

Africa Report by Linda de Hoyos

British-French alliance on Africa

The days of the Anglo-French "inter-imperialist rivalry" are definitively gone.

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine met in London on July 27, and, according to Agence France Presse, decided to "strengthen their cooperation in Africa." Great Britain and France, a statement released by the two foreign ministers said, "have a common vision of promoting positive change and respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in Africa."

In March of this year, the two foreign ministers had travelled together to Ghana and the Ivory Coast, and then presided over a meeting of all French and British ambassadors posted to African countries, to solidify a cooperative agreement signed in December 1998 between British and French intelligence. In remarks to that unprecedented gathering, British Foreign Secretary Cook stated that Britain and France have "common objectives" in Africa.

Cook sounded the death knell on any illusions that an "inter-imperialistic rivalry" might be the cause of the cataclysms seen in east and west Africa over the last decade. "Let us be frank. Britain and France have not always been the closest of partners in Africa. In the last century we regarded each other as rivals. Often our actions were prompted by the habits of competition rather than the spirit of cooperation. But we are now on the threshold of a new century. In that era, nations will not be able to secure their national interests alone," he said.

The alliance was officially signed on Dec. 4, 1998, at the British-French summit in Saint-Malo, France. The final communiqué listed the following

points of implementation:

"Intensify information exchange on the situation in Africa, between capitals and local Embassies, in particular on countries where one or other partner is not represented;

"Explore the scope for co-location of French/British Embassies in Africa;

"Organize joint Anglo/French Africa Heads of Mission conferences at a sub-regional level;

"Prepare meetings between their respective ministers and joint visits by their Foreign Ministers to Africa.

"Furthermore, the United Kingdom and France will pursue joint cooperation to promote sub-regional integration, in particular between networks of anglophone and francophone countries.

"Finally, the United Kingdom and France will experiment in two African countries where one is not represented the possibility of acting on behalf of the other."

The official purpose of the Anglo-French cooperation pact is cited as working toward stability, development, and democracy in Africa. On the ground, however, one sure purpose is to guarantee that President Clinton's American Partnership with Africa is never realized—that is, that the United States through fostering true cooperation with African countries would gain a toehold in the continent heretofore seen as the preserve of European powers.

While the aim is to keep out American foreign investment and trade, the two have agreed on mutual investment in their own former colonies. French investors are moving strongly into South Africa. France is today Sudan's

third-largest trading partner, and, wanting no competition from the United States, is not interested in the improvement of U.S.-Sudanese diplomatic relations. Even more to the point for those who believed that the conflagration in the Great Lakes region was an Anglo-American operation against France, France has more investment in the British Commonwealth stronghold of Uganda, than it did in francophone Zaire at the point of the outbreak of the 1996 Congo war. French media consistently put out the line that the war against President Mobutu was an imperialist policy of the United States, citing as proof the early financial backing given to then-rebel Laurent Kabila by America Mineral Fields—without mentioning that AMF is a Canadian, that is, British Commonwealth company, not American!

British and French intelligence also cooperated in the war against Liberia run by Charles Taylor beginning in 1989, which destroyed the country that had been the sole commitment of the United States in Africa. Taylor launched his operations against Liberia from the francophone bastion of the Ivory Coast, and was propagandistically boosted by the British Broadcasting Corp. He also had help from certain U.S. circles; he first had to "escape" from a Boston jail before he could launch his war.

In fact, the surest way to keep the United States out of the African domain, is to encourage the U.S. State Department to take the lead in fomenting a policy of war toward Africa, which the British and French intelligence services contrive to do through complicit channels in the United States, which reach as high as U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Susan Rice, a protégé of the Royal Institute for International Affairs.