

# British revive old blueprint for Africa

by Linda de Hoyos

“This time, let Zaire fall apart,” was the headline under which Conor Cruise O’Brien, a United Nations envoy to Zaire in the early 1960s, wrote a commentary on Zaire appearing in the Nov. 19 *Times* of London, the semi-official mouthpiece for the British Foreign Office. Applauding the “Tutsi rebel rout” of Rwandan Hutu refugees, O’Brien says that the issue now is what will happen to the “huge state of Zaire.” “Zaire’s condition now,” he says, “appears to be terminal, and international efforts to preserve its integrity will only increase the agonies of its peoples. It should be allowed to assume such shapes as the energies and aspirations of its various peoples may eventually assign to it. The energies of international diplomacy should be confined to holding the ring, and discouraging the internationalization of the tremendous internal conflict.”

As O’Brien is well aware, he is speaking way after the fact. The division of Zaire has been long-standing policy, and the conflict has already been internationalized by virtue of the fact that Zaire was invaded in mid-October 1996 by a military force combined of Ugandan, Rwandan, and Burundian troops, with the backing, through Uganda, of British intelligence.

O’Brien’s demand for “letting Zaire go” has accordingly been stated in more honest terms by the Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front, now ruling in Kigali, Rwanda. Rwandan Foreign Minister Anastase Gasana and Defense Minister Paul Kagame have called for a “Berlin II” to re-divide the territories of Africa, in imitation of the 1885 Berlin Conference of the colonial powers to divide the known African lands. The Rwandese have declared openly that the Tutsi “Banyamulenge” of eastern Zaire are welcome to return to Rwanda, but “they should bring their land with them.” Although Rwandan Foreign Minister Gasana says that a Berlin II should show “respect for the current borders of all states,” he equivocates, stating that the major purpose of such a conference must be to “examine the consequences of Berlin I on the cultural, social, and economic fronts, and so forth, to prevent there being stateless people at our borders, but it is not a matter of calling the borders into question.”

## Museveni is our man

But schemes for redividing the region were put forth far earlier by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, and were the motivation for the Ugandan Army invasion of Rwanda in 1990, and again in 1994. Among eastern Africans, it is understood that Museveni wants to carve out a “Hima empire”

from southern Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and eastern Zaire. This might appear as a pipe dream, but it appears to coincide with foreign interests—notably British. British Minister of Overseas Development Lynda Chalker has advertised her own close relationship to Museveni, underscored by frequent visits to Uganda. The idea of Museveni’s regional hegemony has also found favor in the State Department. A former ambassador of one of the Great Lakes countries recalls how he was called into the State Department East Africa desk in 1994—right before the April 6 downing of the plane carrying Rwandan President Juvenal Habyrimana—and asked who he thought the political leader of the region should be. His first answer, Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seko, was rejected. His second answer, Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, was also incorrect—suggesting to him by process of elimination that the State Department was promoting Museveni as their man.

The geopolitical idea is similar to the actual line of functioning of the erstwhile UN multilateral military force, that was supposed to deliver aid to the “routed” refugees of eastern Zaire in November and December. The peacekeeping force was not to go through Kinshasa or Zaire—despite the fact that there are 600,000 refugees still remaining in central, not eastern, Zaire—but through Entebbe, Uganda, and Kigali, Rwanda. The Anglo-American mining interests now scrambling for the gold and extraordinary mineral wealth of eastern Zaire, want to direct their operations through the same route. The reason is the looters’ paradise Museveni has turned Uganda into—endless tax holidays and full repatriation of profits of fully owned foreign ventures.

As O’Brien is fully aware, the British have long had their eye on eastern Zaire. In his own account, *To Katanga and Back—A UN Case History*, written in 1962, O’Brien, who was in the Irish foreign service and was a special UN envoy to the Congo, relates that the British firmly backed the cause of the secession of Katanga. O’Brien reports a newspaper account at the time: “President Tshombe [of Katanga] received the British Consul . . . who came to convey the sympathy of their government to the Katangese cause.” At that time, London wanted to seize control of Shaba province’s mineral wealth through Rhodesia. Although Leopold II of Belgium had taken sovereignty over Shaba at Berlin I, the Belgians had not occupied it. Britain’s roving imperialist Cecil Rhodes was on his way to establish dominion over the territory, when the Belgians woke up. A deal was struck whereby British capital would get a slice of the profit from Shaba’s exploitation. But even as late as 1961, there was renewed talk of attaching “Katanga” to Rhodesia.

With Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, out of the picture, British intelligence, for whom O’Brien speaks, is honing in on the region once again. This time through Museveni’s Uganda, the country where life expectancy for Africans has fallen the fastest in the last decade, but where profits for British financial interests have risen the fastest.