

# Britain and France move to thwart Nigeria's quest for sovereignty

by Lydia Cherry

The Nigerian government on March 2 charged France with escalating a border conflict between Nigeria and its neighbor Cameroon by sending French paratroopers, helicopters, and military advisers into the area. "It is a direct provocation and we regard the escalation of the conflict as the entire responsibility of the French," Foreign Minister Baba Gana Kingibe told a news conference. "They have to bear the full consequences of whatever happens and whatever follows." France is claiming that only 15 paratroopers and two helicopters are in the area. Kingibe said the numbers could be higher and accused France of seeking to internationalize the dispute further. "As far as we are concerned we are dealing with French troops. We are fully aware and informed about the troop strength and their locations."

The border dispute is being stoked by both Britain and France. That the situation was being heated up on the ground, became obvious on Feb. 22 when Nigerian military leaders claimed that Cameroonian paramilitary police had burned down more than 30 Nigerian villages and displaced thousands of people from the border area in the past two months. The French military personnel were sent in on Feb. 27 to act once again as self-appointed arbiters.

A four-man French delegation met March 2 with Nigeria's new head of state, Gen. Sani Abacha, and other Nigerian officials in the capital Abuja. The French delegation, which included top aides of President François Mitterrand, said it was up to Nigeria and Cameroon to settle their conflict. Nigerian Foreign Minister Kingibe said about those talks: "We heard them, not that we bought everything they said." Two days before, a French spokesman had claimed that "an appropriate solution must be found within an international framework" to the conflict over the "oil-rich border area."

The escalation of the conflict, left behind by the colonial masters of the two West African countries, Britain and France, came as no surprise for Nigeria watchers. Less than two months ago, on Jan. 10, General Abacha delivered a powerful speech which drew the line against the disintegration of the country (see *EIR*, Jan. 28, p. 4). In the speech, he made clear that the days of applying International Monetary Fund Structural Adjustment Programs to the economy of the former British colony were over, and announced measures

to restart investment in the real economy. Among the immediate steps taken were decrees fixing interest and currency exchange rates, imposing controls on foreign exchange trading and imports, and most important, providing that 60% of all bank credit will be directed to agricultural and manufacturing enterprises.

Just days before, Abacha had called for a Marshall Plan for Africa as a whole. The general made clear that Nigeria, one of the two superpowers of Africa, had lost its way from the time of independence 33 years ago, when "we appeared set for grand attainment to fulfill what the rest of the world saw as our manifest destiny to lead the black race into the mainstream of human civilization."

## Anglo-American finance trembles

Abacha's entry onto the Nigerian stage predictably sent tremors throughout the world of Anglo-American finance. It was a foregone conclusion that destabilization operations would be forthcoming to prevent other African countries from following suit in moving away from market "reforms." Though sources in Lagos make clear that the situation is stable on the ground, and that particularly Abacha's initiative to support the Nigerian currency has wide support, the outlines of various French-British operations are coming into view.

The United States seems to be treating Nigeria with "kid gloves," in contrast to Britain and France, perhaps connected to the U.S. need for Nigerian oil. There are also indications, however, of a debate within U.S. policymaking circles on the future of West Africa. According to an *Atlantic Monthly* article, there is a faction within the United States contemplating giving various disintegrating West African countries to a Greater Nigeria, while others, including the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, claim that Nigeria is in the process of disintegrating itself.

The British Broadcasting Corp. has been consistently broadcasting an anti-Nigerian version of the events that have occurred since the Nigerians first announced that Nigerians had been forced to flee their homes on the Bakassi Peninsula in Akwa Ibom state of Nigeria following an invasion by Cameroonian gendarmes. As reflected in earlier coverage of

Abacha's economic changes by the London *Financial Times*, the U.K. was particularly critical that the new Nigerian budget announced by Abacha "gives priority to some notorious projects such as the Ajaokuta steel works, the aluminum smelter, and the new capital in Abuja."

### **Ceaseless manipulation of historical traps**

Former Foreign Minister of Guyana Fred Wills said some years ago that if you want to understand British and French colonialism, keep in mind that, as they were leaving, the colonial powers made sure to leave each of their former colonies with a problem, so they could always come back and be the arbitrator, a Nigerian source living in the metropolitan Washington area pointed out. In explaining the Nigerian-Cameroon border clash, he said that the British and the French, when they gave independence to Cameroon, created this problem between Nigeria and Cameroon: They know that they can manipulate both Nigeria and Cameroon around this to their own advantage.

He reflected back on a period in the early 1980s, when the French military once again came into this "no-man's territory" and began holding military exercises with the Cameroonians. Nigeria responded by announcing that such exercises would be taken as an act of aggression. Notwithstanding, the French government gave the go-ahead, and they began a shooting war against Nigeria. The Nigerian military then managed to take out the French paratroopers within about five hours. The source said he is under the impression that the French government at that time agreed that such an incident would not happen again.

Now, however, after Abacha's recent speech, the French seem to be pushing to do it "for real," and seem to be succeeding in internationalizing it.

### **Threats from within**

The threats to derail this notion of regaining Nigerian economic sovereignty, however, are also coming from within the country. The line coming out of a conference that was held in Ibadan, north of Lagos, in mid-February, was that General Abacha must immediately step down as head of state, and that the country should be divided into eight loose confederations or states, with the central government being mainly responsible for foreign policy.

Under such a plan, the Nigerian military structure, as it now exists, would be dismantled and replaced with a collective security arrangement. The main participants in this conference were leaders of the Yoruba tribe, one of the three major Nigerian tribes. Nigerian sources say that the line coming out of this Ibadan conference was probably responsible for putting back into motion the "Campaign for Democracy" against the Abacha government. Earlier, this Nigerian entity had been split, with the leader of the larger wing, Beko Ransom-Kutu (a Yorubu), being in dialogue with the Abacha government. Now, however, the goal of the western-influ-

enced human rights group is simply to bring the government down.

Some are insisting that the current line coming out of "Yoruba-land" is not home-grown either. Ibadan, a very old, historical, and religious city, not only in the country but also in the whole of West Africa, has been permeated by western organs of Project Democracy (the U.S. "secret government" dirty tricks outfit associated with Col. Oliver North et al.). No wonder that the same line is coming out of certain Yoruba leaders that has been coming out of Project Democracy for over a decade: Split up the country and destroy its military, which they say is too strong anyway. Something has been done to Ibadan that goes completely contrary to the reputation of that city. Lagos, by comparison, is a boom town: It has no history, no culture; but destroying Ibadan debases the culture. The source insisted that, if you destroy Ibadan in western Nigeria, you can easily destroy any other city.

He pointed, in particular, to the University of Ibadan, where extensive projects are conducted, generously funded by the Ford Foundation and other "charitable" foundations. The studies are conducted there, and then offered up to the rest of the country as proven fact: Things like population control, sterilization of women; kookish medical doctors teaching at the University of Ibadan, who have been part of the Ford Foundation-funded operations. And even though Africa in general and Nigeria in particular are underpopulated, they go into the market in Ibadan and distribute condoms and contraceptive pills in the streets. The source said that, to his knowledge, this is done only in Ibadan.

During the same time period of the Ibadan conference that called for weakening the central government, a respected former head of state, Gen. Yakubu Gowon, issued a strong statement saying that the most important thing is to keep the country unified. Speaking on Feb. 15, Gowon insisted that "whatever we do, this nation is more important than any of us and we must continue to keep it one." Gowon condemned public statements that he said are inflaming passions and trying to hasten disintegration. Gowon was leader of Nigeria during the civil war of the 1960s up until the 1970s. According to sources, he took Abraham Lincoln's plans for southern reconstruction and applied them to Nigeria, and as a result is sometimes referred to as the "Abraham Lincoln of Nigeria," because of his role in bringing unity to the country after the civil war.

Speaking in Washington, D.C. on Feb. 20, the American statesman Lyndon LaRouche also addressed the stakes with respect to Nigeria. "I have been watching coups in Nigeria like a fast-spinning revolving door for a great number of years. Why suddenly does a new military regime come in to attack the IMF? . . . Nigeria is the Brazil of black Africa; not the largest, but the most populous. If it does not resist, all black Africa is destroyed. It is resisting. They are fighting against a force that is trying to obliterate their nation. More power to them!"