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Soviet Structural Aid to the Republic of Mali in 1960—1968

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Abstract. The article analyzes the phenomenon of the Soviet Union's structural aid to African countries — technical and economic cooperation covering major sectors of the economy to ensure the self-sufficient development of recipient countries and weaken the neocolonial impact of the West. The case of bilateral relations between the USSR and Mali in 1960—1968 was chosen for a number of reasons — the strategic location of this African country, its place in the structure of French interests, the formats and volumes of Soviet aid, and, finally, rather weak coverage of the issue in Russian and foreign historiography. The authors preface the analysis of Soviet aid with an overview of the country's economic situation in the 1960s and the difficulties faced by the Malian government in establishing an independent economic system through the introduction of its own currency, the Malian franc, and the nationalization of former French enterprises. The research is mostly based on the archival funds of the State Committee on Foreign Economic Relations of the Russian State Archive of Economy. The analysis of Soviet assistance is conducted in a wide range of areas, from industry and agriculture to health care and education. The final section examines the transport issue and the Soviet role in removal of the transport blockade imposed by Senegal. Both successful projects of Soviet-Malian cooperation, as the gold and bauxite exploration, the construction of a cement plant, and a sports stadium, and unrealized ideas are described. Among the most obvious problems that hindered cooperation between the USSR and Mali were the lack of financial resources, excessive caution, and Mali's rather active cooperation with its neighbors and capitalist countries. Soviet aid to Mali allows us to trace the Soviet Union's role in the real decolonization of African countries and the strengthening of their sovereignty. Unlike many other donors, who mostly limited their aid to certain projects, the USSR provided support within the framework of a full cycle of work in all sectors of the economy (resource extraction — construction of enterprises for processing resources — training of personnel to service enterprises — export of finished goods). Obviously, such a comprehensive approach had a truly favorable effect on the sovereignization of the Malian economy.

Key words: USSR, Mali, technical assistance, structural assistance, economic sovereignization

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Советская структурная помощь Республике Мали в 1960—1968 гг.

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Аннотация. Анализируется феномен структурной помощи Советского Союза странам Африки — технического и экономического сотрудничества с охватом основных отраслей экономики для обеспечения самодостаточного развития стран-реципиентов и ослабления неокOLONиального влияния Запада. Кейс двусторонних отношений СССР и Мали в 1960—1968 гг. был выбран по ряду причин, среди которых стратегическое местоположение этой африканской страны, ее место в структуре интересов Франции, форматы и объемы помощи СССР, наконец, недостаточность освещения вопроса в отечественной и зарубежной историографии. Анализ советской помощи Мали предваряется обзором экономического положения страны в исследуемый период и перечислением трудностей, с которыми столкнулось малийское правительство при попытках создания независимой экономической системы через внедрение собственной валюты — малийского франка — и национализацию бывших французских предприятий. Работа написана с опорой на архивные материалы Государственного комитета Совета Министров СССР по внешним экономическим связям (ГКЭС), хранящиеся в фондах Российского государственного архива экономики. Анализ советской помощи проводится по самому широкому спектру направлений — от промышленности и сельского хозяйства до здравоохранения и образования. В финальной части рассматриваются транспортный вопрос и роль СССР в снятии транспортной блокады Мали, установленной Сенегалом. Описываются как успешные проекты советско-малийского сотрудничества в виде геологоразведки месторождений золота и бокситов, строительства цементного завода и спортивного стадиона, так и нереализованные идеи. Среди наиболее очевидных проблем, препятствовавших сотрудничеству СССР и Мали, были недостаток финансовых ресурсов, излишняя осторожность, довольно активная кооперация Мали со своими соседями и капиталистическими странами. Изучение советской помощи Мали позволяет проследить роль СССР в деле реальной деколонизации африканских стран и укреплении их суверенитета. В отличие от многих других стран-доноров, которые ограничивались помощью в отдельных проектах, СССР обеспечивал поддержку в рамках полного цикла работ во всех сферах экономики (добыча ресурсов — строительство предприятий для обработки ресурсов — обучение кадров для обслуживания предприятий — экспорт готовой продукции). Подобный подход Советского Союза благоприятно влиял на суверенизацию малийской экономики.

Ключевые слова: СССР, Мали, техническая помощь, структурная помощь, суверенизация экономики

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Introduction

The cooperation between the USSR and developing world started in the second half of the 1950s, when the process of forming new states in Africa, liberating themselves from the oppression of former metropolises, intensified. A significant part of the newly established states advocated the cooperation with the USSR. Most of them had an agrarian economy and a low level of industrial development. To overcome the economic backwardness of these countries, the USSR initiated a program of assistance, which was announced by Nikita Khrushchev in 1956 at the

XX Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.¹ It envisaged technical, economic and personnel assistance in most areas of the economy of the liberated countries on all

¹ XX Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. February 14—25, 1956. Verbatim report. Vol. I / ed. by V. Gurevich. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury publ., 1956 [XX Съезд коммунистической партии Советского Союза. 14—25 февраля 1956 г. Стенографический отчет. Том I / под ред. В. Гуревича. Москва : Государственное издательство политической литературы, 1956]. P. 25—27, 41. (In Russian). See also: (Gu, 1983, p. 71).

continents.² In 1957, the State Committee on Foreign Economic Relations was established (Degterev, 2011, pp. 241—246).

When distributing aid, many factors were taken into account, mainly political and socio-economic, as well as the geographical location of the recipient country. The Republic of Mali was one of major recipients of Soviet economic and humanitarian aid on the African continent. Located in the center of West Africa at the crossroads of logistical routes, the country was attractive for its favorable geographical location. Since ancient times, many caravan routes have passed through Mali, while one of them, Azalai, is still in use today (Benanav, 2006).

The analysis of Soviet aid to Africa is presented in a number of scientific papers. In particular, there have been published works on Soviet cooperation with West African countries (Beletskaya, 2017; Mazov, 2007; Iandolo, 2011), health care assistance (Tsvetkov, 2022), education (Smirnova & Rillon, 2017), and agriculture in Mali (Maiga, 1985). Nevertheless, the issue of comprehensive Soviet economic and humanitarian aid to Mali immediately after the country's independence has not been adequately addressed.

The research is mostly based on the archival funds of the State Committee on Foreign Economic Relations of the Russian State Archive of Economy. This made possible to determine the actual scope and structure of provided aid, to identify plans and expectations of both sides, and to summarize the main obstacles in the implementation of relevant projects.

The chronological framework of the article covers the period from 1960 to 1968. The independence of Mali and the withdrawal from the French Community were declared on September 22, 1960. Bilateral economic relations with many countries, including the USSR, were very soon launched. In 1968, a military coup d'état took place, which overthrew the regime of

² Constructed with the Economic and Technical Assistance of the Soviet Union / ed. by S. A. Skachkov. Moscow : Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya publ., 1982 [Построено при экономическом и техническом содействии Советского Союза / под ред. С. А. Скачкова. Москва : Международные отношения, 1982]. (In Russian).

the first president, M. Keita, and pro-Western military men came to power. The article also provides data for 1969, which allows to present a comparative analysis of Mali's economic situation and the volume of Soviet aid, as well as to characterize the country's economic development in the first decade of independence.

Mali's Main Partners: Economic and Political Prerequisites for Choosing Allies

For the first two years of its independence, the Republic of Mali was part of the so-called "Franc Zone,"³ which, after most of its members became independent from France, was reorganized and found itself in rather unstable conditions. The restructuring of the "Franc Zone" ended in 1962 with the establishment of the West African Monetary Union (Degterev, 2003), which Mali did not join. On July 1, 1962, a national currency, the Malian franc, was put into circulation,⁴ which was dictated mainly by political reasons in order to break economic ties with the former metropolis. However, Mali's budget expenditures soon far exceeded its revenues (Table 1).

A special place in the budget was given to expenditures related to the activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the maintenance of diplomatic missions abroad and participation in international organizations (including membership fees). In 1961, such expenditures amounted to about 7% of the budget, but increased to 13% by 1968.⁵ This growth was due to the fact that the Malian leadership paid particular attention to international cooperation in the hope of increasing the attractiveness of the young state for investment and technical assistance. In addition, while gaining

³ The franc of the African financial community (Communauté financière africaine) was introduced by the French government in 1945 as the monetary unit of the colonial territories of West and Central Africa.

⁴ Russian State Archive of Economy (RSAE). Fund 365. Reg. 9. File 105. P. 11 [Российский государственный архив экономики (РГАЭ). Ф. 365. Оп. 9. Д. 105. Л. 11]. (In Russian).

⁵ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 9. File 105. P. 4 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 9. Д. 105. Л. 4]. (In Russian).

independence the Republic of Mali confirmed its commitment to ideological neutrality, which provided additional opportunities for receiving financial aid from both socialist and capitalist countries (Touron, 2017, p. 84).

Table 1

Expenditure, Income and Balance of the Budget of the Republic of Mali in 1961—1969, in billion Malian francs

Budgetary year	Expenditure	Income	Balance
1961	11.2	8.0	-3.2
1962	13.4	9.8	-3.6
1963	12.7	11.1	-1.6
I—II quarter of 1964	7.1	6.0	-1.1
III—IV quarter of 1964 — I—II quarter of 1965	13.5	13.1	-0.4
III—IV quarter of 1965 — I—II quarter of 1966	14.1	12.5	-1.6
III—IV quarter of 1966 — I—II quarter of 1967	16.3	15.7	-0.6
III—IV quarter of 1967 — I—II quarter of 1968	21.0	15.5	-5.5
1969*	22.2	18.7	-4.5

Note. * — Indicators according to the economic development plan.

Source: Russian State Archive of Economy. Fund 365. Reg. 9. File 105. P. 10. (In Russian).

Mali's total national product increased by an average of 0.5% a year between 1961 and 1968, while budget expenditures — by about 15%,⁶ which inevitably spurred the growth of public debt. By November 1968 it stood at 150 billion Malian francs. The largest creditors of Mali were France, a former metropolis, which retained close economic ties and whose influence in the region still remains significant even up to now (Davidchuk, 2021; Davidchuk, Degterev & Sidibe, 2022), as well as the USSR, a state whose economic aid was the most extensive and comprehensive (Table 2).

After gaining independence, the government of Mali set a course toward the socialist development of the country (Degterev, 2021; Amselle, 1978, p. 631; Hazard, 1967, pp. 28—

⁶ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 9. File 105. P. 3 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 9. Д. 105. Л. 4]. (In Russian).

29). The relevant decision was taken on September 22, 1960, at an extraordinary congress of the political party named “Sudanese Union — African Democratic Rally”.⁷ The nationalization of the majority of French colonial enterprises led to the formation of the public sector in all branches of the economy.⁸ In 1963, the Republic of Mali imposed most-favored-nation treatment for socialist countries and abolished import duties on goods.⁹

Table 2

Major Creditors of the Republic of Mali in 1968, in billion Malian francs

State	Amount of external debt
France	49.2
USSR	32.9
United Arab Republic*	7.3
Ghana	6.5
Federal Republic of Germany	3.3

Note. * — The United Arab Republic, which existed from 1958 to 1971. Since 1968 only Egypt remained part of the UAR.

Source: Russian State Archive of Economy. Fund 365. Reg. 9. File 105. P. 7. (In Russian).

At the same time, the so-called “moderate” group, which lobbied for an economic orientation toward the West and the active attraction of foreign capital, retained quite strong positions in government. It was under the influence of this group that financial agreements with France were concluded in 1967, against the background of a growing budget deficit, public debt and economic distress (Novikov & Ursu, 1994, p. 204). The agreements significantly restricted Mali's economic freedom. The Malian franc was devalued by 50%, and the National Bank was governed on a parity basis with

⁷ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 510. P. 8 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 510. Л. 8]. (In Russian).

⁸ Vitukhina G. O., Klimanova O. A., Nesterkin V. D., Nechaev V. S., Linder V. I. et al. Mali // The Big Russian Encyclopedia [Витухина Г. О., Климанова О. А., Нестёркин В. Д., Нечаев В. С., Линдер В. И. и др. Мали // Большая российская энциклопедия]. (In Russian). URL: <https://bigenc.ru/geography/text/2169150?ysclid=15i72fwhh5850512450> (accessed: 01.08.2022).

⁹ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 510. P. 8 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 510. Л. 8]. (In Russian).

France.¹⁰ According to the Secretary of State for Energy and Industry of Mali, S. N'Diaye, it was expected that the French would try to eliminate the public sector in the country's economy.¹¹

Due to the signed currency agreements, the Republic of Mali partially lost its monetary sovereignty, which affected the domestic political situation and led to a coup d'état in 1968, without improving the economic situation. Moreover, in 1967—1968 there was a record budget deficit (see Table 1).

In the first decade of its independence, the Republic of Mali was forced to seek foreign aid because of its poor economic indicators. Support was provided by many states and by the UN.¹² Donor countries, both capitalist and socialist, tended to limit their aid to certain types. For example, the GDR, one of the three largest socialist partner countries of Mali along with the USSR and Czechoslovakia (Touron, 2017, p. 86), built cooperation with Mali exclusively in sending specialists, without providing loans or supplying equipment.¹³

Mali's main donor was the Soviet Union, the only one to provide comprehensive structural assistance. Such an approach allowed Mali to form a complete production cycle and link disparate sectors of the economy. Soviet specialists developed exploration projects to ensure the extraction of resources for the country's needs; many factories and enterprises were built in order to process resources and produce finished goods, as well as universities, where Soviet teachers were sent for training personnel capable of servicing new factories and enterprises (Rosen, 1963, p. 10).

Much attention was given to the agricultural sector, health care system, and entertainment. The USSR built a sports stadium that was

planned to host the Second African Games,¹⁴ which eventually took place in Nigeria.

The total estimate of Soviet economic aid to Mali in the 1960s at current prices was about USD 60 million. On March 18, 1961, the USSR and Mali signed a General Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation, which became the basis for subsequent contracts and secondary agreements. The main point was a Soviet loan of 40 million rubles to the Republic of Mali for the construction of educational institutions, a cement factory and a stadium, as well as exploration work.¹⁵

Soviet Aid for Agricultural Development in Mali

One of the most vivid examples of structural assistance through full-cycle production was the Soviet aid to agricultural development in Mali, which at the time was still an agrarian country.¹⁶ In 1961, the government of Mali indicated the importance of supporting its agrarian complex by increasing exports and production through higher yields and crops.¹⁷ The following year, the development of the agricultural sector was included in the Soviet agenda. During a meeting with Mali's president M. Keita, the head of the Soviet delegation, A. I. Mikoyan noted insufficient attention to the actual agricultural problems.¹⁸ It was in the agrarian sphere that the Mali government tried to reproduce the model of

¹⁴ Ibid. P. 7.

¹⁵ Republic of Mali: Handbook / ed. by N. I. Gavrilov, G. O. Vitukhina. Moscow : Nauka publ., 1977 [Республика Мали : справочник / под ред. Н. И. Гаврилова, Г. О. Витухиной. Москва : Наука, 1977]. P. 161. (In Russian). See also: (Imperato & Imperato, 2008, p. xxxiii).

¹⁶ About 80% of Mali's population was engaged in agriculture (Vitukhina, 1987, p. 91).

¹⁷ See: Discours prononcé à l'Assemblée nationale (20/01/1961) // Modibo Keita Information Site. URL: <https://modibo-keita.site/discours-et-interventions-de-modibo-keita/> (accessed: 01.08.2022); Allocution radiodiffusée au peuple du Mali (01/10/1961) // Modibo Keita Information Site. URL: <https://modibo-keita.site/discours-et-interventions-de-modibo-keita/> (accessed: 01.08.2022).

¹⁸ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 340. P. 75—81 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 340. Л. 75—81]. (In Russian).

¹⁰ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 656. P. 43 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 656. Л. 43]. (In Russian).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Mali // Soviet Historical Encyclopedia [Мали // Советская историческая энциклопедия]. (In Russian). URL: https://gufo.me/dict/history_encyclopedia/%D0%9C%D0%90%D0%9B%D0%98?ysclid=15jbrbboen904762724 (accessed: 01.08.2022).

¹³ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 2926. P. 73—74 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 2926. Л. 73—74]. (In Russian).

socialist planning, taking into account national realities.

The main partner of the Soviets in agriculture was the state company “Office du Niger,” established by France in 1932 as a plantation farm and nationalized by Mali. On October 10, 1962, the Agreement on Economic and Technical Assistance in the Development of the “Office du Niger” was signed and became one of the basic documents of the Soviet-Malian cooperation in this sphere.¹⁹

The USSR tried to address the emerging problems in the most targeted and substantive way in order to build a functioning planning system without participation of third countries. Thus, in order to increase the sown area and increase the yield of agricultural crops, a corresponding agreement was signed with the USSR (No. 9225a of October 30, 1963). The Soviet side undertook the development and construction of an irrigation system on the surface of 8—9 thousand hectares in the regions of Niono and Kouroumari (central Mali), as well as the agricultural development of the territories (including installation of electrical equipment), for which Soviet engineers, hydrogeologists, mechanics and electricians were sent to Mali.²⁰ On February 14, 1963, another contract was concluded (No. 9225b), again for the development of the irrigation system in Niono and Kouroumari and the supply of agricultural equipment (in particular, heavy machinery — tractors and trucks).²¹

This comprehensive approach was also applied to pest control, on whose success an increase in agricultural productivity and, consequently, exports of products ultimately depended. In accordance with the contract No. 9225 concluded with the Ministry of Development of Mali on June 6, 1963, the airplanes were sent to the country for pest control, as well as personnel — pilots, technicians and interpreters.²²

The training of personnel for the agro-industrial complex has become one of the priority areas of cooperation, given Mali’s highest interest in this matter. The work was carried out in two directions — the sending of Soviet specialists to Mali and the training of Malian personnel. Thus, in a letter dated 1963 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Mali to the Soviet Embassy in Mali, representatives of the “Office du Niger” expressed a request to send a delegation of Malian specialists and agricultural workers to the Soviet Union to “get acquainted with the rich Soviet experience in agriculture.”²³ In 1964, the Malian side voiced a request to send two Soviet specialists — in agricultural statistics and in economic statistics with a specialization in questions of the national economic balance.²⁴

It is true that the agricultural sector of Mali, as a priority area of its economic development, needed the greatest sovereignty from the influence of the former metropolis and third countries. The USSR’s efforts were aimed at maximum support for Malian agriculture through the widest range of assistance without any neocolonial pressure.

Assistance in the Development of the Heavy Industry in Mali

The focus on providing a full cycle of work was also distinctive in heavy, as well as the mining industry (Table 3). In these sectors, Soviet aid was also provided in all three phases — the search and development of resource deposits, the construction of factories and plants, the provision of equipment, energy, and personnel for the enterprises built.

The main natural resource, the search for which received special attention from both the Malian and Soviet sides, was oil. The discovery of oil deposits could have a favorable impact on the overall state of economic development of the young African state. Negotiations about the

¹⁹ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 925. P. 30—34 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 925. Л. 30—34]. (In Russian).

²⁰ Ibid. P. 83—90.

²¹ Ibid. P. 134—159.

²² Ibid. P. 61—67.

²³ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 411. P. 49 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 411. Л. 49]. (In Russian).

²⁴ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 455. P. 107 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 455. Л. 107]. (In Russian).

possibility of oil exploration began as early as 1961.²⁵ However, the issue remained unresolved for quite a long time. The Soviet side did not dare to start work without confirmed prospects and did not conclude a separate contract for oil exploration. At the same time, in July and August of 1961, contract No. 410 for exploration of cement raw materials and oil shale and contract No. 458 for gold and diamond prospecting were signed.²⁶

Table 3

Number of Enterprises (Built and Planned) as of January 1, 1969

Total		Industry and construction	State farms and farms	Transport and communications	Exploration work	Education, health care, sports
By agreement	Put into service					
13	6	1	1	1	3	7

Source: compiled by the authors on the basis of the Russian State Archive of Economy. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 455. (In Russian).

Mali offered the USSR to conduct an aeromagnetic survey in the area of Gao-Ménaka (northwest of Mali) to localize the deposits. However, the Soviets delayed signing the contract and evaded making a decision because of the serious doubts of the geologists about the prospects of development at a high cost of works. As a result, in 1962, Mali transferred the work order to France, that prompted the USSR to take the order for an aeromagnetic survey in the area of Taoudénit (north of Mali) on obviously less favorable terms.²⁷ Despite attempts at oil exploration and drilling (for example, in 1964, contract No. 1070 was awarded in the amount of 600 million Malian francs for the supply of equipment for deep drilling for oil²⁸), oil

production in these areas has not been established so far.

The search for gold and diamond deposits under contract No. 458 of August 2, 1961, was much more successful. The works were carried out in four main regions (three exploration batches in Kangaba, Bala, Bagoé river basin, and one batch for the implementation of gold and diamond deposits in Faboulako river basin) and included a full cycle of prospecting and development of the deposit: work design, sample extraction and research in laboratories, drilling wells with the help of “Amurets” machines supplied under the contract. It was Soviet assistance in conducting geological exploration that determined Mali’s gold-bearing potential. As of 2019, annual production of the valuable metal was 61 tons, excluding artisanal mining (about 6 tons annually), compared with 150—200 kg of gold per year as of 1965.²⁹

The most productive Soviet project was the exploration of cement raw materials conducted under contract No. 410 of July 22, 1961. The development of three promising bauxite deposits in the Western Bamako, Baléa and Kéniéba (discovered by French companies in 1958—1960³⁰), as well as a deposit in the Bafoulabé-Kayes with reserves of 18.5 million tons (Tarabrin, 1977, p. 204) was the basis for the construction of a cement plant in Diamou (west Mali) with capacity of 50 thousand tons of cement per year.³¹ The construction of the facility was done on a turnkey basis, i.e., by Soviet construction companies. The Malian side

²⁹ See: Mali: Production of Mineral Commodities 2019 // Minerals Yearbook, volume III, Area Reports — International — Africa and the Middle East. National Minerals Information Center. URL: <https://www.usgs.gov/centers/national-minerals-information-center/africa-and-middle-east/ml> (accessed: 01.08.2022); RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 510. P. 8—17 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 510. Л. 8—17]. (In Russian).

³⁰ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 9. File 25. P. 210—212 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 9. Д. 25. Л. 210—212]. (In Russian).

³¹ Constructed with the Economic and Technical Assistance of the Soviet Union / ed. by S. A. Skachkov. Moscow : Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya publ., 1982 [Построено при экономическом и техническом содействии Советского Союза / под ред. С. А. Скачкова. Москва : Международные отношения, 1982]. P. 233. (In Russian).

²⁵ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 278. P. 84 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 278. Л. 84]. (In Russian).

²⁶ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 340. P. 75—81 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 340. Л. 75—81]. (In Russian).

²⁷ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 354. P. 99—100 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 354. Л. 99—100]. (In Russian).

²⁸ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 468. P. 4—5 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 468. Л. 4—5]. (In Russian).

was responsible only for providing free land and building a road and a bridge across the Senegal River from the quarry to the territory of the plant.³²

For the normal functioning of the plant, work was also carried out to supply the country with energy and train qualified personnel. In 1969, 39 Malians were sent to the Soviet Union to study at the cement plant in Novorossiysk to complete all the works at the cement plant.³³ Despite the training of Malian personnel, it was mainly the Soviet specialists who played a key role in the construction and start-up of the cement plant.

Energy production and consumption in Mali in the 1960s remained very low: the total installed capacity of all power plants as of January 1, 1964, was 10,250 kW.³⁴ This was due to the overall low level of industrial development. The Soviet Union supplied small power plants to power some buildings (e.g. schools).³⁵ However, industrial energy production was not established. In 1961, Soviet aid was requested to build a hydroelectric plant and several dams on the Senegal River,³⁶ but these projects were never implemented, because the country did not have a sufficient number of industrial energy consumers at that time. Most of the hydropower plants currently operating in Mali were later built by the Senegal River Basin Development Organization, the regional association of Mali, Guinea, Mauritania and Senegal, with the help of Western funding.³⁷

³² RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 629. P. 1—6 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 629. Л. 1—6]. (In Russian).

³³ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 9. File 46. P. 2 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 9. Д. 46. Л. 2]. (In Russian).

³⁴ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 510. P. 8—17 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 510. Л. 8—17]. (In Russian).

³⁵ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 396. P. 184—186 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 396. Л. 184—186]. (In Russian).

³⁶ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 340. P. 75—81 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 340. Л. 75—81]. (In Russian).

³⁷ See: Le Barrage de Manantali. Rapport de Synthèse // Coopération Financière avec l'Organisation pour la Mise en Valeur du Fleuve Sénégal. URL: https://www.eib.org/attachments/ev/ev_manantali_rapport_de_synthese_fr.pdf (accessed: 01.08.2022); Work Starts on Felou dam in Mali // The Infrastructure Consortium for Africa. URL: <https://www.icafrica.org/en/news-events/>

Structural Aid in the Humanitarian Sphere

The USSR provided no less significant aid to the development of education and health care in Mali. It was usually technical assistance in the form of equipment for hospitals, textbooks, brochures, and literature for schools.³⁸ Assistance also consisted in training Malian specialists. Soviet teachers taught students at five educational institutions³⁹ and Russian language study was mandatory (Sanu & Kamysheva, 2020, p. 180). However, the most important component of Soviet aid was the construction of institutions to provide the country with local highly qualified personnel (Table 4). Obviously, having one's own cadres was fundamentally important for ensuring Mali's economic sovereignty.

Table 4
Number of Educational Institutions as of January 1, 1969

Educational institutions		Higher education institution	High school, school, college	Training centers
By agreement	Put into service			
6	5	2	1	3

Source: compiled by the authors on the basis of the Russian State Archive of Economy. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 1163a. (In Russian).

In 1963, the USSR approved the task of building on a gratis basis of a Higher Administrative School for the training of state and party officials for 250 students (as a gift to the ruling party “Sudanese Union — African Democratic Rally”), a medical school for the training of nurses and midwives for 200 students and a training center for agricultural specialists of higher and secondary qualifications and mechanical engineers for a total of 600 students (Korendyasov & Konstantinova, 2020, p. 22).

infrastructure-news/article/work-starts-on-felou-dam-in-mali-453/ (accessed: 01.08.2022).

³⁸ Russia and Africa. Documents and Materials. 1961 — early 1970s] / ed. by S. V. Mazov, A. B. Davidson. Moscow: Politicheskaya entsiklopediya publ., 2021 [Россия и Африка. Документы и материалы. 1961 — начало 1970-х / под ред. С. В. Мазова, А. Б. Давидсона. Москва: Политическая энциклопедия, 2021]. P. 81. (In Russian).

³⁹ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 293. P. 14 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 293. Л. 14]. (In Russian).

It was planned to allocate 1.6 million rubles for the construction of these educational institutions. It was also proposed to build an agricultural center in Katibougou at the expense of Soviet contributions to a special UN fund.

The training of African students at Russian universities was also organized. The leader in this issue was the Peoples' Friendship University named after Patrice Lumumba (now the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, RUDN University). Representatives of Mali were already present in the first graduates. In total, over 50 years, RUDN University has trained more than 250 Malian specialists (Ponomarenko & Zueva, 2009, p. 28).

However, despite the comprehensiveness of Soviet assistance in training personnel, this area was the least developed. The availability of education and numerous internships in the USSR could not fundamentally solve the problem of the acute shortage of qualified personnel experienced by Malian enterprises, which ultimately forced them to turn to both Soviet specialists and specialists from capitalist countries.

Attempts to Break the Transport Blockade

The question of transport, namely the development of an export route for landlocked products from Mali, was of great importance in the context of the confrontation between Western and socialist countries over economic aid to Mali.

There were two traditional export routes from Mali — through the ports of Senegal (mainly Dakar), as well as through the ports of Cote d'Ivoire (Vitukhina, 1987, p. 112). Communication between Mali's capital Bamako and West African ports was carried out by rail. The railway network in Mali was poorly developed, with the main strategic enterprises located at a distance from the tracks. For example, the average distance from each of three Malian bauxite mines to the nearest railroad was 150—200 km.⁴⁰ Because of this, the cost of

transporting raw materials increased and sometimes exceeded the cost of resources, making the extraction and export of the latter impractical. Thus, the cost of exporting bauxite through Senegal was about 30 rubles per ton at the world price of bauxite 5—8 rubles per ton and transportation costs to the railway station by unpaved roads (approximately 150 km) of 2—4 rubles per ton.⁴¹

In this regard, the construction of railroads as the cheapest means of transporting resources in a landlocked country was a cornerstone issue.

The situation was also complicated by the pro-French foreign policy orientation of Senegal in 1960—1970. As Soviet experts stressed, Senegal actively pushed the Malian government to conclude monetary agreements with France in 1967, pursuing its own goals. First and foremost, Senegal sought to tie Mali's economy more closely to its own and to regain the markets lost after liberation in neighboring African countries. For example, in 1960, the Republic of Mali terminated bilateral agreements with Senegal, but quickly restored them in June 1963.⁴² Senegal also sought to intensify the activities of the "Union of Four Countries" (Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Mauritania), hoping to play a leading role in this structure. The reputational factor was also important. By orienting its foreign policy toward France and maintaining close economic ties with the former metropolis, Senegal sought to show its foreign trade partners the inconsistency of Mali's "sovereign" economic policy, being separated from the former metropolis. The Senegalese government was interested in reaching agreements between France, Mali, and the countries of the West African Monetary Union, persistently pushing Mali and France to negotiations, preparations for which were kept in secret until the last moment.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Le Mali: Des Royaumes Soudanais à l'État Contemporain // Clio. P. 26. URL: https://www.clio.fr/chronologie/pdf/pdf_chronologie_le_mali.pdf (accessed: 01.08.2022).

⁴³ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 2906. P. 10—21 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 2906. Л. 10—21]. (In Russian).

⁴⁰ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 9. File 25. P. 210—212 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 9. Д. 25. Л. 210—212]. (In Russian).

As stated in the annual report of the State Committee for Foreign Economic Relations for 1965, the Dakar route was the main transportation direction.⁴⁴ However, the closure of the border by Senegal in 1960—1963⁴⁵ forced Mali and the USSR to search for bypass routes for exporting Malian products, in particular, to reorient the trade corridor southward to Guinea. This was also due to Guinea's foreign policy orientation, which had taken since 1958 a strongly anti-French stance. In 1960 Guinea left the Franc Zone⁴⁶ and reacted extremely negatively to any calls from Senegal and other states to return there. Guinea seemed to the USSR an ideal candidate for the construction of a railroad network for the subsequent export of Malian goods. The Soviet Union hoped that the Guinean authorities would be interested in its economic proposals. According to the 1961 agreements between the USSR, Mali and Guinea, the Soviet Union made the commitment to build by 1963 the Bamako — Kouroussa railroad. A new section of the railroad was to be built in Mali, while the section already built in Guinea was only to be repaired.

However, the Bamako — Kouroussa railroad was never built by Soviet specialists, despite the fact that it seemed to be an ideal option for bringing Malian goods to the world market under the conditions of creating a sovereign economic system with a full production cycle and its decoupling from the former metropolis. In 1966, when Mali's intentions to join the West African Monetary Union and the Franc Zone became clear, the presidents of Senegal and Mali looked forward to bringing Guinea into the monetary zone, which

⁴⁴ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 510. P. 8—17 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 510. Л. 8—17]. (In Russian).

⁴⁵ Appraisal of the Mali Railway Project // International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, International Development Association. P. 4. URL: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/668051468281934456/pdf/multi0page.pdf> (accessed: 01.08.2022).

⁴⁶ La Zone franc de 1939 à Aujourd'hui // Ministère de l'Économie des Finances et de la Souveraineté Industrielle et Numérique. URL: <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/tresor-international/la-zone-franc/la-zone-franc-de-1939-a-aujourd-hui> (accessed: 01.08.2022).

caused dissatisfaction with the latter and worsen bilateral relations with Mali.⁴⁷ In addition, purely economic factors also influenced the cancellation of the project — a project worth USD 36 million was too expensive.⁴⁸

At present, the railway line passing through Senegal is still the main transport artery providing Mali with access to the sea (Bayane & Qiu, 2020, p. 112). Given the pro-French orientation of Senegal, the issue of breaking the transport blockade of Mali is still acute today.

Competing Donor States of Mali

Mali's cooperation extended far beyond interaction with the USSR and the socialist countries. Mali maintained economic ties with France, especially after the 1967 currency agreements, China, Western countries (Germany, the Netherlands) and regional neighbors (Guinea, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire). The degree of other countries' involvement in Mali's economy can also be judged by the commercial loans. For example, about USD 1.8 million in loans came from Côte d'Ivoire, GBP 2.1 million from China, and the country received deferrals on French loans.⁴⁹

It was important for Western capitalist countries to obtain technical assistance contracts in order to get the greatest possible influence on the Mali's economic development. In this logic, the ideological struggle factor was actively used against the USSR. The press and academic circles constantly published articles about the technical backwardness of Soviet equipment and the “anti-agricultural vector” of Soviet assistance (Bolshov, 1983; Andreev, 1987, pp. 1—2).

In this regard, it is worth examining the assistance to Mali from capitalist countries. Mali concluded contracts and agreements for the

⁴⁷ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 2906. P. 16 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 2906. Л. 16]. (In Russian).

⁴⁸ Appraisal of the Mali Railway Project // International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, International Development Association. P. 24. URL: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/668051468281934456/pdf/multi0page.pdf> (accessed: 01.08.2022).

⁴⁹ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 510. P. 8—17 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 510. Л. 8—17]. (In Russian).

construction of enterprises with a number of Western states. Thus on February 14, 1962, Germany, through the National Bank of Reconstruction, provided a loan of 13 million marks (2.9 million rubles) for the construction of two oil mills in Koulikoro and Toukoto.⁵⁰ In the same year, a contract was signed with the United States for the construction of the building of the Pedagogical Institute at a cost of USD 800,000, later increased to USD 1.1 million (the American side dragged out the contract in every possible way).⁵¹ In 1968, having failed to obtain a Soviet loan for the construction of the road and bridge from the quarry to the cement plant, Mali turned to the French company SNTP with a request to build a road with the assistance of the Malian company “Société Nationale d’entreprise de Travaux Publics (SONETRA)”, while the bridge was to be built by the French company “Dragage.”⁵²

Western interest went far beyond technical assistance and encompassed the most sensitive area — human resources and personnel training. Given the growing interest of Western countries in Africa’s natural resources, particularly potential uranium deposits, West German delegations were sent to Mali to negotiate exploration. French, British, and Austrian nationals worked at the Rural Polytechnic Institute in Katibougou. It is impossible not to admit that Western support was aimed at limiting Mali’s economic sovereignty through the neocolonial practices, as evidenced by both the terms of the currency agreements with France and the mandatory condition of the IMF loan — consultations with the Fund on foreign and domestic financial policies in Mali.⁵³

At the same time, Mali wanted to make the most of the circumstances by trying to manipulate the USSR in an effort to increase the

economic benefits of Soviet assistance. Thus, during the reception of Mali’s Chargé d’Affaires in the USSR D. Maïga on November 14, 1962, whose main purpose of the visit was to defer payments on Soviet loans and extend the loan period, the Malian side veiledly reproached the USSR for the fact that the assistance received from the USSR and socialist countries amounting to 24 billion Mali francs with a fixed allocation by sectors was almost equal to the 23 billion Mali francs given by Western countries with a more flexible allocation.⁵⁴

The USSR began to regularly receive hints from Malian partners about the high interest of Western countries in contracts. In 1963, while discussing the registration of extra contract works on water well drilling into a separate contract with the USSR, the Malians drew the Soviet side’s attention to the fact that France, Germany and the USA also claimed the contract.⁵⁵ In 1964, the Ministry of Public Works asked France to develop technical documentation for the cement plant, as the cost of one ton of cement in similar documents of the Soviet side, according to the Malians, was overstated (9,800 Malian francs with a capacity of 50 thousand tons of cement per year).⁵⁶ In 1967, during the negotiations on the extension of contract No. 9225 (connected with the agricultural aviation) the Malians put forward a demand for its revision in their favor, arguing that, in connection with its implementation, the Malians refused to conclude contracts with the Dutch pilots and did not operate the three “Tipper” aircraft they had.⁵⁷

In negotiations with Western contractors, representatives of Mali used the factor of contractual interest of the Soviet side. In 1965, Mali asked the Soviet Union to build oxygen stations. France also demonstrated its readiness to build them through its company “Air Liquide”

⁵⁰ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 2872. P. 119 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 2872. Л. 119]. (In Russian).

⁵¹ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 656. P. 64 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 656. Л. 64]. (In Russian).

⁵² RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 2926. P. 34 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 2926. Л. 34]. (In Russian).

⁵³ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 510. P. 8—17 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 510. Л. 8—17]. (In Russian).

⁵⁴ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 340. P. 82—86 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 340. Л. 83—86]. (In Russian).

⁵⁵ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 411. P. 7—9 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 411. Л. 7—9]. (In Russian).

⁵⁶ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 466. P. 109—110 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 466. Л. 109—110]. (In Russian).

⁵⁷ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 656. P. 37 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 656. Л. 37]. (In Russian).

Table 5

**Official Development Assistance to the Republic of Mali from Developed Countries
and International Organizations, 1960—1970, in USD millions at current prices**

Country	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970
Austria						0.01					
Belgium								0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02
France					5.9	7.8	5	7.9	10.1	11.3	5.7
Germany			0.91	1.71	0.79	0.38	0.52	0.53	0.59	1.12	1.95
Netherlands											0.01
Switzerland				0.01	0.02	0.04			0.02	0.01	
United Kingdom						0.07	0.08	0.01			0.01
USA		2	2	2	2	2.35	3.19	1.4	0.74	2	2
International organizations (multilateral aid)	0.08	0.44	6.64	3.39	8.48	10.9	12.2	7.29	16.4	8.72	11.3
Total	0.08	2.44	9.56	7.11	17.2	21.6	25	17.2	27.9	23.22	22.1

Source: Aid (official development assistance) disbursements to countries and regions // OECD. URL: <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TABLE2A#> (accessed: 01.08.2022).

for foreign currency, which was extremely unprofitable for Mali.⁵⁸

Most of these hints were ignored by the USSR. The Soviet side perceived them as an element of pressure, reasonably believing that they would not come to their implementation. Mali fully realized that Western contracts significantly limited the country's economic sovereignty by imposing additional burdensome conditions. Moreover, none of the Western partners provided Mali with structural assistance in all sectors of the economy. De facto aid was minimal, as reflected, among other things in the OECD's official development assistance statistics (Table 5).

Conclusion

The technical and economic aid provided by the Soviet Union in the 1960s addressed many of Mali's current development problems and was designed to launch a full production cycle in many industries. Unlike other donor countries, which limited themselves to supporting individual projects, the USSR provided assistance through continuous chains in all three phases, including project planning and

development, the supply of technical equipment, and personnel training.

The most important feature of Soviet aid policy was the complete absence of both colonial and neocolonial influence. The assistance received from the USSR was beneficial and had a direct positive effect on increasing the economic sovereignty of Mali. This contrasted with the approach of Western countries, particularly France and other capitalist donors interested in Mali.

The Malian government had ambitious construction plans, the realization of which depended on a large extent on Soviet assistance. However, not all of the plans that were being developed by Mali and the USSR were destined to come true. Some were never realized for a number of reasons — the unwillingness to undertake the risky costs of exploration, the excessive workload under many contracts of the first five-year plan, the difficulties for the Malian side (which led to the revision and reduction of some contracts), and the disastrous lack of qualified local workers, which caused constant breakdowns of expensive factory equipment.

Nevertheless, in the 1960s, the most difficult period of independent Mali's economic development, it was the Soviet Union who provided it with considerable aid in the development of key economic sectors —

⁵⁸ RSAE. Fund 365. Reg. 2. File 2876. P. 157 [РГАЭ. Ф. 365. Оп. 2. Д. 2876. Л. 157]. (In Russian).

agriculture and heavy industry, organizing a full production cycle: prospecting and development of resource deposits, building of factories, plants, and farms, supplying the constructed enterprises with equipment and energy. In addition, the USSR tried to provide all possible assistance in solving the most difficult problem of training qualified personnel. With the direct participation and often at the expense of the USSR schools, medical and agrarian colleges and institutes were built; Malian students received scholarships and studied at Soviet universities.

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