative power: it no longer had the global military reach it had once possessed and the trade benefits of colonisation had been lost as the colonies reached independence and the economies and markets of the Commonwealth opened to the world. Projection of hard power towards other countries was becoming increasingly perceived as unacceptable, and Britain's political control of its former colonies was substantially weakened, both by decolonisation and as the members of the Old Commonwealth shifted its allegiance increasingly towards the United States while the New Commonwealth was becoming increasingly 'de-Britannized'.³⁰ But far from all of Britain's global influence was lost – Britain remained a key international actor, although it now had to adjust its policies so that its agenda did not clash with those of the superpowers. Its position as the United States' closest ally, reintegration into Europe, maintenance of Commonwealth ties, status as a nuclear power and membership of the United Nations Security Council all served to shore up Britain's prominent position in the international system. Britain's circumstances in the late 1970s, then, were not as dire as they are sometimes presented – it was still an important

²⁹ Avirgan and Honey 1982: 103-4.

³⁰ W. David McIntyre, *British Decolonization, 1946-1977. When, Why and How did the British Empire Fall?* New York 1998: 122. Upon its establishment in 1931 the Commonwealth consisted of the United Kingdom and its Dominions: Canada, Newfoundland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Ireland. When British colonies gained independence after the Second World War, most became members of the Commonwealth. This caused the Commonwealth to change in size, character and political outlook, and in order to distinguish between these two phases of the Commonwealth's history, the first constellation is often referred to as the 'Old Commonwealth' and the second as the 'New Commonwealth'.

actor actively pursuing global interests, although with less direct means to reach their objectives and more dependent on its partners than before.

As for the foreign policy of the Callaghan government, the position taken in this thesis differs from that often presented in the literature. In their single-minded focus on the domestic problems facing the Callaghan government, historians have come to neglect its foreign policy. This has led to the impression that ‘Britain’s defining characteristic in this period was a profound lack of confidence as a major power’³¹ and that the Callaghan government had no foreign policy. This is an absurd notion, which should be remedied through more research on the foreign policy of the period.

1.2 Research objective and relevance

Britain’s foreign policy and international status after the Second World War have been researched extensively. But as we have seen, historians have to some extent neglected the issue of British foreign policy under the Callaghan government, making Britain seem temporarily introvert and politically impotent. Insufficient attention has also been paid to Britain’s relations with former African colonies in the 1970s; as a result it appears as though Britain was relatively uninterested in Africa except for its involvement in the conflicts in Southern Africa. This thesis aims to address both these research lacunas through its study of Britain’s policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War of 1978-79. Thereby it also touches upon a third research lacuna – historical research into the Uganda-Tanzania War has been almost non-existent.

The Uganda-Tanzania War represents a highly interesting case for studying the Callaghan government’s policy towards former African colonies. The Callaghan government was in power for the entire duration of the war, enabling us to study the government’s uninterrupted engagement with the conflict from its early beginnings to the end. The conflict is also ideal for such a study because it was the first ever war between two of Britain’s former African colonies. Involving Tanzania and Uganda (and affecting a third former colony, Kenya), the Uganda-Tanzania War represents an excellent opportunity for studying Britain’s interaction with former colonies at a time when the international society was wary of any sign of imperialist behaviour by former colonial powers. It is also interesting because it involved Uganda’s Amin regime, with which Britain had no relations and regularly expressed its dissatisfaction. The

³¹ Lane 2004: 154.

Uganda-Tanzania War was also a genuinely African War without direct roots in the Cold War or superpower politics. As such, and because it took place in a remote part of the globe and represented little threat to Britain's own safety, it was a conflict to which Britain could *choose* whether to react. Finally, as will be demonstrated in section 1.4, the National Archives provide excellent sources for studying Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War.

This thesis has two research objectives. The first is the examination and analysis of Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War of 1978-79. The second research objective is the discussion of how this policy fits with the frequent portrayal of late-1970s Britain as it is often seen in the research literature - a former great power in unequivocal decline, led by a government whose ability and desire to pursue an active, global foreign policy was paralysed by domestic economic, social and political problems. Hopefully this thesis will contribute towards a more nuanced picture of Britain's international role and global capacity for action in the late 1970s, and demonstrate that the Callaghan government was actively pursuing foreign policy interests on other continents.

Finally, a note on periodization is required. The primary time span of this study is 9 October 1978 to 11 April 1979 – a period of roughly five and a half months. A case could easily have been made for choosing 30 October 1978 as the starting point for this thesis – this was, after all, the date on which the Uganda-Tanzania War officially broke out. But this study begins three weeks earlier, when the first border skirmishes occurred; the slow escalation of the conflict into full-blown war is reflected in the sources, and this provides valuable information about the prejudices and immediate reactions of diplomats and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials³² to the eruption and escalation of the conflict. 11 April 1979 has been chosen as the end point because this was the day when Tanzanian soldiers took Kampala and overthrew the Amin regime. As the Callaghan government lost the British general election shortly after and was replaced by the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher, studying Britain's long-term policy towards Uganda and Tanzania after April 1979 falls outside the scope of this thesis. That being said, some reference will of course have to be made to events happening both before and after this period.

³² All officials referred to in this thesis are FCO officials unless otherwise specified.

1.3 Findings

Britain's defining characteristic in the late 1970s – even at its 'nadir' during the Winter of Discontent – was not 'a profound lack of confidence as a major power'. Contradictory to the research literature's frequent portrayal of the Callaghan government as introvert, politically impotent and unable to execute foreign policy, this thesis demonstrates that the Callaghan government pursued an active and opportunistic foreign policy aimed at maintaining and increasing Britain's global influence and power.

When the Uganda-Tanzania War broke out in October 1978, the Callaghan government saw it as an opportunity to increase its global power by boosting its influence in Central East and Southern Africa. Decolonisation had cost Britain much of its influence on the African continent, and the pursuit of its interests was further impeded by its legacy as an imperialist power and its inability – or, as some African countries saw it, unwillingness – to bring about black majority rule in Rhodesia. As it was normally difficult for Britain to intervene in Africa without being accused of imperialist intervention in African affairs, the FCO officials saw the sudden outbreak of fighting between Tanzania and Uganda as an opening to increase British influence through support for Tanzania. This would allow Britain to demonstrate its support for Tanzania in the face of Ugandan aggression and contribute towards Uganda's military defeat, which the officials hoped would lead to Amin's overthrow. In this way Britain hoped to increase its influence in Central East Africa to the detriment of what it perceived as predominant communist influence in the region. The officials also hoped to use the Uganda-Tanzania war to achieve a mediated solution to the Rhodesia crisis – in their opinion the only way for Britain to retain a modicum of influence with black-majority regimes in the important region of Southern Africa where the West had been losing influence since decolonisation in the mid-1970s. The officials hoped that Britain's support for Tanzania in the Uganda-Tanzania War would win it the trust of Tanzania's President, Julius Nyerere, as the officials viewed his support of the Anglo-American mediation project as crucial to its success. The FCO officials' instinctive desire to intervene in this small intra-African conflict in order to further British interests in Africa demonstrates that Britain in 1978 was still actively pursuing a foreign policy aimed at preserving and increasing Britain's global power and influence, despite the domestic crisis.

As open British interference in the Uganda-Tanzania War would elicit accusations of imperialist intervention, set an unfortunate precedent for British intervention in African conflicts and possibly endanger British citizens in Uganda, a two-pronged policy was developed: one official policy of non-intervention, and one covert policy of support for

Tanzania. Secret support for Tanzania remained Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War throughout the conflict, even as Tanzania transformed from victim to aggressor by invading Uganda in January 1979 and overthrowing its government. Britain's initial attempts to dissociate itself from the conflict in phase two was not due to disapproval of Tanzania's actions, but to the fact that secrecy had become paramount as Britain was now helping one African state overthrow the government of another. There was clearly no place for morals in Britain's foreign policy when it was pursuing its interests.

Due to economic and political constraints Britain's support for Tanzania had to be cheap, non-lethal and reactive. In phase one it provided Tanzania with material and economic support by expediting Tanzanian orders with British firms and offering ten mine detectors, the airfreight of a bridge, a £4 million credit extension and £2.5 million in aid. It also made British oil companies restrict supplies of petroleum products to Uganda, and intervened with other governments to keep supplies low. Although Britain continued to support Tanzania after its invasion of Uganda, Britain's support became less tangible than in phase one and was largely diplomatic in character. Initially, the officials tried to avoid direct support for Tanzania while it was the aggressor, but as Amin's fall seemed increasingly likely and Tanzanian pressure for British intervention increased, Britain suspended the Stansted flights³³ and supported Tanzania diplomatically by intervening with Kenya and impeding a Ugandan request for discussion of Tanzania's invasion by the United Nations Security Council. This thesis is the first archive-based research effort to document Britain's intervention in the Uganda-Tanzania War and demonstrates that its involvement was greater than has previously been known.

Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War was developed and championed by officials in the lower echelons of the FCO, primarily the East African Department (EAD) and the British High Commissioners to Tanzania and Nairobi. There was little controversy within the FCO over policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War, although there was some disagreement over conflicting British interests in Tanzania and Kenya in phase two. Although the FCO officials were eager to intervene in the conflict, they found it difficult to get their policy suggestions approved by ministries and ministers outside the FCO. This demonstrates that those outside the FCO doubted the importance of the conflict and the likelihood that intervention would yield

³³ The 'Stansted flights', or 'whiskey runs' were regular flights between Stansted Airport in London and Entebbe International Airport in Uganda. The flights from Uganda brought coffee exports and other commodities to Britain, and returned with whiskey and other luxury items Amin used to satisfy his army. These flights continued after official diplomatic relations between Uganda and Britain were severed, and provoked much outrage both in Britain and internationally as they were perceived as essential to Amin's ability to stay in power and continue his atrocious human rights abuses.

tangible results for Britain. Cheaper policy measures that didn't require the approval of other ministers than David Owen – and, on occasion, the Prime Minister – were much more easily passed. Owen's willingness to accept the policy suggestions of his officials and Callaghan's occasional redirection of the policy conforms with the research literature's portrayal of Owen as a weak Foreign Secretary and Callaghan as a Prime Minister with substantial influence on foreign policy.

Finally, this thesis makes a small contribution to our knowledge about the Uganda-Tanzania War. Although this thesis is not primarily concerned with the war itself, it sheds some light on the roles played by Britain and the United States in the conflict, and shows that the international dimension of the conflict was probably more important for the outcome than has previously been known.

1.4 Theoretical and methodological approach

The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'theory' as 'a supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something, especially one based on general principles independent of the thing to be explained'.³⁴ Although history tends to be a qualitative and empirical discipline, not often dependent on strict, overarching theoretical systems of thought, it is unavoidable that some 'suppositions' and 'general principles' should affect our work and the conclusions we draw from the empirical evidence. Although this study, too, is primarily an empirical and qualitative effort, some of the basic assumptions guiding the analysis must be discussed.

One recurring question occupying scholars of international relations and political history is the influence of 'agency' versus that of 'structures'. Some scholars take the view that the social world is shaped by social structures – such as globalization, gender roles, social hierarchies or the law – and that these set the perimeters for what actors can or cannot do. Others see structures as relatively unimportant, as they think actors – be they states, institutions, organisations, companies or individuals – can act freely and even change the social structures. Most scholarly work is situated somewhere between these two extremes, allowing both structures and actors influence. This study will also take this view: structures constrain actors' possibilities and choices, but the power of agency should not be underestimated.

³⁴ Oxforddictionaries.com, Theory (accessed 20 March 2015).

In this study, the primary actors are diplomats, state officials, politicians, companies, states and international organisations. Some may claim that it is impossible to view states and organisations as actors with unified interests because each may consist of millions of individuals and groups with separate desires and agendas. But if these units cannot be considered actors, discussion of international relations quickly becomes unnecessarily difficult and perhaps even void of meaning. It is through states and organisations that individuals can come together and express their agency internationally, and therefore this thesis will ascribe them agency.

But even if states are actors, their interests, goals and policies must be determined by someone. This thesis is primarily concerned with the foreign policy of Great Britain, and as a parliamentary democracy, Britain's policy is developed and determined by state officials and politicians on behalf of the people. The analysis will rest on the assumption that these officials and politicians make the decisions that they think will best serve to protect and further Britain's national interests. However, complete rationality can never be assumed – actors are seldom given access to a complete set of information on which to base decisions, and even if they are the decision-making process could be corrupted by misinterpretations, misunderstandings, and misrepresentations of information. Also, as several individuals and departments may be involved in decision-making, the decision arrived at may in any case not be the objectively most rational, but the one that best unifies the views, needs and desires of all parties involved. For the purposes of this thesis, we will view the actors as capable of performing relatively rationally, while keeping in mind that they are neither omniscient nor omnipotent.

A few words must also be said about methodology. This thesis is an empirical study based primarily on source material from the National Archives (TNA) in London, Great Britain. Most of the material originates from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) series, but documents from the Prime Minister's Office (PREM) and the Cabinet Office (CAB) have also been utilised. Additionally, a few transcripts from Parliamentary Debates have been collected from *the Hansard*.³⁵

The primary sources collected from the National Archives can be divided into two groups. The first group consists of telegrams, letters and minutes. The telegrams document the FCO's communication with British embassies and missions abroad, primarily the British High Commissions in Dar-es-Salaam and Nairobi. The letters and minutes primarily document

³⁵ Accessed at Hansard.millbanksystems.com.

communication within the FCO, between FCO officials and other departments or politicians, and between politicians. The other group of archival primary sources consists of policy papers written by FCO officials. These papers describe political challenges as well as possible solutions and their merits. They also include policy recommendations.

The primary sources used in this thesis are comprehensive and detailed, and as such provide an excellent basis for examining Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War. They demonstrate how British policy-makers viewed the Uganda-Tanzania War and Britain's role in it and allows us to trace the development of British policy on the conflict. But the use of such primary sources is not without issues. One obvious flaw is that the source material is incomplete: some documents and parts of documents are missing, while others remain classified. However, this is not a major problem concerning the source material for this study, as many of the documents are duplicated and there are few obvious holes in the source material. The amount of classified information is negligible, mostly limited to a single word in each of the few documents concerned. Although few of the written documents are lost or classified, one must assume that some oral exchanges about the issue have been lost. Telephone calls, meetings and conversations are not always recorded in full, if at all, and so it is possible that we may lose some aspects of the decision making process. It is also possible that documents were overlooked when the source material was compiled.

In addition to the material gathered from the National Archives, autobiographies and authorised biographies constitute part of the primary source material for this thesis. Because such sources are highly problematic, I have been wary of relying too heavily on them; they are hardly objective, and often represent the views and agenda of a single person or group. Additionally, as they are often written well after events took place, the subjects may no longer remember them correctly or could misrepresent them in an attempt to redress or shape history to their advantage. They also tend to emphasise certain events or information, while other important issues or facts may be omitted completely. Thus, autobiographies and authorised biographies can be highly unreliable sources, but they can also provide information that is not available elsewhere, such as details of conversations, assessments of personalities and other first-hand information. They have been used only sparingly in this thesis and are hardly quoted; the Uganda-Tanzania War is not mentioned in any of them, but they have provided useful context and background information on certain issues and personalities that could not have been obtained elsewhere.

Although the source material has its weaknesses, the biggest element of uncertainty is always the historian herself. The act of writing history is the art of interpretation and analysis,

both highly subjective and uncertain activities. No matter the quality of the source material, there is always the possibility that the historian might misinterpret it: she could simply fail to understand it, she could piece the fragmented source material together incorrectly or she could emphasise the wrong parts of it. This could lead her to present a flawed picture of events, issues or personalities. I have tried to avoid these pitfalls, but it is important to keep them in mind whenever one is reading - or attempting to write - history.

1.5 Thesis outline

Finally, a few words on the structure of this study. Chapter 2 provides a short introduction to Britain's domestic situation and foreign policy during the Callaghan years, 1976-9. Chapter 3 is concerned with Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War. It gives a brief introduction to the war and explains the motivations and limitations shaping Britain's policy on the conflict. Chapters 4 and 5 are concerned with Britain's efforts to provide covert support to Tanzania in the Uganda-Tanzania War; chapter 4 deals with the first phase of the war, 9 October 1978 to 22 January 1979, while chapter 5 deals with the war's second phase, 23 January 1979 to 11 April 1979. Chapter 6 is a brief discussion of whether Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War lends itself to the interpretation that 'Britain's defining characteristic in this period was a profound lack of confidence as a major power'.

Chapter 2

The Callaghan government and its foreign policy (1976-9)

Foreign policy can never be abstracted from the domestic context out of which it springs.³⁶

Understanding Britain's foreign policy in any given period requires knowledge of the domestic conditions in which it originated. This is certainly true for the Callaghan years, when Britain was plagued by deep economic crisis and social unrest. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a short presentation of the domestic situation facing the Callaghan government, as well as a brief introduction to the general direction of its foreign policy.

2.1 The Callaghan government and the domestic situation

Leonard James Callaghan simultaneously became leader of the Labour Party and Britain's Prime Minister on 5 April 1976.³⁷ He was an experienced politician – he remains the only British statesman ever to have held all four 'Great Offices of State' in the course of his career³⁸ – and was considered by many an improvement on his ailing predecessor, Harold Wilson.³⁹ Callaghan is known for his extensive Cabinet consultations and defined himself as a 'consensus leader', but he also 'felt it essential for a political leader to seize the initiative and provide an active and engaged sense of direction, from both the strategic and moral point of view'.⁴⁰ This philosophy made Callaghan an engaged and active leader, not least on foreign policy.

Callaghan's expertise and leadership skills proved essential for holding his Labour government together – not only did he lose parliamentary majority on his first full day as Prime Minister,⁴¹ but he was also faced with major internal divisions between the radical and conservative wings of the Labour party.⁴² These divisions rendered unreliable the support of

³⁶ Hill 2003: 37.

³⁷ Sue Pryce, *Presidentializing the Premiership*. London 1997: 150.

³⁸ James Callaghan was Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1964 to 1967, Home Secretary from 1967 to 1970, Foreign Secretary from 1974 to 1976 and Prime Minister from 1976 to 1979.

³⁹ Chris Ballinger and Anthony Seldon, «Prime Ministers and Cabinet», in Anthony Seldon and Kevin Hickson (eds.), *New Labour, Old Labour. The Wilson and Callaghan Governments, 1974-79*. London 2004: 175.

⁴⁰ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Callaghan. A life*. Oxford 1997: 485.

⁴¹ Ballinger and Seldon 2004: 173-4.

⁴² Callaghan is mostly portrayed as a representative of the Labour Party's conservative wing or as 'right of centre'. See Morgan 1997: 479; Lane 2004: 155; Childs 2006: 195.

Labour Members of Parliament for government policies, and in order to get policy through Parliament, Callaghan was forced to seek alliances with other parties; first with Scottish and Welsh nationalists, and later with the Liberal Party in the Lib-Lab Pact of 1977-8.⁴³

As if the difficulties of minority rule and a divided party were not enough, Callaghan had also inherited a Britain in economic and social crisis. The British economy had deteriorated in the 1970s as ‘growth stagnated, unemployment rose, sterling sagged and inflation soared.’⁴⁴ In an attempt to rescue the economy, the Callaghan government applied for a loan of £3.9 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1976 – ‘the largest sum ever sought from it’⁴⁵ and a serious blow to Britain’s prestige.⁴⁶ But by 1978 there were small signs that the government’s economic policies were working, as ‘[i]nflation was in single figures, oil revenues were rising and sterling was strong.’⁴⁷

This small progress had been achieved through close cooperation with the trade unions, who at the time ‘exerted an unprecedented peacetime influence’,⁴⁸ representing ‘12.6 million union members in Britain, which probably meant they and their family members made up half the population.’⁴⁹ The unions had accepted incomes policy⁵⁰ for three years in order to combat the country’s soaring inflation. But when Callaghan suggested in the autumn of 1978 that they accept another year of incomes policy and a 5% cap on wage increases, the Trades Union Congress rejected him, ‘and even more seriously, so did the Labour Party Conference’.⁵¹ The end of incomes policy unleashed a wave of strikes, particularly in the public sector:

The Ford motor workers started the rush by winning a 17 per cent pay increase in a strike immediately after the end of the incomes policy, and the strike of the lorry drivers caused more widespread difficulty and dislocation of industrial production than any other dispute, but what caught the public eye was the visible effect of the strike of the dustmen (at a hygienically cold time of winter), the first-ever strike by nurses, and the macabre problems caused by the strike of the Liverpool gravediggers.⁵²

⁴³ David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the 20th century*. Harlow 2000: 233.

⁴⁴ Reynolds 2000: 238.

⁴⁵ Peter Hennessy, *The Prime Minister: The office and its holders since 1945*. London 2001: 385.

⁴⁶ Keith Robbins, *The Eclipse of Great Power: Modern Britain 1870-1992*. London 1994: 350.

⁴⁷ Robbins 1994: 351.

⁴⁸ Steven Fielding, «The 1974-9 Governments and ‘New’ Labour», in Anthony Seldon and Kevin Hickson (eds.), *New Labour, Old Labour. The Wilson and Callaghan Governments, 1974-79*. London 2004: 286.

⁴⁹ Childs 2006: 202.

⁵⁰ The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘incomes policy’ as ‘A government’s strategy for controlling inflation by attempting to restrict increases in wages and salaries’. Source: Oxforddictionaries.com, Incomes policy (accessed 14 May 2015).

⁵¹ Lowe 2009: 609.

⁵² T. O. Lloyd, *Empire, Welfare State, Europe*. Oxford 2010: 414.

The months of strikes and social unrest between September 1978 and February 1979 became known as the ‘Winter of Discontent’,⁵³ and proved ruinous for Callaghan:

All the same, no sane observer could possibly deny that the Winter of Discontent marked a dreadful nadir in modern British history. It might not have been as bad as Tory propaganda later claimed, and not even Moss Evans and Alan Fisher could be blamed for the freakishly bad weather. But even so, this was a crisis that saw ports, schools and railway stations shut down, businesses starved of essential supplies, farmers forced to slaughter their livestock for lack of fodder and thousands of workers defying not just the government but their own representatives. [...] The sick genuinely went untreated; the dead did go unburied. [...] For a brief period, Wilson and Callaghan seemed to have restored calm, but that illusion had not just been dispelled by the Winter of Discontent, it had been smashed into a thousand pieces. [...] Never had the prospects for industrial peace seemed bleaker; never had the British state seemed so helpless and irrelevant.⁵⁴

The crisis turned into a true public relations nightmare when Callaghan, returning sun-tanned from a summit in Guadeloupe in January 1979, said ‘something perilously close to ‘Crisis, what Crisis?’’.⁵⁵ These remarks caused general outrage, and he was soon castigated for being out of touch with reality. The Callaghan government was overthrown by a vote of no confidence in the House of Commons on 28 March 1979, and lost the general election to Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party on 3 May. It was to be another 18 years before Britain would again trust a Labour government to rule it.

2.2 The Callaghan government and foreign policy

As we have seen, the domestic context out of which Britain’s policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War grew was one of political, economic and social crisis. The Winter of Discontent was bound to affect the government’s willingness and ability to pursue foreign policy, as its attention was fixed on domestic developments and crisis management. Britain’s foreign policy was also affected by Callaghan’s acceptance of ‘the severe limitations imposed on British influence through its declining economic and strategic power’.⁵⁶ Britain’s relative loss of international

⁵³ The term ‘Winter of Discontent’ comes from the opening lines of William Shakespeare’s play *Richard the III*: ‘Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this sun of York; [...]’

⁵⁴ Sandbrook 2012: 758-9. Moss Evans and Alan Fisher were leading trade unionists.

⁵⁵ Kenneth O. Morgan, «Was Britain dying?», in Anthony Seldon and Kevin Hickson (eds.), *New Labour, Old Labour. The Wilson and Callaghan Governments, 1974-79*. London 2004: 306.

⁵⁶ Morgan 1997: 622.

status and power was obvious by 1978, and as it came to terms with its new position as one of several great powers in a superpower world, Britain increasingly pursued its goals through alliances and exertion of soft power. But Britain's overarching foreign policy objective remained the same as it had always been: the furthering and protection of Britain's global interests and status as a great power. Thus, Britain's power was not lost, but transformed: even at its 'nadir' in 1978, Britain remained a key player in the international system, actively pursuing its traditional foreign policy objectives in distant parts of the globe. Ann Lane has described these years as 'the first hesitant beginnings of a renewed British engagement with the rest of the world'.⁵⁷

The Callaghan government's foreign policy was similar to that of the preceding Wilson government, in which Callaghan had been Foreign Secretary. Callaghan continued to dominate foreign policy as Prime Minister, especially after his controversial appointment of Dr David Owen, a 38-year old junior FCO Minister of State, to Foreign Secretary in February 1977.⁵⁸ Although Callaghan had faith in Owen's abilities and talents, Owen was young and inexperienced; he garnered some notice for his role in the Anglo-American Rhodesia mediation project, but has not been remembered by posterity as a particularly strong or memorable Foreign Secretary. As Prime Minister, Callaghan

was focused on peacemaking in Rhodesia and the Middle East, on strengthening relations between the western heads of government, and especially on continuing to promote détente with the Soviet Union (and indirectly with China) and the process of strategic arms limitation, already underway. As events turned out, of course, he was inextricably absorbed with Britain's economic problems, his main immediate priority until the conclusion of the IMF negotiations at the end of 1976. But thereafter he threw himself increasingly into international matters.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Lane 2004: 154.

⁵⁸ Morgan 1997: 589. Although Callaghan's influence on foreign policy is often cited in the literature, David Owen remembers things rather differently in his memoirs: 'I was amazed how Jim consciously chose not to interfere, once actually going to the lengths of ringing me up to apologise for fixing up a meeting with President Kaunda in Kano by telephone without being able to consult with me first.' See David Owen, *Time To Declare. Second Innings*. London 2009: 169.

⁵⁹ Morgan 1997: 588.

It was Callaghan's intention 'to sustain and even enhance British influence, but through development of political economic strength rather than military force.'⁶⁰ Even so, '[m]uch of British foreign policy in these years was reactive and not particularly inspired'.⁶¹

Two of the foreign policy issues of the Callaghan period must be mentioned as they are of some interest to this thesis. The first is the Iranian revolution of 1978-9. Its relevance lies in its effect on the global oil market, as reduced supply of crude oil from Iran to the Central East African countries affected not only the Uganda-Tanzania War, but also Britain's policy on it.

The second issue of relevance is the Rhodesia crisis. Rhodesia was a British colony in Southern Africa led by a white majority government. In order to avoid independence under black majority rule, it issued a unilateral declaration of independence from Britain in 1965.⁶² Britain could not tolerate such embarrassing disobedience from its colonies, but nor could it put down the rebellion by attacking its own citizens. Britain's position was further complicated by the fact that it was pressured by other African states into adopting the policy of NIBMAR – 'no independence before majority African rule.' As the Rhodesian white minority government, led by Ian Smith, rejected any settlement allowing for a transition to black majority rule, Britain was left politically paralysed. Britain's inability to resolve the conflict was highly embarrassing and elicited frequent accusations that it was protracting the conflict in order to avoid independence under black majority rule, especially from the so-called Frontline states.⁶³ The communist bloc supported black Rhodesian guerrilla movements hoping to oust the Smith regime by force. This increased the urgency of obtaining a negotiated settlement, as Britain believed that if the guerrilla movements were to gain power Britain would lose its influence over this rich territory to the communists. Therefore, a renewed Anglo-American mediation project was launched in 1977, led by David Owen and his American counterpart, Cyrus Vance. Their goal was a conference where the white minority government of Rhodesia could negotiate a transition to black majority rule with the guerrilla movements. This was difficult because neither side wanted such a solution.⁶⁴ Owen and Vance worked hard to achieve a settlement in

⁶⁰ Lane 2004: 155.

⁶¹ Morgan 1997: 623.

⁶² Reynolds Harlow 2000: 211.

⁶³ Brian Lapping, *End of Empire*. London, 1985: 523. The Frontline states was an organisation formed by Southern African countries already under black majority rule to pursue the goal of black majority rule in Rhodesia and South Africa. The member countries often lent their territory to the guerrilla movements, and thus became involved in the conflict. Tanzania's President, Julius Nyerere was Chairman of the Frontline states.

⁶⁴ For further information about the Anglo-American mediation attempt, see M. Tamarkin, *The Making of Zimbabwe. Decolonization in regional and international politics*. Oxford 1990: 185ff.

1977-79, and the Rhodesia conflict finally ended with a settlement between the guerrilla leaders and the white minority regime, called the Lancaster House Agreement, in December 1979.⁶⁵ Rhodesia became independent as Zimbabwe under black majority rule. As this thesis is the first to demonstrate, there is a connection between Britain's need to resolve the Rhodesia crisis and its policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War.

Finally, a few words must be said about Britain's relationship with Africa in the late 1970s. Decolonisation had cost Britain its means of direct influence in Africa, and its influence was further hampered by its imperialist legacy and inability to resolve the Rhodesia crisis. As Europe was rapidly becoming the main focus of Britain's foreign policy and little funding was available for an active Africa policy, the FCO aimed to transform its African 'liabilities into assets' in the cheapest possible way.⁶⁶ Its main focus was Southern and Eastern Africa, as these regions were rich in natural resources and geo-strategically important. Located in the geographical centre of Britain's African area of interest, Central East Africa was a natural target for its new foreign policy. But in order for British influence and interests to flourish, two conditions must be fulfilled. Firstly, the Central East African countries must be ruled by regimes friendly – or at least, neutral – to Britain; and secondly, the region must be peaceful and politically stable. At the time of independence, these conditions were to some extent fulfilled, but by 1978, the situation had worsened dramatically.

As the former colonial ruler of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda Britain had a long historical connection with Central East Africa and retained substantial interests there. But by 1978, Britain had lost much influence in the region. Diplomatic relations with Uganda had been severed in 1977 due to President Idi Amin Dada's⁶⁷ anti-Western attitude and his hostility towards British interests. Britain desperately wanted Amin overthrown, and would not consider re-establishing relations while he remained President of Uganda.⁶⁸ Britain's relationship with

⁶⁵ Lowe 2009: 717.

⁶⁶ Mayall 1986: 53.

⁶⁷ Idi Amin Dada held only a fourth grade education, but had become a professional soldier in the King's African Rifles. He had risen to the status of Army Chief of Staff by 25 October 1971, when he overthrew President Milton Obote and appointed himself President of Uganda. The Amin regime is infamous for its human rights abuses and Amin's erratic behaviour. He was subject to many assassination attempts during his eight-year rule, but had a talent for survival. While President of Uganda, Amin continued to promote himself, finally ending up with the full title 'Al-haji Field Marshal Dr. Idi Amin Dada, VC, DSO, MC, CBE. Life President of the Republic of Uganda.'

⁶⁸ By 1978 Britain was attempting to isolate and embarrass Amin whenever opportunities arose: it lobbied intensely for the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to launch an investigation into the alleged atrocities of the Amin regime; it tried to keep Amin from attending Commonwealth conferences, most famously by denying him landing rights in Britain so that he could not attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting there in 1977; David Owen, a professional neurologist, has since written a paper alleging that Amin was insane and admitted in a 2003 BBC interview to having inquired of the MI6 if they

Tanzania was strained by ideological differences. Above all, their relationship was damaged by the Rhodesia crisis, over which President Julius Nyerere⁶⁹ severed relations with Britain in 1965. Although relations were later restored, the relationship remained chilly as Tanzania continued to accuse Britain of imperialist intervention in Africa. Kenya had long been among Britain's most important African allies, but by the late 1970s Britain's influence there was being replaced by that of the United States.⁷⁰ Britain's influence waned as its poor economic performance prevented it from extending to Kenya the preferential economic treatment necessary to remain its main patron, and the accession of a new Kenyan President, Daniel arap Moi, in August 1978, left the future of Anglo-Kenyan relations uncertain.

would be willing to assassinate Amin, a request they declined. There were many British organisations working for Amin's overthrow, and Britain's contempt for him was obvious by the late 1970s.

⁶⁹ Julius Nyerere was one of Africa's most prominent and respected statesmen and remained President of Tanzania from independence until 1985. He transformed Tanzania into a one-party state and tried to keep Tanzania non-aligned in the Cold War. However, his adherence to the ideology of African socialism (*ujamaa*), support for Soviet-backed guerrilla movements in Southern Africa and close defence relationship with China gave Britain the impression that Nyerere was leaning towards alignment with the communist bloc.

⁷⁰ Charles Hornsby, *Kenya: A History Since Independence*. London 2012: 292.

Chapter 3

Great Britain and the Uganda-Tanzania War

The Government condemn the Ugandan invasion and have conveyed an expression of sympathy to the Tanzanian government. We hope there will be an early end to the fighting and that a peaceful settlement can be quickly achieved based on the OAU principle of respect for territorial integrity. [...] We believe African disputes should, wherever possible, be settled in an African context.⁷¹

This was Britain's officially stated policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War for the duration of the conflict. However, this chapter will demonstrate that – except for its genuine condemnation of the Ugandan invasion – Britain's actual policy on the conflict was almost the complete opposite of its official one. Despite its publicly stated intentions to stay out of the conflict, Britain secretly intervened in favour of Tanzania, disregarding its own official promotion of a quick, peaceful, mediated solution in order to ensure Uganda's military defeat by Tanzania.

This discrepancy between official and actual policy was a result of conflicting British interests. The officials of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office wanted to intervene in the Uganda-Tanzania War, which they saw as an opportunity to preserve and increase British influence in Africa. By assisting Tanzania in a war that could potentially cause Amin's overthrow, they thought that British and Western influence might replace communist predominance in Central East Africa. They also hoped that any increase in British influence over Nyerere could be used to achieve a mediated resolution of the Rhodesia crisis, Britain's top priority in Africa in the late 1970s. But external factors and competing British interests put severe limitations on the policy Britain could pursue on the Uganda-Tanzania War: it must be cheap, non-lethal, reactive and – above all – secret.

3.1 Central East Africa and the Uganda-Tanzania War

In order to understand the development of Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War, basic knowledge about the conflict is necessary. Therefore, this subchapter will provide an introduction to Central East Africa's political situation in the late 1970s and to the Uganda-Tanzania War itself.

⁷¹ Defence and foreign affairs debate in the House of Lords, 8 November. Speaking Note for Lord Goronwy-Roberts. Uganda (defensive), 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2390/64, TNA.

Central East Africa was a volatile region in the 1970s. Externally, regional stability was threatened from the north by the conflicts in the Horn of Africa⁷² and from the south by the Southern African conflict over black majority rule in Rhodesia and South Africa.⁷³ If these conflicts spilled into Central East Africa they could destabilise the region, which would be detrimental to Britain's interests there. Internally, the region's stability was threatened by the bad relationships between Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Attempts had been made to unify these countries politically and economically – most famously with the establishment of the East African Community (EAC) in 1967⁷⁴ – but when the EAC collapsed in 1977, the region was more disintegrated than ever, and tensions were high as the former member countries squabbled over its remaining assets.⁷⁵ The relationship between Kenya and Tanzania had been deteriorated as the EAC collapsed, and deteriorated further when Tanzania unilaterally closed their common border in 1977. Kenya's relationship with Uganda was also troubled, and had hit a low point when Amin threatened to annex much of Western Kenya in 1976. Although Kenya never trusted Amin again, it allowed the lucrative Ugandan import trade to continue.⁷⁶ By 1978 and the breakout of the Uganda-Tanzania War, Kenya felt encircled by what it perceived as hostile regimes and had returned to its traditional isolationist foreign policy.⁷⁷

Tanzania's relationship with Uganda had deteriorated with the Amin coup in 1971. Tanzania granted exile to Uganda's ex-President, Milton Obote, and refused to recognise Amin as President of Uganda. Instead, Nyerere allowed Obote to establish guerrilla training camps in Tanzania, and supported his unsuccessful attempt to invade Uganda in September 1972.⁷⁸ This

⁷² The Horn of Africa was highly unstable and volatile in the 1970s. Ethiopia was destabilised in 1974 by the Derg coup and the Ethiopian Civil War (1974-91) and fought Eritrean secessionism in the Eritrean War of Independence (1961-91). Somali irredentism also threatened regional stability. As the Somali nation had been divided between Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya at independence, Somali irredentists wanted to unify the Somali nation in one country, Greater Somalia. This caused the Ethio-Somali War (1977-8) and threatened Kenya. Somalis made incursions into Kenyan territory from the north, and Somalis living in northern Kenya had tried to secede to join Greater Somalia in what became known as the Shifita War (1963-7).

⁷³ South Africa had been nominally independent from Britain since 1910 and was led by a white minority regime. Its infamous *apartheid* system of racial segregation allowed the black majority population very limited rights, and along with South Africa's frequent military and political intervention in neighbouring states was the source of much domestic and international criticism. South Africa initially supported the white minority regime in Rhodesia, but from the mid-1970s started working for a mediated settlement in order to avoid another potential communist regime and/or civil war on its borders.

⁷⁴ The East African community (1967-77) was an economic union modelled after the Common Market of Europe. For more information about the EAC, see Thomas P. Ofcansky and Roger Yeager, *Historical dictionary of Tanzania*. London 1997: 70-71.

⁷⁵ Hornsby 2012: 235.

⁷⁶ Uganda was a land-locked state, and almost all of its imports passed through Kenya, including all its petroleum products.

⁷⁷ Hornsby 2012: 320.

⁷⁸ Avirgan and Honey 1983: 35.

escalated the conflict between Tanzania and Uganda to the brink of war, and the two parties signed a peace treaty in Mogadishu the following month. The Mogadishu Agreement called for a cessation of military operations and the establishment of a demilitarised zone stretching sixteen kilometres on each side of the Tanzania-Uganda border. It also demanded an end to hostile propaganda and ‘subversive forces’ conspiring against one country from the territory of the other.⁷⁹ Although the relationship between Tanzania and Uganda remained hostile in the years following the agreement, open conflict did not erupt until the start of the Uganda-Tanzania War in October 1978.

The political instability of Central East Africa and lack of pro-British regimes made it difficult for Britain to expand its influence in the region. The future of British interests was uncertain in a region threatened by destabilisation from without and within, and the unfriendly relations between the local regimes meant that increased British influence in one state could easily lessen its influence in another. Because of its interest in Central East Africa and its fear that the region might be destabilised, Britain followed the escalating conflict between Tanzania and Uganda in October 1978 with particular interest.

The Uganda-Tanzania War broke out on 30 October 1978 and lasted until 11 April 1979. For the purposes of this thesis, the war has been divided into two distinct phases: the first covering Uganda’s invasion of Tanzania in the autumn of 1978, and the second covering Tanzania’s invasion of Uganda in the spring of 1979.⁸⁰ Although the precise reasons for the outbreak of the war have never been fully documented, the consensus is that it was started by Uganda.⁸¹ Ugandan troops crossed the border into Tanzania on 9 October 1978, triggering three weeks of border skirmishes between the two countries. Amin made repeated accusations that

⁷⁹ Avirgan and Honey 1983: 36.

⁸⁰ Although the Ugandan invasion of Tanzania formally lasted only two weeks, sporadic fighting seems to have occurred until the Tanzanian counter-invasion in January 1979. Therefore, phase one covers the period from 9 October 1978 to 22 January 1979 and is covered in chapter 4. Phase two covers the period from 23 January 1979 to 11 April 1979 and is the subject of chapter 5.

⁸¹ Differing interpretations have been offered about the origins of the war. One interpretation is that the war started when an anti-Amin army mutiny was fought back in Mbarara in October 1978. The disloyal troops were forced to retreat towards the Tanzanian border, finally crossing it on 9 October and triggering the first border clashes. Amin subsequently ordered the Ugandan army to invade Tanzania in the hopes that it would rally to his side to fight an external enemy. Although not discussed in this thesis, this view is supported by my sources. For examples of this explanation, see Phares Mutibwa, *Uganda since Independence: A story of unfulfilled hopes*. New Jersey 1992: 113-4, or Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian intervention in international society*. Oxford 2002: 113. A second interpretation claims that the war was a premeditated action by Amin, who allegedly started preparing his invasion in May 1979. For an example of this explanation, see Avirgan and Honey 1983: 51.

Tanzania had invaded Uganda, and on 30 October 1978 he ordered the Ugandan army to invade Tanzania.⁸²

The Ugandan invasion caught Tanzania by surprise and its army completely unprepared. In compliance with the Mogadishu Agreement of 1972, Tanzanian troop deployment in the border area was minimal, allowing Ugandan soldiers to advance as far as the Kagera River by the town Kyaka without meeting much resistance. The Ugandan army blew up the river's only bridge, and on 1 November 1978 Amin announced the annexation of the occupied area, known as the Kagera salient.⁸³ The Ugandan invasion evoked international condemnation from African and non-African actors alike. The near-universal condemnation of his invasion is believed to have taken Amin by surprise, and faced with international pressure and full Tanzanian mobilisation, he announced the withdrawal of his troops on 14 November;⁸⁴ but Tanzania refused to acknowledge that Uganda had in fact withdrawn, claiming instead that fighting was ongoing and that its army was still expelling Ugandan troops from Tanzania. Although no formal peace was announced, the conflict was commonly believed to be over by December 1978.

Tanzania's invasion of Uganda on 21 January 1979 therefore took the world by surprise. As Uganda had the higher ground on the formal Uganda-Tanzania border and had previously exploited this advantage to launch numerous attacks on Tanzania, it has been suggested that the Tanzanian invasion was motivated primarily by a desire to push on to a more easily defensible point on the Ugandan side of the border.⁸⁵ However, the most commonly believed explanation is that Tanzania invaded Uganda in order to destabilise the Amin regime. As Tanzania would have risked international condemnation for a full-scale invasion of Uganda, they sought instead to 'liberate' the Ugandan border areas from Amin's control with the help of Ugandan exile guerrillas, hoping that this would instigate an anti-Amin rebellion that would cause his downfall.⁸⁶ By late February 1979 it was obvious that this would not happen, and Tanzania

⁸² Avirgan and Honey 1983: 61.

⁸³ The Kagera River starts in Burundi and Rwanda and runs north along the Rwanda-Tanzania border. It then turns east and follows the Tanzania-Uganda border for a while before turning south into Tanzania. The river turns north again by the town Kyaka, about 28 kilometres from the Tanzania-Uganda border. The river then crosses the border into Uganda, where it empties into Lake Victoria. Thus, the river separates an area of roughly 1800 square kilometres from the rest of Tanzania, and this area is called the 'Kagera salient'. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'salient' as 'A piece of land [...] that juts out to form an angle.' Source: Oxforddictionaries.com, Salient (accessed 25 March 2015).

⁸⁴ Wheeler 2002: 114.

⁸⁵ Avirgan and Honey 1983: 69.

⁸⁶ Wheeler 2002: 114.

decided to march on Kampala in order to rid itself of the continuous security threat that the Amin regime represented.

Amin's Arab and communist friends had refused to support his 1978 invasion. But the Tanzanian invasion of Uganda provoked Amin's equally erratic friend, Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi,⁸⁷ into action. By mid-February 1979 Libyan troops and war supplies started arriving in Uganda.⁸⁸ But the Ugandan army was disintegrating, leaving Libyan troops to do most of the fighting. By March Gaddafi realised that the Amin regime could no longer effectively defend itself, and started pulling his troops out of Uganda. In a final effort to save Amin, Libya issued an ultimatum to Tanzania on 25 March stating that if Tanzania did not withdraw from Uganda, Libya would declare war on it – but Nyerere refused to comply. Realising that he would soon be overthrown, Amin made a last-ditch attempt to save his regime by asking the United Nations Security Council for a resolution against the Tanzanian invasion. However, neither African nor non-African members of the Security Council would support his request, and so the Tanzanian army invaded the Ugandan capital, Kampala, on 11 April 1979. Amin fled with his family into life-long exile,⁸⁹ and the Tanzanian army proceeded to clear Northern Uganda of his supporters.

In the weeks prior to the fall of Kampala, Ugandan exiles had formed an organisation called the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF). Members of this organisation became the new government of Uganda, and a teacher named Yusuf Lule was appointed President. But post-Amin Uganda turned out to be politically unstable, and Lule was replaced as President by former Ugandan Attorney General Godfrey Binaisa only one month after his appointment.⁹⁰ Binaisa was himself ousted from the Presidency after less than a year. Milton Obote won the following 1980 general election, but soldier-cum-politician Yoweri Museveni refused to accept the result and started the Ugandan Bush War (1981-6); Thus Uganda, although rid of Amin, slid into political instability and civil war.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Amin and Gaddafi became friends in February 1972, and Gaddafi sent soldiers to help Amin repulse the 1972 guerrilla invasion. In exchange for Gaddafi's friendship and support, Amin renounced Israel and pledged allegiance to the Muslim cause, although Uganda was primarily a Christian country. For more information about Amin's relationship with Gaddafi, see Alison Pargeter, *Libya. The rise and fall of Qaddafi*. London 2012: 127-9.

⁸⁸ John K. Cooley, *The Libyan Sandstorm*. London 1983: 256. The number of Libyan soldiers sent to Amin's assistance in the Uganda-Tanzania War have been estimated between 1500 and 3000.

⁸⁹ Amin first fled to Libya, but later moved to Saudi Arabia, where he died in 2003.

⁹⁰ Oliver Furley, «Britain and Uganda from Amin to Museveni», in Kumar Rupesinghe (ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*. Oslo 1989: 281.

⁹¹ Furley 1989: 285.

The Uganda-Tanzania War also had dire consequences for Tanzania. It had caused major destruction of life and property in the Kagera salient, and the Tanzanian economy, already suffering from low coffee prices and excessive imports, crumbled under the cost of the war.⁹² The war also led President Nyerere, who had planned to step back in 1980, to take another term as President as he did not wish to risk political instability while Tanzania was weakened.

Finally, a note on the international aspects of the war. Libya was the only country to intervene militarily in the conflict. Kenya, although not involved in the fighting, was also an important actor as it neighboured both Uganda and Tanzania. Kenya had the power to stop all of land-locked Uganda's essential imports, including war materials and fuel supplies, as these transited Kenya on their way to their destination. Although Kenya intended to stay neutral, actual neutrality proved nearly impossible; allowing Ugandan imports to pass its borders would constitute indirect support for Uganda's aggressive invasion, while stopping them would be seen as an act of support for Tanzania. Offers of mediation were extended to Tanzania and Uganda by Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan and the OAU, but mediation proved impossible as neither party would participate in phase one unless its adversary would apologise. Uganda was willing to accept mediation in phase two, but Tanzania demanded that the mediator condemn Amin, and that Amin apologise for invading Tanzania, renounce his claims on Tanzanian territory and pay war reparations. As Tanzania was at that time itself invading Uganda, these demands 'were regarded by most people as so unacceptable both to Uganda and to any likely mediator (particularly the OAU) that they were generally seen as tantamount to a refusal by Tanzania to accept mediation under any reasonable circumstances.'⁹³ No non-African actors interfered publicly in the Uganda-Tanzania War, but as this thesis will demonstrate, that does not mean that they kept out it.

3.2 Britain's motivations for intervention in the Uganda-Tanzania War

The purpose of this subchapter is the discussion of Britain's motivation for intervention in the Uganda-Tanzania War. It argues that although the Uganda-Tanzania War was an unforeseen conflict, British officials quickly recognised that the war could be used to further Britain's global power and status by increasing its influence in Africa. This was to be achieved through the pursuit of two goals

⁹² Falola 2002: 258.

⁹³ Memorandum. The Tanzania/Uganda War: Act 2, 30 April 1979, FCO 31/2638/16, TNA.

The first goal the British officials hoped to achieve through intervention in the Uganda-Tanzania War was increased British influence in Central East Africa. They believed that the communist countries enjoyed more influence in the region than Britain did. Although Kenya remained a faithful ally to the West, British officials viewed Tanzania's adherence to the ideology of African Socialism and its close defence cooperation with China as a sign of significant communist influence. Uganda's Amin regime, on the other hand, was erratic and frequently followed anti-Western policies in order to ensure continued Arab and communist financial support. Britain felt its own influence in the region slipping away – it had no diplomatic relations with Uganda at all and therefore no influence there, Anglo-Tanzanian relations were strained, and British influence in Kenya was being gradually replaced by that of stronger patrons.

Therefore, FCO officials were keen to take advantage of the opportunities for increased influence offered by the Uganda-Tanzania War. In the years leading up to the conflict, the Soviet Union had supplied arms to both Uganda and Tanzania. When Uganda subsequently used its weapons to invade Tanzania, the Soviet Union was embarrassed, and opted to lay low:

The Russians are likely to try to maintain a low profile. They will be embarrassed at Amin's action and are vulnerable to African criticism for having armed and trained his forces. Their public reaction so far has been to profess support for the principle of inviolability of frontiers, an implicit disavowal of Amin.⁹⁴

The FCO officials saw this as an opportunity for the West to take advantage of the Soviet Union's blunder and increase its own influence in the region at the communists' expense. Therefore, they were eager to preclude any communist moves to rectify their mistake: 'we want to avoid giving an opening for Soviet or Cuban intervention and the introduction of an east-west dimension.'⁹⁵ The knowledge that Tanzania was unlikely to get assistance from other Western countries led the British officials to conclude that Britain should provide some before the communists did:

We must take into account the possibility that if we appear unwilling to help Tanzania at a time of need, she may turn to others, such as the Russians who do have instant equipment.

⁹⁴ Uganda/Tanzania: Considerations for UK policy, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2390/65, TNA.

⁹⁵ Uganda/Tanzania: Considerations for UK policy, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2390/65, TNA.

We should derive some encouragement from the fact that when the chips were down Nyerere turned to us.⁹⁶

Therefore, the EAD officials deemed it crucial that Britain intervene in the conflict in an attempt to replace communist influence in Central East Africa: ‘we do not want to leave the field to them.’⁹⁷

The officials believed that successful intervention in the war could lead to increased British influence in both Uganda and Tanzania. Although Britain’s relationship with Tanzania was cool, it had ‘a growing bilateral interest in Tanzania, including trade which is significant.’⁹⁸ Therefore, the officials would like to see increased British influence there, but this could only come about if Tanzania was politically stable, and Britain believed that a prerequisite for such stability was that Nyerere remain in power. As they believed that Tanzania’s defeat in the Uganda-Tanzania War could potentially lead to Nyerere’s overthrow, they wanted to shore up his position ‘if only, to put it at its absolute lowest, because there is enough trouble elsewhere in Africa.’⁹⁹ Increasing Britain’s influence in Tanzania, then, was not a top priority, but a nice potential benefit from interference in the conflict.

Britain’s still had substantial interests in Uganda, and was determined to increase its influence there.¹⁰⁰ As there could be no rapprochement between Britain and Uganda while the Amin regime survived, any revival of British influence in Uganda was contingent upon its overthrow. The recent escalation of anti-Amin army mutinies and assassination attempts convinced the British officials that Amin’s position was precarious, and that the war provided an excellent opportunity to ‘exploit what openings may occur to contribute towards Amin’s downfall.’¹⁰¹ They believed that a Ugandan military victory – or even a mediated withdrawal – could strengthen Amin’s domestic position, and would therefore be contrary to British interests. On the other hand, they believed that a ‘military defeat or repulse could precipitate the downfall of Amin’,¹⁰² and decided to assist Tanzania in order to ‘curb and if possible to remove Amin.’¹⁰³

⁹⁶ FCO to Peter J. S. Moon, 10 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/35, TNA.

⁹⁷ Alan G. Munro to Arthur Anthony Duff, 13 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/39, TNA.

⁹⁸ FCO to Peter J. S. Moon, 10 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/35, TNA.

⁹⁹ Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 11 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/37, TNA.

¹⁰⁰ John A. Robson to Derek M. Day, 9 February 1979, FCO 31/2675/11, TNA.

¹⁰¹ Uganda/Tanzania: Considerations for UK policy, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2390/65, TNA.

¹⁰² Uganda/Tanzania: Considerations for UK policy, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2390/65, TNA.

¹⁰³ C. T. Hart to Francis X. Gallagher, 13 November 1978, FCO 31/2400/117, TNA.

Although the British officials feared that Amin's fall would unleash 'a period of anarchy and bloodshed'¹⁰⁴ in Uganda and were unable to predict who his successor would be,¹⁰⁵ they were optimistic about the future prospects of Anglo-Ugandan relations: 'we would welcome Amin's downfall and believe we might be able to work with a successor regime.'¹⁰⁶ If this seemed to be the case,¹⁰⁷ the FCO officials hoped that early recognition, combined with generous amounts of aid, would lead the new Ugandan regime to depend on Britain, thus granting it considerable influence.¹⁰⁸

In addition to the obvious benefits of Amin's replacement by a pro-British regime, the FCO officials believed that his overthrow might facilitate a warmer and more stable political climate in Central East Africa, which would be beneficial to British influence there, as Amin's survival ensured continued animosity between Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. His frequent threats to his neighbours also caused a regional arms build-up, negating much of Britain's aid effort and potentially leading Tanzania and Kenya to 'succumb to military rule, a danger which will be imminent if Tanzania's army is defeated and which may come closer in Kenya as its now small army is expanded and the new government treads on Kikuyu toes.'¹⁰⁹ Therefore, assisting Tanzania in its military campaign to repel the Ugandan invasion was consistent with Britain's interests.

The second goal the officials hoped to achieve through British intervention in the Uganda-Tanzania War was to increase influence over Tanzania's President, Julius Nyerere, in order to solve the Rhodesia crisis. The resolution of the Rhodesia crisis was Britain's main African priority, as it represented a continuous source of international embarrassment and accusations of British imperialism from African and other developing countries. The officials hoped that British intervention in favour of Tanzania might convince President Nyerere – notoriously suspicious of Britain's 'imperialist' policy in Africa – that Britain's intentions were benign and that he should continue to support the Anglo-American mediation attempt. Britain

¹⁰⁴ David Owen to Certain missions and dependent territories, 3 November 1978, FCO 31/2398/62, TNA.

¹⁰⁵ C. T. Hart to Peter E. Rosling, 30 October 1978, FCO 31/2389/41, TNA.

¹⁰⁶ Uganda/Tanzania: Considerations for UK policy, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2390/65, TNA.

¹⁰⁷ John A. Robson to Derek M. Day, 13 March 1979, FCO 31/2682/113, TNA.

¹⁰⁸ K. D. Temple to FCO, 1 November 1978, FCO 31/2389/58, TNA.

¹⁰⁹ C. T. Hart to Francis X. Gallagher, 13 November 1978, FCO 31/2400/117, TNA. The comment about Kenya's new government 'treading on Kikuyu toes' is a reference to the importance of ethnicity in Kenyan politics and its inherent potential for political instability. Kenya's first President, Jomo Kenyatta, had been a member of Kenya's largest ethnic group, the Kikuyu, and had concentrated much power in Kikuyu hands. It was expected that Kenya's new President, Daniel arap Moi – himself a member of the Kalenjin ethnic group – would now strip the Kikuyu of some of this power and transfer it to other ethnic groups in order to tame his rivals and secure his own position. See Daniel Branch, *Kenya: Between hope and despair, 1963-2011*. London 2011: 138-142.

had reason to believe that Nyerere had lost faith in this project,¹¹⁰ and believed a mediated settlement would be impossible if he did not convince the Soviet-backed guerrilla movements to participate in negotiations. If such a settlement could not be reached, the liberation movements would eventually overthrow the Rhodesian minority government, hurting British citizens and robbing the West of what little influence they might have left in this resource-rich territory. David Owen also confirmed that Britain's interest in Tanzania was mostly related to the conflict in Southern Africa: 'Certainly, while we have Rhodesia, Tanzania is important – and while Nyerere is President. But longer term we should be careful about its significance in Africa.'¹¹¹

The British officials were wary that a refusal to help Tanzania in its fight against Uganda might confirm Nyerere's suspicions of Britain, leading him to 'turn eastward and follow more extreme politics in Southern Africa than he now does.'¹¹² Therefore, they concluded that '[o]ur need for good relations with Tanzania, not least in the context of Southern Africa, make it essential we do not lose Nyerere's confidence over this affair and do what we can to help him.'¹¹³ Helping Tanzania might win Britain 'some political credit, which might be worth having for the future. If we do not, we shall lose ground politically, even allowing for a certain inevitable element of blackmail in the initial reaction of the Prime Minister and President.'¹¹⁴ In order to win such credit for use in the Rhodesia conflict, they therefore set out to 'demonstrate to the maximum extent possible our support for Tanzania.'¹¹⁵

But convincing Nyerere of Britain's friendship would not be easy. Anglo-Tanzanian relations were cool and Britain struggled to convince Nyerere that the Anglo-American mediation project was a genuine effort to achieve black majority rule. Nyerere's difficult and suspicious nature meant that there were clear limitations to the results British support for Tanzania in the Uganda-Tanzania War could achieve: 'I just do not think we can ever, by our support, create a situation in which he really feels he owes us something. Whatever we do he

¹¹⁰ Alan G. Munro to Philip R. A. Mansfield, 21 November 1978, FCO 31/2376/88, TNA. Nyerere subsequently confirmed this in a letter to Callaghan on 5 December 1978: 'It would be idle to pretend that the events of the last seven months have done anything except reduce the chances of the Anglo-American proposals being implemented. Yet even so, if there was a minimum chance of success we in Tanzania would once again be willing to urge the Patriotic Front leaders to participate in an all parties meeting to that end. Unfortunately I do not myself believe that the minimum chance at present exists.' For the full text of Nyerere's letter to the Prime Minister about Rhodesia, see: Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 5 December 1978, FCO 31/2643/w14, TNA.

¹¹¹ J. Stephen Wall to Ted Rowlands, 29 January 1979, FCO 31/2643/46, TNA.

¹¹² C. T. Hart to Francis X. Gallagher, 13 November 1978, FCO 31/2400/117, TNA.

¹¹³ Uganda/Tanzania: Considerations for UK policy, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2390/65, TNA.

¹¹⁴ Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 9 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/23, TNA.

¹¹⁵ Uganda/Tanzania: Considerations for UK policy, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2390/65, TNA.

will see it as having been done for some interest of our own.¹¹⁶ Therefore, the officials deemed that any result from successful support of Tanzania in the Uganda-Tanzania War would be more likely to

show itself in the form of averting an increase in his obstruction of our efforts over Rhodesia and other issues, than of enlisting his positive backing. A rebuff could increase President Nyerere's suspicions and earn us his animosity. At minimum therefore we should try to get into a position where we can at least argue to him that we are being as helpful as we can.¹¹⁷

There would be no point, then, in going too far in their assistance to Tanzania. But Nyerere's suspicion towards Britain and his statements saying that the Uganda-Tanzania War was created by 'imperialists' who wanted to divert attention away from the conflicts in Southern Africa, convinced them that they would have to offer Tanzania something. Otherwise, they feared that Nyerere could start 'thinking or saying that our failure to help liquidate the Ugandan incursion is deliberately intended to prolong the diversion.'¹¹⁸ Therefore, 'we should not want any failure on our part to respond reasonably helpfully to Tanzanian requests to work, or give the appearance of working, to the advantage of Amin.'¹¹⁹ Thus, the officials felt that Britain *had* to intervene in the war, not only because of the potential gains assistance might get them, but because of the potential backlash that might follow from a refusal to help. This clearly demonstrates the importance that British officials attached both to the Rhodesia conflict and to avoiding accusations of imperialism for fear that they might hurt their interests in developing countries.

The British goals of increased influence in Central East Africa and the resolution of Rhodesia were vague and the chances of achieving them through intervention in the Uganda-Tanzania War were highly uncertain. This made it difficult for the FCO officials to enlist support for their policy recommendations outside the FCO. When trying to convince politicians from other departments, they therefore tried to bolster their argument by playing up its moral aspects:

¹¹⁶ Peter J. S. Moon to John A. N. Graham, 10 November 1978, FCO 31/2369/50, TNA.

¹¹⁷ Alan G. Munro to Arthur Anthony Duff, 13 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/39, TNA.

¹¹⁸ Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 11 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/37, TNA.

¹¹⁹ FCO to Peter J. S. Moon, 10 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/35, TNA.

Tanzania is a fellow Commonwealth country attacked by a much reviled neighbour. She had turned to us for help and [...] we should be ready in principle to respond in a helpful way provided this is not outweighed by disadvantages elsewhere.¹²⁰

Fortunately for the FCO officials, the international moral consensus on the situation was that Tanzania was the victim, and could thus be used to promote the FCO's preferred policy. They argued that '[a]s the victim of unprovoked aggression Tanzania is likely to have the support of virtually all of African and world opinion',¹²¹ and it would therefore not be morally tight to assist it, but Britain would look bad if its refusal to do so was exposed internationally:

Amin is a tyrant who has done terrible things in his own country and has now invaded his neighbour. Tanzania is seen by many, in Britain as well as outside, as a relatively model African country, of unusual stability, and its leader as an enlightened African statesman. Nyerere has appealed for our help, and this will almost certainly become known, probably quite soon. Do we wish to be able to say we responded? If Nyerere accuses us publicly of having rebuffed him, what will we answer?¹²²

The officials argued that Amin's breach of the OAU principle of territorial integrity was morally wrong and that Britain had a strong interest in seeing it restored. They claimed that Uganda's annexation of Tanzanian territory could spawn new conflicts all over Africa, and that 'an outbreak of territorial disputes would raise tensions and the level of armaments to the detriment of trade and economic development. This would not be to our benefit unless we see our role primarily as a supplier of arms.'¹²³ Therefore, they argued, intervention was not only in Britain's interest, but morally right: '[t]here is really no comparison between Tanzania and

¹²⁰ FCO to Peter J. S. Moon, 10 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/35, TNA.

¹²¹ Uganda/Tanzania: Considerations for UK policy, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2390/65, TNA.

¹²² Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 11 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/37, TNA

¹²³ C. T. Hart to Francis X. Gallagher, 13 November 1978, FCO 31/2400/117, TNA. This could also lead to renewed Somali irredentist threats against Kenya. Britain had issued an assurance to Kenya in 1967, stating that '[w]hile, therefore, the British Government cannot in advance give the Kenya Government any assurance of automatic assistance, the possibility of Britain's going to Kenya's assistance in the event of any organised and unprovoked attack by Somalia is not precluded.' Britain knew that Kenya interpreted this as an assurance of British support, and would expect assistance if it came under threat. For more information about the so-called 'Bamburi Understanding' of 1967, see Charles Hornsby, *Kenya: A History Since Independence*. London 2012: 182.

Uganda on moral grounds and if moral considerations have any part in our present policies there should be no hesitation in pressing for effective action against Amin now.¹²⁴

3.3 Restrictions to Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War

Britain's weakened position in the international system greatly affected the foreign policy. But each foreign policy situation or opportunity also tended to bear with it its own set of limitations determining Britain's policy options. This was true of the Uganda-Tanzania War, and it is the purpose of this subchapter to present the situation-specific limitations restricting Britain's policy on the conflict. It argues that these limitations meant that Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War would ideally conform to four criteria: it had to be secret, cheap, non-lethal, and reactive.

Secrecy was perhaps the most crucial criterion. Britain's lack of representation or a protecting power in Uganda meant that it could not protect the 3-400 British citizens living there against Amin's vengeance should he learn of Britain's wartime assistance to Tanzania.¹²⁵ But the FCO officials did not feel that the safety of the British community was a sufficient reason for Britain to not to pursue its interests. In fact, Owen seemed unwilling to take responsibility for the safety of the British citizens as 'the community have been warned on several occasions of the risks they run by remaining in Uganda':¹²⁶

I do not think that we should be deterred from taking action [...] for fear of retaliation against the British community in Uganda, which still numbers some 4-500 *despite the many warnings they have been given that they remain there at their own risk.*¹²⁷

¹²⁴ C. T. Hart to Francis X. Gallagher, 13 November 1978, FCO 31/2400/117, TNA.

¹²⁵ Uganda/Tanzania: Considerations for UK policy, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2390/65, TNA. The FCO officials had reviewed Britain's 1976 evacuation plan and found it outdated. Sending soldiers to save the British community would be difficult, and it would in any case take 72 hours before they could be on the ground in Uganda. Therefore, they got the British community included in the Federated Republic of Germany's plan for rescuing its own and the US' citizens in Uganda. But this was not an ideal solution, as the British citizens would be told to flee only after the Germans and the Americans had been warned. The officials also checked if any warships were close enough to signal 'muscle flexing' to Amin, and sought to find out if the Saudi Arabians would speak to Amin for them if the British community came under threat, and what could be done through the UN. But in the end, there was little they could do to save the British community if it came under threat, a sign of Britain's reduced influence and reach in this region of Africa.

¹²⁶ Notes for Supplementaries, 13 March 1979, FCO 31/2682/111, TNA.

¹²⁷ David Owen to James Callaghan, 13 November 1978, PREM 16/2268, TNA. [My italics.]

In fact, the FCO officials believed that the British community would be in even greater danger if Britain achieved its goal of seeing Amin overthrown, as they assumed that ‘a period of anarchy and bloodshed’¹²⁸ would follow his fall:

A military defeat or repulse could precipitate the downfall of Amin. This could lead to a general breakdown of law and order and again place the British community, together with other expatriates in Uganda, at some risk. But on the likely assumption that Amin's successor would mark an improvement, on balance a change of régime in Uganda would be to our advantage.¹²⁹

Their decision to intervene in the war despite the risk to the British community demonstrates that Britain valued overthrow and replacement of the Amin regime over the safety of their own citizens. But in order to protect them Britain would have to keep its intervention secret.

Another strong argument for secrecy was Britain’s fear of accusations of imperialist intervention in Africa. The FCO officials felt that African countries wilfully misunderstood Britain’s intentions and that ‘[i]t is an article of faith that all the ills of Africa are the fault of imperialism.’¹³⁰ The Uganda-Tanzania War was no exception, and both African and communist countries blamed the West for the conflict, calling it ‘a manifestation of imperialist attempts to divert attention from Southern African questions by provoking de-stabilisation elsewhere in Africa, in this case Tanzania. Alternatively it is suggested [...] that the aim is to destroy the nationalist movements by depriving them of bases in sympathetic African countries.’¹³¹ The FCO took these accusations so seriously that they issued a guidance telegram to its missions abroad explaining that these allegations were false and that they should be refuted by emphasising Britain’s cooperation with the South African nationalist movements and embarrassing the Soviet Union by pointing out that they had armed both sides in the Uganda-Tanzania War, just like in the Ethio-Somali War the year before. The fact that Britain felt it necessary to tell its own embassies that it was not imperialist and how to counter such claims demonstrates the extreme importance Britain attached to avoiding such allegations. The British officials thought there was ‘considerable danger that we shall be cast in the role of the villain’,¹³² and could not be seen intervening in an inter-African war for their own purposes while the OAU

¹²⁸ David Owen to Certain missions and dependent territories, 3 November 1978, FCO 31/2398/62, TNA.

¹²⁹ Uganda/Tanzania: Considerations for UK policy, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2390/65, TNA.

¹³⁰ Lewen to FCO, 13 November 1978, FCO 31/2399/115, TNA.

¹³¹ David Owen to certain missions, 16 November 1978, FCO 31/2400/148, TNA.

¹³² John A. N. Graham to Alan G. Munro, 3 November 1978, FCO 31/2399/99, TNA.

and African countries were trying to mediate. Therefore, they decided that Britain should publicly support such African solutions to the conflict, while intervening covertly: ‘in any support for Tanzania we want to avoid laying ourselves open to the charge of foreign involvement in an African dispute’.¹³³

The officials also feared that open British assistance to Tanzania ‘could facilitate Amin's efforts to gain support’;¹³⁴ he had so far been unable to attract assistance for his campaign from friendly Arab countries, but both Britain and Tanzania believed that overt British assistance for Tanzania could have this effect.¹³⁵ Britain also wanted their intervention kept secret in order ‘to avoid giving an opening for Soviet or Cuban intervention and the introduction of an east-west dimension.’¹³⁶ Therefore, both parties wanted to keep Britain’s assistance to Tanzania secret.¹³⁷

Britain’s decision to keep its assistance to Tanzania secret also served to protect its general policy on military assistance and disputes in Africa. They believed that their reaction to Tanzania’s requests for assistance – if it became known – could have implications for this policy:

How we respond here will have overtones for other African states who look to us for military help and equipment [...] Our current policies consist in a) giving our backing to African (OAU) efforts to settle disputes peacefully; b) to help through economic and military assistance [...] to equip African countries close to us to maintain stable government and their security. [...] In brief we seek to help African states to stand on their own feet; in the military field this involves help in preparing them to meet potential threats, through a combination of advice and the provision of equipment, training, mainly on commercial terms, designed to avoid their coming to us for direct help in an emergency. *We are not in a position nor do we seek to operate a fire brigade in inter-African disputes; these are for Africans to settle.*¹³⁸

British officials feared that open assistance to Tanzania could set an unfortunate precedent leading to an increased number of requests from African countries who would expect the same level of assistance that Tanzania had received. This was especially true for Kenya in light of the Bamburi Understanding. But since Britain wanted to intervene in the conflict, it was decided

¹³³ Uganda/Tanzania: Considerations for UK policy, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2390/65, TNA.

¹³⁴ Uganda/Tanzania: Considerations for UK policy, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2390/65, TNA.

¹³⁵ Uganda/Tanzania: Considerations for UK policy, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2390/65, TNA.

¹³⁶ Uganda/Tanzania: Considerations for UK policy, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2390/65, TNA.

¹³⁷ Britain also suspected Tanzania of wanting to keep Britain’s assistance quiet because it would lose face if it became known that it had asked its former colonial ruler, whom it often accused of imperialist interference on the African continent, for help. See Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2399/92, TNA.

¹³⁸ Alan G. Munro to Arthur Anthony Duff, 13 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/39, TNA. [My italics.]

that the intervention should be covert in order to avoid having to ‘operate a fire brigade’ in Africa.

In addition to being secret, Britain’s policy had to be cheap. Britain’s poor economic performance meant that there was little extra money for ventures such as intervention in the Uganda-Tanzania War, and the FCO would have to pay for any assistance to Tanzania themselves. As the FCO had just promised massive assistance to Zambia,¹³⁹ leaving the FCO with very little funds available for intervention in the Uganda-Tanzania War.¹⁴⁰ Tanzania had used up its British credit for 1978,¹⁴¹ and as it now had economic problems of its own, the Treasury and Department of Trade was unlikely to approve additional credit.¹⁴²

The combination of economic problems and uncertainty about the outcome of British intervention in the Tanzania-Uganda War meant that the FCO had trouble convincing politicians and other departments that Britain should take this chance. The FCO officials were very eager to intervene, but although Owen went along with their policies other Ministers were not as easily convinced. This meant that cheaper and less risky options were more likely to be approved than more costly policies. In fact, the FCO’s best chance of assisting Tanzania was to develop policies that didn’t cost money at all, and therefore didn’t require the approval of these politicians.

Another criterion for Britain’s policy was that the assistance it offered should be non-lethal. Although not established from the start of the conflict, this became increasingly clear as the FCO struggled to develop a policy on the conflict. There were several practical problems with weapons supply: Britain’s assistance to Zambia had depleted its stocks of weapons suitable for African wars;¹⁴³ the relative expensiveness of weapons compared with non-lethal equipment was problematic; and lethal equipment would have to be declared when seeking overflight clearance for transport, making rejections more likely and exposing British military assistance to Tanzania. Tanzania’s traditional defence cooperation with communist countries – especially China – was also a hindrance as there was no infrastructure for British weapon supply to Tanzania and Tanzanian soldiers were unfamiliar with British equipment.

¹³⁹ Britain’s assistance to Zambia was a result of a Rhodesian guerrilla shoot-down of an Air Rhodesia flight on 3 September 1978. This action caused a massive Rhodesian revenge raid into Zambia, after which Britain agreed to provide Zambia with weapons.

¹⁴⁰ Letter, J. Stephen Wall to Bryan Cartledge, Ugandan attack on Tanzania, 9 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/29, TNA.

¹⁴¹ Alan G. Munro to Arthur Anthony Duff, 13 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/39, TNA.

¹⁴² John Smith to David Owen, 8 December 1978, FCO 31/2377/130, TNA.

¹⁴³ Brian Watkins to Alan G. Munro, 1 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/2, TNA.

But the strained Anglo-Tanzanian relationship was also a limitation on Britain's willingness to provide weapons. The British officials did not trust Tanzania not to pass weapons on to Britain's enemies, namely the Rhodesian guerrillas and the communist countries. Therefore, supply of Blowpipe anti-aircraft weapons was refused on security grounds:

It is an ideal weapon for terrorists/guerrillas. It only needs one Rhodesian aircraft to be shot down near the Tanzanian border for us to be accused of arming terrorists waging war against HM subjects in Rhodesia, etc. No doubt the Tanzanian government is able to prevent Blowpipe falling into terrorist hands; can we be sure they would in all circumstances be willing to act in this way?¹⁴⁴

Tanzania was also denied offensive mine detecting equipment¹⁴⁵ because it was to be standard NATO equipment well into the 1980s and the officials feared

that from careful monitoring of the performance of the equipment, a potentially hostile power could drastically enhance the efficiency of its mine laying tactics. For our part we do not feel able to provide an assurance that the Tanzanians could and would prevent such equipment falling into eg Russian hands.¹⁴⁶

Therefore, Tanzania's orders for mine detecting equipment and Blowpipe were refused, although the official reason given to the Tanzanians was that no orders were accepted due to overly long delivery lead times. The concern that Tanzania might pass weapons on to the Rhodesian guerrilla movements might also open Britain to accusations of arming these soldiers:

I do not think President Nyerere would let much stand in his way if he decided that certain items of equipment belonging to his own forces were likely to be of decisive help to the guerrilla movements which he favours. [...] But it is likely that any equipment the Tanzanians decided to pass on would be lightweight and of a kind the provenance of which might be denied.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Alan G. Munro to Peter E. Rosling, 20 November 1978, FCO 31/2376/87, TNA. It is interesting that Britain continued to publicly profess its support for the 'liberation movements' when trying to avoid accusations of imperialist interference in Southern Africa, but in its internal documents referred to the same movements as 'terrorists'. This reflects their real opinions about the liberation movements and shows their efforts to present themselves as favouring black majority rule and not just an imperialist power.

¹⁴⁵ Baby Vipers and Giant Vipers.

¹⁴⁶ FCO to Peter J. S. Moon, 12 December 1978, FCO 31/2377/133, TNA.

¹⁴⁷ F. Kingsley Jones to Bryan Cartledge, 14 November 1978, FCO 31/2376/56, TNA.

So although the British officials did not want to be supplying the Rhodesian guerrillas, the most important thing was still that Britain was not caught doing it.

Britain's close relationship with Kenya also restricted the assistance it could offer Tanzania. The officials worried that the Kenyans would be angry if they discovered that Britain gave Tanzania military assistance, as they might 'question why we sell them vast amounts of equipment but give the Tanzanians a handout.'¹⁴⁸ Kenya's dislike of Tanzania could mean that 'once the Kenyans got to hear of the supply of guns, as they would in due course through the Parliamentary announcement [...] they would raise objection, with a risk to our close military relationship.'¹⁴⁹ Britain were not inclined to risk their relationship with the Kenyans, and they were also concerned that military assistance for Tanzania against the Ugandan invasion would lead the Kenyans to expect similar treatment if threatened by Somali irredentists.¹⁵⁰ The Kenyans also disapproved strongly of Tanzania's invasion of Uganda, as they feared 'that a continuation of the conflict could lead to a weakening of Amin's position, resulting in his overthrow and a change in Uganda's foreign policy' and 'destroy the balance of power between Nairobi, Kampala and Dar-es-Salaam to Kenya's disadvantage.'¹⁵¹ Therefore, the British officials were careful not to offer the Tanzanians anything that could endanger their interests in Kenya.

Britain's policy was also reactive. This reactivity was partly a result of the fact that Britain had very little reliable information about the conflict on which to act. As Britain had no contact with the Ugandan regime and learned very little about the Tanzanians' intentions, the pursuit of an active and confident policy was difficult. The reactivity was also caused by the fact that Britain was not a dominant actor in the situation. Britain's reduced influence in Africa after decolonisation left it little ability to influence events, as military intervention was not an option. Nor would it be productive to attempt to bully the warring parties into doing what Britain wanted, and its wish not to irritate any of the parties meant that reacting to events as they occurred was probably better than trying to dominate the situation. Therefore, Britain's policy was not an active and dominant policy, but rather a more defensive one of reacting to a series of Tanzanian demands and requests, hoping to seem helpful to them without compromising

¹⁴⁸ Alan G. Munro to Arthur Anthony Duff, 13 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/39, TNA.

¹⁴⁹ Alan G. Munro to Arthur Anthony Duff, 13 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/39, TNA.

¹⁵⁰ Alan G. Munro to Arthur Anthony Duff, 13 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/39, TNA.

¹⁵¹ Translation. Present state of the conflict between Uganda and Tanzania, 23 February 1979, FCO 31/2681/63, TNA.

Britain's other interests. The degree to which Britain deferred to African demands and wishes in this conflict is really quite surprising, and demonstrates their extreme anxiousness not to be accused of imperialist behaviour and lose favour with African countries.

3.4 Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War

The FCO officials were convinced that Britain's interests were best served by active support for Tanzania in the Uganda-Tanzania War, but to do so would harm Britain's wider African interests. Therefore, the officials developed a two-pronged policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War: one official policy to be presented to the public, and one actual policy to be pursued in secret. The official policy was designed to give the impression that Britain had no intention of intervening in the conflict, instead leaving it for African mediators to settle in a quick and peaceful manner; but although it might have been practical for Britain if mediation by the OAU or an African state could settle the conflict, it had no faith that this was possible. Britain's profession of support for the conflict to be solved in an 'African context' was therefore largely lip service – something it had to say in order to show respect for Africa's right and ability to solve its own problem even though this was highly unlikely. Nor would Britain's goals in the Uganda-Tanzania War, namely increased influence in Central East Africa and the resolution of the Rhodesia crisis, be achieved if Britain actually adhered to its officially stated policy. Britain needed the opportunity to demonstrate support for Tanzania when it was threatened and wanted Amin weakened or overthrown by a military defeat if possible.

Britain's actual policy was therefore quite the opposite of its official one – a policy of active intervention in favour of Tanzania, aimed at impeding Uganda's military campaign and facilitating Tanzania's. Britain did not strive for a quick and peaceful solution – in fact, it enabled Tanzania to avoid mediation and prolong its military campaign against Uganda. This policy of secret support for Tanzania remained constant throughout the war, even as Tanzania invaded Uganda in January 1979.

Chapter 4

Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War (9 October 1978-22 January 1979)

Perhaps having convinced himself of a Tanzanian hand in the trouble, and perhaps also with a cunning view to rallying his own forces, Amin went on to occupy the whole of the salient down to the Kagera river by early November. Throwing prudence to the winds and in defiance of the almost sacred OAU principle of territorial integrity, he announced its annexation.¹⁵²

Uganda's invasion of Tanzania in October 1978 triggered not only the Uganda-Tanzania War, but a renewed British interest in Central East Africa. British influence in the region had been waning since independence, and the FCO officials saw the outbreak of the Uganda-Tanzania War as a desirable opportunity for Britain to regain some of its former influence in the region. The officials immediately set out to find a way to support Tanzania's campaign to repulse the Ugandan invasion, and developed several suggestions for how this may be done in the few days between the outbreak of war and Tanzania's first request for assistance.

Britain's support for Tanzania was most intense during the two-week Ugandan invasion, and waned immediately when the Ugandans announced their withdrawal. This demonstrates that the officials' primary goal with offering material assistance was in fact to ensure Uganda's military defeat, in the hopes that this would not only impress Tanzania, but ideally result in Amin's fall. When Uganda announced the withdrawal of its army from Tanzania, both the immediate need for British assistance to Tanzania and the opportunity to unseat Amin seemed to have passed.

Although the FCO officials were able to provide Tanzania with some assistance in phase one, it was unable to get approval for most of its policy suggestions. Politicians and officials outside the FCO were unwilling to prioritise the Uganda-Tanzania War, and in the end the FCO could only get approval for assistance that was free or for which it would bear the cost. As the FCO had recently spent most of its funds on assistance to Zambia and its stocks were depleted, it had little material support to offer Tanzania. After the invasion was over, Britain offered Tanzania some military and economic support in the form of a modest amount of equipment, expedited commercial orders, £4 million credit extension and £3.5 million in aid. The FCO paid for the equipment that was given to Tanzania, and barely got the credit extension approved by

¹⁵² Uganda: Annual Review for 1978, 17 January 1979, FCO 31/2647/7, TNA.

the other ministries. It was fortunate that the Ministry of Overseas Development was willing to approve additional aid for Tanzania, or the FCO's policy might have failed. The officials were concerned that Tanzania would simply turn the offer down if it was insufficient in order to avoid a public announcement revealing that they had asked Britain for help.

In addition to material and economic support, Britain tried to assist Tanzania by restricting Amin's oil supply in the hopes that this would make it impossible for him to continue his invasion of Tanzania. Britain was able to pressure the British oil companies to restrict supplies to Uganda, but was unsuccessful in its attempts to encourage other governments to do the same. After Uganda's withdrawal from Tanzania Britain was no longer willing to pressure its oil companies or intervene with other countries, but helped by Uganda's deteriorating economy and reduced access to crude oil because of the Iranian revolution, Uganda was unable to increase its oil intake even after British pressure for oil reduction waned.

The officials were very pleased with the results of this modest policy. Tanzania was very happy with the assistance Britain had offered, and the Anglo-Tanzanian relationship was significantly warmer by the end of phase one than it had been at the start of the war. Amin remained President of Uganda, but as his fall had in any event been a highly uncertain possibility, the British officials were satisfied that they had increased British influence in Tanzania.

4.1 Britain and the Ugandan invasion

Britain observed the escalating fighting on the Uganda-Tanzania border with growing concern, but did not initially intend to intervene. This changed on 31 October 1978, when Britain learned that Uganda had invaded Tanzania the day before. The FCO officials recognised the conflict as an opportunity to increase British influence in Africa, and immediately set about finding ways of supporting Tanzania's campaign to fight back the Ugandan invasion.

4.1.1 Britain's assistance to Tanzania

Although Tanzania made no request for assistance when briefing Britain about the invasion on 31 October, the EAD was very enthusiastic about the opportunity to intervene in the Uganda-Tanzania War. The officials convinced David Owen to recommend to the Prime Minister that a general offer of assistance be made to Tanzania a mere hours after learning of

the invasion, as they judged the Ugandan invasion to be ‘an important psychological moment in our relations with Nyerere and should like to give a swift demonstration of our readiness to help.’¹⁵³ Owen admitted that stock depletion and Tanzania’s traditional defence relationship meant that there was in fact little equipment Britain could offer, but still believed it to be ‘in our political interests to respond to President Nyerere’s approach by indicating our willingness to help within practical limits’.¹⁵⁴ This suggestion was rejected by the Prime Minister, the Defence Secretary Fred Mulley and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Denis Healey, who believed that ‘an offer of military equipment to President Nyerere at this stage would be premature and possibly damaging’,¹⁵⁵ and that Britain ‘should be careful not to give President Nyerere an opening to put in requests which, in the event, we might not be able to honour.’¹⁵⁶

But this rejection did not deter the EAD officials, who immediately set about finding another way to assist Tanzania. When they discovered that Tanzania had 36 Scorpion tanks on order in Britain, and that the first consignment of four was about to be sent by sea the following week, they suggested offering to airfreight the tanks to Nyerere as this ‘could make a practical contribution to his defence forces and would show our concern to help him.’¹⁵⁷ Despite their discovery that this was an impractical idea because no ammunition was available and the Tanzanian tank drivers were still undergoing training in Britain, the officials thought it worthwhile to make the offer – if the Tanzanians turned it down because it was impractical, ‘that would be for them, and we would have shewn willing.’¹⁵⁸ Owen therefore took the proposal to the Defence Secretary, who turned it down because it was too impractical.¹⁵⁹

The Scorpion idea was abandoned on 6 November, when Tanzania made its first request for British assistance.¹⁶⁰ Several other requests followed throughout November, resulting in a list of Tanzanian equipment and weaponry requirements worth £20 million by early December.¹⁶¹ The High Commissioner to Tanzania, Peter Moon, believed that ‘if we

¹⁵³ J. Stephen Wall to Bryan Cartledge, 31 October 1978, FCO 31/2397/20, TNA.

¹⁵⁴ J. Stephen Wall to Bryan Cartledge, 31 October 1978, FCO 31/2397/20, TNA.

¹⁵⁵ F. Kingsley Jones to Bryan Cartledge, 1 November 1978, FCO 96/789/21, TNA.

¹⁵⁶ Bryan Cartledge to J. Stephen Wall, 31 October 1978, FCO 31/2397/21, TNA.

¹⁵⁷ J. Stephen Wall to Roger T. Jackling, 3 November 1978, FCO 31/2398/60, TNA.

¹⁵⁸ Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 4 November 1978, FCO 31/2399/74, TNA.

¹⁵⁹ Roger T. Jackling to J. Stephen Wall, 3 November 1978, FCO 31/2399/89, TNA.

¹⁶⁰ Peter E. Rosling to Alan G. Munro, 8 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/9, TNA.

¹⁶¹ Background note on military and civil assistance to Tanzania, 30 November 1978, FCO 31/2376/113, TNA.

The United States and Canada also received requests, but chose not to provide assistance. See Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 6 November 1978, FCO 31/2399/80, TNA; Thomas Bridges to FCO, 6 November 1978, FCO 31/2399/84, TNA; Ford to FCO, 9 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/25, TNA; Ford to FCO, 22 November 1978, FCO 31/2376/98, TNA.

respond reasonably generously we will win political credit, and we will lose ground politically if we do not',¹⁶² and therefore thought Britain should try to respond positively to the Tanzanian requests: 'I do not need to elaborate on the political advantages of doing what we can to help. It is clear that the rapid repeat rapid supply of even a few items would be enormously appreciated.'¹⁶³ But the Tanzanian requests were 'far beyond what we could, or indeed might want to, supply rapidly. Cost would run into many millions.'¹⁶⁴ Therefore, Britain responded to Tanzania on 9 November that it would speed up deliveries of items already on order in Britain, and asked how Tanzania intended to pay for the items it requested.

The Tanzanians expressed great shock and disappointment at Britain's response and said it had misunderstood their approach completely – they were not asking for help with commercial orders, but for government-to-government assistance, hoping that Britain would help with the costs and supply Tanzania from Britain's own military stocks.¹⁶⁵ Tanzania's negative reaction made the officials reconsider their strategy and try to repair Tanzania's disappointment with Britain:

The balance of political argument therefore justifies the production of some direct help, even if it is little more than a gesture, in response to the Tanzanian request. [...] In this we shall at least hope to ensure our position is defensible and reduce the chances of a hostile overreaction.¹⁶⁶

Therefore, the officials decided to start working on supplying a 'modest but still helpful package which we would offer to the Tanzanians at no expense to them.'¹⁶⁷ This package was to consist of some radio equipment, a few detectors, and, if available, a small number of assault boats. They also considered offering anti-tank guns if the Tanzanians continued to ask for weaponry.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶² Letter, Peter E. Rosling to John A. N. Graham, Military equipment for Tanzania, 9 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/28, TNA.

¹⁶³ Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 8 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/13, TNA.

¹⁶⁴ FCO to Peter J. S. Moon, 8 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/20, TNA.

¹⁶⁵ Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 9 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/24, TNA.

¹⁶⁶ Alan G. Munro to Arthur Anthony Duff, 13 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/39, TNA.

¹⁶⁷ Peter E. Rosling to John A. N. Graham, 9 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/28, TNA.

¹⁶⁸ Six Karl Gustav anti-tank guns were immediately available, but it was decided that the package should contain non-lethal equipment only. The Tanzanians were not trained in the use of these guns, and had in any case not asked for the Karl Gustavs.

The officials deemed that '[a]n offer on the above lines, together with the availability of commercially supplied equipment which the Tanzanians have on order from the UK, should be sufficient to reassure the Tanzanians that we are being as helpful as we can be towards them and thus hold the position at least until the military situation clarifies.'¹⁶⁹ The officials were willing to go far in order to avoid another negative reaction from Tanzania, and even considered 'whether a message in measured terms from the Prime Minister was desirable to try to hold our relations together.'¹⁷⁰ Owen recommended to his ministerial colleagues that the equipment package be offered to the Tanzanians, but although the Defence Secretary and Chancellor of the Exchequer agreed, Callaghan remained unconvinced and asked: 'If this is to be supplied free, what are we to get in return - politically or in some other way? We must not be bullied by them'.¹⁷¹ As the officials were eager to get the package approved, they immediately started reworking their proposal, but were interrupted by the announcement of Uganda's military withdrawal from Tanzania on 14 November 1978. Any offers of assistance to Tanzania were now put on hold until the situation clarified.¹⁷²

The equipment package was the third FCO policy suggestion on the Uganda-Tanzania War to be rejected by the ministers. The fact that the officials were able to bring three distinct proposals to ministerial level less than two weeks into the Ugandan invasion, demonstrates not only their eagerness to come up with ways of assisting Tanzania, but also the relative ease with which they convinced Owen to promote their ideas. However, the ministerial rejections suggest that the FCO attached excessive importance to the Uganda-Tanzania War, and that the top decision-makers were much less willing to prioritise the conflict. This trend was obvious throughout the Uganda-Tanzania War whenever costly policy initiatives were proposed.

The assistance offers were not Britain's only effort to please Tanzania during the invasion. In an attempt to avoid Tanzanian irritation with Britain, the FCO officers intervened with the editorial content of BBC's radio broadcasts despite their own opinion that 'their reporting is clearly aimed at being fair.'¹⁷³ The Tanzanians were angered by the BBC's equal presentation of official statements from Uganda and Tanzania, and were suspicious of the BBC's motives. Intervention with the editorial practice of Britain's public-service broadcaster

¹⁶⁹ Peter E. Rosling to John A. N. Graham, 9 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/28, TNA.

¹⁷⁰ Alan G. Munro to Arthur Anthony Duff, 13 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/39, TNA.

¹⁷¹ Bryan Cartledge to J. Stephen Wall, 10 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/53, TNA.

¹⁷² FCO to Peter J. S. Moon, 14 November 1978, FCO 31/2400/124, TNA.

¹⁷³ Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 2 November 1978, FCO 31/2398/33, TNA.

was a drastic move is another example of the FCO's eagerness to please the Tanzanians and to guard against Tanzania's tendency to view British actions as suspicious and 'imperialist.' The FCO also discussed bringing the Ugandan invasion to the United Nations, as they considered the conflict 'tailor-made' for the Security Council and that to take it there would be perfectly in line with Britain's UN policy.¹⁷⁴ UN sanctions against Uganda could also relieve pressure on British oil companies and discomfit the Soviet Union as it had armed both Uganda and Tanzania.¹⁷⁵ However, this was never seriously considered, as Nyerere wanted neither mediation nor UN interference and African countries would be annoyed that the OAU were not allowed to resolve the issue.¹⁷⁶ Again, Britain deferred to the wishes of African countries in order to avoid accusations of imperialism, even when a different policy might have been in Britain's interest.

The Ugandan invasion had major impact on Britain's policy of assistance towards Tanzania. It was only during the two-week invasion that Britain would consider any offer of material assistance, and it was only during this period that it was willing to use its influence with other actors such as the BBC or the UN. This tells us that Britain's willingness to assist Tanzania was much greater when it was under attack than otherwise, and also that the prospect of inflicting a military defeat on Amin – thus hopefully toppling him – was very attractive to Britain. Once the Ugandan withdrawal removed these incentives, Britain's interest in the conflict lessened and it started looking for a way not to offend Tanzania rather than provide it with expensive material assistance.

4.1.2 Britain's attempts to undermine Uganda during the invasion

As Britain no longer had diplomatic relations with Uganda, their only remaining area of official contact was bilateral trade. Britain's policy had long been to give 'no active encouragement to British trade with Uganda',¹⁷⁷ but this policy was abandoned when Uganda invaded Tanzania – Britain now actively discouraged trade with Uganda in the two most significant areas of Anglo-Ugandan trade: petroleum and luxury goods.

The Ugandan invasion made the restriction of Uganda's oil supplies a crucial part of Britain's policy. The officials believed that the combination of Uganda's poor economic

¹⁷⁴ D. Beattie to Alan G. Munro, 3 November 1978, FCO 31/2399/97, TNA.

¹⁷⁵ Brian L. Crowe to Alan G. Munro, 13 November 1978, FCO 31/2400/126, TNA.

¹⁷⁶ D. Beattie to Alan G. Munro, 3 November 1978, FCO 31/2399/97, TNA.

¹⁷⁷ Peter E. Rosling to John A. N. Graham, 1 November 1978, FCO 96/789/20, TNA.

performance, the escalating unrest and a reduction in oil supply could cause economic collapse in Uganda, and that this could potentially lead to Amin's overthrow.¹⁷⁸ Alternatively, reduced oil supply could lead to Amin's overthrow through military defeat, as oil supply was considered a 'critical factor in Amin's ability to sustain a campaign'.¹⁷⁹ An additional incentive was Tanzania's request on 2 November 1978 that Britain should stop its oil companies from supplying oil to Uganda while it was invading Tanzania. Uganda's oil supply had 'become a key issue in Nyerere's mind for the moment. He sees a cut off of oil as the one way of ensuring a rapid and succesful [sic] conclusion to the affair.'¹⁸⁰ Nyerere also told the American Ambassador that 'the single thing he wanted most of all was for the British to cut off oil.'¹⁸¹ Thus, the Ugandan invasion made the British officials very eager to ensure that Uganda's oil supply was restricted, although they were wary that too obvious obstruction of Uganda's oil supply would be interpreted as an obvious 'politically-inspired attempt to bring down the Amin regime.'¹⁸²

Because the United States had imposed a unilateral trade embargo on Uganda in October 1978, Britain was already in contact with the British oil companies Shell and British Petroleum (BP) about oil supply for Uganda.¹⁸³ When the American oil companies withdrew from Uganda its oil supply fell by 40%, and as the British oil company Shell/BP (Uganda) Limited was now the largest actor in the Ugandan oil market with its 40% market share, the officials expected Uganda to pressure it to increase supplies.¹⁸⁴ The FCO officials had therefore held a meeting with the oil companies on 26 October, expressing their fears that an increase 'would be likely to arouse substantial public and parliamentary criticism and could

¹⁷⁸ Alan G. Munro to John A. N. Graham, 30 October 1978, FCO 31/2405/14, TNA.

¹⁷⁹ Alan G. Munro to John A. N. Graham, 31 October 1978, FCO 31/2397/19, TNA.s

¹⁸⁰ Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 2 November 1978, FCO 31/2398/46, TNA.

¹⁸¹ Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 2 November 1978, FCO 31/2398/45, TNA.

¹⁸² Alan G. Munro to John A. N. Graham, 30 October 1978, FCO 31/2405/14, TNA.

¹⁸³ The United States' trade embargo on Uganda was passed into law on 10 October 1978. There was some initial confusion about whether the embargo applied to the oil companies, as their products did not originate in the US. Therefore, the oil companies voluntarily ceased supply to Uganda on 24 October 1978 awaiting further instructions. Before the US trade embargo six companies had supplied the Ugandan oil market: 40% of Uganda's oil was supplied by American oil companies Esso, Caltex and Mobil; 30% was supplied by Shell/BP (Uganda) Limited (hereafter referred to as 'Shell/BP'), a joint subsidiary of the British oil company British Petroleum (BP) and the Anglo-Dutch oil company Royal Dutch Shell (hereafter referred to as 'Shell'); the remaining 30% of the Ugandan oil market was shared between the French oil company Total (formally called the Compagnie française des pétroles or CFP) and the Italian oil company Agip (Azienda Generale Italiana Petroli). The three American companies were 100% US-owned, while the Ugandan government owned 50% of the three European oil companies.

¹⁸⁴ Shell/BP (Uganda) Limited was owned 50% by the Ugandan government, 25% by British Petroleum and 25% by Shell. It was supplied through Kenya by the Consolidated Petroleum Company (CPC), jointly owned by Shell and British Petroleum. CPC was under contractual obligation to cover Shell/BP (Uganda) BP Limited's oil requirements. Shell/BP had 200 employees in Uganda. Four of these were expatriates, two of them British.

be used as a lever by those who would like the UK to follow the US example and introduce an embargo against Uganda.¹⁸⁵ The oil companies had explained that their supply to Uganda was currently reduced by 30% due to Ugandan payment arrears, and proposed to keep supply at this reduced level. The companies would blame the Ugandan debts and reduced access to crude oil because of the crisis in Iran, although they expressed concern that this position might not be tenable for long.¹⁸⁶ The officials were pleased with this policy, which they thought ‘coincides admirably with government interests.’¹⁸⁷

But the Ugandan invasion changed Britain’s policy on oil to Uganda, and the FCO officials called another meeting with the oil companies on 1 November 1978. The officials now told Shell and BP that the Ugandan invasion meant that ‘[t]he importance of British companies avoiding infilling the US market share would now be more acute and we hoped that BP and Shell would drag their feet to the maximum extent possible in response to Ugandan requests for more oil.’¹⁸⁸ Although the oil companies claimed to have no intention of increasing supply, they wanted to reserve the possibility in case their local staff came under threat; they thought that as ‘Amin could now be in a difficult situation internally he might be more inclined to rely on threats to achieve the fuel he urgently needed.’¹⁸⁹ The FCO officials told the oil company representatives that they did not want them to increase supplies, threatening that although at present ‘there was no question of the Government instructing oil companies to cease supply [...] the eventuality could not be totally ruled out.’¹⁹⁰ They made it clear that the oil companies would lose the government’s support if they allowed the safety of their local staff to trump Britain’s desire to see oil supplies kept low:

[W]hereas the oil companies would certainly have public and Government support if they pursued their present intention of restricting supply to current levels, it would be much more difficult to offer such support if the companies, *for whatever reasons*, felt obliged to increase supplies.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁵ Uganda: Record of meeting with representatives of BP and Shell on 26 October, 26 October 1978, FCO 96/789/19, TNA.

¹⁸⁶ Uganda: Record of meeting with representatives of BP and Shell on 26 October, 26 October 1978, FCO 96/789/19, TNA.

¹⁸⁷ Alan G. Munro to John A. N. Graham, 30 October 1978, FCO 31/2405/14, TNA.

¹⁸⁸ Uganda: Record of meeting with representatives of BP and Shell on 1 November, 1 November 1978, FCO 31/2399/79, TNA.

¹⁸⁹ Uganda: Record of meeting with representatives of BP and Shell on 1 November, 1 November 1978, FCO 31/2399/79, TNA.

¹⁹⁰ Uganda: Record of meeting with representatives of BP and Shell on 1 November, 1 November 1978, FCO 31/2399/79, TNA.

¹⁹¹ Uganda: Record of meeting with representatives of BP and Shell on 1 November, 1 November 1978, FCO

They made clear that any increase in oil supply to Uganda could lead the oil companies to come under open criticism from the British government or to be ordered to stop supply; in fact, the officials confirmed that they would prefer that Shell and BP withdraw from Uganda altogether than increase it.¹⁹² Faced with these arguments the oil companies agreed to keep supply at the recent reduced levels, which they did throughout the Uganda-Tanzania War.¹⁹³

But the government officials did not trust Shell and BP to keep supplies down, and certainly expected them ‘to raise strong resistance to a move to suspend supplies altogether, on general grounds of commercial policy in Africa, and in view of the risk of retaliation against their staff in Uganda. But these points might at some stage have to be faced.’¹⁹⁴ Therefore, David Owen enquired whether the government could stop oil supply without imposing a full trade embargo.¹⁹⁵ It could not¹⁹⁶ and although it could possibly intervene with BP on policy grounds, trying to do so could damage their relationship with Shell.¹⁹⁷ This idea was therefore rejected, but could potentially be revived if Nyerere should ‘bring fresh and heavy pressure on us over the restricted oil supply by Shell/BP’.¹⁹⁸

Because Britain could not force Shell and BP to stop supplying Uganda, it sought to take pressure off the British oil companies by trying to make other actors restrict the flow of oil to Amin. As all Ugandan oil imports went through Kenya, it was the only actor with the ability to unilaterally stop all oil supplies to Uganda. Britain made several attempts to find out if Kenya would intervene with Uganda’s oil supply, but never pressured it to do so except telling Moi that ‘[i]f the Kenya government felt it was desirable to take measures to restrict further or to prohibit the transit of POL¹⁹⁹ to Uganda this would have our support, certainly as far as Shell BP were concerned.’²⁰⁰ But Kenya was adamant that it should remain neutral and would therefore neither suspend Uganda’s oil supplies nor pressure the oil companies to

31/2399/79, TNA. [My italics.]

¹⁹² Uganda: Record of meeting with representatives of BP and Shell on 1 November, 1 November 1978, FCO 31/2399/79, TNA.

¹⁹³ Uganda: Record of meeting with representatives of BP and Shell on 1 November, 1 November 1978, FCO 31/2399/79, TNA.

¹⁹⁴ Alan G. Munro to J. Stephen Wall, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2406/55, TNA.

¹⁹⁵ Alan G. Munro to John A. N. Graham, 2 November 1978, FCO 96/789/34, TNA.

¹⁹⁶ David H. A. Hannay to John A. N. Graham and J. Stephen Wall, 3 November 1978, FCO 96/789/18, TNA.

¹⁹⁷ Alan G. Munro to J. Stephen Wall, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2406/55, TNA.

¹⁹⁸ Alan G. Munro to J. Stephen Wall, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2406/55, TNA.

¹⁹⁹ Petroleum, oil and lubricants.

²⁰⁰ Stanley Fingland to FCO, 3 November 1978, FCO 31/2399/68, TNA.

supply more.²⁰¹ As the British officials did not want to risk Britain's excellent relationship with Kenya by pressing this issue, they decided to look for other ways to limit oil supplies.

As Britain could not stop British oil companies from supplying Uganda and Kenya was unwilling to do so, the officials concluded that 'our best course is to do all we can to discourage all the oil companies concerned in supply to Uganda, including the Italian and French, from infilling the suspended American share or increasing their supply above current, reduced, levels.'²⁰² They calculated that if all three remaining all companies kept supplies down to recent reduced levels, 'Uganda will only get 40% of normal supply – a severe restraint.'²⁰³ The British officials believed that '[a]ny increase in supplies from Agip and Total must help ease Amin's position and could influence his ability to resist a Tanzanian counter-attack in the Kagera salient.'²⁰⁴ It also put Shell/BP and Britain in a more exposed position in Uganda, as increases from the two other companies would make it seem like Shell/BP was simply refusing to increase supplies because it didn't want to. It also put them in an awkward position with the Tanzanians, whom they believed 'however unfairly, may blame Shell/BP and the British Government for continuing to supply oil to Amin. Clearly we must do what we can to preclude this possibility.'²⁰⁵

Britain therefore decided to ask Italy and France to intervene with Total and Agip to get them to keep supplies down to the same levels as Shell/BP,²⁰⁶ and asked the United States to make the same request to them.²⁰⁷ France, which had a stable relationship with Amin and disliked Nyerere, responded that it would treat the question of oil supply to Uganda as a purely commercial question – it had no desire to intervene in an African conflict and would not ask Total to limit supplies.²⁰⁸ The Italians had no intention of intervening either, but admitted that the Ugandan invasion created special circumstances and 'that there might now be a case for urging restraint on Agip if the Tanzanians were to ask the Italian government to do so.'²⁰⁹ Britain therefore told Tanzania that it might want to approach Italy and France about the oil issue, as it was pointless to only pressure for a British reduction of supply: '[e]ven if we had power to meet the Tanzanian request for a complete cut-off of supply to

²⁰¹ Stanley Fingland to FCO, 3 November 1978, FCO 31/2399/68, TNA.

²⁰² Peter E. Rosling to John A. N. Graham, 6 November 1978, FCO 96/789/28, TNA.

²⁰³ Alan G. Munro to J. Stephen Wall, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2406/55, TNA.

²⁰⁴ Alan G. Munro to Arthur Anthony Duff, 13 November 1978, FCO 96/789/40, TNA.

²⁰⁵ Alan G. Munro to Arthur Anthony Duff, 13 November 1978, FCO 96/789/40, TNA.

²⁰⁶ FCO to Peter J. S. Moon, 2 November 1978, FCO 31/2405/30, TNA.

²⁰⁷ FCO to Peter J. S. Moon, 2 November 1978, FCO 31/2405/30, TNA.

²⁰⁸ John N. Henderson to FCO, 9 November 1978, FCO 31/2406/60, TNA.

²⁰⁹ Campbell to FCO, 3 November 1978, FCO 31/2406/41, TNA.

Uganda by Shell/BP, such action would be rendered pointless if Agip and Total increased supplies to make up the difference.²¹⁰ Although Tanzania waited until December to approach the Italians, they acquiesced and told Agip that they did not want it to increase supply above normal levels.²¹¹

The other important Anglo-Ugandan trade connection was the Stansted flights. The FCO officials had tried to ban the flights on several occasions, but had been repeatedly turned down by the Secretary of State for Trade, Edmund Dell. The FCO had therefore decided to let the issue rest, but the Ugandan invasion provided an opportunity to try again. On 13 November 1978 Owen therefore renewed his recommendation that the flight be suspended, arguing that the Uganda-Tanzania War justified this move:

I believe that Amin's attack on a friendly Commonwealth country, and the internal situation in Uganda, have produced a new situation in which the question of action against the flights should be reconsidered. We now have reason to believe that stopping these flights from Stansted, and with them the flow of luxury items to Amin's military supporters, will weaken his authority over his soldiers. They could indeed be tempted to turn against him. [...] I believe we should not let slip an opportunity to take action which might tip the scales against Amin and that there is a strong case for finding means to suspend the flights from Stansted. [...] If action against the flights is to have the impact we want, it is important to move swiftly to take advantage of the present unrest.²¹²

The Prime Minister agreed with Owen's recommendation,²¹³ but the new Secretary of State for Trade, John Smith, wanted a full Cabinet discussion of the issue.²¹⁴ However, Uganda announced its withdrawal from Tanzania before a conclusion was reached, and the initiative simply petered out. Thus, the FCO's November 1978 attempt to suspend the Stansted flights confirm the impression left by its oil policy: the Ugandan invasion allowed the officials to pursue more extreme policies than they would otherwise have done, but once the invasion was over they reverted to normal policy.

²¹⁰ FCO to Peter J. S. Moon, 7 November 1978, FCO 31/2406/52, TNA.

²¹¹ Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 21 December 1978, FCO 31/2407/86, TNA. The detention by Tanzania of Agip's General Manager in Dar-es-Salaam was instrumental in the persuasion of Italy. See W. John Watts to Peter E. Rosling, 14 December 1978, FCO 96/789/52, TNA.

²¹² David Owen to James Callaghan, 13 November 1978, PREM 16/2268, TNA.

²¹³ Bryan Cartledge to J. Stephen Wall, 15 November 1978, PREM 16/2285, TNA.

²¹⁴ John Smith to James Callaghan, 22 November 1978, PREM 16/2285, TNA.

4.2 Britain and the Ugandan withdrawal

4.2.1 Britain's assistance to Tanzania after the Ugandan withdrawal

The Tanzanians refused to admit that a withdrawal was taking place, and continued to make assistance requests of Britain throughout phase one.²¹⁵ As Britain soon came to believe that the Ugandan withdrawal was genuine, David Owen recommended to the Prime Minister that direct assistance for Tanzania now be abandoned altogether in favour of humanitarian aid and expediting Tanzanian orders for defence equipment in Britain.²¹⁶ In order to avoid a blank refusal of Tanzania's numerous requests for material assistance, Britain offered it a gift of ten mine detectors to be used in the rehabilitation of the Kagera salient,²¹⁷ and free airfreight of a bridge for civilian use.²¹⁸ The officials also sought to find out if any of Tanzania's other requirements could be delivered on commercial terms or as part of Britain's rehabilitation to Tanzania.²¹⁹

Any new Tanzanian commercial orders would require an increase in credit from the Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD), as Tanzania had already maxed out its credit for 1978. 'The Tanzanians have given us a large shopping list worth over £20 m. They are prepared to pay if we can provide ECGD-backed credit. Credit of this order is out of the question. But it is very much in our political interest to go some way to meet Tanzania's request and enable her to place some orders in UK.'²²⁰ When the equipment that could not be provided on delivery or security grounds was excluded from the list along with ammunition – for which credit was never offered²²¹ – the Tanzanian requests would only cost about £4 million. However, a £4 million credit increase would demand approval from the Department of Trade and the Treasury, and was unlikely because Tanzania was experiencing economic problems. Therefore, on 4 December 1978, Owen pressed hard for the other Ministers' approval for a credit increase, arguing that such an extension was in Britain's national interest.²²²

We need President Nyerere's goodwill over various southern African problems not least

²¹⁵ Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 15 November 1978, FCO 31/2400/129, TNA.

²¹⁶ J. Stephen Wall to Bryan Cartledge, 17 November 1978, FCO 31/2376/70, TNA.

²¹⁷ Alan G. Munro to Philip R. A. Mansfield, 21 November 1978, FCO 31/2376/88, TNA.

²¹⁸ Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 29 November 1978, FCO 31/2376/108, TNA.

²¹⁹ Alan G. Munro to Philip R. A. Mansfield, 21 November 1978, FCO 31/2376/88, TNA.

²²⁰ Background note on military and civil assistance to Tanzania, 30 November 1978, FCO 31/2376/113, TNA.

²²¹ Alan G. Munro to Peter J. S. Moon, 19 January 1979, FCO 31/2643/35, TNA.

²²² Alan G. Munro to Derek M. Day, 30 November 1978, FCO 31/2376/112, TNA.

Rhodesia and Namibia. On the whole he has played a constructive role on these issues. However, he is disappointed in our ability to supply equipment on a government-to-government basis. If we now have to indicate to him that we are unable to provide the small amount of additional credit cover needed to meet relatively modest supplies of commercially ordered, non-lethal, equipment I fear that he will be reinforced in his suspicions of us as a friend. [...] *Our national interest in being prepared to help Tanzania to the extent I am now proposing is clear.*²²³

Both the Chancellor of the Exchequer²²⁴ and the Secretary of State for trade were reluctant to approve a credit increase, but agreed because ‘the contract amount you have in mind is fairly modest and [...] there is a wider view of the national interest to be taken into account.’²²⁵ The Prime Minister also agreed.²²⁶ This was the first time the FCO succeeded in getting a costly policy measure on the Uganda-Tanzania War approved by ministers from other departments. That the ministers would grudgingly accept assistance to Tanzania only when it did not constitute an outright gift and when arguments of British national interests were invoked, clearly demonstrates their continued reluctance to make the Uganda-Tanzania War a priority.

Britain had proclaimed their willingness to offer Tanzania humanitarian aid on several occasions during phase one, and when the Ugandan invasion was over the officials tried to ensure that it would be forthcoming. Fortunately, the Minister for Overseas Development, Judith Hart, approved a planned programme aid grant of £2.5 million for Tanzania in late November, of which an unallocated portion of £250,000 could be used for rehabilitation in the Kagera salient if the Tanzanians so wished. Hart stated that ‘[w]hile this offer has no direct bearing on the hostilities in North West Tanzania and has been under consideration for some time, we hope that the timing of this offer will be helpful in relation to current exchanges with the Tanzanians.’²²⁷ This offer was presented to the Tanzanians as part of Britain’s rehabilitation assistance in connection with the Uganda-Tanzania War. In response to continued Tanzanian requests – for instance for a £1 million floating bridge – the FCO asked Hart if she would agree to pay for 50 trucks Tanzania had on order in Britain, a total cost of £760,000.²²⁸ As this offer – like so many other FCO policy suggestions regarding the Uganda-Tanzania War – turned out to be impractical, Hart asked Owen if he ‘would agree, therefore, that it might be preferable to offer a sum – say £1 million – of programme aid to the

²²³ David Owen to John Smith, 4 December 1978, FCO 31/2377/120, TNA. [My italics.]

²²⁴ Joel Barnett to David Owen, 12 December 1978, FCO 31/2377/135, TNA.

²²⁵ John Smith to David Owen, 8 December 1978, FCO 31/2377/130, TNA.

²²⁶ Bryan Cartledge to T. G. Harris, 11 December 1978, FCO 31/2377/134, TNA.

²²⁷ Robert M. Graham-Harrison to J. Stephen Wall, 22 November 1978, FCO 31/2376/94, TNA.

²²⁸ David Owen to Judith Hart, 5 December 1978, FCO 31/2377/122, TNA.

Tanzanians, for use for civilian rehabilitation in the Kagera area. They could order additional equipment with this, or use it to pay for goods already ordered.’²²⁹ It was very fortunate for the FCO officials that the Ministry of Overseas Development was willing to prioritise aid for Tanzania, as Britain otherwise would have been able to offer the Tanzanians very little assistance at all.

The last hindrance to Britain’s assistance offer to Tanzania was parliamentary announcement of its cost. Before the announcement of a successful assistance offer could be made, the Tanzanians had requested that their requests for assistance be kept secret. The officials therefore rejected the News Department’s wish to confirm, if pressed, that Britain had received assistance requests from Tanzania²³⁰ and in response to Parliamentary Questions on the issue simply answered that ‘[t]he Tanzanian and British Governments have kept in touch about the attack by Uganda. The substance of these exchanges is confidential.’²³¹ But the issue of a parliamentary announcement was not straightforward, as the officials feared that Tanzania’s obsession with secrecy might lead it to refuse Britain’s offer and ‘rather forego the assistance than risk the publicity’.²³²

Having regard to the emphasis which they have put on secrecy in the past, which has originated with the President, I also would not exclude their taking the line that, our financial help so far being minimal, they would prefer to pay themselves and have no announcement.²³³

The officials therefore delayed its assistance offer to Tanzania until it was substantial enough to ensure Tanzanian acceptance: ‘It would at that stage be clear to them that what was on offer was substantial and we would hope worth the risk which they see in publicity.’²³⁴ Therefore, the total British assistance offer to Tanzania, consisting of ten mine detectors, the airfreight of a bridge, £3.5 million in rehabilitation aid, a £4 million increase in ECGD credit and the expediting of commercial orders placed with British firms, was made on 28 December 1978 along with information about the necessity for a parliamentary announcement. Fortunately, the Tanzanians accepted both the offer of assistance and – after some hand-holding – the need

²²⁹ Judith Hart to David Owen, 14 December 1978, FCO 31/2377/138, TNA.

²³⁰ FCO to Peter J. S. Moon, 8 November 1978, FCO 31/2375/19, TNA.

²³¹ Hansard, 8 December 1978. Source: hansard.millbanksystems.com.

²³² Peter J. S. Moon to Alan G. Munro, 19 December 1978, FCO 31/2377/143, TNA.

²³³ Peter J. S. Moon to Alan G. Munro, 19 December 1978, FCO 31/2377/143, TNA.

²³⁴ Peter J. S. Moon to Alan G. Munro, 19 December 1978, FCO 31/2377/143, TNA.

for a parliamentary announcement. Owen could therefore announce the assistance to Parliament on 15 January:

The British Government have made available to the Government of Tanzania programme aid amounting to £1 million, to be used subject to the normal conditions attached to such aid, for civilian rehabilitation purposes in the Kagera region. This is additional to the £2.5 million of programme aid made available recently for other purposes. The British Government have also paid the air freight costs of a girder bridge, and have supplied a small amount of mine detecting equipment, to help the rehabilitation of the region. A supplementary estimate for the amount involved, which is of the order of £81,000, will be laid before Parliament the normal way.²³⁵

In accordance with their assurances to the Tanzanians, they emphasised the rehabilitation aspect of the aid. Britain now thought both the war and its part in it to be over.²³⁶

Finally, the development of Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War also tells us something about its relationship with Tanzania. If thinking in traditional great power terms, one might have expected Britain to be the dominant party in the Anglo-Tanzanian relationship. As this chapter has demonstrated, this was clearly not the case. Tanzania's excessive requests to Britain and its open indignation at their rejection indicates that Tanzania did not behave like a submissive developing country hoping for great power benevolence. Tanzania did not defer to Britain in any way, and allowed it no influence on or insight into Tanzanian policy on the conflict. Rather, Britain took the submissive role in the relationship, meekly awaiting Tanzania's requests and trying to avoid rejecting them. It certainly did not push Tanzania in any way, for instance towards mediation or a UN approach, opting instead to simply wait for Tanzania's intentions to become clear so that it could react to them. Britain could not afford to offend Tanzania, both because it needed Nyerere in Rhodesia and because it wanted to avoid suspicions of 'imperialist' intentions on its own part. To demonstrate its friendship towards Africa and Tanzania, Britain strained to provide Tanzania with assistance; oddly, it seems that when it came to the Tanzania-Uganda War, Britain needed Tanzania more than Tanzania needed Britain. The fear of the FCO officials that Tanzania might turn down any British assistance offer it deemed insufficient confirms this tendency.

²³⁵ Hansard.millbanksystems.com, *Hvordan fører jeg dette?* (16 January 1979)

²³⁶ Peter E. Rosling to Derek M. Day, 5 January 1979, FCO 31/2643/6, TNA.

4.2.2 Britain's attempts to undermine Uganda after the withdrawal

After the announcement of Ugandan withdrawal on 14 November the officials were no longer willing to threaten Shell and BP to keep supplies down. They reverted to Britain's pre-invasion policy of simply discouraging an increase, and would now accept an increase to normal levels of supply if the oil companies insisted:

in this situation we should not press the companies too hard. If Total and AGIP have increased their supply continued restriction by Shell/BP will no longer have much effect in weakening the position of Amin's regime. But we should ask them not to go above their normal planned supply level.²³⁷

Fortunately for Britain, the government's mild discouragement, Uganda's inability to pay its debts and supply problems concerning crude oil from Iran led the oil companies to maintain the low supplies agreed with the government throughout the Uganda-Tanzania War.

Uganda's withdrawal also made Britain less willing to intervene with other governments to reduce Uganda's oil supply. Although they continued to monitor the policies and supply levels of Agip and Total, the officials were less negative towards an increase from Agip or Total when the invasion was over as '[p]erhaps oddly enough this will help take the heat off Shell.'²³⁸ This represented a complete turnaround from their attitude during the invasion, when they intervened repeatedly with France and Italy and enlisted the assistance of the United States to stop such an increase.

4.3 The results of Britain's policy on the first phase of the Uganda-Tanzania War

The British officials were pleased with the results of their policy on the first phase of the Uganda-Tanzania War. Britain's initial offer of £2.5 million programme aid to Tanzania had resulted in a very warm personal letter from President Nyerere to Callaghan,²³⁹ and the officials were very pleased when reports that Nyerere was speaking kindly about Britain started reaching them by late 1978.²⁴⁰ Along with their formal acceptance of Britain's

²³⁷ Alan G. Munro to David H. A. Hannay, 22 November 1978, FCO 31/2407/77, TNA.

²³⁸ Alan G. Munro to John A. Sankey, 8 December 1978, FCO 31/2407/85, TNA.

²³⁹ Julius K. Nyerere to James Callaghan, 13 December 1978, FCO 31/2643/w10, TNA.

²⁴⁰ See J. Stephen Wall to Alan G. Munro, 20 December 1978, FCO 31/2377/145, TNA; Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 12 January 1979, FCO 31/2638/3, TNA.

assistance offer, the Tanzanians had signalled that they wanted to develop a military cooperation with Britain.²⁴¹ It soon became clear that the Tanzanians were thinking of placing very large military orders in the UK and wanted a defence attaché in London,²⁴² a development welcomed by Owen, who ‘would like to give the Tanzanian request favourable consideration.’²⁴³ The FCO officials believed that this could be the start of an entirely new relationship with Tanzania, and possibly one where she turned away from communist supply: ‘it seems to me that what is on offer here is little short of a transformation of our relations with the Tanzanians in the Defence field and that there are the strongest political arguments for giving the most positive possible response.’²⁴⁴

This led the officials to conclude that their policy had been a success:

To take stock of our own position, the response we were able to make, albeit limited in the military equipment field, has fully met our objective of avoiding a deterioration in our sensitive relationship with President Nyerere. But it has clearly gone further and produced a new feeling of warmth and an evident desire for closer relations, including in the military arena, on the part of the Tanzanian leadership. This is wholly welcome and could help us in the context of other African problems. [...]The prospect of a closer military relationship with Tanzania now presents itself. Within our means we should do our best to foster this.²⁴⁵

Hopefully further cultivation of the Anglo-Tanzanian relationship could lead to renewed cooperation over the Rhodesia conflict,²⁴⁶ as

[t]here is no doubt that as a result of our previous forthcoming attitude on the supply of defence equipment, additional credit and rehabilitation assistance we are firmly numbered on the side of the angels on an issue of overwhelming importance to Tanzania. We are consequently building up credit on which we can if necessary draw in the future.²⁴⁷

On the other hand, Amin did not fall, and Britain was displeased by his survival: ‘[i]t is unfortunate and perverse that Amin should have emerged from his action without great

²⁴¹ Edward M. Sokoine to Peter J. S. Moon, 1 January 1979, FCO 31/2643/9, TNA

²⁴² Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 16 January 1979, FCO 31/2643/16, TNA.

²⁴³ J. Stephen Wall to Alan G. Munro, 17 January 1979, FCO 31/2643/19, TNA.

²⁴⁴ Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 16 January 1979, FCO 31/2643/18, TNA.

²⁴⁵ Alan G. Munro to Derek M. Day, 18 January 1979, FCO 31/2643/34, TNA.

²⁴⁶ Derek M. Day to Alan G. Munro, 19 January 1979, FCO 31/2643/w20, TNA.

²⁴⁷ Telegram, Dar es Salaam to FCO, MIPT: Tanzania/Uganda, 19 March 1979, FCO 31/2644/68, TNA

damage to his reputation in much of Africa, though the signs of Libyan coolness could prove significant.²⁴⁸ The officials did, however, believe that his power base was eroding:

It is tempting to conclude that 1978 showed that time was running out for Amin. It can be argued that his power base has narrowed, he has alienated international, including African, opinion still further, and his economy is in ruins. But while his problems are undoubtedly accumulating, he has continued to demonstrate his ability to survive. [...] All he asks is to stay on top, one jump ahead of his enemies, indulging in the occasional antic to attract attention; he is adept at survival. Short of the assassin's bullet, which still seems his likeliest end, I suspect my successor in East African Department will have a similar prognostication twelve months hence, though I heartily hope not.²⁴⁹

So British influence in Uganda was not much advanced by its policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War.

On balance, then, the officials deemed that their influence in Tanzania was increasing, while Amin's survival precluded such a development in Uganda. They did, however, feel that their assistance offer to Tanzania 'went down well, and stood in contrast to the negative attitude of others whom the Tanzanians approached, notably the Russians.'²⁵⁰ They also hoped that their warmer relations and a positive response on defence cooperation with Tanzania could mean that reduced Tanzanian dependence on the communist bloc for military equipment:

Given Tanzanian importance in the South African context, and the way a close defence relationship would strengthen our links in all fields, it is clearly in our political interest to provide a favourable response. Even if we cannot meet the Tanzanians all the way we must avoid giving them the impression of a rebuff. We have emerged quite well from our dealings with the Tanzanians in the wake of the Ugandan aggression; we should not dissipate the opportunities this good will has generated for the future. By giving a reasonably positive response, we can usefully develop our contacts with senior Tanzanian political and military figures, until now somewhat distant, and may thereby lessen Tanzanian attachment to the Russians (and Chinese) and foster better understanding of the western position in Africa.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Alan G. Munro to Peter J. S. Moon, 19 January 1979, FCO 31/2643/35, TNA.

²⁴⁹ Alan G. Munro to David Owen, 17 January 1979, FCO 31/2647/7, TNA.

²⁵⁰ Alan G. Munro to Derek M. Day, 18 January 1979, FCO 31/2643/34, TNA.

²⁵¹ Alan G. Munro to Derek M. Day, 19 January 1979, FCO 31/2643/20, TNA.

They were also very pleased at the fact that Britain succeeded in keeping its intervention in the Uganda-Tanzania War secret and avoided damage to its relationship with Kenya. Therefore, considering the low cost of the assistance provided and the uncertainties of whether Britain might gain something from it, the officials were very pleased with the results of their policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War in its first phase.

Chapter 5

Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War (23 January 1979-11 April 1979)

In fact, we know [...] that the Tanzanians have penetrated 15-30 miles into Uganda and are providing support for Ugandan exiles in a bid to overthrow Amin. We are in some potential difficulty over this issue. We condemned the Ugandan invasion of Tanzania, but do not want to offend Nyerere, or appear to support Uganda, in the present situation.²⁵²

Tanzania's invasion of Uganda in January 1979 transformed it from victim to aggressor and breached OAU principles. This challenged Britain's policy of support for Tanzania, as it had recently condemned Uganda for the same offence and could now face pressure to condemn Tanzania. Britain did not want to do so, but nor could they risk open support for Tanzania. Therefore, Britain's policy remained the same as in phase one: covert support for Tanzania. But as it now supported the aggressor in the conflict, secrecy became an even more important part of Britain's policy than before.

Britain's initial reflex was to dissociate itself from the conflict to avoid accusations that it supported one African state's attempt to overthrow the government of another. Therefore, it was at first wary of any association with Tanzania, even to the extent of refusing to give it information. But as the war changed in late February 1979, so did Britain's willingness to become involved, mainly due to three factors: Tanzania's decision to take Kampala and overthrow Amin itself, Libya's military intervention in the conflict and the increasing amount of Tanzanian requests for British intervention.

Britain's intervention in phase two was largely diplomatic. Diplomatic assistance was considered cheaper and less conspicuous, but most importantly, it was the easiest way of pleasing Tanzania. Britain's first major policy measure in phase two was the cancellation of the Stansted flights. This was done only when it seemed clear that Amin would fall, and because the officials thought it would make Britain look better to Tanzania, the new Ugandan government and world opinion in general. Britain also intervened with Kenya after strong pressure from Tanzania, as they had a shared interest in seeing Kenya stop supplies from reaching Uganda and saw it as an opportunity to ensure that Tanzania did not back Obote for the Ugandan presidency. Britain also tried to avoid a Ugandan recourse to the Security Council.

²⁵² Peter E. Rosling to Martin Reith, 7 February 1979, FCO 31/2680/35, TNA.

All in all, the officials felt that their policy in the second phase of the Uganda-Tanzania War had been successful. Amin had fallen and was replaced by a moderate regime with an expressed interest in close relations with Britain. The policy had also allowed Britain to please Tanzania and maintain its influence there without losing influence with Kenya, its most important ally in Central East Africa.

5.1 Britain and the Tanzanian invasion

The war developments had serious impact on the extent to which Britain was willing to intervene in the Uganda-Tanzania War. Phase two started when Tanzania invaded Uganda on 22 January 1979. Tanzania laid no claim to Ugandan territory and said it was simply putting an end to Ugandan border raids. But despite Tanzania's statements that it had no 'intention to take part in any process concerning the internal political changes in Uganda'²⁵³ it soon became clear that it was 'liberating' Southern Uganda from Amin's rule, hoping that the Ugandan people would then join the exile forces and overthrow Amin themselves.²⁵⁴

Tanzania's invasion of Uganda transformed it from victim to aggressor and challenged Britain's established policy of support for it in the Uganda-Tanzania War. Tanzania was now in breach of the OAU principles of territorial integrity and non-intervention, and as Britain had condemned Uganda's invasion three months earlier it might now be pressured into a public condemnation of Tanzania.²⁵⁵ Such a condemnation would be contrary to Britain's interests; not only would it damage the Anglo-Tanzanian relationship and lose Britain the influence won with Tanzania in phase one, but increased international pressure could make Tanzania withdraw its army from Uganda before Amin could be overthrown.

Although Britain had no desire to condemn Tanzania, the invasion made continued active support for it difficult. The invasion of Uganda had cost Tanzania much international sympathy, and Britain would be castigated and accused of imperialist intervention in African affairs if caught supporting its invasion and attempted overthrow of the Ugandan government. The British officials therefore decided that '[i]n the wider context of our Africa policy it might be unwise to be seen to be too closely involved with a Government which might be accused of infringing the principle of territorial integrity endorsed by the OAU.'²⁵⁶ As the Kenyans

²⁵³ Peter J. S. Moon to FCO, 1 February 1979, FCO 31/2680/32, TNA.

²⁵⁴ John A. Robson to Derek M. Day, 9 February 1979, FCO 31/2675/11, TNA.

²⁵⁵ Peter E. Rosling to Martin Reith, 7 February 1979, FCO 31/2680/35, TNA.

²⁵⁶ John A. Robson to Derek M. Day and K. D. Temple, 26 February 1979, FCO 31/2681/71, TNA.

disapproved strongly of Tanzania's invasion of Uganda, the officials believed that Britain through open support for it might 'lose good-will with our best friend in Africa and expose ourselves to criticism in the OAU'²⁵⁷ and decided that '[i]n these new circumstances, we should think carefully before becoming too closely involved in Tanzanian tactics.'²⁵⁸

Thus, Britain could neither condemn Tanzania's invasion nor support it openly. Its initial instinct was therefore to lay low and avoid association with the conflict while the invasion was ongoing. As secrecy was now even more paramount than in phase one, Britain's public statements in phase two were few and designed to distance it from the conflict:

While we condemned the Ugandan invasion of Tanzania, we have since largely avoided public comment, using the defensive line that African disputes should, where possible, be settled in an African context, and expressing the hope that a situation can be established where the two countries can live at peace.²⁵⁹

The official policy, as expressed in these statements, remained the same as in phase one, with one adjustment: the omission of reference to OAU principles or condemnation of the aggressor. In this way, Britain was able to avoid offending Tanzania or expressing sympathy for Uganda. But nor did they come out in open support of Tanzania's invasion.

Tanzania's invasion had not changed Britain's policy of support for it, but made secrecy paramount. Britain could not be caught supporting an aggressive Tanzania breaching OAU principles, and was therefore much less willing to intervene directly in the conflict in phase two. The officials sought to minimise Britain's involvement in the conflict, and decided early on that 'it would be unwise to pass unsolicited information to the Tanzanians, since this could place us in some awkwardness in the wider context of our Africa policy where we have laid stress to our support for the principle of respect for territorial integrity.'²⁶⁰ But the officials were also reluctant to provide Tanzania with information when asked for it, which they did on 26 February.²⁶¹ They did not want to give the Tanzanians a rebuff, but 'would not wish to pass back to the Tanzanians all that we have learned or deduced'.²⁶² Therefore, they opted only to

²⁵⁷ John A. Robson to Derek M. Day, 13 March 1979, FCO 31/2682/113, TNA.

²⁵⁸ John A. Robson to Derek M. Day and K. D. Temple, 26 February 1979, FCO 31/2681/71, TNA.

²⁵⁹ Call on Mr Rowlands by Mr Michael Allison, MP and members of the Uganda Group of Human Rights on 27 March 1979, 27 March 1979, FCO 31/2671/19, TNA.

²⁶⁰ John W. Yapp to Martin J. Dinham, 2 March 1979, FCO 31/2681/85, TNA.

²⁶¹ John A. Robson to Peter R. M. Hinchcliffe, 6 March 1979, FCO 31/2681/94, TNA.

²⁶² John A. Robson to Peter R. M. Hinchcliffe, 6 March 1979, FCO 31/2681/94, TNA.

provide the Tanzanians with ‘information already publicly known or accepted in Dar es Salaam’,²⁶³ while being ‘careful to guard against any risk of appearing to collude with the Tanzanian Government in a situation which is clearly causing concern to some OAU members.’²⁶⁴

The burgeoning Anglo-Tanzanian defence cooperation, which the officials had been so eager to foster prior to the Tanzanian invasion, was also delayed, as ‘[i]t could be embarrassing to become involved in detailed discussions with the Tanzanians about arms supplies at a time when Tanzanian forces are established well inside Ugandan territory.’²⁶⁵ But the officials did not find this difficult, as ‘[t]here would inevitably be delays in credits, payments and deliveries, reinforced by long lead times for delivery of some items. This would in fact be helpful – *we do not want to move too fast.*’²⁶⁶ As for the British weapons Tanzania obtained in phase one, Britain would just have to hope that Tanzania was not caught using any of them on Ugandan territory.²⁶⁷

But as the Uganda-Tanzania War changed in character from the last week of February 1979, so did Britain’s attitude towards intervention in it. Britain was still reluctant to intervene, but by the end of March it was more directly involved in the conflict than it had been even during the Ugandan invasion of Tanzania. Three factors contributed to this change.

Firstly, as it became clear that its attempt to instigate an anti-Amin rebellion in Uganda had failed, Tanzania decided to march on Kampala and overthrow Amin itself.²⁶⁸ This made Amin’s fall a more likely and realistic objective than at any previous point in the Uganda-Tanzania War. As the revival of British interests depended on Tanzania’s successful removal of Amin, Britain now became more invested in its military campaign. Tanzania would try to topple Amin with or without Britain’s assistance, and the officials deemed that helping it would have the added benefit of preparing the ground for British influence over a Ugandan successor government.²⁶⁹

Secondly, Libya intervened from late February 1979 in an attempt to save the Amin regime. The Tanzanian march on Kampala was at first highly effective, as the Ugandan army – undisciplined and short of supplies – disintegrated in front of it. But the arrival of between 1500

²⁶³ John A. Robson to Peter R. M. Hinchcliffe, 6 March 1979, FCO 31/2681/94, TNA.

²⁶⁴ John A. Robson to Peter R. M. Hinchcliffe, 6 March 1979, FCO 31/2681/94, TNA.

²⁶⁵ Derek M. Day’s handwritten comment on John A. Robson to Derek M. Day, 19 February 1979, FCO 31/2644/52, TNA.

²⁶⁶ John A. Robson to Derek M. Day, 19 February 1979, FCO 31/2644/52, TNA. [My italics.]

²⁶⁷ Letter, John A. Robson to Derek M. Day, 15 February 1979, FCO 31/2680/49, TNA.

²⁶⁸ John A. Robson to Derek M. Day, 13 March 1979, FCO 31/2682/113, TNA.

²⁶⁹ John W. Yapp to John A. Robson, 2 March 1979, FCO 31/2675/19, TNA.

and 3000 Libyan soldiers and additional war supplies²⁷⁰ soon impeded Tanzania's advance.²⁷¹ Thus, Libya's intervention threatened to thwart Tanzania's overthrow of Amin, which was Britain's most important objective in this phase of the Uganda-Tanzania War.

Thirdly, Tanzania made a series of requests for British intervention in the conflict from late February 1979, eleven in the war's last three weeks alone. The initial absence of Tanzanian requests had made it easy for Britain to keep its distance from the Tanzanian invasion, but the increasing Tanzanian demands now made this impossible. Britain must choose whether to comply with Tanzania's requests or rebuff them; and as the officials deemed that 'a direct rebuff would harm our relations with Tanzania',²⁷² it reluctantly acquiesced to Tanzania's requests.

5.2 British intervention during the Tanzanian invasion

David Owen had asked that the Stansted flights be suspended in November 1978, but they were not banned until 5 March 1979. Uganda's withdrawal from Tanzania the day after Owen's request had lessened Britain's incentive to suspend the flights. As Owen had never received a formal answer to his request, Cabinet Secretary John Hunt brought the issue to Callaghan in January 1979, stating that 'we ought to be clear what we can do before the next crisis involving President Amin blows up'.²⁷³ Hunt recommended that the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee (DOP) be guided to accept the suspension of the flights, but that formal suspension should be held off until Amin was in trouble again as this was 'more likely to make a public impact. It would also provide a response in a crisis when there might well be little else we could do. [...] the balance of argument seems to point to waiting till the next crisis in our relations with Uganda'.²⁷⁴ The DOP agreed with Hunt's logic, and on 22 January 1979 it decided that the Stansted flights should be suspended, but only at a later time.²⁷⁵ Owen moved to suspend the Stansted flights in late February 1979, as he deemed that 'President Amin is now in more serious trouble than at any time since he seized power. The Tanzanians seem determined to

²⁷⁰Libya sent 'replacement military aircraft and other weapons, fuel and ammunition, and may have provided pilots for the Ugandan planes.' They also sent one or two bomber aircraft to Uganda, and by late March, attempted to send an entire tanker of Libyan oil through Kenya. See Memorandum. The Tanzania/Uganda War: Act 2, 30 April 1979, FCO 31/2638/16, TNA; John A. Robson to Derek M. Day, 30 March 1979, FCO 31/2684/186, TNA.

²⁷¹Anthony J. Longrigg to Peter E. Rosling and John A. Robson, 16 March 1979, FCO 31/2683/120A, TNA.

²⁷²John A. Robson to Derek M. Day, 13 March 1979, FCO 31/2682/113, TNA.

²⁷³John Hunt to James Callaghan, 19 January 1979, PREM 16/2285, TNA.

²⁷⁴John Hunt to James Callaghan, 19 January 1979, PREM 16/2285, TNA.

²⁷⁵Minute of a Meeting held at 10 Downing Street on Monday 22 January 1979 at 3.30 pm, 24 January 1979, CAB 148/178/3, TNA.

keep up military pressure in the hope that Amin will crack.²⁷⁶ The other Cabinet ministers agreed, and the flights were suspended.

The officials were careful to present the flight ban publicly as part of Britain's existing policy of dissociation with Uganda,²⁷⁷ in order

to safeguard against any tendency – which will doubtless be present – to interpret this decision as an attempt to put our own nail into Amin's coffin. The Tanzanians may choose to interpret it that way; but we want to avoid the charge of interference in the internal affairs of an African country.²⁷⁸

But Owen thought that '[t]he very cautious line taken towards Tanzania by the Organisation of African Unity suggests that such a charge would not be levelled at us.'²⁷⁹

In fact, the suspension of the Stansted flights had minimal effect on the Amin regime. The cancellation of the flights was purely cosmetic, intended not to overthrow Amin regime but to remove its last connection with Britain. In reality, the Stansted flights had already ceased because of the Tanzanian invasion, and Uganda Airlines had signalled that they were unlikely to resume in the foreseeable future. The government decision therefore had very little practical effect on the stability of the Amin regime, and was mainly intended to impress Tanzania, world opinion and any Ugandan successor government by distancing itself from the Amin regime while ostensibly contributing to his fall:

Our line should be that we have had no quarrel with the Ugandan people – indeed our relationship and friendships have been very close. The break in relations was a break with the Amin regime. We should rightly claim credit for that (*and that is why we must stop Stansted before Amin falls*).²⁸⁰

This demonstrates that Amin's overthrow was not Britain's main objective with the flight cancellation, and explains why they were willing to suspend them only when his fall seemed certain. But the policy would work even if he should survive the Tanzanian invasion, as it might

²⁷⁶ David Owen to James Callaghan, 27 February 1979, PREM 16/2285, TNA.

²⁷⁷ Background note, 13 March 1979, FCO 31/2682/111, TNA.

²⁷⁸ John A. Robson to Peter R. M. Hinchcliffe, 6 March 1979, FCO 31/2681/94, TNA.

²⁷⁹ David Owen to James Callaghan, 27 February 1979, PREM 16/2285, TNA.

²⁸⁰ John W. Yapp to John A. Robson, 2 March 1979, FCO 31/2675/19, TNA.

weaken his power base over time and the FCO had finally succeeded in cancelling the embarrassing Stansted flights.

Although it had suspended the Stansted flights and confirmed some information for Tanzania, Britain managed to avoid direct intervention in the Uganda-Tanzania War's second phase until late March 1979. But Tanzania's repeated requests for British intervention from 11 March made it difficult for Britain to continue its disengagement from the conflict. President Nyerere had now become obsessed with the idea that Britain and the United States should convince Kenya to stop essential supplies from reaching Uganda, and made eleven requests for such intervention between 11 March and 4 April. Because of the bad relationship between Kenya and Tanzania, Nyerere would take no hints that he should approach Kenya himself. Instead, he wanted Kenya's two most powerful patrons to convince it that the Ugandan army had disintegrated and only Libyans were fighting Tanzania – therefore, Kenya's refusal to stop supplies did nothing to help Amin and simply prolonged the war. Nyerere also wanted Britain and the US to tell Kenya that Tanzania had no intention to foist Milton Obote on Uganda after Amin's fall.

Tanzania's requests were problematic for several reasons, and Britain was reluctant to acquiesce to them. Britain feared that intervention with Kenya would drag it directly into the conflict, at the risk of becoming an involuntary intermediary between Tanzania and Kenya. This would be directly contrary to Britain's wish to stay out of the conflict. Pressuring Kenya to abandon its established policy of neutrality in the Uganda-Tanzania war would also annoy Kenya greatly, thus risking Britain's good relationship with it. Nor would it necessarily be easy to convince Kenya that Tanzania did not wish to reinstate Obote, and 'it would clearly be difficult to maintain our existing relationship with Kenya if we appeared to favour the emergence of a régime in Uganda which the Kenyans thought would be likely to be hostile to them.'²⁸¹ Direct intervention with Kenya would also risk Britain's relationship with other African countries as it 'ran the danger of being accused of encouraging one African government at the behest of another to help overthrow a third.'²⁸² It would be detrimental to British influence in Africa to be caught interfering in a conflict while the OAU was still attempting to mediate; this would expose the dishonesty of Britain's professed hope for a peaceful, African solution and be disrespectful towards the OAU, and would open Britain up to accusations of imperialist intervention. Nor did Britain think that it could achieve anything by pressuring Kenya, as '[t]he

²⁸¹ Stanley Fingland to John A. Robson, 7 March 1979, FCO 31/2675/20, TNA.

²⁸² Peter R. M. Hinchcliffe to FCO, 11 March 1979, FCO 31/2682/107, TNA.

Kenyans are likely to remain extremely reluctant to cut off or further reduce fuel supplies to Uganda'.²⁸³

But intervention with Kenya could also be in Britain's interests. The most important reason was that it didn't want to offend Tanzania by refusing to help, thus losing the influence gained in phase one. The importance of this was emphasised when Nyerere was 'obviously disappointed' by the United States' initial decision to refuse to intervene,²⁸⁴ resulting in a US 'change of heart' and they would 'after all agree to speak to the Kenyans on the lines requested by President Nyerere.'²⁸⁵ Britain wanted to avoid arousing similar disappointment from Nyerere. (It was also helpful that Britain could cooperate with the United States in their approaches to Kenya, as this would increase pressure on Kenya and reduce the risks that Kenya could be annoyed with Britain alone. As Kenya's main patrons, their cooperation could bring substantial pressure on it to change its policy.) Britain also saw Tanzania's request as an opportunity to better Kenya-Tanzanian relations.

We agree that direct contact between Nyerere and Moi is a prerequisite for lessening Kenyan distrust and that the Tanzanians must make clear their readiness to discuss their bilateral differences with Kenya [...] In terms of our interest in East African [sic] and our relationship with Nyerere, we think it desirable to make a further effort to bring this about.²⁸⁶

If the relationship between the two countries could be improved, this would make it much easier for Britain to pursue its interests in Central East Africa, as it would not have to take their bad relationship into account and try not to disappoint one of them all the time. It would also help create a calmer and more politically stable region in which British regional interests could thrive. Britain also shared Tanzania's interest in seeing Amin topple. Britain agreed with Tanzania that a stop in oil and war supplies would hasten his fall:

It should be remembered here that Amin's oil is supplied through Kenya. Without it his economy and armed forces would grind to a halt in a matter of days. It is widely held that this could be the determining factor in any attempt to remove Amin by force. Additional

²⁸³ John A. Robson to Derek M. Day, 27 March 1979, FCO 31/2684/152, TNA.

²⁸⁴ Peter R. M. Hinchcliffe to FCO, 15 March 1979, FCO 31/2682/116, TNA.

²⁸⁵ Peter R. M. Hinchcliffe to FCO, 16 March 1979, FCO 31/2683/122, TNA.

²⁸⁶ FCO to Stanley Fingland, 23 March 1979, FCO 31/2684/146, TNA.

military capability in Tanzania and cooperation with Kenya could make this a viable option.²⁸⁷

In fact, Britain had tried to deflect attention and pressure away from itself and the British oil companies in phase one by hinting that only Kenya could unilaterally stop Uganda's oil supplies. But it had no desire to be the one to convince Kenya to do so. Britain also saw Tanzania's need for Kenyan cooperation as an opportunity to cancel its support for Obote as President of Uganda. Britain considered the imposition of Obote as contrary to British interests, as they considered him 'basically hostile' to Britain.²⁸⁸ Britain had previously tried to convince Tanzania that promoting Obote would be damaging to relations with Kenya, but had accepted that '[t]here is precious little we can do [...] to influence the composition of any successor government to Amin.'²⁸⁹ Tanzania's requests for intervention with Kenya now provided an opportunity to eliminate Tanzanian support for Obote.

We welcome this indication that President Nyerere recognises how deep are Kenyan suspicions over Tanzanian involvement in Uganda and understands the need not to be seen to be pressing a political solution and particularly not an Obote-dominated regime on Uganda.²⁹⁰

There was also the argument that the imposition of a neutral regime in Uganda would not disrupt the fragile balance of power in Central East Africa.

Clearly, Tanzania's requests for British intervention with Kenya presented Britain with a difficult dilemma. Britain's relationships with both Kenya and Tanzania were now at risk, as '[t]he antipathy between Kenya and Tanzania makes it difficult for us to intervene in Nairobi without risking our relations with the Kenyans. But we cannot give a blunt 'No' to Nyerere.'²⁹¹ This conflict between Britain's interests in Kenya and its interests in Tanzania delayed the decision-making process, as the British High Commissioners in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam disagreed strongly on how Britain should react to the requests. The Acting British High

²⁸⁷ P. J. Robinson to Mrs Link and Mr Burns, 20 February 1979, FCO 31/2644/58, TNA.

²⁸⁸ Peter E. Rosling to John A. Robson, Anthony J. Longrigg and Francis X. Gallagher, 15 March 1979, FCO 31/2682/118, TNA.

²⁸⁹ Derek M. Day's typed comment on John A. Robson to Derek M. Day, 9 February 1979, FCO 31/2675/11, TNA.

²⁹⁰ FCO to Stanley Fingland, 23 March 1979, FCO 31/2684/146, TNA.

²⁹¹ Derek M. Day's handwritten comment on John A. Robson to Derek M. Day, 13 March 1979, FCO 31/2682/113, TNA.

Commissioner to Tanzania, Peter Hinchcliffe,²⁹² recognised that ‘there are objections to meeting the Tanzanian request’, but hoped that Britain could ‘at least avoid returning to the Tanzanians with a blank refusal to help’.²⁹³ But Britain’s High Commissioner to Kenya, Stanley Fingland, did not think that Britain could gain anything by pressuring Kenya on the issue:

There is no inclination in Nairobi to help President Nyerere in this matter, since there is a deep suspicion throughout the Kenyan government of the Tanzanians' good faith and intentions, to the extent that some Kenyans would welcome the defeat of Tanzania in the current conflict.²⁹⁴

In order to reconcile these conflicting interests and reach a decision on what Britain should do about the requests, the Prime Minister intervened himself, asking that Owen reach a decision and commenting that ‘[w]e should give Nyerere what help we can that will be effective’.²⁹⁵ Therefore, Owen decided to try to steer a middle course so as to avoid hurting Britain’s relationship with either Kenya or Tanzania.²⁹⁶ Britain was to approach Kenya extremely carefully, presenting Tanzania’s views as British assessments of Tanzania’s attitude, and not as a Tanzanian message.²⁹⁷ As it did not believe that Kenya would abandon its position of neutrality, Britain’s aim was to convince Tanzania and Kenya to communicate directly about their bilateral conflict and the Uganda-Tanzania War, thus eliminating the need for further British facilitation.

It took time to solve this conflict of interests, and therefore Britain’s first approach to the Kenyans was made on 26 March 1979, a full two weeks after the initial Tanzanian request. High Commissioner Fingland told the Kenyans that Tanzania did not seem to be supporting Obote, and took the opportunity to ‘encourage them to take advantage of an apparent Tanzanian willingness to repair the relationship.’²⁹⁸ Fingland reported that the Kenyans ‘expressed keen interest in this indication of Tanzanian thinking, including the disclaimer that Nyerere was working for the promotion of an Obote dominated regime or seeking to impose a political solution on Uganda.’²⁹⁹ The Kenyans commented that this represented ‘a significant change

²⁹² Peter R. M. Hinchcliffe was Acting British High Commissioner to Tanzania from 17 February 1979 to 17 April 1979 while Britain’s High Commissioner to Tanzania, Peter J. S. Moon, was on leave.

²⁹³ Peter R. M. Hinchcliffe to FCO, 11 March 1979, FCO 31/2682/108, TNA.

²⁹⁴ Stanley Fingland to FCO, 13 March 1979, FCO 31/2682/110, TNA.

²⁹⁵ Bryan Cartledge to J. Stephen Wall, 16 March 1979, FCO 31/2683/129, TNA.

²⁹⁶ FCO to Stanley Fingland, 23 March 1979, FCO 31/2684/146, TNA.

²⁹⁷ FCO to Stanley Fingland, 23 March 1979, FCO 31/2684/146, TNA.

²⁹⁸ FCO to Stanley Fingland, 23 March 1979, FCO 31/2684/146, TNA.

²⁹⁹ Stanley Fingland to FCO, 26 March 1979, FCO 31/2684/147, TNA.

from what had been their understanding of Tanzanian policies, which was very helpful to be aware of in connection with any future discussions between the two presidents.’³⁰⁰ Fingland considered the meeting a success, as the Kenyans were ‘clearly grateful to accept the information I had brought to Kenyan notice without feeling that we were in any way acting as intermediaries.’³⁰¹ High Commissioner Hinchcliffe told the Tanzanians that Britain had discussed the situation with the Kenyans, who remained indisposed to take sides.³⁰² The officials hoped that Kenya and Tanzania would now discuss the conflict directly with each other, leaving Britain out of it.

However, the Tanzanians had obtained information about Libyan war supplies and soldiers transiting Kenya for Uganda, and their requests for British intervention with Kenya continued. Therefore, Britain approached Kenya again on 31 March. Fingland was told to repeat that Tanzania did not back Obote and that the Uganda-Tanzania War ‘provides a valuable opening to establish direct communication with the Tanzanians on wider issues affecting Kenya and Tanzania and the future of the region.’³⁰³ He was also instructed to ‘sound them out in their attitude towards the use of Kenya by the Libyans as a transit point for supplies to Uganda. We would much rather the Kenyans desisted from such activity.’³⁰⁴ But before Fingland could bring this up, the Kenyans told him that their contact with Tanzania over the Uganda-Tanzania War seemed to be getting closer and that the Tanzanian Prime Minister was arriving for discussions with President Moi that morning. Fingland got ‘the clear impression that Kenyans were reviewing their attitude towards Libyan movements through Kenya’,³⁰⁵ and was told that Kenya had just decided that Libyan aircraft would be asked to leave Nairobi immediately, that no further flights carrying Libyan supplies to Uganda would be permitted to transit Kenya, and that an incoming shipload of Libyan war supplies for Uganda was to be turned away upon arrival.³⁰⁶ Fingland, who had not wanted to intervene with Kenya, considered it ‘very good news that Kenyans have come to these decisions of their own accord.’³⁰⁷ The officials believed they had navigated the breach between their Tanzanian and Kenyan interests well:

³⁰⁰ Stanley Fingland to FCO, 26 March 1979, FCO 31/2684/147, TNA.

³⁰¹ Stanley Fingland to FCO, 26 March 1979, FCO 31/2684/147, TNA.

³⁰² FCO to Peter R. M. Hinchcliffe, 30 March 1979, FCO 31/2685/194, TNA.

³⁰³ FCO to Peter R. M. Hinchcliffe, 30 March 1979, FCO 31/2685/194, TNA.

³⁰⁴ FCO to Peter R. M. Hinchcliffe, 30 March 1979, FCO 31/2685/194, TNA.

³⁰⁵ Stanley Fingland to FCO, 31 March 1979, FCO 31/2685/196, TNA.

³⁰⁶ Stanley Fingland to FCO, 31 March 1979, FCO 31/2685/196, TNA.

³⁰⁷ Stanley Fingland to FCO, 31 March 1979, FCO 31/2685/196, TNA

In some rather intricate, circumspect conversations with the Kenyans and Tanzanians we have managed, we think, to get the Tanzanians to recognise the importance of the Kenyan position and their dislike of Obote, while the Kenyans, for their part appear to be ready to move some way in doing what the Tanzanians want, to the extent of not allowing Libyan arms to transit Kenya.³⁰⁸

But the high-level meeting between Tanzania and Uganda on 31 March went badly, and Kenya-Tanzanian relations deteriorated once more. The Kenyans now appeared to be backtracking on their promises to stop transit of Libyan supplies; although they confirmed that Libyan troops would not be allowed to transit Kenya, they were evasive on whether they would allow arms to pass to Uganda and confirmed that Kenya would allow Uganda all the oil it could pay for.³⁰⁹ Both Britain and the United States voiced concern at this apparent reversal of policy, stating ‘that whilst Kenya’s holding to a strict policy of neutrality in the Tanzania-Uganda conflict was generally understood, there could be less public understanding and possible public criticism outside Kenya if she allowed special consignments of war supplies to go through on behalf of Libya, as opposed to simply continuing normal supplies for Uganda.’³¹⁰ But British officials were unwilling to risk further intervention with Kenya despite renewed Tanzanian requests, as they believed ‘it would be damaging to appear to question Kenyan good faith when they appear to be adopting a tougher line on Amin and when we have at least achieved the objective of getting the Kenyans and Tanzanians into direct contact at a high level.’³¹¹

Luckily for Britain, the Americans were willing to make one more attempt at changing Kenya’s policy and put an end to the continuing Tanzanian requests. President Jimmy Carter sent President Moi an oral message on 4 April which the Americans admitted ‘puts into Moi’s mouth words which go further than we in fact believe to be Kenyan policy on restricting supplies to Amin’,³¹² hoping that it would convince him to stop supplies to Uganda. The message congratulated Moi on ‘his decision to prohibit the airlift of petroleum to Uganda and the refuelling of Libyan aircraft to and from Uganda’, stating that the United States Government ‘believes this step is consonant with Kenya’s position and that Kenya’s long-term interests are best served by its publicly stated policy that Kenya will permit no arms to transit Kenya for Uganda.’³¹³ The American message appeared to have changed Moi’s mind, as he told the US

³⁰⁸ Peter E. Rosling to Maeve Fort, 3 April 1979, FCO 31/2685/215, TNA.

³⁰⁹ Stanley Fingland to FCO, 3 April 1979, FCO 31/2685/202, TNA.

³¹⁰ Stanley Fingland to FCO, 3 April 1979, FCO 31/2685/202, TNA.

³¹¹ John A. Robson to Derek M. Day, 2 April 1979, FCO 31/2685/199, TNA.

³¹² John A. Robson to J. Stephen Wall, 5 April 1979, FCO 31/2685/227, TNA.

³¹³ Attached to John A. Robson to J. Stephen Wall, 5 April 1979, FCO 31/2685/227, TNA.

Ambassador that he could thank President Carter for the message and assure him that Kenya would not let Libyan supplies, fuel or arms transit Kenya for Uganda.³¹⁴ President Nyerere was ‘delighted’ with this Kenyan change of attitude and expressed his satisfaction with the British and American intervention.³¹⁵ The officials were very pleased with their policy, as Tanzania seemed to think that Britain had put more pressure on Kenya than it had in fact done:

In the end with the Libyan withdrawal the fuss died a natural death but not before the Kenyans had “been turned” (as the Tanzanian Foreign Minister put it) towards a more helpful frame of mind; a change of attitude for which the Tanzanians were prepared to give both ourselves and the Americans considerable credit but which was probably more due to a realistic re-assessment by the Kenyans of the likely outcome of the war in Uganda than to any change in their intense suspicions of Tanzanian and UNLF motives and intentions.³¹⁶

But the officials were disappointed that they had been unable to improve the bilateral relationship between Kenya and Tanzania, as they were ‘now apparently talking to one another but a deep gulf of suspicion remains and seems all too likely to do so for some considerable time to come.’³¹⁷

Britain also ignored Uganda’s appeals for a discussion of the Tanzanian invasion in the United Nations Security Council. Britain had been eager for Tanzania to demand a UN resolution against Uganda in phase one, but as Britain’s ally was now the aggressor and close to overthrowing Amin, discussion of the Uganda-Tanzania War in the UN was no longer in Britain’s interest. A discussion of the issue in the Security Council could also expose Britain’s support for Tanzania in the conflict.

Unfortunately, Uganda made four appeals to the Security Council about the conflict during the spring of 1979,³¹⁸ and one was made by Libya.³¹⁹ Luckily, none of the council members wanted to discuss the Uganda-Tanzania War; its erstwhile ally, the Soviet Union, was embarrassed by Amin’s invasion and would not ‘wish to annoy the Africans or the non-aligned

³¹⁴ Stanley Fingland to John A. Robson, 4 April 1979, FCO 31/2685/219, TNA.

³¹⁵ Peter R. M. Hinchcliffe to FCO, 5 April 1979, FCO 31/2685/233, TNA.

³¹⁶ Memorandum. The Tanzania/Uganda War: Act 2, 30 April 1979, FCO 31/2638/16, TNA.

³¹⁷ Memorandum. The Tanzania/Uganda War: Act 2, 30 April 1979, FCO 31/2638/16, TNA.

³¹⁸ On 26 January 1979 Amin asked that the UN stop Tanzania’s invasion; on 9 February he asked that the Security Council convene and discuss the matter; on 14 March Amin wrote to expose ‘a very dangerous plan engineered by American and British imperialists, in collaboration with Zionist Israel, against my country’ (seemingly triggered by his learning of the American and British communities’ evacuation from Uganda); and on 28 March he once more requested that the Security Council discuss the matter.

³¹⁹ This happened on 15 February 1979. See Ali Abdusalam Al-Treiki to Kurt Waldheim, 15 February 1979, FCO 31/2680/84, TNA.

by taking a pro-Ugandan line’;³²⁰ China and the Western countries sympathised with Tanzania; and the Africa group was ‘most concerned at the prospect of Uganda insisting on a council meeting’³²¹ as they were highly embarrassed by both Amin’s behaviour and their own inability to resolve the issue within the OAU. So, much to Britain’s advantage, there was ‘no enthusiasm’ for a meeting and ‘disposition to regard Amin’s phraseology as sufficiently ambiguous not to amount to a formal request for an immediate council meeting’.³²²

If an unambiguous request was made, Britain would have to support Uganda’s right to bring the matter before the Security Council – much to the dislike of the FCO officials³²³ – but ‘would explain to the Tanzanians, African and other friends, that this was for reasons of principle and not because of any sympathy with Uganda.’³²⁴ At the meeting, the British delegation would aim to ‘say as little as possible and to avoid a statement if we can.’³²⁵ Hopefully the other members of the Security Council would follow the same approach, and ‘afterwards the matter would simply run out of steam and peter out. That would be by far the best outcome, if it has to come to a meeting at all. Frankly we are all waiting for Amin to fall and for it all [...] to be over as soon as possible without having to declare ourselves’.³²⁶

On 28 March Amin made an unambiguous request for a meeting.³²⁷ But the African countries were ‘clearly embarrassed by the Ugandan request’³²⁸ and sent ‘a message to Amin indicating that they did not consider that it was wise to bring this matter before the Security Council at this stage while the OAU was still seized of it. [...] The African Group did not want to wash their dirty linen in public’.³²⁹ In order to delay a meeting Britain and the United States suggested that ‘if no reply had been received from Uganda by an unspecified time next week the Council should look at the matter again.’³³⁰ Thus the timing of a potential meeting was left unclear, and the British officials were ‘satisfied that the principle has been upheld without our having to cross swords with the African Group and that a little time has been bought.’³³¹ As the

³²⁰ Maeve Fort to Peter E. Rosling, 29 March 1979, FCO 31/2684/181, TNA.

³²¹ Ivor Seward Richard to FCO, 15 February 1979, FCO 31/2680/46, TNA.

³²² Ivor Seward Richard to FCO, 14 February 1979, FCO 31/2680/42, TNA.

³²³ Peter E. Rosling to John A. Robson, 29 March 1979, FCO 31/2684/179, TNA.

³²⁴ Peter E. Rosling to John A. Robson, 29 March 1979, FCO 31/2684/179, TNA.

³²⁵ Maeve Fort to Peter E. Rosling, 29 March 1979, FCO 31/2684/181, TNA.

³²⁶ Peter E. Rosling to Maeve Fort, 3 April 1979, FCO 31/2685/215, TNA.

³²⁷ Idi Osman to Leslie O. Harriman, 28 March 1979, FCO 31/2684/164, TNA.

³²⁸ Maeve Fort to Peter E. Rosling, 29 March 1979, FCO 31/2684/181, TNA.

³²⁹ Maeve Fort to Peter E. Rosling, 30 March 1979, FCO 31/2685/188, TNA.

³³⁰ Maeve Fort to Peter E. Rosling, 30 March 1979, FCO 31/2685/188, TNA.

³³¹ Maeve Fort to Peter E. Rosling, 30 March 1979, FCO 31/2685/188, TNA.

officials had hoped, Amin did not request the meeting and fell from power just over a week later.

Britain's contingency planning for a United Nations Security Council discussion on the Uganda-Tanzania War clearly demonstrates that it only approved of a Security Council solution when it suited their own interests. The realities on the ground had direct impact on their willingness to bring the issue to the council, but also on their inclination to work for a real solution. Britain's own policy interests were obviously a higher priority than the peacekeeping responsibilities of the Security Council.

5.3 The results of Britain's policy on the second phase of the Uganda-Tanzania War

As Amin fled into exile on 11 April 1979, it seemed to Britain that much had been won by intervention in the Uganda-Tanzania War. The officials deemed that 'Amin's chances of playing any role in Uganda in future must surely have disappeared',³³² and were pleased that he had been replaced by a politically moderate government with an expressed desire for close cooperation with Britain. After waiting for an appropriate number of African states to recognise the government of Yusuf Lule, Britain offered its recognition on 16 April.³³³ Early recognition of the new government and early offers of aid was intended to secure and maximise British influence with the new government. As the Soviet Union's arming of Amin harmed its prospects of future influence in Uganda and it seemed that Britain would become a main patron of Uganda, British officials were very pleased with what they had achieved there.

The officials were also satisfied that they had been able to preserve – or maybe even increase – the influence won with Tanzania in the first phase of the war. They judged that 'these events have on the whole brought benefit to British Tanzanian relations',³³⁴ and were very pleased that this had been accomplished 'at comparatively little cost.'³³⁵ The officials were particularly pleased that they had been able to turn around Nyerere's initial dissatisfaction with their assistance:

On 29 November 1978 Nyerere expressed dissatisfaction with our role in regard to the Ugandan situation when speaking to Mr. Cledwyn Hughes. He was then doubtless

³³² Memorandum. The Tanzania/Uganda War: Act 2, 30 April 1979, FCO 31/2638/16, TNA.

³³³ Stanley Fingland to FCO, 16 April 1979, PREM 16/2285, TNA.

³³⁴ Peter J. S. Moon to David Owen, 30 April 1979, FCO 31/2638/16, TNA.

³³⁵ John A. Robson to Mr Mr Williams, 31 May 1979, FCO 31/2638/24, TNA.

disappointed at our inability to be more forthcoming in our response to Tanzanian requests for assistance – (particularly arms) and was also probably influenced by stories of British assistance to Amin (e.g. the Stansted flights). Yet, by the time, not five months later, Tanzanian troops captured Kampala we had been elevated to the front rank of Tanzania's friends (in the Ugandan context) and the President was obviously warmly appreciative of our attitude and our actions.³³⁶

The officials believed that this turnaround was caused by the extension of aid and additional credit in December 1979, as well as to Britain's positive response to the Tanzanian request for a closer military relationship, its continued expediting of Tanzanian orders, its 'understanding' of Tanzania's position and apparent willingness to put across Tanzania's views to the Kenyans (although avoiding a formal mediatory role) which certainly led the former to believe that we played an important part in changing the Kenyan attitude to the passage of war supplies to Uganda through Kenya'.³³⁷ The decision to stop the Stansted flights when Amin was vulnerable was also believed to have pleased the Tanzanians.³³⁸

The officials were also relieved that Britain's relationship with Kenya had not been compromised, and were very pleased with its policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War:

From our point of view the outcome of the Tanzania/Uganda war has so far been largely gain. We are glad to see Africa disembarassed of Amin. The assistance and support we have given to Tanzania have been to the benefit of British Tanzanian relations [...] We now also have the prospect of renewing fruitful relations with Uganda. What may require careful handling in the future is the balance of our relations between the three East African countries – Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.³³⁹

But, as the officials were well aware, only time could reveal the amount of influence really won through their policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War.³⁴⁰

³³⁶ Memorandum. The Tanzania/Uganda War: Act 2, 30 April 1979, FCO 31/2638/16, TNA.

³³⁷ Memorandum. The Tanzania/Uganda War: Act 2, 30 April 1979, FCO 31/2638/16, TNA.

³³⁸ Memorandum. The Tanzania/Uganda War: Act 2, 30 April 1979, FCO 31/2638/16, TNA.

³³⁹ Peter J. S. Moon to David Owen, 30 April 1979, FCO 31/2638/16, TNA.

³⁴⁰ Memorandum. The Tanzania/Uganda War: Act 2, 30 April 1979, FCO 31/2638/16, TNA.

Chapter 6

A profound lack of confidence as a major power?

Although the predominant impression is that Labour was necessarily preoccupied with domestic issues during this period, the avowal of Britain's diminished power and status provided them with the opportunity for the first time to impose a fresh vision of Britain's interaction with the outside world which was rooted in the principles of socialist internationalism tempered by pragmatic recognition of the realities of world affairs.³⁴¹

So far this thesis has been devoted to the examination and analysis of Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War. It is now time for a brief discussion of whether or not this policy fits the research literature's frequent portrayal of the late 1970s as 'the moment when British decline reached its nadir, marked by further retreat from existing commitments under the pressure of intractable domestic political and economic difficulties' and its suggestion that 'Britain's defining characteristic in this period was a profound lack of confidence as a major power, dependent on its nuclear deterrent for residual status and influence.'³⁴²

Scholars on the Callaghan government seem to have been so mesmerised by the domestic crisis facing it that they have almost completely neglected its foreign policy, thus inadvertently creating the impression that it didn't have one or at least that it is not an interesting topic for research. And yet it is perhaps the Callaghan years that provide the most interesting opportunity to study Britain's foreign policy under pressure, both from domestic crisis and from its perceived loss of international status. If Britain's defining characteristic in the late 1970s really was 'a profound lack of confidence as a major power' due to domestic difficulties, one would expect this to be particularly conspicuous during the winter of 1978-9. But as this examination of Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War has demonstrated, this is not a fitting description for Britain even at its 'nadir' in 1978-9.

When the Uganda-Tanzania War suddenly broke out in October 1978, Britain immediately seized it as an opportunity to increase its global power by strengthening British influence in Southern and Central East Africa. By supporting Tanzania in a war that could potentially lead to Amin's overthrow, Britain hoped to gain influence in Uganda and Tanzania, ideally replacing what the officials considered predominant communist influence in Central

³⁴¹ Lane 2004: 154.

³⁴² Lane 2004: 154.

East Africa. The officials also hoped to use any influence gained with President Nyerere to bring about a mediated settlement to the Rhodesia crisis, thus ridding Britain of an embarrassing and constant reminder of its imperialist legacy and an impediment to British influence in the developing world. Intervention in the Uganda-Tanzania War could therefore not only preserve British influence in Africa against increasing communist influence, but open new possibilities for Britain to exert its global power.

Britain pursued a policy of active intervention in the Uganda-Tanzania War. Although it took great care to present itself publicly as a passive bystander hoping for the conflict's peaceful resolution by African actors, Britain covertly undermined just such a solution through material, economic and diplomatic support in an attempt to secure Tanzania's military defeat of Uganda. Britain's policy of support for Tanzania remained constant even as Tanzania transformed from victim to aggressor, committing the same offenses for which Britain had recently condemned Uganda. Although the Tanzanian invasion made the secrecy of Britain's policy even more paramount, it continued to provide Tanzania with diplomatic support throughout its campaign.

Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War was developed in the lower echelons of the FCO. David Owen did little to shape the policy, and was mostly content to approve the East African Department's policy suggestions. The research literature's portrayal of Owen as a 'weak' Foreign Secretary fits well with his unobtrusive role in the development of policy on this conflict. Concurrently, the literature's portrayal of Callaghan as a Prime Minister with strong influence on foreign policy is also correct as far as his involvement with Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War is concerned – although he did not micromanage its development, he redirected and shaped the policy when he considered it necessary.

Britain's willingness to intervene actively in this unanticipated conflict demonstrates its readiness to seize unexpected opportunities to further its foreign policy objectives even in the face of severe domestic crisis. As the Uganda-Tanzania War was a relatively small and unimportant local conflict that posed no threat to Britain itself, it could *choose* whether to intervene or not. Clearly, a Britain politically paralysed by domestic crisis would not necessarily have had the capacity to act on this opportunity – but as this thesis has demonstrated, it did. It immediately placed the Uganda-Tanzania War in a global context, perceiving it as an opportunity to further British interests and influence globally, and in acting on it displayed both great power thinking and an impressive opportunism during times of crisis.

One could argue that the financial constraints restricting Britain's policy on the Uganda-Tanzania War were a clear sign that the domestic crisis was limiting its ability to pursue foreign policy. While this is probably to some extent true, it does not automatically follow that Britain would have spent more money on this conflict if it had the opportunity. The limited political will to prioritise the conflict represented a limitation in itself, and one that would not necessarily have been alleviated even if Britain had not been in domestic turmoil.

Another restriction that Britain faced was the restrictions its status as a great power and former colonialist put on its relationship with Africa and developing countries. Britain would not pursue a policy that these countries would view as imperialistic, as such accusations were incredibly harmful to Britain's international image and influence. This demonstrates that Britain was still perceived internationally as a great power and acted as one in its pursuit of interests in distant parts of the globe. Although the fear of imperialist accusations restricted the policy that Britain could pursue on the Uganda-Tanzania War, I also believe it to be one of the reasons for its choice to intervene; Britain could not actively and openly pursue its interests in Central East Africa, but the special circumstance of the Uganda-Tanzania War allowed it to do so and get African gratitude in return.

Although Britain's reaction to this one small African conflict cannot necessarily be assumed to be representative for Britain's foreign policy as a whole, it is still indicative of Britain's willingness to pursue an active and global foreign policy even at its 'nadir' in 1978-9. It also seems reasonable to believe that parallel with the interest it took in this particular conflict, the FCO must have been pursuing policy on many other conflicts, developments and events around the world. It is therefore my conclusion that Britain's opportunism and active intervention in the small, local war between Uganda and Tanzania in 1978-9 does not correspond with the portrayal of British foreign policy in the late 1970s as defined by 'a profound lack of confidence as a major power'. Rather, it points towards a government in opportunistic pursuit of British interests in remote parts of the globe, despite the domestic crisis.

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