

Conflict in Africa:

A Case Study of the Shaba Crisis, 1977

TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE that there is an inherent tendency toward instability in Africa, Zaire (the former Congo), offers an archetypal example to support the thesis. From its independence in 1960 to date, the country has had to cope with various problems: problems of underdevelopment, revolt, ethnicity, communal conflict, and wars of secession. Yet, with Zaire's vast size, its strategic location on the continent, its substantial population, a large standing army, and its impressive, albeit few, mineral resources, Kinshasa ought to have gained a privileged position of influence and respectability in Africa. For a number of reasons, it has so far, however, failed to achieve this. In the first place, the internal crises and the difficulties that President Mobutu has had to contend with in holding the country together have detracted from the country's possible external impact. Second, the developmental physical infrastructures and linkages are still weak and rudimentary. Third, the volatile nature of the world price for copper, the mainstay of Zaire's economy, has consistently increased the uncertainty of income from this commodity. Fourth, Kinshasa's spendthrift policies on nonproductive prestige projects have steadily ensured that Zaire incurs huge international loans and unmanageable national debts. Fifth, that the Mobutu administration is essentially based on corruption, nepotism, and a secret police network means that a constantly increasing attention has to be paid to maintaining the regime in power rather than coming to grips with the problem of satisfying the basic needs of the masses.

Given all these factors, it may seem curious that President Mobutu has managed to remain in office for thirteen years. The reason seems to lie not so much on his political

agility and maturity in resolving problems and handling internal opposition, but on the massive support received from his foreign allies.

One of the major crises that the president has recently had to cope with, and succeeded in handling through the cooperation of these allies, was the Shaba invasion of 1977. This paper, while examining some of the main factors that promote conflict in Zaire in general, discusses the international ramification of the crises, and argues that, to reduce the margin of conflict propensity, an effective and stable linkage mechanism should be built into the Zairean political system.

From Katanga to Shaba

Zaire stands out as a state that does not easily fit the stereotypes of emerging African states. A new state, it is argued, enjoys an initial period of stability, usually ranging from three to seven years after its independence, that comes to an abrupt end when the so-called revolution of rising expectations fails to deliver the pre-independence promises of the nationalist leaders. In the second phase, therefore, instability would creep in, usually precipitated by military intervention.¹ In the case of Zaire, instability crept in soon after independence, and instead of an orderly movement from phase one to phase two, the country found itself catapulted straight from its independence into the latter stage.

Much, of course, has already been written about how the Belgian colonial policy and other foreign intervention helped to unleash the forces of fragmentation in the country, and, in particular about the rebellions in some of the provinces and the attempted secession of the copper-rich Katanga (now known as Shaba).² Suffice it to mention here that it took the forces of the United Nations three military operations from September 1961, to January 1963, to keep the country united.³ In November 1965, General Mobutu took power in a bloodless coup, ostensibly to enable him to bring authority and stability to the country. Since then, he has somehow managed to cling to the presidency.

The 1977 Shaba crisis, however, reopened many of the old wounds of Zaire. For one thing, it brought back the memories of the Katangan secession bid and actually featured some of the gendarmes who had fought in that bloody conflict in the early sixties. Then, as in the 1977 operation, General Nathaniel Mbumba exercised overall control of the gendarmes.

The gendarmes were the core of the seven-thousand soldiers that Moïse Tshombe, at that time prime minister of Katanga, commanded when the province seceded from what was then the Congo (in July 1960). The majority of the officers of this force were Belgian ex-members of the *Force Publique*, the army of pre-independence Zaire. After the U.N. forces had succeeded in breaking the back of the resistance, the Katanga separatist movement disintegrated and the gendarmes went into exile, mainly to Zambia. When Tshombe was asked by the central government in Kinshasa to become its prime minister, however, they returned. Tshombe had been offered the post largely because it was believed that his Katangan troops would be a match for the rebellion, led by Antoine Gizenga, that had broken out in Stanleyville (now Kisangani), in the east of the country. This proved to be so, and the rebels were defeated. However, when Mobutu assumed

power in November 1965, the gendarmes went once again into exile to Zambia and Angola. Some were later involved in the short-lived military adventure of 1967, when a group of mercenaries led by Colonel Jean Schramme, a Belgian, captured Kisangani and Bukavu. When the enterprise failed, they dispersed. Some followed the mercenaries to Rwanda and were evacuated to Europe or Zambia; others went to Angola.

In Angola, the Katangan exiles assisted the Portuguese colonial authorities by acting as a bulwark against the divided nationalist movement in the eastern part of the country. During the civil war, which immediately preceded independence, they were recruited into the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). Mobutu maintained an anti-MPLA posture during that conflict but tried, after Angola's independence, to come to terms with President Agostinho Neto. The two leaders met in Brazzaville on February 28, 1976, to settle their differences. Both agreed to the safe return of their refugees and Mobutu agreed to withdraw all support for the MPLA's rival, the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), provided the Katangan gendarmes were returned to Zaire. In the end, neither happened; the FNLA continued to operate from Zairean territory, while the Katangans later became an invading force.

The Seeds of Conflict

Economically, Zaire has been in the doldrums in recent years. Agreed, Mobutu's self-proclaimed economic revolution looked as though it would become a reality during the boom years of 1969 and 1970, when the price of copper was high, but, from the early 1970s onward, Zaire gradually lost much of its revenue-yielding ability as the world price of the commodity began to slump. The effect was devastating since copper represents half of the country's exports. Indeed, its impact on the level of investment was soon noticed: investments, which had risen by 45 percent in 1969, fell to 32 percent in 1970 and, a year later, dipped much lower to a mere 6 percent; even worse, the balance of payments deficit shot up and the growth rate was halved. Revenues stagnated and salaries rose, with the wage bill of government employees rising by 32 percent.⁴ By 1975, Kinshasa showed a record \$537 million balance of payments deficit and an external debt mounting to \$2.7 billion more than half of it owed to commercial banks at high interest rates.⁵ A year later, the low price of copper, world inflation, high oil prices, transport difficulties (caused by the unsettled situation in Angola), and the burden of servicing the external debt, all coalesced to worsen the economic plight of the country.⁶

Another major factor in the deterioration of the economy was the steadily worsening agricultural situation. At least 70 percent of the population is engaged in agriculture. True, this sector accounted for only 15 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1972, but since that time, the position had deteriorated so much that, four years later, Zaire was spending 30 percent of its foreign exchange to pay for imports of food-stuffs.⁷ In the interim, and perhaps to compound the problem even more, the rural population, dissatisfied with the prices and wages they were getting from farming, migrated in great numbers to the urban centers. The growth of Kinshasa, in particular,

went on apace despite the already existing high local unemployment. Suddenly, it dawned on Mobutu that the miracle was over.

Even at the height of the so-called "economic miracle," the per capita income, at \$147, was lower than most poorer African states, including that of its neighbor, Congo-Brazzaville. In fact, the per capita income has been decreasing since July 1967—the time of Mobutu's monetary reforms and the creation of the *Zaire* as the national unit of currency. On the whole, the average Zairean is still worse off than he was before independence.

In economic planning and development, there is very little in the country to impress the critical development economist. Much emphasis has been placed on the psychological aspect of nation building, with nonproductive, prestigious capital projects receiving far more attention than a conscious attempt to improve the lot of the masses. Such a policy has only succeeded in widening the division between the rich—the politicians, civil servants, businessmen, and army officers—and the rest of the people.⁸

Corruption is rife and it affects all segments of Zairean society. Mobutu himself seems to epitomize that malady. He is a man of great wealth who allegedly owns houses, properties, hotels, apartment blocks, newspapers, and construction and building companies from Kinshasa and Abidjan to Nice, Brussels, and Lausanne. A large chunk of the Zairean budget is devoted to presidential expenses. True, some of it goes to state projects, but an enormous proportion is spent on Mobutu's own business, prestige, and political welfare.⁹

President Mobutu's Zairisation program had brought, in its wake, its own economic difficulties. The Zairean citizens who took over the foreign-owned companies and farms proved to be both incompetent and improvident. Plantations and businesses went to ruin while funds were squandered on imported cars, high living, and luxury goods from Europe. It was this development that prompted the president to launch a "radicalization" program early in 1975. Companies that had been most flagrantly mismanaged, along with most local firms with an annual turnover of more than \$2 million, were taken over by the government. The situation did not change much, however, and in the end Mobutu retraced his steps by embarking on "de-Zairisation," and inviting the Belgians back into the country.¹⁰

These economic policies were, of course, not the only source of bitter anti-Mobutu murmurings. The president had, through other policies, incurred the odium of many sectors of the society. His "authenticity" program, for example, won him the hostility of the Roman Catholic Church, in which he was raised.

A despot,¹¹ Mobutu held sway on the life and death of all Zairean nationals inside his country. As could be expected, most of the attempts to overthrow the Mobutu administration earned the conspirators instant justice. In 1967, for instance, former Premier Evariste Kimba and three other ex-ministers were publicly executed for participating in a plot to overthrow the regime. Two years later, at least twenty students from Kinshasa Lovanium University were shot during a demonstration, and the entire student body was briefly placed under military discipline. In 1970, Mobutu offered amnesty to

all those who had taken part in the various rebellions of the postindependence period, but the overture was merely a smokescreen. The key figures that returned were dealt with in the typical Zairean fashion: Christopher Gbenye, former leader of the Popular Republic of the Congo in Stanleyville, Nicholas Olenga, one of the leaders of the rebellion, and Jean Willy Tshimbila, a former Congolese politician who had come back from exile in Cairo, were tried for subversion and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, with Olenga receiving ten years. Pierre Mulele, who had been living in exile in Brazzaville, across the Zairean border, and was only lured back with the declaration of amnesty and promises of protection, was, soon after his return, murdered in a most horrifying manner. The incident, no doubt, served as an eye-opener to Mobutu's other political opponents. The remaining big names, which included Antoine Gizenga, Gaston Soumaliot, and Thomas Kanza, all kept away from Zaire.

The last obstacles to Mobutu's supreme power were the members of the powerful Binza group. One by one, he got rid of the popular ones: Justin Bomboko, who had been foreign minister under almost every government since Lumumba; Victor Nendaka, head of the *Suret * (the secret service); Joseph Nsinga, a minister of state; and Albert Ndele, governor of the National Bank. Mobutu's attack on this group was, no doubt, a reflection of the worsening situation in Zaire and of his growing unpopularity. His antagonistic stance toward Bomboko and Nendaka, in particular, was a clear proof of his sense of insecurity. These two figures had been the most important men in Zairean politics and were often described as "*les inamovibles*" in the local press. Mobutu knew their power and had, for years, played one off against the other until, in the end, he decided to remove them from the government.¹²

The effect of these actions has been to increase the growing pool of political opponents to the Mobutu administration and, even more critical, to encourage them to stay away from Zaire and work against the regime from the comfort of foreign countries. It was against this background that one of the leading dissident exile groups of Zairean nationals, the National Liberation Front for the Liberation of the Congo (FNLC), decided to strike. The aim of the organization, its spokesmen pointed out, was to overthrow Mobutu's "neocolonialist tyranny" and install a truly democratic system in Zaire.¹³ It was hardly surprising, therefore, that it claimed total responsibility for the invasion of the Shaba province.

Given the preceding analysis, one could argue that, as a form of positive antigovernment protest, the invasion was inevitable. Yet if he had really wanted to, Mobutu could have mobilized the government institution to cement national unity. Instead, he built a highly autocratic structure of government around himself and took control of every decision from the publication of a book to the granting of an import license, giving his ministers less and less responsibility. It is true that there is an all-embracing political party in the country, the Popular Revolutionary Movement (MPR), through which the president governs, but it is less a unifying factor for nationalism than a huge political intelligence network specially designed to keep Mobutu in power.¹⁴ Moreover, although membership for every citizen is compulsory, and the party's structure reaches to the

smallest villages in the country, the president himself is out of touch with the real problems of the common man. In fact, this is not peculiar to the party alone; he is equally out of touch with his own armed forces. The periodic unrests within the army, for example, lend credence to this point.¹⁵

The army has always been a sensitive factor in Zairean development and politics; Mobutu has, on occasion, been forced to concede this point. In fact, after the rapid inflation and cash flow problems created by the financial crisis discussed earlier, the president was compelled to launch the program of Zairisation in order to appease certain elements in the huge standing army and the state bureaucracy. In effect, the confiscation of small enterprises and agricultural holdings held by foreigners that began in November 1973 became the compensation for the low salaries that were paid to army officers and civil servants. Exactly a year later, in November 1974, 120 foreign companies were also nationalized, and Mobutu's friends in both the army and the MPR benefited from these actions and formed a new rich elite.¹⁶ It was little wonder then that the president's main economic initiatives, the Zairisation measures¹⁷ and the radicalization policy, were largely unsuccessful. Wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few families, while the rest were pinched by unemployment and inflation.

Because Mobutu's army officer friends benefited from his economic policies does not mean, of course, that the army backed him to the hilt. On the contrary, there have been several attempted coups in the country, and the president's economic policies have often served as one of the main reasons for periodic military unrests. For instance, the radicalization policy of 1975 and the resultant economic difficulties served, in part, as a motivation for an attempted coup. After it failed, the president carried out an intensive purge of the army and replaced its commanders.¹⁸ Interestingly, he alleged that foreigners played an effective role in the attempted coup,¹⁹ so he forbade his army officers from taking foreign wives. Those who were already so married were asked to choose between their commissions and their spouses. In the future, Mobutu decreed, officers must be "single, or married legitimately, and monogamously, to a Zairean citizen."²⁰

The Angolan Connection

One important point remains to be examined among factors that precipitated the invasion of Shaba, the impact of the Angolan situation on the conflict. As was shown earlier, Mobutu supported FNLA during the Angolan conflict. Ideologically, he found the movement's pro-Western face more acceptable than that of the pro-Soviet MPLA. Besides, Holden Roberto, the FNLA's leader, was his brother-in-law. The Zairean president, naturally, wanted the movement to triumph and he gave his support accordingly. Later, when it became clear that the FNLA was fighting a losing battle, he strove for a peace plan that would protect the vital interests of the movement. While covertly adopting a policy of strengthening FNLA, he openly advocated a coalition of all three liberation movements in Angola.

Apart from his support for the FNLA, Mobutu, who had all along been casting a covetous eye on Cabinda's oil, also supported the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC) in hope that the breakaway of the territory would make Zaire its de facto suzerain.²¹ For economic reasons, Mobutu supported the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) toward the latter part of the conflict, largely because that movement controlled most of the Benguela railway, which Zaire uses for transporting its copper exports. With the success of MPLA, ably backed by the Soviets and the Cubans, Mobutu's policy fell apart. Nevertheless, he continued his support for the FNLA, and, largely on account of this, the peace plans worked out in Brazzaville for normalizing relations between Luanda and Kinshasa never achieved their objective, as discussed previously. By maintaining his support for the MPLA's opponents, Mobutu easily and unmistakably exposed himself as an enemy of the Neto regime in Angola.

Although it was never established that Angola actively encouraged the invasion of Shaba, it is hard to imagine how the FNLC forces (incorporating ex-Katangan gendarmes), which numbered between two and three thousand, could have used Angola as their rallying and launching point without first intimating Luanda. Such tacit approval must have been necessary if, as it was widely thought, President Neto wanted the invasion to serve as a serious warning to Zaire to desist from giving further support to the FNLA.

That the Neto administration accepted the invasion is not to say that it enthusiastically supported it. It is true, of course, that the FNLC forces rendered active service in both the Portuguese colonial army and, later during the civil war, in the MPLA. They were never, however, integrated into the Angolan army. This, certainly, was a grievance that the FNLC forces nurtured against Luanda. Moreover, the relationship between the FNLC and the MPLA had been strained by General Mbumba's refusal to accept Angola's advice in teaming up with other Zairean dissident groups.²² President Neto had directly made several abortive attempts to reconcile the various resistance leaders and had become increasingly impatient with Mbumba's intransigence and his autonomy in the eastern region of Angola. It would seem that the leader of the Katanga gendarmes, having sensed some equivocation on the part of the Angolan leaders, decided on his own to present them with a *fait accompli*. Even so, he treaded warily and made initial attacks with only a small sector of the invading force. After these initial successes Mbumba moved the bulk of his forces into Shaba.²³

All these points show that Angola was never deeply involved in the invasion. Not even the American Central Intelligence Agency was able to prove any serious involvement, and it is unlikely that, given President Neto's numerous internal problems (political and economic), his government or even his Cuban allies would have dissipated their forces in an attack on Shaba. After all, the bases from which the FNLA was being reorganized at the time, to strike another blow at Angola, were further to the north; and the Benguela railway, the copper mines, and other Zairean economic foci were too far to the east and south to justify any economically-targeted *blitzkrieg*.

Once Angola had chosen to assume a low profile, it was clear that its mentor, Cuba, would take a similar stance. Neither Luanda nor Havana provided serious backing or logistical support to the dissidents.

Mobutu's Allies

The invasion itself began on March 8, 1977. Within a matter of weeks, General Mbumba's forces had driven the Zairean army out of the towns of Kasaji and Mutshatsha and had found themselves in control of the strategic railroad from Dilolo almost thirty kilometers to Kolwezi. This lightning success, particularly the possible fall of the rich copper-mining town of Kolwezi, giving the FNLC access to the rail link between Lubumbashi and Kamina, spread great panic in Kinshasa and forced President Mobutu to launch an urgent international appeal for assistance.

Initially, the United States stepped up military supplies to Zaire, but once it had satisfied itself that there was no direct Angolan or Cuban involvement in the fighting, it reduced its assistance to Mobutu. While President Carter pledged that the United States would continue to expedite military aid to the Zairean government, he ruled out the possibility of sending American troops to prop up the Mobutu administration.²⁴ United States finance houses and banks were equally restrained. The Citibank, for instance, told Kinshasa that a \$250 million loan promised earlier would not be processed until the situation in Shaba had been resolved.²⁵ Congress, too, joined in tightening aid. At the height of the 1977 Shaba crisis, for example, the House of Representatives International Relations Subcommittee voted to slash military sales credits to Zaire from \$30 million to \$15 million. The general restraint could, to a great extent, be attributed to the U.S. determination, at the time, to rid itself of unreasonable fears of Communist threats and, instead, to embark on a more realistic and progressive foreign policy.²⁶

Although Moscow, like Washington, maintained a low profile, many states intervened in the conflict, largely because of what they perceived to be the threat of new Soviet expansion in Africa. As we shall soon see, some Western powers and Arab states, alarmed by the USSR's aggressive and large-scale involvement in Angola, saw the need to act swiftly--if only to halt the Soviet drive across the continent--and they did just that. All other considerations were deemed secondary.

Although both Belgium and West Germany came to the aid of Mobutu, by far his most energetic European ally was France. The major part of the French intervention was the provision of military transport aircraft; it commenced over the Easter weekend and was completed in barely a week--that is, before criticism could gather real force. The aircraft were used to airlift Moroccan soldiers to Kolwezi. The promptness with which France provided the airlift, and the fact that it did so at all, was an important diplomatic vote of confidence in President Mobutu's administration.

The intervention, however, quickly provoked some hostile international public opinion--so much so that President Giscard d'Estaing had to justify his country's involvement. He conceded that Zaire was not France's former colony but argued that, since the country was the largest French-speaking community in the world after France

itself, it had every right to seek support and aid from Paris. Once an application had been made to that effect, his government could not remain indifferent. The president asserted that subversion in Africa was bound to have consequences for both France and Europe, so it was in France's national interest to wade into the crisis. He further emphasized that his administration was determined to show, and constantly reassure, Franco-phone states that it could be relied on in moments of grave national crisis; France could never be "deaf to the appeals of her friends when they were acting within their sovereignty and within their rights."²⁷

Louis de Guiringaud, the French minister of foreign affairs warned the Soviet Union that France was not prepared to approve a situation whereby detente in Europe could only be achieved at the expense of stability in Africa. Lending support to President Giscard d'Estaing's arguments, he expressed his country's alarm that moderate African states could no longer feel secure because of recent Soviet activities.²⁸ It was essential, therefore, for France to act positively to allay such fears.

Apart from the airlift, Paris also provided, and for a much longer period, arms supplies and some military advisers. It was these French officers that supervised the unloading of supplies and reorganized the defenses of Kolwezi.²⁹

Several Arab states also backed Kinshasa, including Morocco, Sudan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. In the case of Egypt, for example, once the Sadat administration had made up its mind to intervene, it acted swiftly. Fifty Egyptian pilots and technicians were sent to Mobutu, and they flew the French-built Mirage jets of the Zairean air force throughout the conflict.

Cairo's involvement in the Shaba crisis seemed rather interesting. Why, for instance, should it intervene in such a crisis when it had its own persistent problem with Israel? In a sense, it did so because of the wider politics of the Middle East conflict itself. The Soviets, it must be remembered, had been a major irritant to President Anwar Sadat over that conflict. Thus, Sadat seemed intent upon embarrassing the Soviets at every convenient moment. Because he thought they were behind the Shaba problem, he decided to join the conflict. Like the French, he, too, pointed an accusing finger at the USSR's expansionist threat in Africa, citing Moscow's influence in Libya and the Soviet-inspired Ethiopian attack on the Sudan. The Egyptian leader also gave two further rationalizations for his policy. First, he argued that since an attack on Zaire could be regarded as an attack on the source of the Nile, and thus a threat to Egypt's national security, he could not fold his arms as an interested bystander. Second, the president recalled that Mobutu had originally been a paratrooper trained in Israel and that Zaire had been that country's major base and ally in Africa. However, by the summer of 1973, Mobutu had ordered the Israeli Military Mission out of Kinshasa and by October 4, 1973, had broken off diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv, openly embracing the Arab cause in the Middle East conflict. Given such a warm pro-Arab policy by the Zairean government, President Sadat contended, his administration had no other honorable option than to reciprocate Mobutu's gesture, and it did so at this opportunity in joining the conflict.³⁰

Just as France was the most active supporter of Kinshasa among the Western powers, so was Morocco the most energetic among the Arab states. Morocco, like Egypt, intervened in the crisis largely because of what it perceived to be the new Soviet threat in Africa. Indeed, to Rabat, the invasion was yet another proof of the USSR's expansionism in the continent. In addition, King Hassan saw a link between his own immediate problems with the POLISARIO Front in the Sahara and Mobutu's encounter with the former Katangan gendarmes. The former enjoys the tacit support of the Neto administration, as do the FNLC forces. In fact, the king repeatedly alleged that Cuba, Angola's mentor, had been sending soldiers to fight side by side with the POLISARIO Front. When, therefore, Mobutu claimed that the Shaba invasion had been masterminded by Angola and that the Cubans were fighting actively with the FNLC forces, Rabat saw a conspiracy of the Angola-Cuba-Soviet alliance against moderate states in Africa.³¹

Morocco lost no time in coming to Mobutu's aid,³² but studiously provided some rationalizations for its decision. Some radical African states had condemned Morocco's involvement in a conflict they saw as having nothing to do with Rabat and, to them more important, support for a reactionary head of state like Mobutu. The Moroccan government pointed out that it had not departed from its past policies over conflicts in Arab and African states. It was not out, it emphasized, to support the regime of any individual in Zaire, but to support the state—just as it had supported Syria as a state against Israel. Moreover, Morocco had never questioned (nor had the charter of the United Nations or of the Organization of African Unity so directed) the degree of honesty or democracy practiced by the regimes ruling states threatened by invasion. The argument continued that if this criterion was used, very few states would pass such tests. Finally, Rabat asked why there had been no suggestion when countries like Morocco offered support to the Nigerian federal government during their civil war (at a time when foreigners were also assisting the secessionists) that such support was wrong, or why such a complaint had not been made about the support for the Kasavubu administration in what was then the Congo, when such a regime was hardly democratic or even honest.³³

Morocco gave generously to Zaire's war efforts by providing 1,500 troops from its *Forces Armées Royales*. These soldiers, led by Colonel Loubaris, were airlifted by the French aircraft to Kolwezi on April 9. Their arrival lifted the spirits of President Mobutu. Within days, on April 14 to be exact, the Moroccan troops and the Zairean army launched a massive counterattack against the FNLC forces. One by one, all the major towns formerly captured by General Mbumba's forces were retaken. No one valued the success of the Moroccan and Zairean joint forces more than President Mobutu himself. He quickly recovered from the very low point to which his fortunes had sunk while the former Katangan gendarmes were advancing. Even as the fighting continued, the presence of the Moroccan troops enabled the president to sidestep, to some extent, the Zairean army and to keep his remaining paratroop units with him in Kinshasa ready, if need be, to deal with any sudden upsurge of discontent in any of the larger towns or the more crisis-prone provinces, like Kivu.

Among other African states the moderate Francophone states, as might be expected, all came out in support of the Mobutu regime. In fact, it was these states, which had earlier been alarmed about the Soviet threat, that invited France to deal with the situation.³⁴ The radical states, however, were not as enthusiastic about the Mobutu administration. One group, including Libya and Algeria opposed the interventionist roles of Morocco and Egypt and chose to be hostilely neutral. Some, including Zambia and Tanzania, openly denounced the Zairean leader's strategy of deliberately internationalizing the conflict. One state, Nigeria, claiming that it was so requested by Angola and Zaire, played a mediatory role. It accused France of improper interference in Africa's internal affairs.³⁵

The Organization of African Unity (OAU), as the continental political institution, had its hands firmly tied by its own internal rules of jurisdiction—noninterference in the internal affairs of member states. Interestingly, toward the latter stages of the conflict, the postures of the organization's chairman and secretary-general differed. Initially, Sir Seewosagur Rengoolam, prime minister of Mauritius and the 1977 Chairman of the OAU, condemned the invasion of Shaba as "an abusive interference in the internal affairs (of Zaire) and a flagrant violation of the OAU charter." He appealed to African states to "avoid internationalizing an internal problem" and warned more firmly that "any positions contrary to this fundamental principle created extremely dangerous implications for international peace and involved the risk of compromising the internal stability and unity of the OAU."³⁶ Later, however, he shifted his ground and supported, in very strong terms, Kinshasa's internationalization of the conflict.³⁷

Etaki Mboumoua, the secretary-general, on the other hand, held firmly to the non-interference article of the OAU charter from the very beginning of the crisis. Although he later went to Kinshasa and, after meticulously gathering information from various sources, wrote up a report, his verdict remained very much the same: the Shaba affair was essentially an internal problem of Zaire.³⁸

Clearly then, the OAU, like the majority of the member states it represents, failed to resolve the Shaba crisis. Nigeria's mediatory effort, perhaps the most ambitious attempt to solve the conflict through pacific settlement, failed to yield any fruitful dividend, largely because of the deep-rooted complexities of the problem. In the end, the crisis was contained not strictly within the OAU framework of letting African states solve their own problems but, in the main, by the French and Moroccan initiative.

Conclusion

Although there was no superpower confrontation in the conflict, the influence or anticipated postures of the United States and the USSR affected the level of outside intervention. Threats of Soviet expansion lay behind the roles of the three prominent outsiders: France, Morocco, and Egypt. Yet, ironically, it was largely because Moscow did not adopt an active interventionist stance that the external role was reduced to an affair of the small powers. Washington could afford to play a background role since it seemed

clear that the French and Moroccan efforts would, among other things, hold the Western front in the crisis.³⁹

For the OAU, there was never a possibility of becoming actively involved, since its charter clearly gives prominence to the internal jurisdiction clause. As far as the organization was concerned, therefore, the conflict was essentially Zaire's own internal problem in which member states could not dabble. As we saw, however, member states played different roles in the crisis, and Nigeria, though without success, attempted to solve the problem through mediation.

One cannot dismiss the OAU's guidelines for dealing with African conflicts out of hand. Though the organization had, by virtue of the provisions of its charter, been reduced to playing the ostrich role, some of the ideals of the organization nevertheless remain relevant. In the final analysis, a lasting solution to the Zairean case can, in part, be achieved if the OAU principles are adhered to. In practical terms, this would mean guarantees for the territorial integrity of Cabinda as part of Angola, as well as for the inviolability of Zaire's frontiers. Such an outcome would reduce the tension between Kinshasa and Luanda, and, since it was their poor relations that enabled the Neto administration to turn a blind eye on the FNLC's use of Angola as the launching base for Shaba's invasion, it would improve Zaire's security.⁴⁰

The external role was, undoubtedly, an important factor in the final determination of the conflict. Without the French-Moroccan intervention, the Mobutu regime would have been hard put to flush the FNLC forces out of Shaba. Agreed, these Katangan dissidents also obtained external support, but such assistance was dwarfed by the assistance received by Kinshasa.

Perhaps what should be emphasized about the Shaba affair is how it was brought about by Mobutu's policies. The dissidents that invaded the province did so largely on account of the president's excesses and inadequacies. For twelve years he failed to achieve a high degree of national political reconciliation in the country. From our earlier analysis, one thing seems clear: if, in the short term, it was Zaire's continuing hostility to Angola that led to the invasion, in the longer term, it was the failure of the Mobutu administration's economic and political strategies that turned large sections of the population against the regime. By deliberately internationalizing the conflict, the president was merely seeking a way out of his internal political dilemma. Even his army could not be relied upon to effectively defend Zaire's territorial integrity in a moment of grave national crisis. Surely, if a regime could not muster enough support from a 30,000-man army⁴¹ to defeat one small rebel thrust, then one should question its credibility.⁴²

President Mobutu had relied for a very long time on the thesis that, since only he seems to have been able to maintain a semblance of law and order in the country for a considerable length of time, the outside world should support him. True, this argument may have its logic, but, to be objective, it should be tempered with some measure of domestic quid pro quo. Clearly, a regime whose repressive measures, inefficiency, and corruption continually alienate its subjects will eventually get to a point where it will either collapse or be forced out of office. In the interim, it may have to contend with

major crises, like that of Shaba. In any case, a suppressive authoritarian regime like that of President Mobutu, no matter what false impression it gives to the outside world of being stable internally, will keep on exporting its opposition and adding to the growing pool of dissidents that will constantly seek to work against it.

True, there is an all-embracing political party in Zaire, the MPR, but, as we argued earlier, it is more or less a facade for keeping Mobutu in office. There is no effective unifying mechanism between the public and the government. Yet this is crucial if the likelihood of conflict is to be greatly reduced. As long as it is lacking, the public will continue to have inadequate channels for articulating its interests to Kinshasa, and the propensity for conflict will remain high. If Zaire must remain a one-party state, it will be necessary to inject a much higher dose of democratic process into the MPR than has existed.⁴³ Such a democratic system is more likely to achieve a strong linkage system and would contribute more effectively to the genuine institutionalization of the party. It would also inhibit stress, since government sanctions, in themselves a major component of stress, are less necessary where linkages are strong. However, bearing in mind that the Zairean president has transformed his regime into what Willame once described as a "Caesarist Bureaucracy,"⁴⁸ the injection of a high-level democratic process into the MPR or the building of an effective and unifying linkage system may be impossible as long as Mobutu remains the head of state and continues his dictatorial policies.

Notes

1. See, for instance, the arguments of W. Scott Thompson in "Political Violence and the 'Correlation of Forces,'" *ORBIS*, Winter 1976, pp. 1270-308.

2. See, for example, Crawford Young, *Politics in the Congo: Decolonization and Independence* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965); and J. Ph. Peemans, "Social and Economic Development of Zaire," *African Affairs*, April 1975, pp. 148-78.

3. For an account of U.N. peace keeping in the country, see Alan James, *The Politics of Peace Keeping* (London: Chatto & Windus [for the Institute of Strategic Studies], 1969), pp. 354-64 and 411-23.

4. See Peemans, "Social and Economic Development."

5. Indeed, largely because of the unhealthy balance of payments deficit, the Belgian office, Duroire, which guarantees export credits to Belgian exporters, decided in March 1975, to suspend its cover on short term exports destined for Zaire. This move was of great significance since Belgium remained the country's major trading partner, taking 33 percent of its exports and selling Zaire 24 percent of its imports. See *African Development*, September 1975.

6. In November 1976, Zaire was forced to have a meeting with the agents of thirteen banks, representing more than one hundred creditors owed as much as \$400 million in unguaranteed funds. The Mobutu government agreed to begin repaying interest in arrears, to put aside principal payments, and to meet certain conditions. It would start negotiating with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on conditions for a standby arrangement, so that the IMF would effectively set the requirements for further private loans. In the end, however, Zaire used the threat of bankruptcy to stretch payments and get additional loans. See *Wall Street Journal*, 9 November 1976.

7. *African Development*; *Newsweek* observed that Zaire was spending nearly \$200 million each

year importing food that could be produced locally." "The Zaire Experiment," *Newsweek*, 8 December 1975.

8. "If one had the opportunity of advising the Zaire ruling elite," observed Peemans, "one would urge them to go to the masses" and give: "a list of appropriate commandments; stop spending the existing economic surplus on prestige consumption; clamp down upon other leakages, such as external money transfers and imports of luxury consumption goods (which together represent 50 percent of the gross annual formation of capital in the country); increase wages and peasant incomes; devote state resources only to productive investments and welfare spending." Peemans, "Social and Economic Development," p. 173.

9. See, for example, Cleophas Kamitatu, *La Grande mystification du Congo - Kinshasa: les crimes de Mobutu* (Paris: Francois Maspero, 1971); and Thomas Kanza, *Conflict in the Congo* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972).

10. One of the reasons for the failure of the "radicalization" policy was that, in spite of all the talk about imposing strict discipline, many of Zaire's rich elite got wind of the impending nationalizations well in advance and quickly withdrew their assets, thereby leaving the companies in worse shape than before.

11. One expert on the African military has argued that the predominant characteristic of the Mobutu regime "resembled Mussolini's Italy." W. F. Gutteridge, *Military Regimes in Africa* (London: Methuen, 1975), p. 147.

12. To reinforce these repressive measures, Mobutu has carefully nurtured a cult of personality. Billboards with his photographs are every where, frequently bearing the inscription, "Thank you, citizen President." In newspapers and all official speeches, Mobutu is referred to as "the President Founder" and "the Guide," and the nightly television news opens with an image of the president drifting seraphlike to center screen out of a blanket of clouds.

13. *Sunday Times*, April 17, 1977.

14. Note that while Mobutu banned all political parties in the country, he allowed his own MPR to continue. This was based on the plank that it was a nationalist movement, as opposed to a political party, and as such, opposition to it cannot be allowed in any way or form. See Gutteridge, *Military Regimes in Africa*.

15. Some observers see Mobutu's lack of effective contact with his people as one of the greatest dangers to his regime:

Nasser would go down to the officers' mess and talk and be chums with the officers and one might give him a hint of something that needed attention. No one would dare do that with Mobutu. He has made the classic error of . . . getting out of touch. The people of the Congo remember Kasavuba, Lumumba and Tshombe and they know a politician can't last for ever. They watch for signs of his unpopularity. They begin to lose faith in their leader.

The Sunday Times, February 27, 1972.

16. See *West Africa* (1977), p. 1533.

17. For details, see *Africa Research Bulletin* (1973), Economic, Financial and Technical Series, pp. 2946-47.

18. The commanders were replaced by the following officers: Brigadier Danga Ngbokoli (Shaba); Colonel Kabwe Kapasula (Kinshasa); Colonel Mampa Salamayo (Upper Zaire); Colonel Kwima Misela (Bandundu); Colonel Mandungu Gbende (Kivu); Colonel Biamwenze Mbiye Mwenzeya (Lower Zaire); and Colonel Matudkia (Equateur).

19. Mobutu stressed the U.S. "involvement," in particular, and the American ambassador in Kinshasa, Mr. Dean Hinton, was expelled. For details, see *Africa Research Bulletin* (1975), Political series, p. 3665.

20. *West Africa* (1975), p. 819.

21. President Mobutu has, on several occasions, openly identified his regime with the aspirations of FLEC. "Its our view," he argues, "that Angola and Cabinda are separate entities." *Newsweek*, 8 December 1975, p. 33.

22. These included Antoine Gizenga's *Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Congo* (FODELICO) based in Brussels, and Laurent Kabila's forces based in the rugged mountains south of Kivu province.

23. Caution was necessary because some reports claimed that the rebel leader had, in fact, been

warned by President Neto that should his forces fail in their enterprise, they might not be welcome back into Angola. See *West Africa* (1977), p. 1253.

24. This stance was reiterated by the president and some of his Cabinet colleagues throughout the 1977 Shaba crisis. The U.S. Permanent Representative at the United Nations, Mr. Andrew Young, was even more forthright. Asked whether in the event of both Cuba and the Soviet Union intervening directly, the United States would intervene militarily, the ambassador replied: "After Vietnam, there is almost no way you could get the United States militarily involved in Africa." See *Africa*, No. 67 (March 1977): p. 16.

25. Note, however, that this decision was based on economic, not political, reasons. The Citibank rightly felt that a prolonged, or indecisive, end to the conflict could be a continuing drain on Zaire's slender resources. Such a development would affect the country's financial and credit worthiness and, worse, its ability to stay current with repayments on existing commercial debts, much less the new loan.

26. "Being confident of our own future," said President Carter, "we are now free of that inordinate fear of Communism which once led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in our fear." See United States Information Service, *Information Background*, No. 18 (May 1977): p. 3.

27. See *West Africa* (1977), p. 790.

28. In M. Guiringaud's words:

The moderate regimes of Africa are concerned about a certain number of attempts at destabilisation in Africa, in particular after what happened in Angola, where there was a massive intervention by the Cubans with Soviet support.

They are equally concerned to see the Soviet Union increasing its influence in Ethiopia and concluding, with the new Addis Ababa regime, a friendship and cooperation agreement which includes an important military tab . . .

Africa, No. 72 (August 1977): p. 71.

29. See *West Africa* (1977), p. 1253.

30. Note that in the history of Egypt's reactions to civil conflicts in Africa, the aid to Zaire was not without a precedent. During the Nigerian civil war, for example, Egyptian pilots flew Soviet Migs for the federal government. In both the Zairean and Nigerian cases, however, the military usefulness of the Egyptian pilots was far outweighed by the diplomatic repercussions of their accidental bombing of wrong targets. In Shaba, for example, their bombing exercise strayed, more often than not, into nonmilitary targets (including hospitals) in Angola and Zambia. Nonetheless, both Lagos and Kinshasa valued the symbolic impact of Egypt's support.

31. *West Africa* (1977), p. 981.

32. King Hassan said he felt as if he were in the same situation as President Eisenhower when he sent the Marines to Lebanon in 1958. All would have been lost in Zaire, the king claimed, if he had not acted within forty-eight hours. See *ibid.*, p. 1253.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 981.

34. These moderate states led by Presidents Houphouet-Boigny of Ivory Coast and Senghor of Senegal, have now, more than ever before, in a bid considered likely to counter the threat of Communism, chosen to get closer to France. For instance, at their meeting in Dakar in April 1977, at the very height of the Shaba crisis, they warmly approved the French airlift of Moroccan troops and French supplies to Zaire, and were favorably inclined toward proposals of some sort of French military defense umbrella for themselves.

35. *Sunday Times*, 5 June 1977.

36. *Ibid.*, 10 April 1977.

37. *Daily Times* (Lagos), 8 May 1977. It is tempting to argue that Sir Seewosagur's *volte-face* may be attributed to the fact that he, as a moderate, saw the Soviet expansionist threat, considered by other moderate African states in diagnosing the crisis, as real.

38. At the first closed session of the 1977 OAU summit, held in Libreville, Gabon, President Mobutu lambasted the secretary-general for the report and accused him of "intellectual dishonesty" for saying that it was difficult to see the Shaba crisis as anything other than an internal affair. See *Africa*, No. 72 (August 1977): p. 25.

39. See, for instance, Robert Moss, "Dream of Jimmy Carter" in *Sunday Telegraph*, 29 May 1977.

In Moss's opinion, the French-Moroccan intervention was "one of the precious few recent examples of an effective Western initiative to block Soviet expansion in the Third World, following the tragic abdication of the Western powers in Angola."

40. After the Shaba rebellion had been quelled, President Mobutu visited Morocco to express his gratitude to King Hassan. While in Rabat, he appealed to African states to desist from constantly turning the OAU into a forum for ideological confrontations and urged them, instead, "to work toward ensuring stability on the continent by respecting the organization's charter in so far as it relates to respecting the realities of each member state." See *Le Matin Du Sahara* (Rabat), 16 June 1977.

41. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, after Nigeria and Ethiopia, Zaire has the largest armed force in black Africa with 33,400 men in all—30,000 in the army, 400 in the Navy, and 3,000 in the air force. In 1976, it spent \$76.8 million on the armed forces.

The army has a number of tanks (some ex-Chinese) and one mechanised battalion; the navy has a collection of small craft; and the air force is said to have fifty-four combat aircraft, a helicopter squadron, and some thirty transport aircraft. There are also 30,000 men in eight National Guard and six Gendarmerie battalions. See the Institute's *The Military Balance, 1977-78*.

42. It should be mentioned, however, that the army had not fully recovered from President Mobutu's preemptive purge of June 1975, when the 1977 Shaba rebellion surfaced. The arrest of ten generals and the accusation of "blatant passivity" ending in demotion for the retired General Lundula Okoko struck a severe blow to the army's pride. Then came the abortive plot in 1976 that provided Mobutu with an excuse to get rid of several of the highest ranking army and air force officers. With this background, the Zairean president could not expect 100 percent loyalty from the army. In any case, he himself alleged that some top-ranking officers had colluded with the FNLC. After General Mbumba's forces had been thrown out of Shaba, thirty army officers were dismissed outright, the chief of staff and two colonels were reduced in ranks, and Colonel Mampa Salamy, the former commander of military operations in Shaba province, was sentenced to death for allegedly endangering state security and demoralizing troops on the battlefield.

43. The "democratic" measures introduced by President Mobutu in the autumn of 1977—and the subsequent three levels of elections that were conducted as a result of the measures—have not resulted in any major structural change in Zaire's political system. The political bureau of the MPR, for instance, is still dominated by the President's sycophants.

44. Jean-Claude Willame, *Patrimonialism and Political Change in the Congo* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 129.