## CONTENTS

**Acknowledgments** xi

Introduction 1

1 Development as an Ideology for Empire 9

*The Civilizing Mission in the Interwar Years* 10

*Modernity and Authoritarian Rule* 13

*The Second World War* 16

2 Truman's Dream: When the Cold War and Development Met 22

*Point Four* 26

*Studying Backward Areas: Social Scientists, the Marshall Plan, and the Limits of the Cold War* 29

3 Socialist Modernity and the Birth of the Third World 33

*Ideology Put to the Test on the Colonial Question* 34

*The Age of Indifference* 35

*The Afterthought* 38

*The Age of Neutralism, or the Birth of the Third World* 40

*Khrushchev's Challenge* 42

*Features of Socialist Aid: Constructing the Ideological Framework* 43

*The Political Economy of Socialist Cooperation* 45

4 Western Alternatives for Development in the Global Cold War 50

*The Inevitability of Foreign Aid as a Cold War Tool?* 52

*Plans for Eurafrika* 55

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## Contents

An Ideology for the Global Cold War: The Rise of Modernization Theory

The Kennedy Administration: A Turning Point?

5 The Limits of Bipolarity in the Golden Age of Modernization

- The Cooperation Imperative in the West
- Disappointments: The United States and Bickering in the DAC
- Rostow and the Idea of Binding Rules
- The European Economic Community Way
- Coordination among Socialist Countries: The Permanent Commission for Technical Assistance in Comecon
- Responding to External Challenges

6 International Organizations and Development as a Global Mission

- Precedents: The League of Nations
- Development as Profession after the Second World War
- The World Bank
- The United Nations and Development: The Place for an Alternative?
- UNCTAD
- Assessing Aid at the End of the First Development Decade

7 Multiple Modernities and Socialist Alternatives in the 1970s

- The Soviet Union Reinterprets the Two Worlds Theory
- Convergence and Interdependence
- Third World Visions
- China's Development Alternative
- Self-Reliance? Tanzania between the Tazara Railway and Ujamaa
- Third Worldism and the New International Economic Order
Contents

8 Resources, Environment and Development:
The Difficult Nexus 124
The End of Technological Optimism? 125
Recasting the Problems of Modern Society 129
The Emergence of Global Environmentalism: Stockholm, 1972 133
Environment and Development as Seen from the East 137
The Legacy of Stockholm and the Invention of Sustainable Development 139

9 Responding to the Challenges from the Global South:
North-South Dialogues 142
The Birth of Basic Needs in the Second Development Decade 143
The Lomé Revolution 145
A Regional Plan: The Euro-Arab Dialogue 148
North-South Dialogue: The Global Dimension 150
Development and Human Rights 154

10 The Dynamics of the Lost Decade 160
Conclusions 169

Notes 179
Bibliography 227
Index 263
ON 25 JUNE 1975, Samora Moises Machel, the first president of Mozambique, celebrated independence at Machava Stadium in the capital, Lourenço Marques, soon to be renamed Maputo. A jubilant crowd filled the arena. Hundreds of guests from the various countries and organizations that had supported FRELIMO, the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique), during the armed struggle for independence joined the celebrations. Machel had traveled from the Rovuma River in the north down to the Maputo River in the south: a triumphal march that lasted over a month. He hoped to convince his people to help construct the new state by spreading the news of independence and its significance. Machel promised the People’s Republic of Mozambique that he would eradicate the remnants of colonialism and forever banish exploitation. He would build a new society, based on agriculture and propelled by industrial development, relying on its own forces with the support of its natural allies: the socialist countries and its African neighbors Tanzania and Zambia. Education, youth, and health were important parts of the plan; the emancipation of women was fundamental, along with social development within a community framework, the valuing of tradition, and the exchange of knowledge.¹

Mozambique’s bloody war of liberation from Portuguese colonialism lasted ten years (1964–74), during which FRELIMO received support from the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies. They sent weapons, emergency supplies, advisers, and technicians and pledged to help construct the new state. Mozambique was ideally situated to become a new front of the Cold War, which in 1970s Africa often ran hot. Liberation, whether in Mozambique or elsewhere in Southern Africa, did not imply the end of conflicts,
and internal struggles continued, fueled by competing ideologies. President Samora Machel was the unchallenged leader of a paternalistic political elite anchored to an ethic of socialist development of the country. In 1977 during FRELIMO’s Third Congress, the first after independence, the broad-based liberation movement became a vanguard Marxist party, built hierarchically and using central planning as its main development strategy. During the congress, the plans sketched at the moment of independence acquired a more precise shape, with Soviet-style modernization as its paradigm. One infrastructure project towered over the rest: the Cahora Bassa Dam, the huge work on the Zambezi River originally conceived in the 1930s by Portuguese authorities as a symbol of their power.

After complex and extended negotiations, in September 1969 a consortium of firms from Portugal, West Germany, the United Kingdom, and South Africa—ZAMCO—had signed a $515 million agreement to build the dam. Work was finally completed in 1974. Intended to supply energy to South Africa, the hydroelectric power plant symbolized the idealized union of white settler communities in Southern Africa. Owned and operated by a Portuguese corporation, Hidroeléctrica de Cahora Bassa (HCB), and inserted within the colonial development plan by Portuguese authorities, the megadam was associated with colonial oppression and had long been in the crossfire of both FRELIMO propaganda and warfare. After independence, the dam became a challenge for the new ruling class: could the new government “tame the white elephant” and turn the colonial project into a tool for social revolution and the empowerment of the black population, by using the energy produced by Cahora Bassa’s turbines in Mozambique? Machel’s words and plans in this direction echoed those of earlier icons of national independence: Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, Jawaharlal Nehru in India, Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana. Here, though, the rhetoric of liberation was clearly Marxist Leninist, promising a complete overhaul of the old socioeconomic order and a new model of a more equitable society. Ultimately, the dam did not serve the cause of socialist empowerment. Mozambique’s postindependence political elite struggled to convert it into a symbol of emancipation within a plan for accelerated national modernization of economic and social structures where the state bore the burden of economic progress and social development. The imposition of collective forms of production and forced settlement into rural communities, often reminiscent of colonial methods, alienated big sectors of the population and nourished the raging civil war fomented by RENAMO (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana, supported by Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa) that transformed large areas into battlefields. Cahora Bassa is a useful case study of development’s entanglement with the colonial legacy and Cold War dynamics in Southern Africa. It is one of many examples of how economic decolonization mixed
with Cold War interests, with local elites inviting superpowers in to help them achieve modernity and economic growth, often with mixed results.

This book is about the history of development as a Cold War global project from the late 1940s until the late 1980s, a period when the world’s imagination was seduced by a concept that encompassed progress, modernity, economic growth, and welfare. Development was crucial to colonial administrations, as the case of Cahora Bassa suggests. Used to appease both the European settlers and the local population, it strengthened empire. With decolonization, it ceased to be domestic policy for empires and became a form of international politics for their successors. How and on what terms would newly independent countries be integrated into the international system? Development became diplomacy’s favored way to keep the emerging countries that Alfred Sauvy named the Third World, which could model themselves on either the West or the East, from following the wrong trajectory. In both the East and West, rich countries sought to help the decolonizing states catch up by offering both aid and an example of how a society could and should work. Development projects became a feature of international relations, part of the toolbox of both nation-states and international organizations. For the former colonial powers, development often meant resuming older commitments. It became development aid; once seen as investment at home, it was now a gift abroad, an act of generosity or enlightened interest. To the formerly colonized, however, foreign aid was a form of reparation, a duty for former colonizers who were expected to remedy the wrongs of imperial rule by helping correct global economic inequality. Using it effectively for the postcolonial state was a move of self-determination that national elites exploited to legitimize their rule. So crucial was aid in Asia, Africa, and Latin America that it is impossible to accurately discuss history in the late twentieth century without considering development projects, many of which were complex state-building operations that touched entire societies.

Narrating the political, intellectual, and economic history of the twentieth century through the lens of development means dealing with ideas as much as with material transformation, recounting the ways ideas and projects affected local realities, transnational interactions, and, eventually, notions of development. In describing this trajectory, Global Development makes three main points. First, it argues that the Cold War was fundamental in shaping the global aspirations and ideologies of development and modeling the institutional structures that still rule foreign aid today. Second, it contends that the role of the state was crucial, and that though development projects were articulated in global terms, as narratives to frame problems and provide solutions, they actually served national purposes. Third, it argues that development institutions tried to create a universal and homogeneous concept of development but ultimately failed.
German historian Reinhart Koselleck has remarked that a concept is both a product of its context and a factor shaping it. Development was molded by the Cold War and, in turn, actively designed some of its structures. It predated the end of empires and the Second World War but acquired a special role with the globalization of American and Soviet ideological competition and the building of the institutions and ideology of an economic Cold War. At the very inception of the Cold War, with the Marshall Plan, development and foreign aid met, and development became a transnational project with potential global reach. It quickly became the preferred way to conquer the hearts and minds of poor people in Europe and—with Point Four in 1949—outside it. Postwar reconstruction valued cooperation highly, seeing it as the blueprint for dealing with backwardness. Even before the Cold War, it was the fear of communism that provided incentives for development. Economic aid was devised in the interwar years to counter the specter of revolutions fueled by social discontent and rising expectations. After the Second World War, anticommunism was clearly behind Truman's Point Four, but it was not until 1956 that aid became institutionalized as a tool for Cold War politics. It was then that Nikita Khrushchev took up the challenge by arguing that the socialist mode of production, with its system of cooperation on an equal base grounded in fraternal solidarity and stressing industrial development, possessed decisive advantages over the capitalist one. The combined effect of the collapse of European empires and the Cold War opened new space in international politics. To receive aid, newly independent countries were forced to choose a social and economic development model. This gave their leaders leverage, and as they showcased their needs and stressed the moral obligation of redressing colonial exploitation, they systematically threatened to align with the other side in order to receive aid for their favorite plans. In the late 1950s, development projects were competing against one another in terms of effectiveness and symbolic strength, which meant that Cold War politics determined the stakes, timing, and distribution of aid.

Development was also a tool of bloc consolidation and solidarity, with two rival groups, East and West, engaging in a worldwide tug-of-war for influence and clients. In the West, cooperation occurred through the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); in the East, through the Permanent Commission for Technical Assistance in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA or Comecon). These cooperative projects functioned both as a promotion of cultural values—Western democracy versus socialism—and as security ventures. In the West, the security dimension meant achieving social peace by granting extensive welfare. In the socialist countries, it meant strengthening international solidarity around the promise of an alternative
system: an industrialized society with high levels of welfare and equality. But over time, donors on both sides were increasingly baffled by the security paradox: instead of enhancing security, aid nourished inefficient and autocratic governments that committed blatant violations of human rights and caused regional destabilization. The connection between foreign aid and security, a pillar of the system, did not hold. Disappointment with both the quantity and quality of aid was such that instead of bringing consensus, aid increased North-South tensions. In the 1970s, these tensions exploded within the United Nations, where the North-South divide inherited from decolonization and initially articulated through trade controversies became more prominent than the East-West divide. There were always new reasons for rupture on global issues such as resources, population, and the environment. And even when East-West détente lowered Cold War tensions, they continued at the local level, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, where decolonization struggles persisted.

Global Development claims that notwithstanding their universal aspiration, development projects served mainly the national purposes of both donor and recipient countries. Donors wanted to promote their national self-interest, whether politically or economically, for instance by expanding markets for their products or securing strategic resources at favorable prices. Meanwhile, recipients were able to manipulate the interests of the donors to their own ends, sometimes national, sometimes for a specific group or even particular individuals. They systematically used the threat of moving to the other side of the Cold War, often exhibiting indifference to the source of aid in order to stress their independence and readiness to defect. In the hands of national elites in the “age of development” (1940–1973), economic growth became one with the national project, and planning and state investments were key—the conditions that created the developmental state. All you need to fight poverty is a plan, Gunnar Myrdal bragged in 1956, but the plan was not just about economics—it was about constructing a new society. Joseph Schumpeter, upon meeting his former student Hans Singer, who was working on development for the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, remarked sarcastically, “I thought you were an economist.” Development, he claimed, was a matter for anthropologists, sociologists, or geographers. In the 1950s and 1960s, development concepts, however different their details, shared a faith in the state as an actor and in planning as a method, making it tempting to describe the history of development as a history of planning.

In the modernization era, the state was a powerful engine for development. The development field agreed that improving the living standards of the common people was a primary duty of governments. This belief, Myrdal enthusiastically noted in 1957, was brand-new in history. In donor and recipient countries alike, policy makers extolled the virtues of development plans
and technology’s ability to promote growth. Big infrastructure projects such as dams and power plants were the ultimate symbols of modernity. And all of this was compatible across the spectrum of societal organization—it could be the product of capitalist ventures or be associated with hardcore planning the Socialist Bloc’s way. Either way, it rested on an optimistic view of society and its future, on the feasibility of making the world a better place. The faith in the state, discourses of self-betterment, and the fundamental role of science and rational thought in replacing traditions ended in the late 1960s. And when the myth of invincible scientific-technological progress crumbled, development entered a long era in which there was a crisis of vision. Poor results also shook the optimistic view of economic growth automatically translating to generalized well-being. Poverty persisted despite economic growth: fresh tools thus had to be devised. New anxieties appeared, particularly resource scarcity, population, and concern for the environment. Trust in progress as linear development toward modernity collapsed. Historian Alexander Gerschenkron argued that linear development did not accurately describe European history, let alone global dynamics. Linguist Noam Chomsky demolished the double myth of social sciences: political benevolence and scientific omniscience. Together these destroyed the idea that the poor would eventually converge toward the rich. The main divide was not East-West anymore, but North-South, and trust in state planning was replaced by faith in the market. The costs of global modernization exploded, leaving national elites in recipient countries with huge debts that they were unable or unwilling to pay. They turned to more radical requests that challenged Cold War schemes and premises.

This global history of development shows how institutions promoted an unrealistic idea of development as a homogeneous system. The differences in interests and perspectives between North and South, East and West, and Europe and the rest were simply too great, and while there were temporary alignments, a stable consensus was elusive. The development galaxy was better described as a patchwork of regional plans with global ambitions than as a coherent system. Although cooperation—among allies and international organizations, between North and South, and among countries of what is now called the Global South—was fundamental to how aid was understood, this harmonious vision did not reflect reality. As this book reveals, coordination among allies was never simple, and it was not what made the system work. European countries had their own national interests and disparate visions on aid, regardless of whether they were allied with the Americans or the Soviets. These countries used the recipes proposed by the superpowers’ experts or international organizations instrumentally, adapting them to their own needs. This happened in both the West and the East. Sometimes what seemed like just a slight difference in approach hid a substantial disagreement, as with Italy
and its different ideas on the state’s role in industrialization, or East Germany’s preference for smaller projects in the processing industry rather than the big projects favored by the USSR. At other times, the opposition was more explicit, as with West Germany criticizing US program aid or Romania identifying with the Third World instead of with the Soviet Bloc. Development scholars often describe development as a global design with Western—usually American—ideas at its center. Indeed, many see it as a regime governed by Western concepts of morality and steered by the United States in cooperation with like-minded international experts.\(^{11}\) Depending on the scholar’s ideological view, the United States looms as either a generous patron or a malevolent, hegemony-seeking, neocolonial imperial power. However, although US-backed modernization theory and the policies it shaped were influential, they did not go unchallenged by national interests and alternative visions.\(^{12}\) This book avoids the hegemony narrative by looking at the tensions and competing interests roiling beneath the even surface created when development is described as a single idea.

Typically, the economic Cold War has been explored in the classic bipolar framework by discussing the ways that Western and socialist views met and diverged.\(^{13}\) However, Cold War development was much more than a competition between superpowers, and this book delves into national and regional archives, both public and private, to broaden this picture. This allows the appreciation of similarities and differences between and within the “First” and “Second” worlds during the Cold War. It brings in a wide range of actors, including state actors such as China, international organizations and their agencies, and Third World voices around the project for the New International Economic Order. One regional actor that rarely shows up in economic histories of the Cold War is the European Economic Community (EEC), which offered what it called a third way in development. The EEC discussions about how to structure a common aid program show the fundamental tension within development strategies over whether to take a regional or global approach. Regionalism, in this case, was a legacy of empire—the French especially cherished the geopolitical dream of Eurafrika—and this book tells the story of how it transformed itself into an alternative to the superpowers, something resembling Third World demands for a New International Economic Order.

The history of development shows that this concept underwent multiple transformations, yet there were also recurring ideas and models and long-term continuities in national strategies. Development was never linear. And while debates about aid have shifted from asking outdated questions such as “does aid work?” to strengthening aid mechanisms in specific situations, there are consistent through lines across decades. There is still a focus on food security and rural development, albeit with a stress on democracy in the case of US
aid, on project aid with allegedly maximum control in the case of Germany, or the centrality of student exchanges in the socialist tradition, which remains part of Chinese aid.

On 9 March 2018, newspaper articles reported the “cold war” staged the day before at the Sheraton Hotel in Addis Ababa. Then US secretary of state Rex Tillerson and Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov crossed paths on Ethiopian soil, but though they stayed at the same hotel, they did not meet. Lavrov had visited Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique, and Namibia: traditional Soviet trade partners in Southern Africa. Tillerson, who then traveled on to Djibouti and Kenya, signed a $100 million loan agreement with the Ethiopian government and commented on China’s presence on the continent. American aid to Africa focuses on training for military and police forces in peacekeeping operations and lessons in good governance and democratic traditions—the priority is security, just as during the Cold War. Russia focuses on weapons and mining industries, as it used to do in the 1970s, stressing the importance of noninterference in domestic affairs and supporting China against US accusations of predatory business methods. China, an important alternative socialist modernity described in this book, typically focuses on infrastructure. In Addis, for example, the Chinese have financed the new headquarters for the African Union and built the metro running from the airport to the city center, as well as the railway line connecting Addis Ababa with the port in Djibouti on the Gulf of Aden. Tillerson’s and Lavrov’s simultaneous trips to Africa—which continued geographical priorities established during the Cold War, and their interest in the classic intervention sectors—is just one example of how development mind-sets and aid dynamics still follow the paths laid out during the Cold War. In the history of development in the pages that follow, overriding trends and patterns are clearly recognizable, but regional and national specificities consistently complicate the picture, while the Cold War determines much—but not everything, and not always in the way that might be expected.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Act for International Development (United States), 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adenauer, Konrad, 56, 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan, 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization (AAPSO), 114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afrobarometer, 175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aid: definition of, 70–71; from the EEC, 76–81; immorality of, argument for, 161; as one of the greatest disappointments of the twentieth century, 171–73; pipeline problems associated with project, 81; Rostow's efforts to create binding rules for, 73–74; the security paradox and, 5; tied, 71, 173. See also development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid-India Consortium, 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid to Turkey, consortium for, 71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfonso, Juan Pablo Pérez, 120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allardt, Helmut, 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Álvarez, Alejandro, 155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Álvarez, Luis Echevería, 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amin, Idi, 158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amin, Julius, 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amin, Samir, 104, 113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amnesty International, 155, 158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amuzegar, Jahangir, 153, 155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anstee, Margaret Joan, 96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arbenz, Jacobo, 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armand, Louis, 125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arney, William Ray, 169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aron, Raymond, 88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian mode of production, 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association for the Development of Industry in Southern Italy (Svimez), 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aswan High Dam, 43, 54, 84–85, 133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atkins, Homer, 61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atoms for Peace, 53, 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augstein, Rudolf, 139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aziz, Abdul, 149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balassa, Bela, 163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ball, George W., 71–72, 74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandung Conference, 40–41, 102, 114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basak, Aroon K., 110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bauer, Peter T., 160–61, 171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beavogui, Louis Lansana, 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedjaoui, Mohammed, 155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bell, David E., 64, 74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Bella, Ahmed, 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bennett, Henry Garland, 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benson, Wilfred, 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berg, Elliot, 164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berliner, Joseph S., 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernstein, Eduard, 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bevin, Ernest, 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond the Limits to Growth (Club of Rome), 140–41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biosphere Conference, 133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop, Elizabeth, 84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, Eugene, 50, 95, 125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boumedienne, Houari, 115, 120–21, 149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourquin, Maurice, 90–91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyle, Edward, 104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brando, Marlon, 61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Brandt, Willy, 76, 131, 139
Brandt Report, 161–62
Brauer, Max, 92
Bräuigam, Deborah, 173–74
Bretono, Heinrich von, 56, 72
Brezhnev, Leonid, 108, 112, 154, 165
Britain: colonies and the wartime economy, problems of, 17–18; Commonwealth countries, aid to, 59; EEC, joining of, 145; from postwar colonialism to postcolonial relations, 19; post-World War I colonialism of, 11–12
Broso, Manlio, 131
Bruce, Stanley, 91
Bruce Report, 91
Brutents, Karen, 111–12, 166
Brzezinski, Zbigniew, 42, 88, 154, 156
Bulganin, Nikoai, 39
Bundy, McGeorge, 138
Burdick, Eugene, 61
Bush, George H. W., 169

Cahora Bassa Dam, 2–3
Caine, Sidney, 18
Caine Memorandum (Britain, August 1943), 18
Campbell, William Kenneth Hunter, 92
Campos, Roberto, 104
Cancun Summit, 162–63
Carson, Rachel, 126
Carter, Jimmy, 139–40, 153–55, 158
Castaneda, Jorge, 162
Castle, Barbara, 75
Ceaușescu, Nicolae, 109
Cederna, Antonio, 132
Chapperon, Jean, 76
Charter of Algiers, 121
Chase, Stuart, 15
Chenery, Hollis B., 31, 170
Chen Yi, 114
Chervonenko, Stepan Vasilievich, 41
Cheysson, Claude, 145–49, 158
Chiang Kai-shek, 37, 91–92
China: Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) mission in, 25; the League of Nations and, 91–92; the Soviet Union and communists vs. nationalists in, 36; Stalin and, 37
China, People's Republic of: Africa, engagement in, 174–76; Africa, focus on, 115–16; decolonization, impact of, 50; development alternative offered by, 113–19; the New International Economic Order, support for, 122; Soviet Union, relations with, 45, 114–15; Stockholm Conference, participation in, 135; Tanzania, projects in, 116–19
Chissano, Joaquim, 116
Chomsky, Noam, 6
civilization: rhetoric of in the West, 10; as vindication of colonialism, 11
civilizing mission: imperialism conceived of as a, 10; in the interwar years, 10–13; postwar revision of, 19
Clark, Colin, 30
Clay Report, 71
Clayton, William, 24
Club of Rome, 128, 136–38, 140–41
CMEA. See Comecon
Coale, Ansley, 125, 127
Coffin, Frank M., 70
Cold War: disarmament and environmental concerns, 137; foreign aid as weapon in, United States policy of, 52–55, 60–67; the North-South divide and, 143; Point Four and, 26, 28–29; postwar emergence of, 24; the Soviet model for development (see socialist development/modernization; Soviet Union); weaponization of development in, 68–69; Western alternatives for development, 50–67 (see also Britain; Europe; France; Point Four; United States)
Colonial Development and Welfare Act (Britain), 17, 59
Colonial Development Corporation (Britain), 19
colonialism: administration and bureaucracy of, 12–13; backwardness, believed to
be the cause of, 33–34; as a civilizing mission in the interwar years, 10–13; "development," origin of the use of the term in, 9–10; legacy of for postcolonial regimes, 20–21; the mandate system and, 11–12; Marxists/Bolsheviks and, 34–35; postwar European efforts to retain some form of, 50–51; postwar struggles and failure to establish a new, 18–20; social engineering and welfare, 13–16; World War II, impact of, 17–19. See also decolonization

Colonna di Paliano, Guido, 69

Comecon: developing countries, cooperation efforts with, 82–85; establishment and membership of, 81–82; external challenges, responses to, 85–88; integration of LDCs into, reversal of position on, 112; Permanent Commission for Technical Assistance, 4, 69, 82, 86–87, 108–9; as a regional framework, 171; shifts of the late 1960s and 1970s, the international division of labor and, 107–10, 113; Tripartite Industrial Cooperation (TIC) strategy of, 110–12; the West, consideration of cooperation with, 75–76; Western non-cooperation with, 73

Cominform, 37

Commission for Technical Co-operation in Africa South of the Sahara (CCTA), 145–46

Commoner, Barry, 127, 134

Communist International, 34–35

Comprehensive Program for Socialist Economic Integration (a.k.a. the Bucharest Plan), 84

Condliffe, John Bell, 92

Conference for International Economic Cooperation (CIEC), 152–53

Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), 138

convergence: interdependence and in the 1970s, 111; modernization theorists-socialists disagreement over, 88

Cooper, Richard, 153, 156

Corea, Gamani, 165

Coudenhove-Kalergi, Richard, 51

Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. See Comecon

Cros, Pierre, 76

Cuba, 112–13

Currie, Lauchlin, 28

DAC. See Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Development Assistance Committee

Davis, Kingsley, 126

Declaration on the Human Environment (a.k.a. Stockholm Declaration), 136

decolonization: the EEC and, 58–60; initial European responses to, 50–51; Mozambique as a case study of the Cold War and, 1–3; Soviet position on, reevaluation of, 39, 43; Stalin’s disinterest in, 36–37; Third World stance at Bandung on, 40–41. See also colonialism

de Gaulle, Charles, 58

Delavignette, Robert, 76

Delhi Declaration, 167

Deng Xiaoping, 41, 116

Deniau, Jean-François, 58

development: aid war, beginning of, 42; assessments of at the end of the First Development Decade, 103–6; basic needs as a focus of, 143–45, 156–57; belief in the universality of recipes for, 25–26, 29–30; China’s rise regarding, 174–76; as a civilizing mission (see civilizing mission); during the Cold War, conclusions regarding, 169–72; the Cold War and, 4, 68–69; the end of the Cold War and, 169, 172–73; the environment and (see environment, the); etymology of the term, 9; history, need to appreciate the significance of, 177; human rights and, 155–59; legacy of colonialism for postwar, 20–21; limits to the American/universalistic approach to, 30–32; malaise and disappointments associated with in the
development (continued)
early 1970s, 129–31; the neoliberal attack on, 160–65; new postwar language of, 19; the 1980s as the lost decade of, 160–68; Official Development Assistance in 2016, amount of, 176; post-Cold War criticisms of, 173–74; as a profession after World War II, 92–94; reconstruction as, 23–26; Soviet model of, 14–16; stages of, noneconomic elements of the mandate system and, 11; successes of, 172, 174; sustainable, 141, 167–68, 177–78; sustainable, setting the stage for, 133–37; as a tool for colonial government, 13; transnational approach, move from national approach to, 22; the United Nations and, 96–103 (see also UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA); United Nations (UN)); World War II, impact of, 16–21. See also aid
Development Assistance Group (DAG, a.k.a. the Dillon Group), 55
Development Loan Fund (DLF), 53
Diem, Ngo Dinh, 54
Dillon, C. Douglas, 55, 104
Dollar, David, 175
Dragoni, Mario, 92
Dubos, René, 127, 134–35
Duchêne, François, 145
Dulles, John Foster, 43, 53–54
Dumont, René, 125
Dupree, Louis, 68
Durieux, Jean, 77, 81

Easterly, William, 161
Eastern Bloc countries: boycott of Stockholm Conference, 134–35; cooperation with the United States on aid matters, consideration of, 75; Guinea, assistance to, 48–49; Mozambique, assistance to, 1–2; raw materials from developing countries, imperative to obtain, 108–9. See also German Democratic Republic (GDR); Soviet Union
East Germany. See German Democratic Republic (GDR)
ecological issues. See environment, the
Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, 92
Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA), 25
Economic Development Institute, 96
ECOSOC. See UN Economic and Social Council
Eden, Anthony, 25
EDF. See European Development Fund
EEC. See European Economic Community
Ehrlich, Paul, 126–27
Eisenhower, Dwight D.: counterinsurgency strategy in Vietnam under, 67; development assistance, lack of enthusiasm regarding, 52–53; domino theory, reference to, 52; scientific-technological elite, warning about, 125
Elton, Charles, 125
environment, the: crises of, 168; developing countries’ rejection of environmentalism, 135–36; development and, 124–25, 140–41; disarmament/security concerns and, 137–38; emergence of concerns about, 125–29; emergence of global environmentalism at Stockholm, 133–37; the energy crisis/austerity and, 139–40; explosion of concern about, 131–32; Nixon’s initiative focusing on, 131; sustainable development and, 141, 167–68, 177–78; the systems analysis approach to, 138–39
Eppler, Erhard, 145
EPTA. See UN Expanded Program of Technical Assistance
Erb, Guy, 156
Erhard, Ludwig, 73
Erler, Brigitte, 163
Eurabia, 150
Eurafrica, 53, 55–60, 145–46, 150
Euro-Arab dialogue, 149–50
Europe: as a "civilian power," 145; plans for Eurafrica, 55–60
European Development Fund (EDF), 56–58, 77–78, 146
European Economic Community (EEC): aid to less-developed countries from, 76–81; Britain, accession of, 145; Cheysson Fund, 152; creation of, 56; Directorate-General of Overseas Development (DG Development), 76–77, 147; East German attitude towards, 85; environmental issues, concerns with, 132; Eurafrica and, 56–59, 145–46, 150; the Euro-Arab dialogue, 149–50; the Lomé Convention, adoption and implementation of, 145–48; the Lomé Convention, socialist countries' criticisms of, 148; Lomé II, 158; as a regional framework, 171; third way for the Third World, offering of, 143
EXIM Bank, 53, 65
Fanon, Frantz, 57, 120
Ferguson, James, 93
Ferrandi, Jacques, 57–58, 68, 76–78, 80, 105, 147
Ferry, Jules, 10
FIDES. See Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Économique et Social
Foccart, Jacques, 58
Foley, Maurice, 147
Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Économique et Social (FIDES), 20, 57
Fong, H. D., 92
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 93–94, 97
Food for Peace, 52, 65
Forbes, William Cameron, 16
Ford, Gerald, 150–51
Forrester, Jay, 128
Founex Report, 133–34
France: colonization as a political duty for, 10; the EEC and, development policies of, 58–59; the EEC and, formation and administration of, 56–58; postwar colonialism of, 20; post-World War I colonialism of, 11–12
Frank, Andre Gunder, 123
Friedman, Milton, 40
Frisch, Ragnar, 40
Gaddafi, Muammar, 110, 120, 148
Galbraith, John Kenneth, 40, 60, 64, 88, 93
Gandhi, Indira, 135
Gandhi, Rajiv, 167
Ganjí, Manouchehr, 155
Gardner, Richard, 89
Gaud, William, 130
GDR. See German Democratic Republic
Geertz, Clifford, 47
General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT): Kennedy Round, 74
Georgescu-Roegen, Nicholas, 137
German Democratic Republic (GDR): in Comecon, 82–83; as economic partner for African countries, 110–11; the EEC and, 85; Freundschaftsbrigaden (friendship brigades) sent to Africa, 64, 86; Guinea, trade agreements and assistance for, 48–49; political cooperation with progressive parties in developing countries, 86; scientific and technical cooperation agreements by, 82; as Soviet ally in reaching out to movements of national liberation, 42–43; Tanzania, support for, 85–86
Germany, Federal Republic of: communist threat to less developed countries, concern with, 55; cooperation with the East on aid matters, 75–76; the EEC and, development policies of, 58; the United States, bilateral relations with, 72–73
Germany (post-unification): Africa conference in, 177
Germany (pre-partition): as exception to the civilizing mission conception in the West, 10
Index

Gerschenkron, Alexander, 6
Gil, Federico G., 66
Giscard d’Estaing, Valéry, 75, 150
Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP), 149
Global Negotiations on International Economic Cooperation, 162
Goldsmith, Edward, 127
Gorbachev, Mikhail, 167
Gordon, Lincoln, 64
Green Revolution, 130, 161
Griffin, Allen, 29
Gromyko, Andrei, 122, 166
G7, 151–53
G77 group, 86–87, 102–3, 112
Guinea, 48–49
Guth, Wilfried, 104
Gvishiani, Dzhermen, 138, 140
Häfele, Wolf, 138
Haig, Alexander, 162
Hailey, William Malcolm, 25–26
Halle, Louis J., 26
Hancock, William Keith, 18
Hansen, Roger, 156
Hardin, Garrett, 126–27
Hardy, Benjamin H., 26
Hart, Albert G., 102
Hartmann, Klaus, 85
Hayes, Samuel, 29, 64
Hendus, Heinrich, 58, 77
Herrera, Felipe, 66
Herriot, Eduard, 15
Hessel, Stéphane, 90
Heyerdahl, Thor, 135
Hidroeléctrica de Cahora Bassa (HCB), 2
Hinton, Deane R., 68, 74
Hirschman, Albert O., 31, 66, 104
Ho Chi Minh, 35
Hodge, Joseph, 163
Hoffman, Paul G., 30, 99–101, 105–6, 145
Honecker, Erich, 110
Hoover, Edgar M., 125
Houphouët-Boigny, Félix, 56, 146–47
Hull, Cordell, 23
humanitarianism: colonialism/struggle against slavery and, 10; in Point Four, 26
human rights, 155–59
Humphrey, Hubert, 62
Huntington, Samuel, 88
Huxley, Julian, 93
ideology: the civilizing mission as, 10–13; the Cold War as a clash of (see Cold War); competition between development models, 38; convergence, disagreement over the idea of, 88; development as a weapon in the clash of, 15–16; of postwar colonialism, 18–21; socialism, nationalism, and the colonial question, 34–35; of socialist development, 43–45; the Soviet model of development as, 14–15; of welfare colonialism and social engineering, 13–16
Illich, Ivan, 161
Independent Commission for International Development, 161–62
India: Point Four efforts in, 65; Second Five-Year Plan, 39–40; the Soviet model of development and, 39; Stalin and, relations between, 37–38; Stockholm Conference, participation in, 135
Indochina: beginning of United States’ involvement in, 52–53. See also Vietnam
Indonesia, 47–48
Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), 44, 49
International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), 55
International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), 23, 94. See also World Bank
International Cooperation Administration, 53
International Finance Corporation, 96, 101
International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), 138–39
International Labour Organization (ILO), 14, 90, 94, 143–44

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu
international law: the New International Economic Order and, 154–55
International Monetary Fund (IMF), 23, 164
International Study Congress on Backward Areas, 31–32
Italy: development as a means of promoting empire for, 15–16; development assistance and migration policies, connection between, 176; limits of American approach to development illustrated in, 32; regional development policies turned into global models, as a case study for, 30–32; World Bank and Marshall Plan aid, recipient of, 95

Jackson, C. D., 53
Jackson, Robert G. A., 24, 89, 96, 105–6
Japan, 16
Johnson, Lyndon, 73
Jolly, Richard, 104

Kagame, Paul, 174
Kaldor, Nicholas, 40, 102
Kalecki, Michał, 39–40, 107, 111
Kaunda, Kenneth, 115
Kautsky, Karl, 34
Kaysen, Carl, 128
Kennan, George F., 15, 24, 131–32
Kennedy, John Fitzgerald: Decade of Development, proposal for, 90; modernization-guided foreign aid under the presidency of, 52, 64–67; the Peace Corps and, 62–63
Keynes, John Maynard, 102
Khomeini, Ruholla (Ayatollah Khomeini), 163

Khrushchev, Nikita: assistance not in Soviet Union’s favor, declaration that, 46; Aswan Dam, visit to, 85; “Basic Principles of the Social International Division of Labor” proposal by, 83–84; Central Asia, political base in, 46; competition between socialist and capitalist states, bid for, 55; outreach to newly independent countries, 42; socialist mode of production, argument for, 4; trip to less developed countries in 1955, 39

Kiesinger, Kurt Georg, 76
Kindleberger, Charles, 60–61
King, Alexander, 128, 131
Kipling, Rudyard, 10
Kissinger, Henry, 42, 129, 150–52
Kitzinger, Uwe, 56
Knack, Stephen, 173
Kojève, Alexandre, 56
Korry, Edward M., 130–31
Koselleck, Reinhart, 4
Kotewala, John, 41
Kreisky, Bruno, 138–40, 162
Krohn, Hans-Broder, 81
Krupp Plan, 28
Kuznets, Simon, 40, 98

La Guma, Alex, 46–47
Lal, Deepak, 163
Lamberz, Werner, 110–11
Landau, Ludwik, 30
Lange, Oskar, 39
Lavrov, Sergey, 8
League of Nations, 11–12, 91–92
Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), 15
Lederer, William, 61
Lehman, Herbert, 24
Lemaigen, Robert, 57–58
Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich, 14, 34–35
Leontief, Wassily, 137
Lewis, C. S., 9
Liberia, 173
Libya: nationalization in, 120; trilateral cooperation, interest in negotiating, 110–11

Lie, Trygve, 97, 99–100
Lilienthal, David, 16, 30, 32, 124

Limits to Growth, The (Club of Rome), 127–28, 136–38
Little, Ian, 163
Lodge, Henry Cabot, 53
Lomé Convention, 146–47
Lugard, Frederick, 12
Luns, Joseph, 56
Lusaka Declaration on Non-Alignment and Economic Progress, 121
MacDonald, Malcolm, 17
Machel, Samora Moises, 1–2, 115
Madagascar, 78–79
Maddox, John, 127
Mahalanobis, Prasanta Chandra, 39
Malik, Jacob, 113
Malinowski, Bronislaw, 17
Malinowski, Wladek R., 103
mandate system, 11–12
Mangold, Hans-Joachim, 71
Mao Zedong, 37, 115
Marjolin, Robert E., 104
Marshall, George, 24
Marshall Plan (European Recovery Program), 24–26, 28, 30, 69–70
Martin, Jamie, 91
Marx, Karl, 34
Maximova, Margarita, 111
Mayer, Eugene, 94
Mazower, Mark, 11
M'Ba, Léon, 59
McCarthy, Joseph, 100
McCloy, John, 94–95
McGhee, George C., 72
McKinley, William, 10
McNamara, Robert, 128–29, 144–45, 161, 163–64
Mead, Margaret, 135
Meadows, Dennis, 128
Mengistu, Haile Mariam, 116, 154
Menon, K. P. S., 38
Merkel, Angela, 177
Merkel Plan, 177
Messali, Hadj-Ahmed, 40
migration, management of, 176
Mikoyan, Anastas, 44
Millikan, Max F., 53, 60–61
Miro, Carmen, 135
Mirska, Georgi, 49
Mittag, Günter, 110
modernity: authoritarian rule and, 13–16;
rhetoric of in the interwar years, 13
modernization: Chinese-style in Tanzania, 116–19; socialist, 14–16 (see also socialist development/modernization)
modernization theory: convergence idea as anathema to socialists, 88; criticism of, 88; decline of, 129; rise of, 60–64; technological optimism of, 125; as Western ideology for waging the Cold War, 51–52
Moellendorff, Wichard von, 14
Mollet, Guy, 56
Montini, Giovanni Battista. See Paul VI (Pope)
Morgan, Arthur E., 16
Morgenthau, Hans J., 50
Moro, Aldo, 153
Morse, David, 144
Mosaddegh, Mohammad, 54
Moynier, Gustave, 10
Moynihan, Daniel Patrick, 131
Moyo, Dambisa, 161
Mozambique, 1–3
Mutual Security Agency (MSA), 28
Myrdal, Alva, 93–94
Myrdal, Gunnar, 5, 19, 31, 40, 88, 135
Nabokov, Vladimir, 61
Nasser, Gamal Abdel, 2, 41, 43, 54
nationalism: anticapitalist in newly independent countries, 34; importance of in the former tsarist Empire, 35; socialism and, relationship of, 34–35
Nehru, Jawaharlal, 2, 15, 37–38, 40–41, 124
Nesterov, M. V., 38
neutralit y of Third World countries, 40
Ne Win, U, 45
New International Economic Order (NIEO), 120–23, 142, 152–57, 162
Nguyen-Ai-Quo (Ho Chi Minh), 35
NIEO. See New International Economic Order
Nixon, Richard, 55, 105, 129, 131

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Nkrumah, Kwame, 2, 33, 45, 57, 87, 105, 108
Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), 41, 112, 157
North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), 55, 70, 131
North-South dialogues: the Cancun Summit, 162–63; challenges of, 142–43; Conference for International Economic Cooperation (CIEC), 152–53; the Euro-Arab dialogue, 149–50; the global dimension, 150–54; human rights as an issue in, 155–59; international social justice (NIEO) versus intranational social justice (basic needs), debate between, 156–57; the Lomé Convention, 145–48; the Soviet Bloc missing from, 153–54
Nu, U, 41
Nyerere, Julius, 86, 103, 115–18, 159
Official Development Assistance (ODA), 70–71
Ohlin, Göran, 75
Okita, Saburo, 104
OPEC. See Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), 55
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD): aid effectiveness in Mali, study of, 173; Development Assistance Committee (DAC), 4, 67, 69–73, 75–76, 82, 171; qualitative factors, slow recognition of, 129
Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), 120, 138, 142, 152
Oriental Institute, 44
Orr, John Boyd, 93
Osterhammel, Jürgen, 170
Ouattara, Alassane, 177
Owen, David, 98
Özbekhan, Hasan, 128
Padmore, George, 114
Palámkai, Tibor, 148
Palme, Olof, 135, 139–40
Pandit, Vijaya Lakshmi, 37, 157
Parsons, Talcott, 60
Partners in Development (Pearson), 104–5
Pasvolsky, Leo, 23
Patel, I. G., 104
Paul VI (Pope), 136
Peace Corps, the, 62–64
Pearson, Lester B., 104–5
Pearson Report, 103–5, 142, 161
Peccci, Aurelio, 30, 127–28, 135, 140
Pérez, Carlos Andrés, 156
Pérez-Guerrero, Manuel, 145, 153
Perón Juan Domingo, 96
Perroux, François, 88
Pervikhin, M. G., 39
Pestel, Eduard, 140
Peterson, Rudolph, 130
Peterson Report, 130, 144
Pisani, Edgar, 147
Pleven, René, 20
Point Four, 26–29; anticommunism behind, 4; as a Cold War policy, 50, 52; at the Milan Conference, 31–32; presentation of by Truman, 22; Soviet annoyance regarding, 38; technical assistance as the focus of, 29–30, 65
Poland, 95
population, issue of, 125–27, 136
Poujade, Robert, 131
poverty: basic needs approach as a response to, 143–45, 156–57; discovery of, development efforts and, 30, 93; impact of growth on, 142; the World Bank, as focus of, 144–45
Prebisch, Raúl, 66, 99, 102–3, 105, 145
Prebisch-Singer doctrine, 99
Primakov, Yevgeny M., 166
productivism, 14, 18
Pye, Lucian, 60
race/racism: the mandate system and, 11–12
Rambouillet Summit, 150–51
Rathenau, Walter, 14
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reagan, Ronald</td>
<td>160, 162, 169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reconstruction, postwar</td>
<td>23–26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rempe, Martin</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuss, Henry S.</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>revolution of rising</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rist, Gilbert</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochereau, Henri</td>
<td>58, 76–77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockefeller, David</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockefeller, Nelson</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome, Treaties of</td>
<td>56–57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rompe, Martin</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuss, Henry S.</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>revolution of rising</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rist, Gilbert</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochereau, Henri</td>
<td>58, 76–77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockefeller, David</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockefeller, Nelson</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome, Treaties of</td>
<td>56–57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rouhani, Fouad</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossi-Doria, Manlio</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rostow, Walt Whitman</td>
<td>53, 60–61, 64, 66, 73–74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rouhani, Fouad</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy, Mahabhendra Nath</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda, 174</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saburov, M. Z.</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sachs, Ignacy</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salant, Walter</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salter, Arthur</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saraceno, Pasquale</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarraut, Albert</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sartre, Jean-Paul</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sauvy, Alfred</td>
<td>3, 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sawaki, Masao</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schivelbusch, Wolfgang</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schmidt, Helmut</td>
<td>151–52, 154, 162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schumpeyer, Joseph A.,</td>
<td>5, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Committee on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems of the Environment</td>
<td>134, 138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Committee on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems of the Environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sebregondi, Giorgio Ceriani</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seers, Dudley</td>
<td>75, 129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senghor, Léopold</td>
<td>57, 88, 140, 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaw, George Bernard</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shriner, Sargent</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simonia, Nodari</td>
<td>166–67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singer, Hans W.</td>
<td>5, 90, 98–102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singh, Manmohan</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sino-Soviet Treaty of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship, Alliance and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual Assistance</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smuts, Jan Christiaan</td>
<td>11–12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>socialism: the colonial</td>
<td>34–35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>question and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>postcolonial elites and</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>socialist development/</td>
<td>43–45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modernization: disappoint-</td>
<td>43–45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ment of recipients in the</td>
<td>43–45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quality of, 48–49; the</td>
<td>43–45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ideological framework for,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43–44; for less developed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>countries, 38; political</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>economy of, 45–49; &quot;social-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ism development,&quot; definition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of, 43–44; in the Soviet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union, 14–15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solow, Robert</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia: EEC aid to</td>
<td>77–80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point Four efforts in</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song Ziwen, 91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet Union: Afghanistan,</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assistance to, 47; &quot;Afghan-</td>
<td>167;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>istan syndrome,&quot; 167; Africa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>influence in, 152; Bolshe-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vik model of development,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>export of, 34–35; Cheys-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>son's attack on, 148; China</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and, 36, 37, 45, 114–15;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold War development ide-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ology and programs, 69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(see also Comecon);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coordination of “solidar-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ity” efforts with other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Bloc countries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(see Comecon); Cuba, rela-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tions with, 112–13; develop-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ment in the 1980s, backing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>away from, 165–68; East</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany and, 42–43; econo-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mic conference within the UN,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>request for, 102; environ-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mental issues, response to,</td>
<td>137–39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India, the Soviet model of</td>
<td>39–40;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development and, 39–40; Ind-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ia and Stalin, relations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between, 37–38; Indonesia,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assistance to, 47–48; Khrus-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chev and the apex of interest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the Third World, 42–43;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>movement from ideology to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pragmatism in the 1970s, 108;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the New International Eco-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nomic Order, rejection of,</td>
<td>121–22;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North-South dialogue, miss-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ing from, 153–54; Point Four, reaction to, 28, 38; political economy of cooperation/solidarity with, 45–49; post-Stalin shift</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
towards developing countries, 38–39; raw materials as the new focus in relations with developing countries, 108–9; socialist modernization in, 14–15 (see also socialist development/modernization); Stalin and the age of indifference to foreign development, 35–38; SUNFED, endorsement of, 100; the Third World, ambiguous relations with, 112–13
Spaak, Paul Henri, 56
Special UN Fund for Economic Development (SUNFED), 100, 104
Staley, Eugene, 16, 30, 64
Stalin, Joseph, 14, 35–38
Stassen, Harold, 53
Stedtfeld, Fritz, 72–73
Ster, Ernest, 129
Stevenson, Adlai, 89
Stockholm Conference, 133–37
Stoddard, Lothrop, 12
Streeten, Paul, 157
Strong, Maurice, 133–35, 140, 145
Subandrio, 47
Sukarno, 40–41, 44; sources of foreign aid and, 47–48
Sultan-Galiev, Mirsaid, 35
Sumner, John D., 28
Sun Yat-sen, 9, 91
Taft, Robert, 97
Tanzania, 85–86, 116–19
al-Tariki, Abdullah, 120
Taylorist model of production, 14
Tazara Railway, 118–19
Technical Cooperation Administration (TCA), 27
technology: from modernization utopia to environmental pessimism, 125–29; optimism based on at the IIASA conference, 138
Teitgen, Henri, 51
Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), 16
Than, U, 124
Thatcher, Margaret, 162
Thiam, Doudou, 120
Third World: aid as a right, call for, 119–20; ambiguous Soviet relations with, 112–13; the Bandung Conference, 40–41; creation and adoption of the concept, 40; G77 group, 86–87, 102–3; human rights and, 158–59; Khrushchev’s outreach to, 42–43; naming of, 3; neutrality of the countries of, 40; the New International Economic Order and, 120–23; political economy of cooperation/solidarity with the Soviets, 45–49; Soviet hostility to in the 1980s, 166; UNCTAD and, 102 (see also United Nations Conference on Trade and Development)
Thompson, Robert G. K., 67
Thorp, Willard L., 29, 70, 75, 89
Thorsson, Inga, 137
tied aid, 71, 173
Tillerson, Rex, 8
Tinbergen, Jan: aims of the Second Development Decade, report on, 143; commodity-based currency, memorandum on, 103; convergence, endorsement of, 88; ECOSOC report on the choice between agriculture and industry, co-author of, 98; India, invitation to consult on development in, 40; rationalization of the UNDP, consultation regarding, 105; Reshaping the International Order (the Rio Report), 140; world economic report, participation in a meeting to discuss, 145
Touré, Sékou, 45, 49, 57
Trilateral Commission, 150, 154
Truman, Harry: exporting the TVA vision, discussion of, 16; Point Four, 22, 26–29, 52
Truman Doctrine, 26
Trump, Donald, 178
Tung Ke, 136
Turkey, 71
Index

Ugly American, The (Burdick and Lederer), 61–62
Ulbricht, Walter, 84
ul Haq, Mahbub, 104, 128, 142–44
Ulianovsky, Rostislav, 166
UN Conference on the Human Environment, 133–37
UNCTAD. See United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), 39–40, 91, 97–100, 143
UN Economic Commission for Africa, 134
UN Economic Commission for Asia, 134
UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), 24
UN Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), 99, 102, 134
UN Expanded Program of Technical Assistance (EPTA), 38–39, 104
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). See Soviet Union
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 74, 86, 101–3, 113, 146, 148, 159
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 104–5
United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE), 101
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 93, 97, 133
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 133, 138
United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), 24–25, 29, 97
United Nations (UN): Brundtland report on sustainable development, 167–68; development as a consideration of, 96–103; differences among Western countries on aid at the, 74; Economic and Financial Commission, 102; Expanded Program of Technical Assistance (EPTA), 97; Global Negotiations on International Economic Cooperation, 162; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 155; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 155; meeting place for opposing countries and viewpoints, 89–90; the New International Economic Order discussed at, 121–22; Population Division, 125; postwar reconstruction centered on, 23; Right to Development, discussion of, 157; Social and Economic Office (Beirut), 134; Soviet attack on Point Four at, 38; Soviet model successful with newly independent countries at, 46; Special UN Fund for Economic Development (SUNFED), 100, 104; A Study of the Capacity of the United Nations Development System (Jackson Report), 105–6; Sub-Commission for Economic Development, 97; Twenty-Year Peace Program, 97
United States: anticommunism, the Cold War and, 29 (see also Cold War); anticommunism and opposition to SUNFED, 100; anticommunism shaping the foreign policy of, 24, 29, 52–54; basic needs strategy, move to, 144; binding rules and donor country cooperation, failure to achieve, 73–75; burden of civilization taken up by, 10; cooperation with Eastern Bloc countries on aid matters, consideration of, 75; covert operations by, 54; DAC and, 71–73; development assistance, rethinking of, 130–31; environment, Nixon’s initiative focusing on, 131; foreign aid as a policy tool for, 22–23, 52–55, 61, 69; foreign aid during the Kennedy administration, 64–67; foreign policy priorities, development assistance and the shift in, 129–30; human rights and the North-South dialogue, policy regarding, 155–56; Khrushchev’s challenge, response to, 42; limits to the Cold War approach to development, Italy as a case of, 30–32; the Marshall Plan, 24–26, 28, 30; Mekong River Project, appropriation of, 101;
modernization as ideology/theory, 51–52, 60–64 (see also modernization); the New Deal, 16, 23, 25; the Peace Corps, 62–64; Point Four, 22, 26–29, 31–32, 38; postwar European efforts to maintain empires, support for, 50–51; postwar foreign policy of, 22–29; recipients of development aid, relations with, 69; West Germany, bilateral relations with in the 1960s, 72–73
United States Information Agency (USIA), 54
UNRRA. See United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
USAID (Agency for International Development), 65, 144
USSR. See Soviet Union
Vance, Cyrus, 154
van Lennep, Emiel, 129, 145
Varga, Eugen, 36, 43
Vietnam: foreign aid as a companion to counterinsurgency activities in, 67. See also Indochina
Wachuku, Jaja, 89
Wald, George, 127
Waldheim, Kurt, 135, 162–63
Wallerstein, Immanuel, 123, 163
Washington Consensus, 164
Webb, Beatrice, 15
Webb, Sidney, 15
Welles, Benjamin Sumner, 23
West Germany. See Germany, Federal Republic of
“White Man’s Burden, The” (Kipling), 10
Wilson, Harold, 151
Winzer, Otto, 85
Wischnewski, Hans-Jürgen, 75
Woods, George D., 75, 104
World Bank, 94–96; Africa’s development problems, underlying causes of, 173; basic needs-based policies, move away from, 163–64; Commission on International Development, 104; development as focus of, 94; as expression of a Western capitalist mind-set, 90; International Development Association (IDA), 100; International Finance Corporation, 96, 101; The Limits to Growth, review of, 128–29; Pearson Report, 103–5; poverty alleviation, shift to focus on, 144–45; poverty threshold set by, 30; reconstruction and development tasks inherited by, 26; structural adjustment policy of, 164; United States’ Third World megaprojects, support for, 65; World Development Report, origins of, 145
World Health Organization (WHO), 94, 97
World Meteorological Association, 138
World War I, 11
World War II, 16–19
Wright, Richard, 41
Xi Jinping, 175
Yaoundé Convention, 60, 77–78, 146
Yong Longgun, 114
Youlou, Fulbert, 58, 115
ZAMCO, 2
Zevin, Leon Zalmanovich, 111–12
Zhdanov, Andrey Aleksandrovich, 37
Zhou Enlai, 40, 114
Zuckerman, Solly, 135