

Immoral French facts

The French, of late, have been raising a storm of criticism over America's policy in Central America. Hardly a day passes without Paris newspapers or TV commentators blasting U.S. efforts to curb the advance of Marxist forces in this strategic area. Now the French government, a vocal critic of American actions, has just warned the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua to prepare for a U.S. invasion.

All of this moral outrage is perhaps uplifting to the French spirit but when we examine the way Paris behaves in its own colonial backyard, West Africa, the mantle of righteousness doesn't seem to fit the French so well.

Cleverly recognizing the irreversible tide of nationalism, the French granted "independence" to their former West African colonies during 1960-1961. This independence was something of an illusion: Pro-French black leaders were put in office but almost all important functions of these new regimes were still controlled by the thousands of French political, economic and military advisers who remained in West Africa.

In fact, most of the important governmental decisions in these small nations were and still are made in Paris and implemented by the French administrative infrastructure in West Africa. The currencies of these countries are tied to the French franc as part of the West African Monetary Union, an arrangement that gives Paris enormous economic and political leverage over her former colonies.

France also made sure that their client regimes would remain secure from subversion and the ambitions of junior officers. A special "Intervention Force" was based in West Africa, designed to react rapidly and decisively against all threats to the French protectorates. Today, 3,600 mobile troops based in the Central African Republic, Gabon, Senegal and the Ivory Coast ensure France's continued domination over the nations and important mineral resources of the area.

In contrast to their highly moral public image, France has not hesitated to use its troops to quickly crush any threats to its client regimes. In 1964, for example, a group of officers tried to overthrow the government of uranium rich Gabon: The next day

ERIC MARGOLIS



planeloads of foreign legionnaires roared into the capital, shooting at everything that moved, and quickly extinguishing the coup and the plotters.

French intervention forces have also gone into action in Mauritania, in Zaire's Shaba Province against Cuban directed rebels, in Chad during 1978-1979, and again in the Central African Republic where the French finally threw out the odious regime of Emperor Bokassa I. The French have also been covertly involved in a number of coups in Togo, Upper Volta and Niger.

These rapid French interventions have gone almost unnoticed by the rest of the world, no doubt a function of their geographical remoteness. All of the professional Third Worlders, who routinely lambaste the U.S. for "imperialism," hardly say a word about the more subtle and certainly more efficient French.

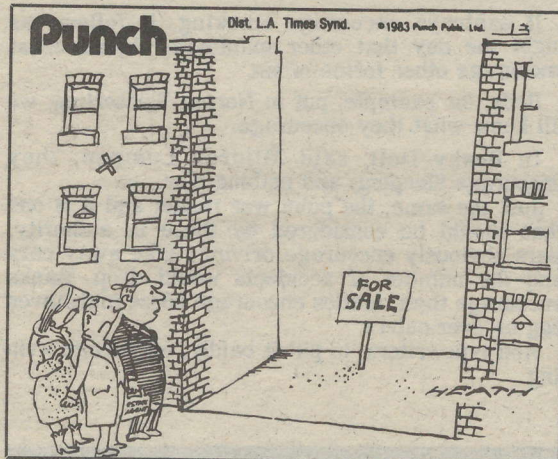
If the U.S. had maintained small bodies of elite strike troops in Central America, troops that could have moved quickly to snuff out communist insurgencies during their vulnerable infancy, Marxist rebels would not be a mortal threat today. But unlike the French, who speak softly but act ruthlessly when necessary, the U.S. has spoken loudly while moving with extreme timidity and uncertainty, hobbled by opposition from the left wing in Congress and afraid of world public opinion.

The French, and for that matter, the Russians, usually ignore public opinion when the issue is of great importance, confident that most people are more interested in sports news than invasions of faraway places like Kabul or Bangui. If the French had been backing the Somoza regime in Nicaragua the Sandinista rebels might well have found themselves dead or refugees in East Germany.

Practical as always, the French realize that their client regimes, while no more lovable than those of Central America, are important assets that simply cannot be allowed to fall into the hands of the communists or anti-French factions. When these regimes become too awful, as in the case of Emperor Bokassa, Paris performs its own housecleaning with minimum fuss and alacrity.

So while President Mitterrand urges the Americans to negotiate a settlement with the communists in Central America — one that will inevitably result in Marxist governments — the French have just discreetly flown 400 tons of arms and plainclothes military advisers into Chad.

France wants to make sure that its protege, Hisan Habre, wins Chad's civil war since the emergence of an anti-French regime in that nation would be a threat to the other West African states that Paris simply will not accept. When it comes to their own vital economic and political interests, the French don't waste time on the moral delicacies that they so readily urge on others.



"Mind you, it needs a bit of work."

MADE IN CANADA PAT. 766,656

10 1 2