

## Head of State releases blueprint for new Nigeria

by Lydia Cherry

In a period in which Anglo-Dutch raw materials cartels are making major grabs in West Africa to hoard precious metals and strategic minerals before the imminent financial collapse, it is an extremely important question, whether Nigeria as a nation-state remains standing. As *EIR* has reported, the British oligarchy has three principal targets for destabilization on the continent of Africa: Nigeria, Sudan, and the Republic of South Africa.

In several West African countries—most blatantly in Sierra Leone—British and South African businessmen have teamed up with British and South African mercenaries to commandeer and “protect” mineral resources. A British-linked South African conglomerate, Anglo-American Corp., announced on Oct. 3 that it is moving into once-stable Ivory Coast to take advantage of gold finds there; the same week, a top Roman Catholic churchman, Archbishop Bernard Agre, warned that that West African country was on the brink of chaos. The British conglomerate Lonrho has moved into nine sites in western Niger.

This is the strategic context in which the blueprint for a “new Nigeria” was presented to the nation by Head of State Gen. Sani Abacha on Oct. 1—the 35th anniversary of Nigeria’s independence from Great Britain.

General Abacha had promised three months earlier, when the Nigeria government was presented with the results of the 12-month-long National Constitutional Convention, that on Oct. 1 he would unfold the next stage of the political program based on the convention’s recommendations.

His Oct. 1 speech, broadcast on television, was directed primarily to individual Nigerians, to “get their heads out of the sand.” It also included attempts to reach out to the international community. As he laid out the next phase in the

nation’s political development to move to stable civilian rule, General Abacha challenged Nigerians to prepare “to begin the transition into the 21st century.” As Nigeria is also in transition, we should use this coincidence, he said, to “focus on a vision of where we want to be in economic terms at the start of a new age.”

With respect to where the country is going economically, Abacha reiterated government policy: “Our fiscal and monetary policies will focus greater attention on developing the productive sectors of the economy by increasing capacity utilization of our industries and job creation.”

### Looking to the future

The speech was directed very personally to the individual Nigerian, to look at the immediate conjuncture from a higher standpoint, and to look past current difficulties, into the future. “Fellow Nigerians, honor and true resolution are easily betrayed if we concentrate the mind upon transient emotions and temporary advantages,” he said.

The speech was also a thoughtful presentation of the Nigerian elites’ perception of the importance of their actions at this point in history. “We who are privileged to live in these times,” he said, “must consider ourselves blessed. For ours is a generation which has been chosen by destiny to lay enduring foundations for a common existence for the Nigerians of future eras. This responsibility bestows a supreme duty upon us for which we should be proud.”

Abacha reiterated what had been the first pledge of his administration, which has ruled Nigeria since November 1993: “We were prepared to travel any distance, bear any burden, and seek every valid avenue in our undertaking to lay the bedrock of a lasting democracy for our country.” He

noted that in "our careful selection of priorities, our first objective was to deny ourselves any factional, regional, or sentimental attachments."

The broadcast had been designed largely to respond to the new draft Constitution that had been hammered out in the National Constitutional Conference that ended in late June. Abacha noted that since June, this draft Constitution had also gone several more steps. A Review Committee had met on the document; a Constitutional Analysis Committee had been established to examine the provisions of the draft and to highlight its implications for future generations; the work of the Analysis Committee was then followed by meetings of the official governing body, the Federal Executive Council and the Council of States, to discuss the document. He added, "Yet, in order not to confine ourselves to institutional sources, we also carefully studied the views we received from a wide range of other contacts." Abacha made clear that some modifications were made in the 1995 Draft Constitution by the Provisional Ruling Council before the body gave it its stamp of approval. One of these changes was an extension of the timetable to civilian rule: The PRC's final version contains a point-by-point blueprint of what must be accomplished in each quarter, within a 36-month period leading up to free elections.

What must have been some of the most surprising final recommendations, for those Nigeria-watchers that have bought the London line about the supposed "Muslim northerners who will maintain their power at all costs," was that concerning regional power sharing. "At the end of its careful study of the issue, there was agreement with the Constitutional Conference's proposal for rotational power-sharing by region of the country," Abacha said. This regional power-sharing arrangement is to be "entrenched in the Constitution at federal level and applicable for an *experimental period of 30 years*."

In elaborating on the reasons why this relatively unusual arrangement is necessary for the country, Abacha said: "Some of our political controversies . . . are transient in nature. But others have to be faced and tackled. The Council, in its deliberations, understood the origins of the sympathy for the principle of rotation which we all recognize as a way of satisfying the fears of marginalization. . . . This option will apply to all levels of government. It is hoped that with the adoption of this system, all segments of society will feel a sense of belonging."

The national political offices which will be filled by candidates on a rotational basis (rotated among six identifiable geographical groupings) are: President, vice president, prime minister, deputy prime minister, senate president, and speaker of the House of Representatives.

Another major change is the decision to "devolve" federal powers and functions to states and local governments. "It is our conviction that the competition for political offices at the federal level may become less intense, less attractive or

acrimonious, if some federal powers are devolved to states and local governments," Abacha explained.

What kind of mindset is it going to take to build a new Nigeria, a Nigeria that can take its rightful place, as the most populated country in Africa, in leading black Africa? Although no constitutional structure change can address this directly, the head of State attempted to deal with the question: "Great nations are built by men with flesh and blood whose hearts beat with a sense of mission and a desire to serve, whatever their political coloration and ideology. I do not believe that the entire Nigerian political class is in a class of its own and that it is less than its counterpart in the world at large. But I do believe that we have not always gotten the best from a significant number of those who asked to be allowed to serve."

Abacha concluded by asking all those who wish to serve, "to step forward now with courage, sincerity and commitment to give our country a new leadership."

### **The question of subversion**

General Abacha also delivered a two-point message to foreign powers. First, referring to the high-pitched international campaign for clemency for 40 Nigerian coup plotters (a coup plot which this news service has determined was instigated from London), Abacha noted that Nigeria "cherishes her cordial relations with the world beyond our borders," and that "in consideration for the earnest pleas of our friends and in the spirit of national reconciliation, which has been the centerpiece of this administration's policy, the government has decided to commute to jail [the] sentences on the coup plotters," rather than administer the death penalty.

With respect to the thwarted coup plot—it was supposed to have resulted in the assassination of General Abacha while he was at Muslim prayers last March 1—the government, the same day as Abacha's speech, put on television sections of a videotape of the coup trial itself. Here were shown admissions from various coup plotters that such a plot did exist; that meetings around the plot had been held both overseas and in Benin. According to wire service reports, the broadcast showed that there were actually two plots, which eventually converged into one.

Once in his speech, Abacha referenced the coup trial itself, noting that "investigations and confessions taken at the trial have since revealed that the accomplices included some Nigerian fugitives, some of whom were implicated in previous coups and are now residing in some European cities."

The second aspect of General Abacha's message to other countries was a warning against foreign powers' providing support for Nigerian dissidents who are living abroad, and who are trying to destabilize Nigeria. He insisted that "foreign nations which wish to continue to maintain cordial relations with us, must observe the internationally accepted standard, which holds that dissidents should not be permitted to

use their host country as a basis for subversion and the plotting of violence.”

The major Nigerian dissident groupings, such as the Campaign for Democracy (Nadeco), are headquartered in London and given political and economic support by Britain's Overseas Minister, Baroness Lynda Chalker. On the same day as Abacha's national address, another group was formed in Westminster, England, this one headed by Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka. He launched a European branch of a new National Liberation Council of Nigeria. Soyinka said that his movement's "underground resistance" component was "committed to the removal of the Abacha regime by all means necessary."

Two days before he laid out the blueprint, General Abacha met with Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi in the Nigerian capital of Abuja. The two leaders discussed the need for "true democratic processes that will stand the test of time." Referencing his upcoming speech, Abacha expressed doubt to his visitor about the likelihood of the political program being able to convince those he described as skeptics who are bent on carrying on a campaign of calumny against Nigeria, Lagos NTA Television Network reported Sept. 29.

### Angry British response

It was no big surprise, that the strongest condemnation of Abacha's speech came from the London *Times*, mouthpiece for the British oligarchy, which on Oct. 4 screamed for General Abacha's blood. The editorial, entitled, "Is Abacha Joking?" rejected Abacha's "timetable for a return to democracy." Mocking his carefully enunciated steps toward this democratic transition, the paper objected to "the striking irony," that all this was broadcast to the nation, "on the anniversary of its independence from Britain." Evidently still believing that the British run Nigeria, the paper assured readers that "Nigerians, inured by now to unyielding rule by men in uniform, will not be taken in by any of this: the trappings of elaborate detail do not make a charade respectable." The *Times* attacked Commonwealth Secretary-General Chief Emeka Anyaoku for his expressed "hope" that Abacha, by commuting the sentences of the coup plotters, was creating a "more human rights-conscious environment" in Nigeria. This is a "miscalculation," the *Times* barked, compounded by the chief's stated view that there was "no basis" as yet for excluding Nigeria from the upcoming British Commonwealth heads of government summit in New Zealand. Wrote the *Times*: "Chief Anyaoku is wrong. There is every reason to exclude General Abacha and his functionaries from November's summit. Moshood Abiola, the presumptive winner of the elections annulled by General Abacha's uniformed predecessor, languishes under lock and key still—and the General's three year 'disengagement' plan ignores contemptuously the fact of that election. Imprisoned, too, are the people of Nigeria: neither Britain, nor the Commonwealth, can ignore their situation."

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