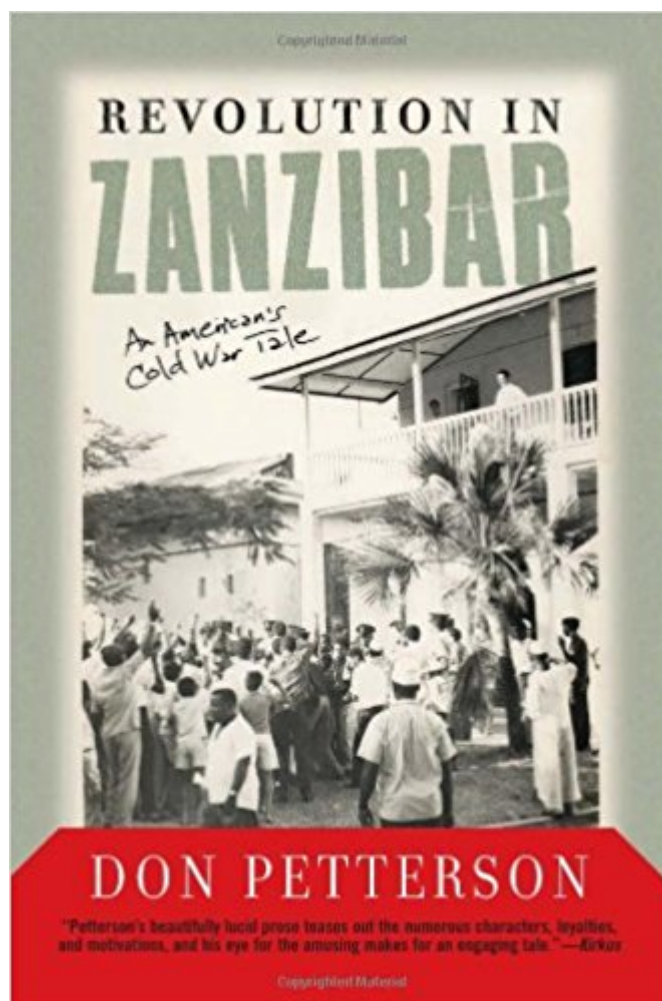


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# Revolution In Zanzibar: An American's Cold War Tale



## Synopsis

The Cold War exploded in Zanzibar in 1964 when African rebels slaughtered one of every ten Arabs. Led by a strange, messianic Ugandan, Cuban-trained factions headed the rebels, making Zanzibar (in the eyes of Washington) a potentially cancerous base for the communist subversion of mainland Africa. Exotic Zanzibar - fabled island of spices, former slave-trading entrepôt, and stepping-off point for 19th century expeditions into the vast interior of the Dark Continent - had succumbed to the terror of 20th century revolution and Cold War intrigue. In the vivid, eyewitness tradition of *The Bang Bang Club* and *The Skull beneath the Skin*, Donald Petterson weaves an engrossing tale of human drama played out against a background of violence and horror. As the only American in Zanzibar throughout the revolution, Petterson reports with the inside authority of a highly placed diplomatic observer, illuminating how the current troubles in Zanzibar are rooted in the Cold War and the revolution of 1964.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Now a seasoned Foreign Service officer, Petterson (*Inside Sudan*) began his career in Zanzibar from 1963 to 1965. During this extremely tumultuous time the island became independent of Great Britain, experienced a coup d'état, undertook a Marxist path, switched to the nonaligned movement, expelled two U.S. Chiefs of Mission, agreed to unite with Tanganyika, and worked to find its proper place in the balance of world powers. Recent memories of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Kennedy assassination made Washington officials very worried about rumors of Cuba-trained agents behind the revolution and new government. During part of the early 1964 revolution, the

author was the only American diplomat to remain on post, representing the concerns of Washington to the competing factions and looking after property, including a NASA tracking station, left empty when Americans were evacuated. The literature on this revolution is quite sparse; this eyewitness account will add to understanding it. The lively and engaging writing style holds the reader's interest throughout and conveys much of the uncertain nature of diplomacy at a remote post during turbulent times. Recommended for most collections. Marcia L. Sprules, Council on Foreign Relations Lib., New York Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Petterson, a U.S. career service officer, takes the reader on a journey of cold war conflict, independence struggle, and revolution. His initial foreign post assignment was Zanzibar, an island nation off the east coast of Africa, in the period from 1964-1966, when the nation was transforming itself from British colonial status. Yet for the majority of Zanzibaris of black African descent, independence apparently had little significance. The ruling elite was predominantly Arab, with East Asians playing a substantial if not dominant commercial role. The resulting revolution, bloody and efficient, manifested without anticipation by Britain or the U.S. Petterson's baptism in the U.S. diplomatic corps initially thrust him into the temporary role of sole representative at the American consulate during the revolutionary period and once again some three years later when his supervisor was forced off the island, suspected of espionage. It was the interim period that proves a rich insight into the super power cold war conflict and the tensions associated with maintaining a posture of nonalliance during a period of rising African nationalism. Vernon Ford Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book, written by State Department employee Don Petterson, discusses the 1964 revolution in the tiny African country of Zanzibar. The island state had just come from under the British umbrella as a protectorate and was ruled by a Omani Sultan and dominated by an Arab minority. In the bloody revolution which swept the Arabs out of power a small clique from the African majority took over. Petterson was there and wound up as the only American official left on the island, trying to look out for the property of U.S. citizens as well as a space tracking station which had been built on the island of Zanzibar. The book is fascinating in that it shows how Cold War thinking skewed State Department thinking, losing opportunities to influence the situation and provide stability. A very good read and includes some black and white photos in the text.

I was an American teacher in the new secondary school on Pemba during in the 1963 Zanzibar revolution. The British army was stationed at our school during the election and I enjoyed the Uhuru celebrations on Chake Chake. After the revolution, I was housed at the King George IV School grounds until deported as an American "spy" just before it was announced the Zanzibar was part of the new Tanzania. The book answered a lot of questions I had 50 years ago thanks to the author.

Great book if you are visiting Tanzania, or want to understand more about the history of the region. Great history of the 1960's regarding the local government, politics, and how the cold war interfered in that region.

Mr. Petterson has presented us with a very interesting and personal view of the Cold War from one of its more obscure and exotic locales. This book presents an interesting account of politics in 1960s East Africa through the eyes of the only US official to remain on the island of Zanzibar throughout the revolution. It describes the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar and dispels some of the myths surrounding the revolution. The author also provides interesting insight on the early careers of some of the notable figures to emerge in US and African politics including Frank Carlucci, Thomas Pickering, and Julius Nyerere. Anyone who is interested in East African politics or the East-West face off during the cold war should read this book. It is a great addition to any political science library.

Being married to someone who was brought up in the diplomatic lifestyle has its merits. One hears many stories of how life is lived in exotic countries, as well as the impact the cultures of those countries has on a person. Even though the immersion into another culture is marred by working and living with other Americans, that culture does work itself into you. My husband and I have both read this book, and have also been lucky enough to travel to East Africa. The author's descriptions of Zanzibar's history, culture and people are informative and well-researched. His passages can be either light-hearted or serious, and he does a good job of conveying the chaos and terror of the revolution's first days. I thought that the book flowed quite well, and that his style was quite engaging. My husband especially felt that this book was an accurate depiction of diplomatic life. Calling one's servants by first name was just the way things were done; not in the manner of "boy" or "man", but in the manner of friendship. Also, a certain detachment is inevitable due to working in an Embassy or Consulate, as well as the people that one works with. Of course, there are diplomats

who take NO initiative in learning about or experiencing another culture. Ambassador Petterson does not seem like this type at all. This book allows a glimpse into the life of a lone American in a highly dangerous diplomatic situation. An almost unknown country and historical event unfolds through the pages, and we learn about the fringe of the Cold War, where one small island is contested between the Super Powers. An excellent read.

"Revolution in Zanzibar: An American's Cold War Tale" by Don Petterson is the story of the before, during, and after of Zanzibar independence (from Britain), self-rule, revolution, and union with Tanganyika (to form the current Tanzania). Petterson was the only U.S. State Department official who was there the entire time. He tells the story of the various political players on all sides: the "Arab" rulers and elites who lost power; and the "African" revolutionaries who took it; the British officials -- old "African hands", and the Americans, eager to support democracy but wary of communist influence. Briefly, Zanzibar and its bloody revolution was on the front pages, but soon it was forgotten. Petterson tells of not only the international diplomatic calculations, but also writes about the day-to-day life of a diplomat in a far away place and time, and relates some of the history and atmosphere of a real place that many Americans might equate with Shangra-la or Xanadu. Illustrated with historic photographs. Well worth reading for the East Africa enthusiast or historian of U.S. diplomacy. And it has a great ending!

I found this book offered a fascinating insight into our cold war era. I was eleven at the time the author was in Zanzibar and we had just come through the Cuban Missile Crisis. As I read through the book I relived some of those moments. A very interesting insight into a lesser known African nation that plays into many of the issues that face just about all nations in Africa, namely the role that tribalism plays in determining who is in power and who is not in power. Idi Amin was one of the most notorious dictators and in this poignant book one gains an understanding that no matter how large or small your nation is in Africa, the challenges of bringing people together under one rule is daunting. Last, I liked the author's humor. This is not a dry book. I highly recommend it.

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