

## OTHER NATIONS

hood, "large" being defined as about the size of "the pre-World War II A&P." Because chains do not compete against one another, Japanese consumers are offered fewer goods than their Western counterparts.

To reduce trade surpluses, Wood concludes, the Japanese government needs to slash farm subsidies and eliminate restrictions on business. Housing deregulation, for example, would allow export-oriented Japanese manufacturers to concentrate on domestic markets, as well as provide new customers for Western construction firms. "Reducing Japan's congestion," Wood asserts, "is as important as reducing America's budget deficit."

*Neocolonial Triumph*

"Gabon: A Neocolonial Enclave of Enduring French Interest" by Michael C. Reed, in *The Journal of Modern African Studies* (June 1987), 32 East 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

The overthrow of governments is common in much of Africa. Yet in the small West African country of Gabon, French neocolonialism has helped ensure that only two men have ruled this nation of perhaps one million since its independence in 1960. Gabon's very identity, notes Reed, a doctoral candidate at the University of Washington, Seattle, "is inseparable from France."

Gabon's first president was Léon M'Ba, leader of a Gabon political party backed by French forestry interests. M'Ba was ousted in February 1964, but was restored to power with the assistance of 600 French paratroopers. After M'Ba's death (in a Parisian hospital) in November 1967, he was succeeded by his vice president, Albert-Bernard (later Omar) Bongo, who has remained in charge ever since.

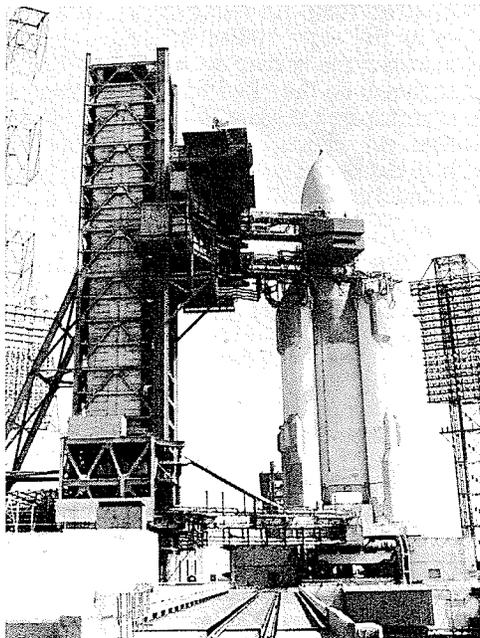
Bongo maintains strong ties with France. The *Service d'action civique* (SAC), a neo-Gaullist paramilitary organization, is quite influential in Gabon; SAC members (who are led by retired general "Loulou" Martin, a Dienbienphu veteran) control both the Presidential Guard and Gabon's secret service.

But Bongo has also ingratiated himself with African governments of widely varying political philosophies. During the 1970s, for example, Gabon helped break the sanctions imposed by the UN on Rhodesian exports. But Bongo has also made six state visits to China, and has offered to negotiate peace between Libya and Chad. Gabon's foreign policy, Bongo has said, is "neither to the right nor to the left, but straight ahead."

Oil revenues have brought prosperity to Gabon. In 1984, for example, sources of petroleum totaling \$691 million accounted for 83 percent of the country's exports. But oil production and revenues have been declining since 1976, and life *après pétrole* looks bleak. Budget revenues fell from \$2.28 billion in 1985 to \$1 billion in 1987. Big development projects, such as the trans-Gabon railway completed in December 1986 at a cost of \$4 billion, may not become profitable for years, if ever.

Bongo's hold on power appears secure. Opposition parties are weak and divided, and Bongo won the November 1986 presidential election with a 99.97 percent majority. "According to African tradition," Bongo declared after his victory, "the *chef* (leader) is chosen one time and forever."

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*The Soviet rocket carrier Energia, shown here in a May 1987 test at the Baikonur Cosmodrome. The Energia will launch the Soviet space shuttle, which, unlike its U.S. counterpart, can change course during its final descent to Earth.*

### *Soviets in Space*

"Sputnik's Heirs: What the Soviets Are Doing in Space" by Peter Pesavento, in *Technology Review* (Oct. 1987), Mass. Institute of Technology, Building W59, Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

For most Americans, the "space race" between the United States and the Soviet Union ended with the Apollo 11 moon landing in 1969. But during the past two decades, Soviet efforts in space have far surpassed those of the United States. Soviet cosmonauts, for example, have logged 13 years in orbit, eight years more than their American counterparts.

Pesavento, a free-lance writer, details the "ambitious and accelerating program of space activity" on which the Soviets have embarked. Some of their achievements:

- Eight space stations (holding up to 12 people) have been launched since 1971. Over 3,000 experiments, lasting up to 100 hours, have been conducted on these stations. In June 1987, the Soviets began renting laboratories on their *Mir* station, capable of manufacturing crystals, pharmaceuticals, and biological products, to Western corporations.

- The *Energia*, now undergoing final tests, is the world's "heaviest, and most powerful launcher," capable of putting payloads exceeding 41 metric tons into orbit. Because Saturn V rockets have been abandoned, the U.S. will not have a comparable launcher available until at least 1993.

- The Soviet space shuttle program, Pesavento predicts, will become operational within a year, and will employ many shuttle craft.

Among other future Soviet space undertakings is a joint French-Soviet