

The Challenge of Western Neutralism

Britain and the Build-up of a Nigerian Air Force

Introduction

On 22 January 1962, the British and Nigerian Governments announced that they had agreed to abrogate the Anglo-Nigerian Defense Agreement,¹ which had only been signed a year earlier upon Nigeria's independence.² This dramatic move was supposed to protect and strengthen the pro-British government of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa which, because of its pro-western stance in general, and the defense agreement with Britain in particular, had been faced with increasingly strong opposition in parliament and the streets, as well as criticism from other African states.³ The abrogation was welcomed by the domestic opposition, which was dominated by the Action Group, the Nigerian Youth Congress, and the National Union of Nigerian Students. It was not only considered "a blow against neo-colonialism," but the opposition also rejoiced that the major obstacle to "the declared policy of the Federal Government of 'non-alignment' in foreign matters" had been removed.⁴ According to the West German Ambassador in Lagos, Harald Count von Posadowsky-Wehner, it was instructive that the defense agreement was seen as a neo-colonial scheme that conflicted with the principle of non-alignment. In his view, "with this agreement immediately after independence," Britain had "demonstrated little psychological empathy."⁵

Only one-and-a-half years after this watershed in Anglo-Nigerian relations, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) became responsible for the build-up of the Nigerian Air Force. This was, as it will be argued here, rendered possible by the interrelated factors of Britain's diminishing influence on Nigerian defense in the wake of the abrogation of the defense agreement, and Nigeria's increasingly strong neutralism, which led Lagos to search for alternative sources of military assistance. In light of the inability of Commonwealth

¹ "Defence Pact Abrogated," *West African Pilot*, 22 January 1962, Vol. XXV, No. 7,402, p. 1, National Archives of Nigeria Ibadan, University of Ibadan (hereafter NANI), Newspapers.

² Defence Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the Federation of Nigeria, 5 January 1961, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom (hereafter TNA), DO 118/218.

³ "Defence Pact Scrapped," *Nigerian Morning Post*, Vol. 1, No. 96, 22 January 1962, p. 1, NANI, Newspapers. On this aspect of and the Anglo-Nigerian Defense Agreement more generally see: Marco Wyss, "A Post-Imperial Cold War Paradox: The Anglo-Nigerian Defence Agreement, 1958-1962," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 44, No. 6 (2016), pp. 976-1000.

⁴ "Defence Pact Reactions," *West African Pilot*, 23 January 1962, Vol. XXV, No. 7,403, p. 8, NANI, Newspapers.

⁵ Anglo-nigerianisches Verteidigungsabkommen, Posadowsky-Wehner (German Embassy Lagos), 23 January 1962, Politisches Archiv, Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin (hereafter PA AA), B14, 81.04, 737.

countries other than Britain to fully compensate for British military know-how and hardware, the western outlook of the Nigerian Government, as well as Germany's military reputation and distant colonial past, by mid-1963, the FRG had thus become responsible for Nigeria's third armed service. This was a setback for London, for whom it had been self-evident that if the Nigerians would opt for the establishment of an air force, they would turn to their 'mother country' and the Royal Air Force (RAF). This potentiality was clearly stated in the Anglo-Nigerian Defense Agreement and, once the latter had been rescinded, Whitehall counted on its military assistance to maintain its security role and interests in Nigeria. Moreover, despite the 'failure' of the formal defense relationship, the British and Nigerian Governments promised each other to remain faithful to the spirit and main clauses of the defense agreement by exchange of letters.⁶ This transpired in the press release on the abrogation, which stated that "Each Government will, however, endeavour to afford the other at all times such assistance and facilities in defence matters as are appropriate between partners in the Commonwealth."⁷ The opposition, notably the Action Group leader Obafemi Awolowo, was thus quick to exclaim that the "military alliance with Britain is not yet completely broken," and "its spirit remains and lives on."⁸

In this climate, and with non-alignment on the rise in the Third World,⁹ Lagos wanted to demonstrate that it was living up to its proclaimed foreign policy of non-alignment by reducing its defense ties with London. In Nigeria, however, the British were challenged by a variant of neutralism that was – at least at the governmental level – anti-communist and pro-western, and inasmuch marked by anti-colonial and African solidarity sentiments as by the Cold War struggle. This helps to explain why Lagos turned to another western country, which was neither a colonial nor a superpower, rather than the Soviet Union or another Eastern Bloc country, as an alternative for British military assistance. The possibility that newly independent African countries like Nigeria might turn to the Soviet Bloc for weapons and military training hung like a Damoclean sword over the head of British policymakers. In the wake of decolonization, the Cold War had also definitely arrived in Africa.¹⁰ Soviet leader

⁶ Balewa to Head (UK High Commission Lagos, hereafter Lagos); Head (Lagos) to Balewa, 20 January 1962, TNA, AIR 19/1023 and DO 195/105.

⁷ Abrogation of U.K. Defence Agreement, Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO), 22 January 1962, TNA, AIR 19/1023.

⁸ C. Chijiado, "AG Congress Begins at Jos: Awolowo Drops a Bomb: Says Defence Pact Not Totally Off," *Nigerian Morning Post*, Vol. 1, No. 107, 3 February 1962, p. 1, NANI, Newspapers.

⁹ Mark Atwood Lawrence, "The Rise and Fall of Nonalignment," in Robert J. McMahan, ed., *The Cold War in the Third World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 143-145.

¹⁰ For overviews of the Cold War in Africa, see: Jeffrey James Byrne, "Africa's Cold War," in McMahan, ed., *The Cold War in the Third World*, pp. 101-123; and Elizabeth Schmidt, "Africa," in Richard H. Immerman and

Nikita Khrushchev's calls for an offensive in the Third World were followed by deeds. With the first African countries gaining independence in the late 1950s, the Soviet Union tried to establish a foothold on the continent. Thereby, Moscow benefitted from Paris cutting off relations with Conakry after the Guineans had rejected General Charles de Gaulle's Franco-African Community; Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah's anti-colonial and at times anti-western Pan-Africanist agenda; and Congolese President Patrice Lumumba's disillusionment with the United Nations and the western powers, especially the United States. As a result, by the beginning of the 1960s, the Soviets had made important inroads into West Africa, notably in Guinea, Ghana, the Congo and, after the break-up of the Mali Federation (Senegal and the Sudanese Republic), Mali.¹¹ This inevitably led to a heavier involvement of the United States, which responded with extensive development aid, force – notably in the Congo – and even a charm offensive by President John F. Kennedy to forestall and roll back Soviet advances on the African continent.¹²

Yet the United States and the former colonial powers did not only face the Soviets in Africa. In addition to the increasing Chinese involvement following the Sino-Soviet split,¹³ the Soviet Union was from the beginning supported by some of its satellites, especially Czechoslovakia. Loyal to Moscow and in pursuit of economic opportunities, international legitimacy, and communist ideals, Prague became heavily involved in Africa. Drawing on their technical skills and historical experience of Africa, the Czechoslovaks became important partners for a number of African states, especially the so-called 'radical' ones. More specifically, starting in the late 1950s and thanks to its important armaments industry, Czechoslovakia turned into a significant source of military assistance for Guinea, Mali, and Ghana, notably also in the field of military aviation.¹⁴ Less suspicious than the Soviet Union, towards the mid-1960s, the small state of Czechoslovakia also began to establish military relationships with 'conservative' African states, notably with Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Morocco. Interestingly, this never was an option for the leaders of the First Nigerian

Petra Goedde, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 265-285.

¹¹ Sergey Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956-1964* (Washington, DC, and California, CA: Woodrow Wilson Center and Stanford University Press, 2010), *passim*. See also Robert Legvold, *Soviet Policy in West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

¹² See, for instance, Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Betting on the Africans: John F. Kennedy's Courting of African Nationalist Leaders* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), and Lise Namikas, *Battleground Africa: Cold War in the Congo, 1960-1965* (Washington, DC, and Stanford, CA: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2013).

¹³ Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), *passim*.

¹⁴ Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Czechoslovakia in Africa, 1945-1968* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 4, 19, 50-85, 101-104.

Republic, which had established diplomatic relations with Prague in 1961.¹⁵ Instead, and because of their western orientation, they preferred to search for alternative sources of military assistance within the Commonwealth and the Western Bloc.

The general tenor among historians and analysts of Nigerian foreign policy is that the Government of the First Republic, which lasted from independence in October 1960 to the military coup d'état in January 1966, was clearly pro-western and anti-Soviet, or even a neo-colonial stooge.¹⁶ Yet there have also been more nuanced or even dissonant voices, such as Gordon J. Idang and Olasupo A. Ojedokun, who have argued that there were indeed substantial neutralist and Pan-Africanist elements in Nigeria's early foreign policy, which grew stronger in reaction to domestic opposition and, especially, after the abrogation of the defense agreement.¹⁷ Douglas G. Anglin and Olatunde John Ojo have gone even a step further by arguing in their respective works that Nigeria was indeed independent and non-aligned, despite being economically dependent on the West. Among other things, this was, in their view, illustrated by Nigeria's leading position in the campaign against South Africa in both the Commonwealth and the United Nations, the breaking of diplomatic relations with Paris following the French nuclear tests in the Sahara, as well as the rejection of aid from the European Economic Community and, occasionally, from Britain.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 113-117.

¹⁶ Okon Akiba, *Nigerian Foreign Policy Towards Africa: Continuity and Change* (New York etc.: Peter Lang, 1998), *passim*; Basse E. Ate, *Decolonization and Dependence: The Development of Nigerian-U.S. Relations, 1960-1984* (Boulder, CO, and London: Westview Press, 1987), *passim*; Maxim Matusevich, *No Easy Row for a Russian Hoe: Ideology and Pragmatism in Nigerian-Soviet Relations, 1960-1991* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), pp. 57-91; Eghosa E. Osaghae, *Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 50-52; S.O. Osoba, "The Transition to Neo-Colonialism," in Toyin Falola, ed., *Britain and Nigeria: Exploitation or Development?* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1987), pp. 232-248; Robert B. Shepard, *Nigeria, Africa, and the United States: From Kennedy to Reagan* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), *passim*; Hakeem Ibikunle Tijani, *Britain, Leftist Nationalists, and the Transfer of Power in Nigeria, 1945-1965* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006); Kaye Whiteman, "The switchback and the fallback: Nigeria-Britain relations", in Adekeye Adebajo and Abdul Raufu Mustapha, eds., *Gulliver's Troubles: Nigeria's Foreign Policy after the Cold War* (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), pp. 256-258.

¹⁷ Gordon J. Idang, "The Politics of Nigerian Foreign Policy: The Ratification and Renunciation of the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Agreement," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1970), pp. 227-251; Gordon J. Idang, *Nigeria: Internal Politics and Foreign Policy 1960-1966* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1973), pp. 136-137; Olasupo A. Ojedokun, "Nigeria's Relations with the Commonwealth with Special Reference to Her Relations with the United Kingdom 1960-1966," Ph.D. Diss., University of London, 1968, *passim*; Olasupo A. Ojedokun, "The Anglo-Nigerian Entente and its Demise, 1960-1962," *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1971), pp. 210-233.

¹⁸ Douglas G. Anglin, "Nigeria: Political Non-alignment and Economic Alignment," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1964), pp. 247-263; Olatunde John Ojo, "Nigeria's Foreign Policy 1960-1966: Politics, Economics & the Struggle for African Leadership," Ph.D. Diss., University of Connecticut, 1973, pp. 263-279; Olatunde John Ojo, "Continuity and Change in Nigeria's Non-Aligned Foreign Policy," *Nigerian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 7, Nos. 1 and 2 (1981), pp. 31-40.

These conflicting perspectives on the foreign policy record of the Balewa regime are not mutually exclusive, but can be reconciled, notably through the concept of western neutralism or non-alignment. This becomes more evident in comparing neutralism to neutrality. The traditional western neutrals Sweden and Switzerland were both clearly anti-communist and western-oriented, and even secretly co-operated with leading NATO powers, first Britain, and then the United States. Nevertheless, their neutrality came to be accepted, and was at times even praised, by the major Cold War powers.¹⁹ In contrast to European neutrality, which – with the notable exception of Finland – was clearly western-biased, Third World neutralism or non-alignment has generally been considered eastern-oriented or anti-western. Therefore, it was at first seen as a threat by the United States, and as an opportunity by the Soviet Union.²⁰ In line with this view, the scholarly literature on neutralism and non-alignment has predominantly focused on the so-called ‘radical’ states, notably on Ghana in Africa, whereas Nigeria has been considered a ‘moderate’, and thus not necessarily a neutralist state.²¹ London was at first concerned, but then came to accept and see a positive potential in the phenomenon of neutralism in the Global Cold War.²² Yet Whitehall focused on the so-called ‘radical’ states, while the Nigerian Government was, despite its early neutralist rhetoric, considered pro-British and largely aligned with the west. The rise of Nigeria’s western, yet increasingly anti-British neutralism thus posed a challenge for Britain. Meanwhile, it provided the FRG with the opportunity to gain the friendship of the most populous independent African state. Thereby, the West Germans could strengthen their position vis-à-vis the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in their own parallel Cold War.²³

¹⁹ See, for instance, Jussi M. Hanhimäki, “Non-aligned to what? European neutrality and the Cold War,” in Sandra Bott et al., eds., *Neutrality and Neutralism in the Global Cold War: Between or Within the Blocs?* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 17-32; Mikael Nilsson and Marco Wyss, “The Armed Neutrality Paradox: Sweden and Switzerland in U.S. Cold War Armaments Policy,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (2016), pp. 335-363.

²⁰ Marco Wyss et al., “Introduction: A tightrope walk – neutrality and neutralism in the global Cold War,” in Bott et al., eds., *Neutrality and Neutralism, passim*.

²¹ See, for instance, Nataša Mišković, Harald Fischer-Tiné, and Nada Boškovska, eds., *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi – Bandung – Belgrade* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014); Robert B. Rakove, *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Nonaligned World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Jürgen Dinkel, *Die Bewegung Bündnisfreier Staaten: Genese, Organisation und Politik (1927-1992)* (Berlin etc.: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015); H.W. Brands, *The Specter of Neutralism: The United States and the Emergence of the Third World, 1947-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Roy Allison, *The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-Alignment in the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

²² Ann Lane, “Third World Neutralism and British Cold War Strategy, 1960-62,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2003), pp. 151-174.

²³ On the German-German Cold War see William Glenn Gray, *Germany’s Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Ulf Engel and Hans-Georg Schleicher, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten in Afrika: Zwischen Konkurrenz und Koexistenz 1949-1990* (Hamburg: Institut für Afrikakunde, 1998).

Consequently, this article allows us to study the hitherto largely neglected western variant of neutralism and non-alignment, and thereby shed light on Britain's postcolonial security role in West Africa. The British were challenged by an increasingly assertive and neutralist Nigerian leadership, and in contrast to traditional Cold War patterns, the competition came from within, and not outside the Western Bloc. This is well illustrated by the episode of the build-up of the Nigerian Air Force, which will be analyzed – on the basis of research in British, German, Nigerian, and American archives – in three parts: firstly, the 'paternal' British advisory role from late decolonization to the early days of independence; secondly, the Nigerian search for alternative sources of military assistance in Commonwealth and neutral countries in the run up to and in the months after the abrogation of the Anglo-Nigerian Defense Agreement; and, thirdly, the German breakthrough on the Nigerian defense market by gaining the responsibility for the creation of a Nigerian Air Force. Thereby, this article not only uncovers the forgotten western variant of neutralism and its similarities with European Cold War neutrality, but also shows the room for maneuver and opportunities that existed for newly independent African states and allies of the former colonial powers and the United States in the East-West struggle. Ultimately, and to a certain extent mirroring the recent work of Philip E. Muehlenbeck on Czechoslovakia and the Eastern Bloc in Africa,²⁴ this article illustrates the rivalry and cooperation that existed within the Western Bloc, the early African Cold War market for military assistance, and the complexity of the East-West struggle in Africa. There, the leaders of the newly independent states were under pressure from within and other African states, and the choice of the provider(s) of military assistance could determine their credibility and that of their policies.

A British Prerogative

In the run up to and the early days of independence, London saw the potential build-up of a Nigerian Air Force as its prerogative. The two existing armed services, the army and the navy, had not only been established by Britain, but they also remained heavily reliant on British officers and equipment.²⁵ Moreover, the Anglo-Nigerian Defense Agreement clearly stated that Britain would assist Nigeria with the establishment of an air force. This was part of the military assistance that London had been willing to offer in exchange to secure its strategic interests in Nigeria, first and foremost overflying and staging rights. Meanwhile, the

²⁴ Muehlenbeck, *Czechoslovakia*.

²⁵ On the origins and history of the Nigerian Armed Forces during the First Republic, see Jimi Peters, *The Nigerian Military and the State* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1997), chs. 3 and 4.

Nigerian Government seemed determined to retain close and intimate ties with Britain, and the references of Nigerian leaders to non-alignment and neutralism were dismissed as harmless by Whitehall.

In the late 1950s, the British shared the American fear that the Soviet Union could use and encourage neutralism in Africa as a means to wean away the newly independent countries from the West.²⁶ This fear did not, however, apply to Nigeria. The future Nigerian leaders and their parties were pro-Western, and in agreement to retain a close relationship with Britain after independence.²⁷ Moreover, their references to non-alignment were either lukewarm, or not translated into practice. The Action Group, which dominated the Western Region, advocated for instance in its 1958 foreign policy paper “a policy of close friendship towards Great Britain.” Meanwhile, the issue of non-alignment, and whether it was to “be preferred to the policy of actively associating with one of the blocs,” had yet to be examined.²⁸ In early 1959, policymakers in Whitehall acknowledged that external contacts after independence “might encourage a movement towards political neutralism.” But since “neutralist policies were not at present in favour in Nigeria,” and there was “a strong pro-Commonwealth and anti-Communist feeling” in Nigeria, they believed that this was unlikely.²⁹ In their view, it was only the leader of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), which predominantly represented the Eastern Region, who “perhaps in his hearts of hearts [...] advocates a purely ‘neutralist’ policy.”³⁰ Yet when Nnamdi Azikiwe came out in autumn 1959 with a statement in favor of neutralism, this was dismissed as an attempt by the NCNC to distinguish itself from the Action Group. The British Deputy Governor-General and the Nigerian Prime Minister even laughed together about it, and remembered Azikiwe’s strong support to the defense agreement during the initial discussions in 1958.³¹ Balewa, whose emerging administration happily received substantial foreign policy advice from the British – also on the issue of neutralism – was confident that there was “no

²⁶ “[Assessment, agreed with Mr Dulles, of communist interference in tropical Africa]: circular tel (no 67) from Mr Selwyn Lloyd (FO) to British representatives in Africa,” *British Documents on the End of Empire (BDEE)*, Series A, Vol. 4, Part II, p. 231.

²⁷ Akiba, *Nigerian Foreign Policy*, pp. 27-29.

²⁸ Fingland (Lagos) to Emanuel (Colonial Office, CO), 15 September 1958, TNA, DO 35/10474.

²⁹ “AF (59) 2, [British influence after independence]: Cabinet (Official) Africa Committee minutes,” 22 January 1959, *BDEE*, Series B, Vol. 7, Part II, pp. 586-587.

³⁰ “AF (59) 5, ‘Prospects for the African territories for which the Colonial Office is responsible’: CO memorandum for the Cabinet (official) Africa Committee,” 20 February 1959, *BDEE*, Series B, Vol. 7, Part II, p. 593.

³¹ Grey (Lagos) to Eastwood (CO), 16 September 1959, TNA, CO/554/2059.

real risk of Nigeria becoming neutralist” if the West provided development aid.³² The Prime Minister’s own party, the Northern People’s Congress (NPC), which was Britain’s favorite political partner in Nigeria, “rule[d] out completely any idea of adopting a policy of neutrality in international affairs.” In its foreign policy statement of October 1959, the NPC instead emphasized that “Nigeria must maintain the closest relationship with the United Kingdom.”³³

On the eve of independence, however, the tone began to change. In his first official foreign policy statement to the Nigerian House of Representatives on 20 August 1960, Balewa observed that it was “wrong for the Federal Government to associate itself as a matter of routine with any of the power blocs.”³⁴ The British were neither surprised, nor alarmed by this apparent shift towards non-alignment. Not only had they been able to read and moderately intervene on a draft of the speech, but they were also aware that Balewa was catering to the neutralist wing of his and the NPC’s coalition partner, the NCNC. The statement was thus seen as a “holding operation,” and not “as presaging any drastic reorientation of Nigeria’s long standing friendship and regard for the West.”³⁵ The ambiguity of Nigeria’s officially declared non-alignment also transpired in Balewa’s speech to the United Nations General Assembly in October, immediately after independence. While he reiterated Nigeria’s non-alignment, he also declared “we shall not forget our old friends.”³⁶ This was certainly reassuring for officials in Whitehall, because while they had come to see the potential benefits of “genuine” neutralism in Africa, Nigeria was supposed to be built up as a pro-Western country.³⁷

The provision of military assistance was not only seen as a quid pro quo for securing British strategic interests, but also a means to maintain influence over the Nigerian Armed Forces and thereby help retain Nigeria close to Britain and the West. Although the British saw other priorities for the Nigerian Armed Forces, they thus responded favorably to the desire of Nigerian politicians to have an air force. In early 1958, when the Nigerian House of

³² “[Nigerian foreign policy]: letter (reply from C G Eastwood to A W Snelling outlining the CO response to M E Allen’s memorandum on Nigerian foreign policy. Enclosure: CO proposed additions to memorandum,” 21 April 1959; “[Nigerian foreign policy]: letter from S J G Fingland to Sir G Laithwaite on Soviet representation in Nigeria,” 1 July 1959, *BDEE*, Series B, Vol. 7, Part II, pp. 602-603; p. 607.

³³ Eastwood to Ross (both CO), 1 October 1959, TNA, CO 554/2059.

³⁴ Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, “A Policy for Foreign Affairs,” 20 August 1960, in *Idem, Nigeria Speaks: Speeches Made between 1957 and 1964*, Selected and introduced by Sam Epelle (Ikeja: Longmans of Nigeria, 1964), p. 57.

³⁵ “[Foreign policy]: letter from S J G Fingland to D W S Hunt on a speck by Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa on Nigeria’s foreign policy alignment,” 24 August 1960, *BDEE*, Series B, Vol. 7, Part II, pp. 730-731.

³⁶ Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, “Sovereign Nigeria and the World,” 8 October 1960, in *Idem, Nigeria Speaks*, pp. 62-63.

³⁷ “‘Policy towards Africa south of the Sahara’: officials’ interdepartmental paper (FO, CO, CRO),” 1 August 1960, *BDEE*, Series A, Vol. 4, Part I, pp. 189, 191.

Representatives discussed the forthcoming takeover of the military forces from the British, there were not only calls for continued British military assistance, but one representative also called for the establishment of an air force. In his view, which was shared by other representatives, an air force was “among those things necessary for an independent country.”³⁸ Consequently, when the British tried to win over the Nigerian Prime Minister and Regional Premiers for a defense agreement on the margin of the constitutional talks in London in October 1958, they also promised to help with the build-up of an air force.³⁹

The potential air force assistance and Britain’s strategic interests were thus closely linked from the beginning. When the Air Secretary inspected the RAF’s staging facilities at Kano in April 1959, the Nigerian Minister of Communications and Aviation, Samuel Akintola, voiced a strong interest in British air force assistance. George Ward was forthcoming and promised information on British assistance to the Indian and Pakistani air forces. It was in Britain’s “wider interest,” he observed to the Colonial Secretary, “to encourage them to look to us as it should help in many ways not least in the continuance of our staging and overflying rights.”⁴⁰ Alan Lennox-Boyd fully agreed, also because he did not want the Nigerians to look elsewhere.⁴¹ The Air Secretary thus followed up on his promise to the Nigerian Aviation Minister and, in addition, offered to make officers available to give more detailed advice.⁴² But to the Air Ministry’s great disappointment, the Nigerian leaders had not yet made up their mind on the question of an air force and, apparently also under pressure from the opposition, whistled back their Aviation Minister. The Colonial Office thus advised the Air Ministry not to press the issue.⁴³ The only tangible result of this episode was the provision of two RAF surplus aircraft for the setting up of a Nigerian Government Flying Training School.⁴⁴

The Air Ministry was not, however, willing to give up and lose out on an opportunity to gain long-term influence over a Nigerian armed service. In January 1960, in reaction to an enquiry by the Prime Minister what additional military assistance Britain could provide to

³⁸ “Governor-General’s Speech,” 19 February 1958, in Federation of Nigeria, *House of Representatives, Debates, Official Report, Vol. I, Session 1958-59, Comprised Period from 18th February-5th March, 1958* (Lagos: Federal Government Printer, 1958), pp. 38, 76, NANI, Official Publications, NL/H2.

³⁹ Defence Agreement, Proposed Undertakings by H.M.G., CO to Nigerian Premiers, 24 October 1958, TNA, CO 968/668.

⁴⁰ Ward (Air Ministry, AM) to Lennox-Boyd (CO), 14 April 1959, TNA, AIR 19/954.

⁴¹ Lennox-Boyd (CO) to Ward (AM), 7 May 1959, TNA, AIR 19/954.

⁴² Ward (AM) to Akintola, 4 June 1959, TNA, AIR 19/954.

⁴³ Cooper to Hudleston (both AM), 15 and 21 September 1959; Hudleston to Cooper (both AM), 16 and 22 September 1959, TNA, AIR 19/954.

⁴⁴ Coleman (Nigerian Ministry of Communications and Aviation) to Broadbent (AM), 29 September 1959; Extract from A.C.S.C.(59) 19th Mtg., 12 October 1959, TNA, AIR 19/954.

allay Nigerian security fears and sweeten the pill of the defense agreement,⁴⁵ the Vice-Chief of the Air Staff asked the Air Secretary to press the case for air force assistance to Nigeria with the Defense Minister. “It could be,” argued Edward Hudleston, “a grave embarrassment to us if Nigeria were to turn to some other country for ‘air advice’ c.f. Ghana.”⁴⁶ But for the time being, the air force assistance planning did not go beyond the Air Ministry. Moreover, Ghana was an unlikely alternative source of assistance. The Nigerian desire to have an air force was also motivated by jealousy and fear in reaction to the build-up of a Ghanaian air force with Soviet aircraft and RAF training.⁴⁷

Immediately after Nigeria’s independence in October 1960, Lagos’ interest in an air force became more pronounced and official. In addition, the Air Ministry gained the support of the Commonwealth Relations Office, which was now responsible for Britain’s relations with Nigeria and willing to ask the High Commission in Lagos “to cast a discreet fly and report.”⁴⁸ The signs from the Nigerian capital were encouraging. On 19 November 1960, in presenting and defending the Anglo-Nigerian Defense Agreement to the House of Representatives, the Nigerian Defense Minister referred to the article (II) and paragraph in which Britain promised to help with the build-up of an air force.⁴⁹ Muhammadu Ribadu then not only emphasized the need to start building up an air force as soon as possible, but also argued that “those Members who saw the fine display of flying during the Independence Celebrations will think it not wrong of us to consider the Royal Air Force of the United Kingdom will provide excellent advanced air training for our airmen.”⁵⁰ The Commonwealth Relations Office thus believed that time was ripe to make a discreet approach to the Nigerians on the issue of air force assistance.⁵¹ The UK High Commissioner in Lagos, Antony Head, even expected an approach by the Nigerians themselves.⁵² In January 1961, the British Military Adviser in Lagos was thus instructed to start discussions on air force assistance with

⁴⁵ Wyss, “A Post-Imperial Cold War Paradox.”

⁴⁶ Nigeria Defence Forces, Hudleston to Ward (both AM), 28 January 1960, TNA, AIR 19/954.

⁴⁷ Chief Festus, Hubback to Rickett (both Treasury), 31 October 1960, TNA, DO 177/58.

⁴⁸ Price (CRO) to Salthouse (AM), 10 November 1960; Nigerian Air Force, Salthouse (AM) to Price (CRO), 21 October 1960, TNA, AIR 2/15642; Bromhead (Lagos) to Price (CRO), 12 November 1960, TNA, DO 177/58.

⁴⁹ Defence Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the Federation of Nigeria, 5 January 1961, TNA, DO 118/218.

⁵⁰ “Defence Agreement,” in Federation of Nigeria, *Parliamentary Debates, First Parliament, First Session, 1960-1961, House of Representatives, Saturday 19th November* (Lagos: The Federal Government Printer, 1960), p. 5, TNA, DO 177/20.

⁵¹ Nigerian Air Force, Salthouse (AM), 6 December 1960, TNA, AIR 2/15642.

⁵² Head (Lagos) to Alport (CRO), 24 December 1960, TNA, DEFE 7/1486.

the Nigerian Government. But he was “to avoid the impression that we are trying to foist onto the Nigerians something they may not want.”⁵³

The problem was that while the Nigerians knew that they wanted an air force, they did not know what kind of air force this should be.⁵⁴ During a visit to London in early March 1961, the Nigerian Defense Minister thus expressed his hope to Commonwealth Secretary Duncan Sandys to get an air force adviser from Britain or another Commonwealth country.⁵⁵ The Air Ministry was not only willing to provide an adviser, but even recommended the sending of an RAF team to Nigeria to advise the Nigerian Government on the form of the Nigerian air force. The Nigerians were to be encouraged to look to the RAF for assistance to “sustain the Nigerian Defence Agreement,” and avoid that “neutral or possibly unfriendly countries [...] move in by default.”⁵⁶ The British Defense Minister followed the Air Ministry’s advice during his meeting with the Nigerian Defense Minister in mid-March. When Ribadu pointed out that what was needed was a preliminary study by experts, Harold Watkinson seized the opportunity to recommend a small RAF mission. This was well received by the Nigerian Defense Minister, who promised to get back about this upon his return home.⁵⁷ Ribadu did not, however, follow up on his promise. By mid-May, the Air Secretary, Julian Amery, thus asked Head in Lagos “for putting a word in the right quarter” in case he “saw a suitable opportunity.”⁵⁸ This was an urgent matter for the Air Ministry, which saw a “tendency for new independent countries to look for assistant elsewhere.”⁵⁹

There had, for now, been no sign that Nigeria might turn elsewhere – other than Ribadu mentioning Commonwealth countries as an alternative to Britain for air force advice. In light of the defense agreement, the seemingly pro-British Nigerian leadership, and the substantial practical defense links between Britain and Nigeria, it was self-evident for British military planners that the RAF would provide the required air force assistance. But Lagos’ non-committal attitude made them increasingly nervous, and wary that they would soon face competition on the Nigerian defense market. And soon they did, because the Nigerian attitude towards Britain, the world and, as a corollary, neutralism, was changing.

⁵³ Price (CRO) to Bromhead (Lagos), 18 January 1960, TNA, DO 177/58.

⁵⁴ Nigerian Air Arm, Bromhead (Lagos) to Price (CRO), 7 March 1961, TNA, DO 177/58.

⁵⁵ Record of Conversation between the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations and Mr. Ribadu, Nigerian Minister of Defence, 7 March 1961, TNA, DO 177/58.

⁵⁶ Nigerian Air Arm, Salthouse to Amery (both AM), 10 March 1961, TNA, AIR 19/954.

⁵⁷ Record of a Meeting between the Rt. Hon Harold Watkinson, M.P., United Kingdom Minister of Defence, and Mr. Ribadu, Nigerian Minister of Defence, in London on Tuesday 14th March, 1961, 15 March 1961, TNA, DEFE 7/1307.

⁵⁸ Amery (AM) to Head (Lagos), 18 May 1961, TNA, DO 177/58.

⁵⁹ Air Adviser, Nigeria, Tomalin to D. Air Plans (both AM), 26 May 1961, TNA, 19/954.

A Family Affair

In the wake of independence, the Nigerian Government was still pro-British and western-oriented. Simultaneously, however, it was free from Britain's political tutelage and no longer had to please Whitehall in order to ensure a smooth transition to independence. Moreover, it was both under domestic and external pressure. At the domestic level, the Action Group, which had changed political course following its electoral defeat, as well as the Nigerian Youth Movement, the National Union of Nigerian Students, and trade union elements, called on the government – often through large-scale and at times violent protests – to live up to its proclaimed foreign policy of non-alignment. Externally, this was echoed by the Casablanca Group, notably Ghana, which accused Nigeria of not being truly independent. This was all the more problematic, because Lagos wished to play a leading role in African and, even, world affairs. As a result, Nigeria began to move slowly towards a more nationalistic and neutralist position.⁶⁰ In addition to a less hostile attitude towards the Eastern bloc and the abrogation of the Anglo-Nigerian Defense Pact, this also led to a search for complementary, if not alternative sources of military assistance, but at first not necessarily beyond the 'family' of Commonwealth nations.

The changing mood in Nigeria made itself already felt one month after independence during the parliamentary debate on the defense agreement. In reaction to accusations from the opposition, the Defense Minister emphasized that it did neither infringe on Nigeria's independence, nor preclude the government from seeking military assistance elsewhere than Britain. Meanwhile, the Finance Minister added that the draft agreement had been improved "to reflect the sovereignty of Nigeria and her adoption of a foreign policy of non-alignment."⁶¹ But despite these justifications and the passing of the agreement, opposition to it continued unabated. This did not escape the attention of British policymakers. In June 1961, the High Commission in Lagos thus advised not to press the Nigerian Government with the long overdue registration of the defense agreement at the United Nations ahead of the Non-Aligned Conference in Belgrade, because this could "re-open the controversy in this Country on the Agreement."⁶² Only once Nigeria had received a last minute invitation to

⁶⁰ Idang, *Nigeria*, pp. 75, 79-95, 136; Akiba, *Nigerian Foreign Policy*, p. 39; Olakunle A. Lawal, "Britain, Decolonisation and the Construction of Nigerian Foreign Policy in the Era of Transfers of Power, 1958-1960," *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2013), pp. 40, 43-44.

⁶¹ "Defence Agreement," in Federation of Nigeria, *Parliamentary Debates, First Parliament, First Session, 1960-1961, House of Representatives, Saturday 19th November* (Lagos: The Federal Government Printer, 1960), pp. 4-7, TNA, DO 177/20.

⁶² Bromhead (Lagos) to Davidson (CRO), 23 June 1961, TNA, DO 177/20.

Belgrade in July, the Commonwealth Relations Office wished to go ahead with the registration.⁶³ But eventually, Balewa decided not to attend the conference. The official explanation was that, on the one hand, Nigeria did not believe in blocs and did thus not want to join a third bloc in the making and, on the other, an invitation had only reached Lagos late because Nigeria's attendance was disputed among core non-aligned nations.⁶⁴ Back in the Commonwealth Relations Office, however, it was assumed that the defense agreement "was probably the cause of Nigeria's absence."⁶⁵ In reaction to the lobbying of the British High Commission in Lagos, by autumn Whitehall had come to realize that the defense agreement was a thorn in Anglo-Nigerian relations, notably because it undermined Nigeria's non-aligned credentials.⁶⁶ Consequently, and despite opposition from the Air Ministry, London and Lagos agreed to abrogate the agreement in early 1962.⁶⁷ But despite this dramatic move, the British High Commissioner foresaw that the Balewa regime would remain under pressure to live up to its declared non-alignment policy.⁶⁸ Against this background, Lagos did not want to be seen to solely rely on Britain for military assistance.

Already in late spring 1961, it came to Whitehall's attention that the Nigerian Government was putting its feelers out. The Air Ministry was informed by the British aircraft manufacturer Armstrong Siddeley that De Havilland Canada was in discussions for the sale of aircraft with Nigeria.⁶⁹ Moreover, Ribadu had still not followed up on his promise to formally request an RAF study mission. But the British High Commissioner reassured the Air Secretary that he did not think that "the reason for this dilatory procedure is in any way sinister, i.e. I don't think he is contemplating getting somebody else to do the job." Head believed instead that the Nigerian Government had realized how costly the creation of an air force would be, and that the new service risked being dominated by Igbos, who already had a lot of officers in the army.⁷⁰ Simultaneously, however, the UK High Commission informed the Commonwealth Relations Office that while the Nigerians would probably turn to Britain for their air force, for political reasons they "may insist that another Commonwealth country,

⁶³ Chadwick (CRO) to Hunt (Lagos), 27 July 1961, TNA, DO 177/20.

⁶⁴ "PM Boycotts Neutralists," *Daily Express*, No. 279, 29 July 1961, p. 1; "Why Nigeria Did Not Go to Belgrade: PM," *Daily Express*, No. 318, 13 September 1961, p. 1, NANI, Newspapers.

⁶⁵ Record of a meeting held in Room 112 in the Commonwealth Relations Office at 4 p.m. on 15th September, 1961, Nigerian Defence Agreement, CRO, TNA, DO 177/22.

⁶⁶ Chadwick (CRO) to Gough (Ministry of Defence, MoD), 11 September 1961; Hunt (Lagos) to Chadwick (CRO), 12 September 1961, TNA, AIR 2/15525.

⁶⁷ Wyss, "A Post-Imperial Cold War Paradox."

⁶⁸ Federation of Nigeria: Communist Influence, Head (Lagos) to Sandys (CRO), 25 January 1962, DO 165/27.

⁶⁹ Nigerian Air Force, Huddleston to Haynes (both AM), 31 May 1961, TNA, AIR 19/954.

⁷⁰ Head (Lagos) to Amery (AM), 2 June 1961, TNA, AIR 19/954.

non-white, be brought into the scheme.”⁷¹ Indeed, in August, the Nigerian Defense Minister visited India, apparently to enquire about the possibility of Indian training for Nigerian air force personnel.⁷²

Yet the whole issue of a Nigerian air force remained blurred, and was followed up at different levels and into different directions. During the Nigerian Prime Minister’s visit to Washington in July 1961, his Foreign Minister enquired about potential US air force assistance. But this approach remained without consequences. Not only did the Americans still see military assistance to Nigeria as a British prerogative, but, as they informed London, they were opposed to “prestige assistance of this kind.”⁷³ Meanwhile, also in July, the Nigerian Finance Minister insisted in a meeting with the Commonwealth Secretary on the need for a Nigerian air force in light of Ghana’s Soviet-sponsored military build-up and potential aggression. Instead of encouraging this view, Duncan Sandys argued that an outright attack by Ghana was unlikely, and if there was a danger it was of a subversive nature. In order to meet this threat, he recommended an expansion of the army, rather than the build-up of a costly air force.⁷⁴ These ‘sideshowes’ reflected the fact while Nigerian ministers all seemed to want an air force, they did still not have a commonly agreed plan on how to pursue this aim. Moreover, as Sandys’ case illustrates, not all policymakers in Whitehall shared the Air Ministry’s enthusiasm for building up an air force in Nigeria.

But the advocates of British air force assistance, notably the Minister of Defense and the Air Secretary, were aware that in order to succeed they had to win over the increasingly influential Nigerian Defense Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, who was to receive special attention during his visits to London.⁷⁵ In a meeting of 12 September 1961, during which Harold Watkinson almost begged Ribadu to accept British military assistance for, among other things, the establishment of a military academy and an ordnance factory, the issue of a Nigerian air force figured prominently on the agenda. Ribadu stated that while he would welcome assistance from Britain, he “hoped to get some assistance elsewhere in the Commonwealth, perhaps from India and Canada.” In reaction to this, Watkinson did not only reiterate his recommendation for a British advisory mission, but also emphasized that he “was anxious to be as helpful as was possible,” notably in the provision of training for Nigerian

⁷¹ United Kingdom Visit of Nigerian Defence Minister, Lagos to CRO, 10 June 1961, TNA, AIR 19/954.

⁷² Visit of the Nigerian Defence Minister to India, Scott (AM) to Fearnley (Lagos), 25 August 1961, TNA, DEFE 7/1486.

⁷³ Note of a Meeting in Mr. Chadwick’s Room at 11 a.m. on Friday, 4th August, Sir Abubakar’s Visit to the U.S.A., CRO, 8 August 1961, TNA, DEFE 7/1468.

⁷⁴ Note for Record, CRO, 21 July 1961, TNA, DO 177/20.

⁷⁵ Visit of Mr. Ribadu, J. Roberts to S.6 (both AM), 11 September 1961, TNA, AIR 19/1023.

pilots in Britain.⁷⁶ The next day, the Nigerian Defense Minister met with the Air Secretary. While much of the discussion turned around the role of Nigeria's future air force – mostly transport – and the adequate aircraft, Ribadu eventually agreed to the Air Ministry's repeated recommendation for an advisory team being sent to Nigeria.⁷⁷

But immediately thereafter, the Nigerian Defense Minister flew to Canada to ask for air force assistance. Apparently, he was successful. On 28 September, Ribadu publicly announced that the Canadian Government had promised to train Nigerian officer cadets in Canada and to send a military team to Nigeria to assess its training requirements, and that he would recommend the purchase of Canadian De Havilland aircraft, in particular the Caribou, to his government.⁷⁸ Moreover, the Air Ministry was informed that the Nigerian Minister did not anymore wish to see British aircraft or to visit an RAF training establishment after his trip to Canada, as it had been agreed earlier. The Air Ministry thus asked Harold Watkinson, who was supposed to meet with his Nigerian counterpart, to enquire whether Ribadu still wanted an RAF team to visit his country.⁷⁹ In their meeting of 4 October, the Nigerian Defense Minister said that he hoped to have a decision on this matter by the middle of the month.⁸⁰ This time, Ribadu stood by his word, and on 14 October, he made a formal request for an RAF team to visit Nigeria – alongside another one for a military academy.⁸¹

The British were aware that in addition to Canada and India, Ribadu had also visited Ethiopia, Sweden, and Switzerland to discuss, depending on the country's military and defense-industrial base, potential support for an air force, a military academy, an ordnance factory, as well as training and equipment more generally.⁸² The only immediately visible result had been the Canadian willingness to help Nigeria not only with an air force, but also a military academy. In light of their long-standing and close defense relationship, the British began to discuss with the Canadians the coordination of their potential military assistance in

⁷⁶ Record of a Meeting between the Rt. Hon. Harold Watkinson M.P. United Kingdom Minister of Defence, and Al Haji Muhammadu Ribadu Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Federation of Nigeria in London on Tuesday, 12th September, 1961, MoD, 14 September 1961, TNA, DEFE 7/1307.

⁷⁷ Note of a Meeting between the Secretary of State for Air and the Nigerian Minister of Defence to Discuss the Formation of a Nigerian Air Force, Roberts (AM), 19 September 1961, TNA, DEFE 7/1307.

⁷⁸ Visit of Nigerian Minister of Defence, Ottawa to CRO, 29 September 1961, TNA, DO 177/58.

⁷⁹ Visit of Nigerian Minister of Defence, AM to Watkinson (MoD), 3 October 1961, TNA, AIR 19/1023.

⁸⁰ Record of a Meeting between the Rt. Hon. Harold Watkinson, M.P., United Kingdom Minister of Defence, and Al Haji Muhammadu Ribadu, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of the Federation of Nigerian in London on Wednesday, 4th October, 1961, MoD, 5 October 1961, TNA, DEFE 7/1486.

⁸¹ Ribadu to Head (Lagos), 14 October 1961, TNA, DO 177/58.

⁸² Nigeria Fortnightly Summary (For the period 29th September – 12th October 1961), Lagos to CRO, 17 October 1961, TNA, DEFE 7/1307.

these fields to Nigeria, both at ministerial and officials' levels.⁸³ This coordination and, especially, the contribution from other sources than Britain was actually seen as necessary – not only from a Nigerian, but also a British perspective. On its return in November 1961, the RAF advisory mission to Nigeria on the one hand reported that the Nigerians still preferred air force assistance from two to three Commonwealth countries, with Ribadu mentioning Canada and India in particular. On the other, it concluded that the build-up of a Nigerian air force was such a difficult and extensive task that Britain should not undertake it single-handedly. Britain should have the primary and overall responsibility, but complementary assistance from within the Commonwealth was almost considered essential.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the Nigerian Defense Minister, who had read the reports, seemed very satisfied,⁸⁵ and the British High Commissioner in Lagos qualified the RAF team's visit to Nigeria as a success and beneficial to Anglo-Nigerian relations.⁸⁶ In following up on this, the British Defense Minister thus optimistically offered his Nigerian counterpart "any further help you want."⁸⁷ Indeed, on 22 December 1961, the Nigerian Government approached London for an offer to build-up a Nigerian Air Force. But simultaneously, and as the British were informed, it made similar requests to Canada, India and, as a new contender, the neutral, yet western-oriented Sweden.⁸⁸

The problem was that while Britain was 'downgraded' to one among four potential contenders for air force assistance to Nigeria, the matter reached an unprecedented degree of urgency in light of the increasingly inevitable abrogation of the Anglo-Nigerian Defense Agreement. In early January 1962, the Commonwealth Secretary expressed to the Chief of the Defence Staff the hope that air force assistance to Nigeria would help securing Britain's overflying and staging needs until a new arrangement could be found.⁸⁹ Consequently, Sandys had also now joined the proponents of a British air force mission to Nigeria. Meanwhile, the pressure from within the Air Ministry did not only step up a degree, but was also reinforced by British aircraft manufacturers who feared losing out against Canadian,

⁸³ Watkinson (MoD) to Harkness (Minister of National Defence, Canada), 25 October 1961; Harkness to Watkinson, 1 November 1961, TNA, DEFE 7/1486; Note of a Discussion in Mr. V.C. Martin's Room in the C.R.O. at 3.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 25th October, Defence Assistance for Nigeria, 26 October 1961, TNA, DO 177/58.

⁸⁴ Nigerian Air Force, Haynes (AM) to Price (CRO), 17 November 1961, TNA 2/17892; Report of British Air Ministry Team on the Creation and Development of the Nigerian Air Force, 25 November 1961, TNA, AIR 2/15642.

⁸⁵ Ribadu to Watkinson (MoD), 18 November 1961, TNA, DEFE 7/1307.

⁸⁶ Head (Lagos) to Amery (AM), 22 November 1961; Head (Lagos) to Watkinson, TNA, AIR 19/1023.

⁸⁷ Watkinson (MoD) to Ribadu, 5 December 1961, TNA, DEFE 7/1486.

⁸⁸ Obande (Nigerian Ministry of Defence, NMoD) to Head (Lagos), 22 December 1961, TNA, AIR 2/15642.

⁸⁹ C.O.S. (62) 1st Meeting, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday, 2nd January, 1962 at 2.45 p.m., Warne, TNA, DEFE 4/142.

Swedish, and even German competitors.⁹⁰ On 18 January 1962, the Chiefs of Staff thus concluded that if “we were quick to respond to their [the Nigerians’] requests it was probable that they would drop their enquiries elsewhere.” Consequently, following the Air Ministry’s suggestion, a Head of the RAF mission had to “be selected as quickly as possible and sent out to Nigeria to show our interest.”⁹¹

Meanwhile in Lagos, the UK High Commissioner was trying “to knock some sense” into the Nigerian Defense Minister.⁹² Initially, it seemed as if Head was successful, because he brought Ribadu to ask London to send out an Air Commodore as designated head of a future mission to start planning, ahead of a general agreement on assistance.⁹³ The problem was, however, that the Nigerian Defense Minister was not willing to make a choice among the candidates that the Air Ministry presented him for this post. In February 1962, he cancelled his trip to Britain, during which he was not only supposed to choose a British general to replace the outgoing General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Nigerian Army, but also the Head of the air force mission and someone for a similar position for the military academy. According to the Nigerian Prime Minister, because of Ribadu’s conflict with the current GOC, he would not move ahead on other issues before having replaced him.⁹⁴ But matters turned out to be even more disappointing for the British. When the Minister of State for the Army came instead of Ribadu to London to interview the new potential GOC, he did not even want to meet the potential candidate to head the air force mission. Apparently, he was not allowed by his Defense Minister to deal with this issue before the conclusion of an air force assistance agreement.⁹⁵ It was clear that despite all British insistence, Ribadu was not willing to move ahead before he had heard back from Canada, India, and Sweden.⁹⁶

In light of the Nigerian Defense Minister’s insistence to diversify his country’s sources of military assistance, in March 1962, the Joint Intelligence Committee concluded that it was “probable that British military influence may decline over the next years.”⁹⁷ But at the same time, it seemed that Britain’s ‘competitors’ were either unable, or unwilling to help

⁹⁰ Holder to Lees (both AM), 10 January 1962; Nigerian Air Force, Holder to Lees (both AM), 10 January 1962, TNA, AIR 19/1023; Military Assistance to Nigeria COS 67/16/1/62, Holder (AM), 17 January 1962, TNA, AIR 2/15642.

⁹¹ Chiefs of Staff Committee, Extract from Minutes of COS(62)6th Meeting held on Thursday, 18th January, 1962, 19 January 1962, TNA, AIR 19/1023.

⁹² Head (Lagos) to Price (CRO), 6 January 1962, TNA, AIR 2/15642.

⁹³ Forward to Amery (both AM), 2 February 1962, TNA, AIR 19/1023.

⁹⁴ Head (Lagos) to Price (CRO), 6 February 1962, TNA, AIR 2/15642.

⁹⁵ Price (CRO) to Lagos, 13 February 1962, TNA, AIR 2/15642.

⁹⁶ R.A.F. Assistance to Nigeria, Forward to Amery (both AM), 20 February 1962, TNA, AIR 19/1023.

⁹⁷ Outlook for Nigeria, Report by the Joint Intelligence Committee, Stephenson, 6 March 1962, TNA, CAB 163/54.

the Nigerians building up their air force. First the Canadians, with whom the British were in close consultation, declined to assist the Nigerians in forming an air force. In light of Britain's willingness to play this role, the Canadians did not seem to see the need to intervene at this level.⁹⁸ Then, in briefing the Chiefs of Staff in mid-April, the UK High Commissioner in Lagos observed that "Sweden and India were not expected to help." Head thus concluded that Britain would eventually be asked to build up the Nigerian Air Force.⁹⁹ Back in Lagos, Head tried to push the Nigerian Defense Minister to finally take up the British air force assistance offer by emphasizing "that neither [the] Indians, Swedes nor Canadians would do it."¹⁰⁰

In the Swedish case, the British High Commissioner was certainly right, because Stockholm was not willing to provide any governmental air force assistance. Only the Swedish aircraft manufacturer SAAB was eager to help the Nigerians on a commercial basis in order to sell aircraft.¹⁰¹ Yet the British seemed to have underestimated the Indians and, probably more importantly, the appeal it had for the Nigerians to get military assistance from a leading non-aligned state instead from Britain. In early summer 1962, an Indian Air Force team was invited to Nigeria to advise the Federal Government on air force matters.¹⁰² This was not yet a mission to build up a Nigerian Air Force, but a worried Commonwealth Secretary nevertheless enquired with Lagos whether this implied a "lack of confidence in us," or if it came "from [a] desire to demonstrate their 'non-alignment'."¹⁰³ Head reassured Sandys that the Nigerian Defense Minister favored India because he wanted to reduce Nigeria's dependence on Britain, considered the Indians cheaper, and had been impressed during his visit to India by their training system.¹⁰⁴ Inside the Air Ministry, however, the Nigerian preference for India was also seen as a "demonstration of non-alignment."¹⁰⁵ But the Nigerians had not yet taken a definitive decision on who was to build up their air force. The British, who were aware of the weaknesses of the Indian Air Force, thus put on a brave face.

⁹⁸ British/Canadian Military Assistance to Nigeria, Boxer (UK Service Liaison Staff) to Minister of Defence (Attn: Secretary C.O.S. Committee), 26 February 1962; Nigerian Air Force, Lagos to CRO, 14 April 1962, TNA, AIR 2/17892; C.O.S. (62) 160, Chiefs of Staff Committee, British/Canadian Military Assistance to Nigeria, Copy of a letter (Reference: BDLS/23/CS/21/OTT) dated 29th March, 1962, from the Chairman, British Defence Liaison Staff, Ottawa, to the Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee, TNA, AIR 19/1023.

⁹⁹ C.O.S.(62) 28th Meeting, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday, 17th April, 1962 at 2.45 p.m., TNA, DEFE 4/144.

¹⁰⁰ Head (Lagos) to Price (CRO), 2 May 1962, TNA, AIR 2/17892.

¹⁰¹ Hebblethwaite (Stockholm) to Ewart-Biggs (Foreign Office, FO), 1 February 1962, TNA, DEFE 7/1307.

¹⁰² Nigerian Air Force, Delhi to CRO, 30 June 1962, TNA, AIR 2/17892.

¹⁰³ Sandys (CRO) to Lagos, 6 July 1962, TNA, AIR 2/17892.

¹⁰⁴ Head (Lagos) to Sandys (CRO), 9 July 1962, TNA, AIR 2/17892.

¹⁰⁵ Nigerian Air Force, Holder to Lees (both AM), 16 July 1962, TNA, AIR 19/1023.

They even reassured the Americans, and simultaneously probably themselves, that the Nigerians “would eventually turn back” to them.¹⁰⁶

This certainly was an all too optimistic assessment after what had happened since Nigerian independence. Admittedly, part of the explanation why the Nigerians hesitated to take up the British air force assistance offer was down to disagreements within the Federal Government and the potential cost of an air force. Yet by summer 1962, it had become not only obvious that the Nigerian Defense Minister was the man in charge, but also that he was desperately seeking an alternative to British military assistance, preferably from Commonwealth states.

The Rival Within

The British expected that the Nigerians would eventually turn to them for the establishment of their air force, because two ‘competitors’ – Canada and Sweden – had already dropped out, and it was expected that India would not be able to deliver. Moreover, they were confident that Nigeria would, despite its proclaimed foreign policy of non-alignment, not cross the Iron Curtain for military assistance. Meanwhile, London did not expect to be challenged from the major powers within the Western bloc, especially since Washington was still sticking to its mantra that military assistance to Nigeria was a British prerogative. But the British had failed to factor the West Germans, who had no such scruples, into the equation. The FRG stood in competition with the GDR in Africa, and it had already made inroads into Nigeria. With its military know how and colonialism in Africa long gone by, it thus became a serious alternative provider for air force assistance in the eyes of the Nigerian Government.

The Germans were not new to Africa, but they had been largely absent from the continent since the loss of their colonies after the First World War. During the late 19th century ‘Scramble for Africa’, in 1884, the German Empire took official possession first of German South West Africa, then of Togo and Cameroon and, finally, of German East Africa. Berlin’s imperial ‘adventure’ in Africa was, however, rather short-lived. Following the opening of hostilities in Europe, the First World War also rapidly spread to Africa, where the Germans lost Togo in 1914, South West Africa in 1915, Cameroon in 1916 and, finally, their colony in East Africa in 1917 – even though the commander of the German colonial forces there only surrendered after the armistice in Europe in November 1918. Eventually, article 119 of the Versailles Treaty confirmed that Germany had to cede its colonies to the victorious

¹⁰⁶ Military Assistance in Africa, Wolfe (Department of State), 13 July 1962, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park MA (hereafter NARA), RG 59, Entry 3107, Box 1.

powers. Thereafter, there was no official German attempt to regain the lost colonies, and even in the Third Reich Sub-Saharan Africa remained on the margins of colonial and imperial thinking and planning.¹⁰⁷

Yet with the arrival of the Cold War in Africa in the wake of decolonization in the late 1950s, not one, but two Germanies returned to the African continent. After having been built up by their superpower patrons and fully integrated into the Western and the Eastern Bloc respectively, the FRG and the GDR disputed the international legitimacy to represent Germany. Therefore, in what turned into a German-German Cold War, Bonn and East Berlin fought for the diplomatic recognition by other countries. By the mid-1950s, the western and economically successful West Germany had a clear lead, and the GDR was only recognized by a handful of fellow Communist countries. The emergence of numerous new states in Africa thus represented for East Berlin an opportunity to gain diplomatic recognition, and thereby increase its international legitimacy and play its part in the escalating East-West struggle for the Third World. Consequently, with the first countries gaining independence in Sub-Saharan Africa, the East Germans rushed to the new African capitals to establish friendly and, preferably, diplomatic relations. In order to forestall such an outcome and in line with the Hallstein Doctrine,¹⁰⁸ which implied that the FRG would not maintain or establish diplomatic relations with a state recognizing the GDR, Bonn dispatched its own diplomats to Africa. An early and significant episode of this competition came in the late 1950s with newly independent Guinea, where its leader, Sékou Touré, eventually opted for the wealthier West Germany, even though he would have preferred to avoid such a stark choice. This outcome became the norm in numerous similar scenarios. Nevertheless, Bonn had to fight a defensive battle in Africa, which did not only require the establishment of an extensive diplomatic network, but also the disbursement of important sums of development aid.¹⁰⁹

Meanwhile, in addition to fighting the German-German Cold War and, by extension, supporting the Western position in postcolonial Africa, Bonn also saw economic opportunities on the African continent, both for raw materials and exports. In order to woo African nationalist leaders in pursuing these political and commercial aims, the FRG

¹⁰⁷ Winfried Speitkamp, *Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005), pp. 155-156, 172; Dirk van Laak, *Über alles in der Welt: Deutscher Imperialismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005), pp. 66-107.

¹⁰⁸ Named after senior German diplomat Walter Hallstein.

¹⁰⁹ Gray, *Germany's Cold War, passim*. On the German-German rivalry in Africa, see also Engel and Schleicher, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten*; and Andreas Wilkens, "L'Allemagne et l'Afrique, 1949-1963," in Marie-Thérèse Bitsch and Gérard Bossuat, eds., *L'Europe unie et l'Afrique: de l'idée d'Eurafrrique à la convention de Lomé I: actes du Colloque international de Paris, 1 et 2 avril 2004*, Groupe de liaison des historiens auprès des Communautés, Vol. 10 (Bruxelles: Bruylant, 2005), pp. 298-299.

presented itself not only as a champion of self-determination, but, in light of its distant colonial past in Africa, also as untarnished by colonialism.¹¹⁰ Against the background of the rise of the Third World, it would have been unwise and counterproductive for Bonn to try to capitalize on historical colonial links. This seemed especially true for the provision of military assistance to African states, where the absence of a recent colonial past proved to be a major asset for the FRG. In the early 1960s, the Federal Ministry of Defense developed an arms exports and military assistance program, which had been rendered possible by the creation of large weapons surpluses through rearmament, and the increased demand through African decolonization. Moreover, some newly independent African countries approached the FRG for military assistance. Bonn thus created a special fund for military assistance and, in June 1961, the Federal Defense Council authorized the Federal Ministry of Defense to decide – in consultation with the Foreign Office – independently on individual military assistance requests.¹¹¹ Thereby, it was inevitable that the West Germans would tread on the toes of the former colonial powers in Africa, especially with people like the overzealous Brigadier General Herbert Becker on the ground.¹¹² But in Africa, Bonn showed more respect for the traditional sphere of influence of its European integration partner France,¹¹³ than it did for Britain's.

Nigeria was of particular interest in Bonn's eyes, not least because of its sheer population size.¹¹⁴ By autumn 1962, the West Germans had already developed friendly and increasingly close relations with Nigeria. The FRG was – after the United States and Britain – the third most important national donor of foreign aid,¹¹⁵ increasingly active at a cultural level, and Nigeria's second most important trading partner.¹¹⁶ Moreover, it already had a foot in the Nigerian defense market. As early as October 1961, the Nigerian Defense Minister approached the German armaments manufacturer Rheinmetall for rifles and, potentially, help with the establishment of an ordnance factory in Nigeria.¹¹⁷ The British, who had offered the

¹¹⁰ Ulf Engel, *Die Afrikapolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949-1999: Rollen und Identitäten* (Hamburg: LIT, 2000), pp. 8, 39-45; van Laak, *Über alles in der Welt*, pp. 156-157, 164.

¹¹¹ "384. Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirektors Allardt," 8 October 1962, *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland [hereafter AAPBD] 1962, Bd. III*, p. 1656.

¹¹² William Glenn Gray, "Waffen aus Deutschland? Bundestag, Rüstungshilfe und Waffenexport 1961 bis 1975," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (2016), pp. 330-331.

¹¹³ Engel, *Die Afrikapolitik*, pp. 230-241.

¹¹⁴ "451. Deutsch-amerikanische Regierungsgespräche in Washington," 15 November 1962, *AAPBD 1962, Bd. III*, p. 1943.

¹¹⁵ Idang, *Nigeria*, p. 140.

¹¹⁶ Deutsch-nigerianische Beziehungen, Posadowsky-Wehner (FRG Embassy, Lagos) to Auswärtiges Amt (AA), 2 October 1962, PA AA, B34, 307, 90.22, 360.

¹¹⁷ Nigeria, Rheinmetall to Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs, 6 October, PA AA, B57, IIIA4-81.SR 90.22, 78.

Nigerian Government help with setting up such a factory, soon had to learn that the contract for this project was indeed going to Germany. Seemingly furious, the British High Commissioner in Lagos regarded this as “a frightful waste of money as it will mean jettisoning the [British] F.N. rifle and turning over to a German weapon.”¹¹⁸ In January 1962, at the same time as he tried “to knock some sense” into Ribadu in relation to the air force, he also tried to convince him to abandon the plan for a German ordnance factory. Eventually, his arguments that this was a waste of money that would disrupt the present equipment and training with British weapons were in vain.¹¹⁹ Instead, the ordnance factory was only the beginning of a growing West German-Nigerian defense relationship. In spring 1962, the Nigerian Defense Minister expressed his interest to visit the FRG. Brigadier General Becker argued that such a visit was in Germany’s interest, because Nigeria was the most populated African state, in which other countries were strongly interested, and it could be politically and economically beneficial. The German Defense Minister, Franz Josef Strauß, thus had the intention to invite Ribadu. Even though military assistance was not to figure officially on the agenda, the aim was to give the Nigerian Defense Minister a good impression of the *Bundeswehr* (German Armed Forces) and the German armaments industry.¹²⁰

But while the West Germans grew closer to the Nigerians, the British focused on India. In November 1962, Whitehall learned that the Nigerian Defense Minister had eventually entrusted the Indians with the establishment of an air force, and that Delhi intended to take on this role. Nevertheless, Ribadu also asked London to assist by offering training “for advanced flying on more complicated planes and also the training of ground staff.” British policymakers were not, however, keen to play such a complementary and even junior role. The High Commissioner in Lagos advised against sending an RAF team to Lagos to assist the Indians, and to only consider the training of Nigerian pilots in the United Kingdom.¹²¹ This was echoed in the Air Ministry, which did not want an RAF team “to be placed in a subordinate capacity to an Indian team, as we would then either have to endorse their ideas or cause trouble by rocking their boat.” It was also feared that this could encourage the Nigerians to “play one off against the other in an endeavour to get cheaper aid.” Meanwhile, it was assumed that the Nigerians would not be ready for advanced flying training any time soon and that, if necessary, the Indians could provide it. Finally, it was

¹¹⁸ Head (Lagos) to Watkinson (MoD), 22 November 1961, TNA, DEFE 7/1307.

¹¹⁹ Head (Lagos) to Price (CRO), 6 January 1962, TNA, WO 32/19658.

¹²⁰ Aufzeichnung, Besuch des nigerianischen Verteidigungsministers in der Bundesrepublik, AA, 5 April 1962, PA AA, B34, 307, 90.22, 360.

¹²¹ Assistance to Nigerian Air Force, Bird to ACAS (both AM), 7 November 1962, TNA, AIR 2/17892.

advised not to inject any British offers, because this could antagonize the Indians, and make “them more reluctant to seek our help later on should they subsequently get out of their depth.”¹²² Consequently, the British had come to accept that they had lost out on the air force assistance mission to Nigeria against a fellow Commonwealth, yet non-aligned country. Confronted with further setbacks in Lagos, the British High Commissioner was “sorry and disappointed that our negotiations and ability to influence the Nigerians in the field of Defence have been so unsuccessful.”¹²³

Yet there was a turn of events on the horizon that was even more disappointing for the British. Following the Sino-Indian War of late 1962, Delhi did not seem anymore interested or capable to assist the build-up of a Nigerian Air Force. But instead of London, the Nigerian Government turned to Bonn. According to the West German Embassy in Lagos, this was because German military and technological know-how was still held in high esteem in Nigeria. Even though it was considered in the West’s interest to do “everything” to maintain the still substantial Anglo-Nigerian defense relations, the embassy argued that the Nigerian efforts to diversify their sources of military assistance should be supported.¹²⁴ The very same embassy questioned, however, whether Nigeria was aware of the potential political consequences, because West Germany was “in the line of fire of eastern propaganda,” and whether another western state was thus not better suited.¹²⁵ It certainly was sensible to raise these questions, especially since Nigeria wanted to reduce its dependence on British military assistance to burnish its non-aligned credentials. Nevertheless, in early March 1963, the West German Government tested the waters with the British by informing them that they were thinking of sending military experts to Lagos to assess the Nigerian air force needs.¹²⁶

This was not well received in Whitehall. Within the Commonwealth Relations Office, it was questioned whether the pro-British Nigerian Prime Minister was aware of his Defense Minister’s approach to the Germans.¹²⁷ But London’s attitude softened once it was realized that the German Foreign Office was trying to gain British approval, and had itself been taken off guard by the Federal Ministry of Defense’s rapid and independent sanctioning of the Nigerian request. British officials appreciated that the German Foreign Office seemed “at last to have woken up to the need to put the Federal Government house in order in regard to arms

¹²² Assistance to Nigerian Air Force, Holder to Burns (both AM), 9 November 1962, TNA, AIR 2/17892.

¹²³ Head (Lagos) to Price (CRO), 19 November 1962, TNA, AIR 2/17892.

¹²⁴ Nigerianische Streitkräfte, Hampe (FRG Embassy Lagos) to AA, 28 December 1962, PA AA, B57, IIIA4-81.SR 90.22, 61.

¹²⁵ Hampe (FRG Embassy Lagos) to AA, 28 December 1962, PA AA, B57, IIIA4-81.SR 90.22, 61.

¹²⁶ Brash (Bonn) to West and Central African Department (FO), 5 March 1963, TNA, DEFE 7/1307.

¹²⁷ Nigerian Air Force, CRO to Lagos, 18 March 1963, TNA, AIR 19/1023.

supplies to cooperate with other Western powers concerned.” They were not amused by the increasingly extensive German military activities in Nigeria and Africa more generally. Yet they understood that the FRG was also receptive to Nigerian requests because it did not want to drive Lagos “to less desirable sources.” Consequently, there was a willingness in London to find an arrangement with the Germans in Nigeria.¹²⁸ Moreover, the British High Commission in Lagos reported that Prime Minister Balewa was aware of the approach to the Germans, and in light of Ribadu’s determination to reduce Nigeria’s dependence on British military assistance, a diplomatic intervention would only be counterproductive. Ultimately, the Germans were considered “much preferable to some other possible choices.”¹²⁹ Nevertheless, the British remained hopeful that sooner or later Balewa, with the help of the influential Northern Premier, “might put Ribadu in his place.” In light of potential tensions within the Nigerian Government, Head also surmised that “the German authorities probably regretted being bounced into” this air force mission.¹³⁰

But Bonn was willing to take on this adventure, and on 19 April 1963, it signed an agreement with Lagos through which it committed the FRG to help with the build-up of the Nigerian Air Force. This included advice on all matters relevant for the training and equipment of the air force, the sending of an advisory group, the training of Nigerian personnel with the German Air Force, and support with the establishment of units and training establishments in Nigeria.¹³¹ The German Foreign Office was aware that the British were all but pleased with their country’s military activities in Nigeria and West Africa more generally, and insisted with the Federal Defense Ministry to bring its people there, notably Brigadier General Becker, under control.¹³² Meanwhile, the Americans were not only skeptical about the German air force mission to Nigeria, but also wanted the FRG to coordinate its military assistance to Africa with its Allies.¹³³ Bonn was willing to do so, for as long as the information-sharing was based on reciprocity and did not endanger its commercial

¹²⁸ Military Aid to Nigeria, CRO to Lagos, 18 March 1963, TNA, AIR 19/1023; Etdorf (FRG Embassy London) to AA, 18 March 1963, PA AA, B34, IB 3, 90.22, 434.

¹²⁹ Lagos to CRO, 19 March 1963, TNA, AIR 19/1023.

¹³⁰ Record of Meeting in C.R.O. 3.45 p.m. Thursday 18th April, CRO, 18 April 1963, TNA, DO 195/97.

¹³¹ Luftwaffenaufstellungsbefehl Nr. 223 für die Luftwaffenberatergruppe Nigeria, Hoffmann (Federal Ministry of Defence) to Air Force Advisory Group Nigeria, 17 May 1963, PA AA, B57, IIIA4-81.SR 90.22, 61.

¹³² Vermerk, Bemerkungen des 1. Sekretärs der britischen Botschaft, Mr. Brash, über die Tätigkeit von Brigadegeneral Becker, Steltzer (AA) to D I, 19 April 1963, PA AA, B 130 – VS – Registraturen, 301-81.04/0, 914B.

¹³³ “166. Deutsch-amerikanische Koordinierungsbesprechungen,” Stübel (AA), 13 May 1963, *AAPBD 1963, Bd. I.*, pp. 528-539; “203. Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirektors Jansen,” 21 June 1963, *AAPBD 1963, Bd. II.*, pp. 651-653.

interests.¹³⁴ As a result, the FRG shared the details of the German-Nigerian air force assistance agreement with Britain, and refused to bow to Nigerian requests to avoid contact with the British in Nigeria.¹³⁵

Through the agreement with Nigeria, the FRG committed itself to the training of 1,100 Nigerian Air Force personnel, and the supply of 56 aircraft.¹³⁶ A military assistance program of such a scale could not long be kept secret and, as soon as the first German air force advisers were sighted on their arrival in Lagos in June 1963, it became public knowledge. The news about what was nothing less than the young *Bundeswehr*'s most significant foreign venture so far, immediately led to an outcry in Germany and further questions on Bonn's military activities in the Third World. In order to calm domestic opinion, the Federal German Government emphasized the relatively modest cost of these programs, the coordination with allies, and that representatives of the *Bundestag* (Federal Diet) had been informed. Moreover, the Federal Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, justified it as a contribution to the political stability of newly independent states.¹³⁷ Meanwhile, the Nigerian Defense Minister was fearful that the military cooperation with the FRG could provoke a backlash in Nigeria. The press associated with the NCNC, the junior partner in the NPC-dominated Federal Government, had already criticized the air force assistance on the basis of German NATO membership and militarism.¹³⁸ Interestingly, however, domestic criticism remained relatively modest. Instead, even the NCNC's mouthpiece, the *West African Pilot*, went so far as to justify German involvement by drawing a distinction between the FRG and Nazi Germany, and emphasizing the absence of German colonial aspirations.¹³⁹ With a sense of relief, the German Embassy in Lagos observed that the general tenor of Nigerian newspapers was that "why should the Germans not do in Nigeria what the English, Canadians, Israelis and even Eastern Bloc representatives are allowed to do in other African states?"¹⁴⁰

This was a forceful demonstration that the Nigerian foreign policy of non-alignment, which led to the search for alternative sources of military assistance, was not anti-western, but anti-colonial. The air force assistance agreement with Germany came with more economic and political strings attached than what the British would have offered. Not only

¹³⁴ Koordinierung der Ausrüstungshilfe mit unseren Alliierten, Schwartz (Department II 7) to Department III A4 (both AA), 29 May 1963, PA AA, B 130 – VS – Registraturen, 301-81.04/0, 914B.

¹³⁵ Lagos to CRO, 21 June 1963, TNA, AIR 20/9219.

¹³⁶ Ojedokun, *Nigeria's Relations*, p. 124.

¹³⁷ Gray, "Waffen aus Deutschland?" p. 332.

¹³⁸ Hampe (FRG Embassy Lagos) to AA, 12 June 1963, PA AA, B34, IB 3, 90.22, 434.

¹³⁹ Bob G. Oteh, "Pink Elephants," *West African Pilot*, 24 June 1963, PA AA, B57, IIIA4-81.SR 90.22, 61.

¹⁴⁰ Nigerianische Reaktion auf das deutsch-nigerianische Militärabkommen, Posadowsky-Wehner (Lagos) to AA, 3 July 1963, PA AA, B34, IB 3, 90.22, 434.

was Lagos to carry the brunt of the cost, but it also implied that Nigeria sided with the FRG in the German-German Cold War. London, by contrast, would have offered some of the assistance for free, and even contributed to the training costs of Nigerian Air Force personnel in the United Kingdom.¹⁴¹ The crux of the issue was to reduce the dependency on British military assistance. Consequently, whereas in 1965 the British Army GOC was replaced by a Nigerian, the head of the German air force mission was to become the Commander of the Nigerian Air Force. Despite certain frictions, the Germans even stayed in Nigeria after the coups of 1966, and Bonn only withdrew its men in reaction to the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War.¹⁴² The void was filled by the Czechoslovaks, who came in the wake of the Soviets, to whom the Federal Nigerian Government had turned after the American and initial British refusal to supply weapons to wage war on Biafra.¹⁴³ The Nigerians thus only opted for Soviet Bloc military assistance when being cut off from Western supplies. Moreover, in reaction to this self-inflicted Communist incursion into the Nigerian defense market, London reversed its policy and delivered again weapons in support of the Federal cause.¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

On the day of Nigerian independence, the future for Anglo-Nigerian defense relations looked bright. The two countries were about to enter into a defense agreement, which guaranteed Britain's strategic interests and promised Nigeria substantial military assistance. Moreover, the Nigerian Armed Forces had not only been organized, trained, and equipped by Britain, but they were still led by British officers. London was thus confident that it would remain in charge of Nigerian defense. Yet already less than three years later, it was clear that something had gone wrong. The defense agreement had been rescinded, Lagos had turned to other countries than Britain for its equipment, notably to the FRG for an ordnance factory, and the responsibility for the build-up of Nigeria's third armed service was in West German hands.

When the Nigerians first came up with the idea of an air force, it was self-evident for Whitehall that this would be a mission for the RAF, especially since the potentiality of air force assistance was clearly written into the defense agreement. But in reaction to rising anti-British, anti-colonial, African solidarity, and neutralist sentiments in Nigeria, as well as mounting criticism from other African, notably the 'radical' states, the Federal Government

¹⁴¹ Ojedokun, *Nigeria's Relations*, pp. 125-126.

¹⁴² Peters, *The Nigerian Military*, p. 82.

¹⁴³ Muehlenbeck, *Czechoslovakia*, p. 120.

¹⁴⁴ John J. Stremlau, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), *passim*.

embarked on a search for alternative sources of military assistance to demonstrate that it was living up to its proclaimed foreign policy of non-alignment. This search was, for the air force, at first confined to the Commonwealth and neutral Sweden. The British did not mind a supporting role by a Commonwealth country, especially not from Canada. Ottawa did not see, however, a need to get involved, for as long as London was willing to take care of the development of a Nigerian air force. Lagos thus opted for India, which as a leading non-aligned country had a particular appeal for a government that wanted to burnish its non-aligned credentials. But when it became clear that the Nigerian Defense Minister expected the British to play a junior role in an Indian-led air force development project, officials in Whitehall were not amused. Anyway, they still expected that one day the Nigerians would crawl back to them.

But when the Indians withdrew their air force assistance offer in the wake of the Sino-Indian War, instead of returning to the ‘mother country’, the Nigerians turned to the FRG. The West Germans not only already had a foot in the Nigerian defense market through the ordnance factory, but they were also important donors of development aid. Moreover, while the reputation of German military skills and know-how was still very much alive, the German colonial past was long behind. Consequently, it would have been counterproductive for Bonn, which was in search of African friends in the German-German Cold War and economic opportunities, to remind the Nigerians of their colonial past, especially in neighboring Cameroon.

The German-Nigerian air force assistance agreement was a serious setback for the British, especially since they had hoped to use military assistance as a means to secure their strategic interests in Nigeria in the wake of the abrogation of the defense agreement in early 1962. The challenge to Britain’s influence on Nigerian defense came not, however, from outside, but within the Western Bloc. The Nigerian leadership was clearly anti-communist and pro-western. Moreover, it wanted to maintain access to western know-how and, especially, money. Despite its proclaimed foreign policy of non-alignment, it was thus not willing to cross the Iron Curtain for military assistance. This did not mean, however, that Nigerian non-alignment was pure window dressing. In Nigeria, the British were challenged by a western variant of non-alignment, which was more driven by anti-colonialism than the Cold War. First and foremost, by diversifying the sources of military assistance, the Nigerians wanted to reduce their military dependency on, and alignment to Britain. Nigeria’s non-alignment was thus not a mere chimera, but comparable to the western neutrality of countries like Sweden and Switzerland.

The Nigerian Government was aware of the importance the choice of the source of military assistance represented for its credibility and that of its policies. In the early African Cold War market for military assistance, military equipment and training normally came, with a few notable exceptions, only from one bloc, and was the result of or led to a tacit alignment. But whereas the obvious source of military assistance for a western-oriented country tended to be the former colonial power or later increasingly the United States, other western suppliers, such as the FRG, provided an anti-colonial and seemingly less bipolar alternative. This was not too dissimilar to the Eastern Bloc, where Czechoslovakia emerged as the alternative to the Soviet Union. Consequently, in the early 1960s, the defense market added an additional layer of complexity to the Cold War in Africa. While this gave newly independent African states more than just an either-or choice, it also allowed non-colonial and lesser Cold War powers to play a role and gain influence on the African continent. In the case of Britain, this weakened its postcolonial security role in Nigeria. London first tried to meet the challenge with increasingly generous offers of military assistance, and then came to accept the German role in the development of Nigeria's third armed service. This was still considered the much preferable option to Lagos turning eastwards. Whitehall was aware that for reasons of prestige and in reaction to the military build-up of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, the Nigerians were adamant to strengthen their defenses. The question was thus not whether, but from where they would seek and, ultimately, receive military assistance.