

US-NATO Interventionism in Africa: Imperialists Host Conference on “Nigerian Security” in Paris

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Reports of mutinies within the army mount while tensions escalate

A conference on the security concerns of the most populous state in Africa was not held on the continent but in France, a former colonial power in the region.

Nigeria, which has recently been designated as having the largest economy in Africa, is the focus of the governments of the United States, Britain and France as it relates to the rising conflict in the northeast of the country where the government of President Goodluck Jonathan has been unsuccessfully battling the Boko Haram sect. Since 2009, thousands of people have been killed in the conflict between the military, the state security forces and Boko Haram.

With the abductions of nearly 300 high school girls in the village of Chibok in Borno State on April 14, the leaders of the western states have made the rescuing of the students a priority militarily. Offers by Boko Haram leaders to exchange the students for members of their organization held by the Nigerian government have been publicly rejected by the Jonathan administration.

Nigeria is the largest exporter of sweet crude oil into the U.S. The country also has substantial natural gas reserves.

Since 1956, the Nigerian oil industry has been dominated by firms from Britain, the U.S. and Europe. In recent years the People's Republic of China has signed agreements with Abuja to increase its investments in the Nigerian oil industry.

In addition to the participation of France, Britain and the U.S., four African states, Chad, Benin, Niger and Cameroon, also attended. Jonathan in a press conference in Paris on May 18 attempted to place the internal security crisis in Nigeria within the context of a broader “war against terrorism.”

Jonathan said that “Boko Haram is no longer a local terrorist group it is operating clearly as an Al-Qaeda operation. It is an Al-Qaeda of West Africa,” Jonathan said during a news conference in Paris. (Rt.com, May 19)

“We have shown our commitment for a regional approach. Without West African countries coming together we will not be able to crush these terrorists,” the president said.

Presidents Paul Biya of Cameroon and Idriss Deby of Chad went even further to proclaim that “we are declaring war on Boko Haram.” Biya noted that the problem of Boko Haram

was no longer just regional with the abduction of two Italian priests and a Canadian national during April.

President Francois Hollande of France said after the conference that fighting Boko Haram would be a priority for his government. He said that the conference would result in a “global and regional action plan.”

“Boko Haram is a major threat for all of western Africa and now central Africa, with proven links to AQIM (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and other terrorist organizations,” said Hollande. France already has troops deployed in the West African states of Mali and Niger as well as in the Central African Republic, all of which are former colonies of Paris.

Reports of Mutiny in the Nigerian Army

Since the targeting of Boko Haram by the Nigerian government, many politically informed people have alleged that there are elements in the northern regional elites both within the administration and military which provide covert support to the insurgent group. Many members of the officer corps of the Nigerian army are from the North which is heavily dominated by Muslims.

Jonathan is from the South of Nigeria and there is concern that the Boko Haram attacks in the northeast of the country are a reflection of the regional power struggle inside the country. The president’s lack of ability to command authority within the military may also be related to the deep divisions even within his own People’s Democratic Party (PDP) which is facing a tough re-election campaign in 2015.

Reports have surfaced in recent weeks of unrest within the military in the North of the country. Aspects of these stories indicate that lower-ranking soldiers are dissatisfied with the character of the operations being carried out against Boko Haram in three of the northeastern states that are now under a state of emergency.

In an article published by Star Africa on May 15, it says that “The Nigerian army has announced it is opening investigations into a mutiny in the main barracks in the city of Maiduguri involving soldiers of the seventh division. A group of soldiers in Maiduguri opened fire on a convoy carrying army commander Maj-Gen. Ahmed Mohammed as it entered the Maimalari barracks.”

This article goes on to report of the Maj-Gen. Mohammed that “He was unhurt, witnesses say. The defense headquarters confirmed on Thursday that it was questioning those involved over the circumstances surrounding Wednesday’s incident in the capital of Borno State in the northeast of the country. The army has sought to allay fears that Maiduguri remained tense in the wake of the shooting, claiming that the situation had been brought under control.”

Nigeria has a history of military intervention in political rule. In 1966 there were two military coups which led to a civil war between 1967-70.

During the years between the 1960s and the 1990s there were periodic military seizures of power. After the return to civilian rule in 1979, a military coup was carried out in late 1983 and again in mid-1985. A scheduled election in 1993 was halted while another military leader took power and held it for five years.

In 1999, former military leader Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo came out of retirement and successfully ran for president as a civilian candidate. Over the last fifteen years the country has been under civilian rule.

However, the advent of the Boko Haram conflict has created speculation that the military is playing a significant role in the destabilization of the Jonathan government in Abuja. Although Boko Haram has been linked with Al-Qaeda, this same so-called “terrorist” network has been supported by the U.S. in recent years in Libya and Syria.

Nigerian Political Economy and the Intensifying Class Struggle

Even though Nigeria has been deemed as an economic powerhouse for the continent, these designations are leading to a scenario where there will be increased military and intelligence interventions on the part of the imperialist states. The conference in Paris is representative of the burgeoning militarization of the continent led by the Pentagon and NATO forces.

There is still considerable poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria. The profits accrued from the exploitation of oil and natural gas has not been sufficiently reinvested to boost the social wages of the working class and poor of the country.

The political weaknesses of the Jonathan government are being utilized to further infiltrate the Nigerian state. However, these measures that are being taken by the present government in Abuja will not improve the security and well-being of the workers, farmers and youth of the country.

Strikes and other industrial actions have been occurring in Nigeria at an escalating pace over the last two years. The working class and youth who have been demanding better jobs, educational opportunities and environmental justice must take control of the political future of the country.

The security of young girls and women cannot be achieved by forming closer ties with the imperialist states but only through the organization and mobilization of the Nigerian masses. If the government of Nigeria cannot provide the necessary security for the youth of the country then it will be up to the majority working class and farmers to self-organize to put an end to imperialism and their collaborators inside the country.

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