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In My View

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IN MY VIEW . . .

"Strategy for Increased Stability in Africa"

Sir:

I read with keen interest my copy of the *Naval War College Review* whenever it arrives and was particularly attracted to the article of the above title by Commander Mégna M. Diomandé of the Ivorian Navy in the Autumn 1994 issue. While I agree with most of the points he raised as factors contributing to Africa's present sorry state of affairs, I vehemently disagree with his statement that "Nkrumah's actions in Ghana are a good example; in the early 1960s, he attempted to enhance his country's prestige by making flashy, yet not very useful, investments in projects like the Akosombo Dam complex." For those not aware, this hydroelectric dam was built by our late president, Dr. Nkrumah, in the early 1960s to replace the many diesel generators which had been scattered up and down the country at the time of Ghana's independence in 1957 with the aims of providing cheap energy for domestic consumption and of laying the foundation for a modest industrialization of the country. I wish Commander Diomandé could have imagined the adverse effect on Ghana's economy in the 1970s, when OPEC member countries saw the sky as the limit for the price of their crude oil, if Ghana had been then still totally dependent on oil as the source for generating electrical energy.

Far from being a prestige project, it even became necessary to build an additional one, smaller in size, at Akuse, downstream of the Akosombo Dam site in the 1970s. Also, the present government announced a few days ago plans

for the building of more, smaller hydro dams at suitable locations around the country.

The Akosombo Hydro Dam, together with many other projects Nkrumah constructed during his time in office, were subjected to all sorts of degrading adjectives, such as "prestigious," "useless," "wasteful," etc., by his opponents, especially non-Ghanaians envious of his drive for the rapid industrialization of Ghana. Put under efficient management, many of these projects have turned out to be very good investments, creating employment, turning out a skilled and semiskilled labour force for new industries, and contributing to huge savings in foreign currency which would have otherwise gone into importation of some very basic products.

It may interest readers to know that Commander Diomandé's own country, the Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo—which are Ghana's western and eastern neighbours respectively in West Africa—purchase electric energy from Ghana, the source of which is the Akosombo Hydro Dam, which he describes as flashy and not a useful investment.

Commander Diomandé needn't have crossed the Côte d'Ivoire–Ghana border to look for an example of a prestigious and worthless project; there is one—the most expensive, the biggest, and the newest one, completed as recently as early 1993—in his own backyard. This is the huge basilica built at the cost of over \$150 million by the late president of the Côte d'Ivoire, Mr. Houphouët Boigny, at his home village. Even the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Rome, from the pope downwards, were not impressed by the huge amount of money, whether private or public, spent by a poor African country like the Côte d'Ivoire on building a place of worship. They expressed the view that the money could have been spent on projects such as schools and clinics, which would have been socially more beneficial for many people in that country. Instead, this white elephant's maintenance cost, in the not-too-distant future, will fall on Ivorian taxpayers, who will derive no benefit whatsoever from the project.

George Bedu-Addo
Captain, Ghana Navy, Ret.