

immediately recognized the newly independent state of Mali. He asked what sports I was interested in. I replied that I loved to play tennis. "Do you play volleyball?" I replied that I had played volleyball in the past. "Do you want to come and play volleyball with me up here from time to time?" It took me no time to accept his offer. Modibo Keita was about 6 feet 5 inches tall, a good looking man, and an excellent athlete. From time to time, I went up and played volleyball with him, which established a relaxed relationship with him. Later, when the American staff had joined me, I took my colleagues with me and we had a regular American-Malian sports competition.

Q: We had nothing there.

DEAN: For the first few weeks, I was all alone. Both my bedroom and office were at the Grand Hotel, which was quite grand and comfortable. Later, all other foreign missions got their start there. One of the first to arrive were the Soviets. The French had their own building. Everybody else had to look for lodging and office space. All foreigners lived at first together at "Le Grand Hotel". The Russians would come and say: "Hey, I'm going back to Moscow. I need some dollars. Can you give me some dollars? I want to buy something there." I would say "Okay" and give him \$20 and he gave me some local currency. Mali had remained in the West African French Franc Zone and its currency was convertible.

Then, the revolutionary shadow of Sekou Toure began to fall on Mali. Modibo Keita was flirting with the idea of establishing Mali's own currency, the "Malian Franc". Next, he asked the French military forces to leave Mali. The Soviet Mission was quite popular among the Malian politicians. The Soviets offered aid and advisers from Guinea. The Advisers came from Guinea to Bamako to offer their services. Mali

showed its political leanings by holding protest marches at night with torches, objecting to the killing of Lumumba in the Congo. The Malians made it clear at the time that they thought foul play was involved in Lumumba's death, and the West was responsible. It was the beginning of discussions among Malians whether to leave the West African French Franc Zone and discontinue membership in the French Union, and questioning their ties to the former colonial power.

With storm clouds on the horizon, I received a phone call from Fernand Wibaux, who was the French High Commissioner in Mali. Prior to his diplomatic posting, Wibaux had been the Director General of the Office du Niger, a 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) project to grow rice and cotton in Mali. It was a highly successful project in developing the agriculture of that relatively poorly endowed country. When I met with the High Commissioner, he asked me to do him a favor: "The French troops are standing down. Would you come and see the last parade?" General Charles was the commander of the French troops stationed in Mali. I replied that we were NATO allies and I found it natural to stand next to the Frenchman, taking the salute of the departing troops. Then Wibaux said: "Don't be surprised if the Malians ask you to help them in the training of their troops." "Why not" I replied, "but let's wait and see what happens." It was my impression that the French had even suggested the idea to the Mali military. Perhaps they thought better American advisers than Russian officers.

My attention then turned to finding office space. A former French bank building was offered to me. Soon, the first American colleagues began to arrive to staff the post: an Economic Officer, an Administrative Officer, an Economic Aid Officer, and a Political Officer. The Head of what became the Economic Aid Mission was Sam Adams, a very distinguished Afro-American

who later became U.S. Ambassador to a country in Africa. We became good friends. The new head of the Political Section, Robert V. Keeley, became my best friend in the Foreign Service. One day, I received a request from Modibo Keita to call on him. He said: "John, I have André Malraux coming as the Representative of Charles de Gaulle. His flight arrives at 4:00 in the morning. Would you accompany your French colleague to meet him, thereby showing Western solidarity on what I am trying to do in Mali." It was an interesting experience for me to meet with one of Europe's leading authors and cultural personalities.

Q: Was he Minister of Culture at that time?

DEAN: Yes, he was Minister of Culture under De Gaulle. But he was sent on many diplomatic missions by General de Gaulle. He was going to play a role later in my life with Robert Kennedy. When I first met him in Bamako, in the early hours of the morning, he thanked me for meeting his plane, and revealed the reason for his coming to Mali. "We have to try to keep the Malians in the West African French Franc Zone. We don't want to repeat Guinea and be overrun by Soviet advisers and Soviet ideology in Mali." Malraux also stressed the "strategic location" of Mali. I never thought of Mali in these terms. Mali is south of Algeria and north of the Ivory Coast and Guinea, the latter two leading to the Atlantic Ocean. It's the ancient trade route between the Arab North Africa and the Negro tribes in Western Africa. He also urged us to keep each other informed so that there would not be any duplication of effort.

Shortly thereafter, I went to see Modibo Keita and he said he would like to establish his own currency. Instead of giving a negative or

positive answer, I took a piece of paper and drew up a bank balance sheet with credit and debit on opposite sides. I showed what items to put under assets, and what to list under debits. In a Central Bank balance sheet. I explained that you cannot just go down into the vault of the Central Bank and take the bank notes as if you had earned the money. We discussed the need for drawing up a national budget and the advantages of a convertible currency. What I had learned about finance at Harvard came in very handy. I was surely not the only one who tried to convince President Keita of the advantages for Mali to remain in a convertible currency zone. Malraux made the same points and he undoubtedly had much greater influence with Modibo Keita than I ever had.

In the course of this continuous dialogue I had with President Keita, I was asked what I thought about Mali establishing its own Airline. My response was very negative because I thought Mali was too small a country and had an insufficient number of air travelers to make Air Mali a profitable operation. Despite my advice, for a very brief period, a few planes flew under the Air Mali flag. Then, common sense prevailed and Air Mali became part of the regional airline: Air Afrique.

But independence and the departure of the French military also meant that President Keita started to look around to find new sources of assistance for equipping and modernizing the Malian Army. When approached by Modibo Keita whether the U.S. might be interested in this role, I replied that I would query Washington. Specifically, Modibo Keita wanted training for paratroopers, because the huge size of the country and the desert in the north may require the means to move troops quickly and by air.

The U.S. Government agreed to send a couple of airplanes and trainers to teach the Malians to jump out of planes. A Military Aid Mission was established at Embassy Bamako, and a competent Lieutenant Colonel arrived to head the mission. He took charge of all military cooperation. An agreement was signed --military to military -- which undoubtedly contributed to the good relations between the U.S. and this new West African independent republic, which has been continual for more than 40 years. The military agreement was matched by an economic assistance agreement which was signed in 1960. All along the period I remained in charge of this growing U.S. Mission, I kept my French colleague informed of what we were doing with the Malian Authorities.

Q: Were the French disturbed about this?

DEAN: No, I don't think so. At this stage, the important objective was to keep the Soviets out. If we, the U.S., would not have done it, the Soviets were willing to move in, as they had done in Guinea.

Q: Were the Malians getting their idea from Guinea or from Senegal?

DEAN: The French role in Senegal goes back a couple of centuries. In Mali, ex French Sudan, the French presence was much more recent. Some Senegalese had been French citizens for over 200 years, as for example in St. Louis du Senegal which goes back to Louis XV.

The Malians were aware of the problems the Guineans had with the Soviets, but Sekou Toure was an African hero, a nationalist, who had dared to defy De Gaulle. The Malians did not want to offend anybody. They did not defy De Gaulle. As a matter of fact, Modibo Keita had been a

Minister in the French Government in Paris – just as Houphouet Boigny, of the Ivory Coast, had been. Both African leaders were French-speakers and French-educated. When the West Africans asked for independence, De Gaulle gave it to them. The French helped the newly independent states of West Africa and did not object to anybody else coming to support this effort.

But the French colonial past and traditions surfaced from time to time. One day, the Malian Commander in chief of the Army came to the Embassy and asked if we could provide uniforms for the Malian forces. "But we want the buttons to be not American buttons, but French buttons." Our American officer in charge of the Military Assistance Mission inquired: "What do you mean, French buttons?" "Like French cavalry buttons. Not infantry buttons, but cavalry. They are kind of rounded at the top" was the answer. Our American Lieutenant Colonel explained that "Our buttons are flat" and the Malians got the American variety. Don't let me give the wrong impression. Compared to French and European assistance to Mali, our effort was modest. But it was greatly appreciated and above all, it was timely. Mali is not the most promising country as far as resources are concerned. Foreigners were not lining up to come in to exploit their oil, chrome, or whatever they may have. It was not there. Nonetheless, with our timely efforts, and above all warm personal relationship with the Malian leadership, we built a solid link with a country which became more and more democratic with time.

While I was in charge, we had the visit of Edward Kennedy, who was running for the U.S. Senate that year, and Senator Church. When they saw how hard we worked in Mali and the relations we had established with Africans, they became supporters in my later assignments.

Q: I was wondering about Edward Kennedy only because in his very early years, he was a little bit difficult to handle.

DEAN: I found Edward Kennedy and Frank Church to be very outgoing and friendly. Let me give you an example. All staff of foreign missions lived at the Grand Hotel. The Russians, the Yugoslavs, the Bulgarians, the British, the Israelis, and the Americans were there. Everyone was living in the same place. The evening the Senate Delegation arrived in newly independent Mali, there was a dance at the hotel. All the foreigners danced with each other, and with Mallians and other Africans from the region. It was co-existence at its best.

In conclusion, I would say that our timely, energetic presence prevented Mali from going the Guinea way. Mali remained in the French Franc Zone, part of West Africa, and with close links to the West. The U.S. had put its best foot forward and Mali did not present an opportunity for communist countries to subvert it or wean Mali away from the path of democracy. Shortly before my departure, a new American ambassador arrived. I relinquished my chargéship to Ambassador Ken Wright and I left for my next assignment a couple of months later.

Q: You left in 1961.

DEAN: Yes, but before discussing my 4-year Washington assignment, let me just say that in Bamako, I made friends for life with Robert Keeley, one of America's great ambassadors, and John Leonard who left the Foreign Service to become a priest. We are friends still today and see each other regularly. Today, Mali is not a major factor. 40 years ago, newly independent African countries were flirting with the Soviet Union because

they postured as friends of the underprivileged and the poor. Guinea had received from the Soviet Union aid and advisers, but their assistance did not develop the country. Mali has become a democratic success story in West Africa. I would like to believe that our opening an Embassy in 1960 and the programs we started in conjunction with the former colonial power had something to do with it.

Q: You came back in 1961 to Washington.

DEAN: I came back in 1961 to Washington to work in the Bureau of African Affairs. I had known "Soapy" Williams when he came to Africa and I had helped him in collecting African artifacts. Prior to taking the job as Assistant Secretary for Africa, a position only created the year he was given the job, Soapy had been running for the presidency of the United States. He was a liberal Democrat. The Africans liked him and he, in turn, liked Africa.

Q: He had been Governor of Michigan.

DEAN: Right. We knew him slightly, and his wife, Nancy, from Grosse Pointe, Michigan.

Q: You were in African Affairs from 1961 until when?

DEAN: Until 1963.

Q: What was your job?

DEAN: I was Officer in charge of Togolese and Malian Affairs.

Q: Oh, yes.

DEAN: It was a time when African States established their first missions in Washington. My job included duties beyond those linked directly to Togo and Mali. For example, when new African ambassadors and their wives arrived in Washington, I often helped them to establish themselves and open a functioning office. My wife also was helpful to Mrs. Rusk and Mrs. Williams to entertain the wives of the newly arrived African ambassadors, who had quite often not been exposed to life in the capital cities of the world. I worked mostly with the French-speaking Africans. Helping the new African ambassadors to hire local French-speaking staff sometimes gave rise to difficult situations. Attractive Haitian ladies had the professional skills, spoke French and English, and knew their way around Washington. But when the new ambassador found the local female staff more attractive than their own older African wives, it could cause a family problem which ended on the desk of the State Department. Another example was trying to persuade some African servants who were brought by the ambassadors that you don't make a wood fire on the floor of the basement of your house, but you turn up the thermostat of your heating mechanism. For two years, we (my wife and I) worked with many of these new African ambassadors and their staffs in making them feel at home in Washington.

During this 2-year tour, President Olympio came on an official visit to the United States, so did Sekou Toure. All official guests of the President were housed in Blair House. The lady in charge of Blair House showed the visiting President to his rooms and those for his staff. She used to say: "Mr. President, this is your room. Mrs. Lincoln slept in this bed. The room for your foreign minister is on your right. On your left, I have put the governor of the central bank of your country. Then,

upstairs are some rooms for your secretaries." Sekou Toure said: "Send the foreign minister upstairs. Send my secretary to the room next to mine." You can imagine the reaction of the lady in charge of Blair House!

When Olympio came on an official visit to Washington, I had the privilege of writing a paper for President Kennedy and briefing him for five minutes the day before. He asked for my name. "My name is John Gunther Dean. I was asked to brief you." The next day, I accompanied Olympio on his call on the President of the United States. As I came in, President Kennedy said: "John, so happy to see you again. You have done a wonderful job in Togo." President Kennedy gave me a big build-up, and I felt proud to serve my country. Olympio made a very good impression on all American authorities. He clearly felt at ease in an Anglo-Saxon environment. Little did we realize then that shortly thereafter both would be assassinated. Olympio was assassinated in Togo.

Q: How did we figure... What was the cause of this?

DEAN: The cause of Olympio's assassination was well known at the time. Olympio died in the arms of Ambassador Pulada, the second American ambassador to Togo. Olympio, who had his personal residence next to the U.S. Chancery, climbed over the wall to escape his assassins. The man who held the gun was a sergeant at the time. Today, he is the President of Togo and he holds the rank of General!

Q: How did we view this at the time?

DEAN: Olympio was the first African Chief of State to be assassinated. In the U.S., we were debating whether to cut off aid, or recall our ambassador. We left the decision to the African Chiefs of States who had assembled in Africa to debate what action they would take. They

talked... but did nothing. We followed suit. We did nothing. We did not understand in 1963 that if we thought some sanctions should be taken, we had to be out in front in order to play a role for justice and decency. Olympio's assassination was clearly linked to local Togolese political machinations. But there may also have been some geopolitical considerations. So, since neither the Africans nor the former colonial power imposed meaningful sanctions on the very person who killed Olympio, we decided to stay out of the fray.

Q: Were we sort of waiting to see how the French were going to respond?

DEAN: After the Africans did nothing of consequence, the French recognized the new Togolese Government.

In the Autumn of 1963, I was sent to the United Nations in New York to be one of the advisers to the American Delegation to the General Assembly. My job was to advise on the French-speaking African Delegates who represented 18 countries. The voting pattern of that group in 1963 at the United Nations was well-known. The French-speaking Africans (and that included the former colonies of Congo, Burundi, and Rwanda) had agreed that they would vote all the same way. Sometimes, they discussed in private caucus how they would vote, before the official vote. In the 1963 U.N. General Assembly, the question of recognition of Mainland China and its seat in the Security Council came up. In those days, the French Delegation had the most influence with the French-speaking Africans. Hence, I decided to work with them. Ambassador Seydoux of France had agreed with Governor Stevenson, the Chief of the U.S. Delegation, that France would vote against recognition in 1963. That was the last year

the French voted the same way as we did. When the vote on China came up, I was sitting with the American Delegation in the big Assembly Hall. The Assistant Secretary General of the U.K. pulled a name out of the hat and that country was the first to cast its vote. This time it was Gabon. All the countries in the French African block --18 countries -- had the instructions to vote as the other French-speaking Africans. So, here was Gabon, the first one. The Assistant Secretary General called out again: "Gabon! Yes? No?" No answer. "Oui? Non?" I was watching Ambassador Seydoux of France. He gently shook his head in a negative way so that others could see it, and finally Gabon came out with a loud "No". It was the last year France voted with the U.S. on the China issue at the U.N.

Q: China got into the United Nations much later, but we were not getting the African vote.

DEAN: Later, the African vote split, and they did not vote any longer as a block.

Q: China really did not get in until 1975.

DEAN: This, I don't know. But shortly thereafter, the French established a Diplomatic Mission in Beijing. Then, around 1971 or so, France sent its first ambassador, which I will discuss later since the incumbent played a major role in Cambodia. At the U.N. I came again across corruption. I was asked to approach certain delegates to vote a certain way in return for financial favors. Since this was not my job, I would refer the chap to somebody else whose job it was to buy votes. Unfortunately, the delegates of the poorer countries were particularly vulnerable and targeted.