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1978–1979**

Nathaniel K. Powell

**African Studies Center
Boston University**

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Series Editor: Michael DiBlasi
Production Manager: Sandra McCann

African Studies Center
Boston University
232 Bay State Road
Boston, MA 02215

Tel: 617-353-7306
Fax: 617-353-4975
E-mail: ascpub@bu.edu
Web: www.bu.edu/africa/publications

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By Nathaniel K. Powell

In June 1978, nearly 2,500 soldiers from Morocco, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Gabon, and Togo deployed to Zaire on behalf of the country's dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko. This *Inter-African Force* (IAF) represented the first time that African states had collaborated on a peacekeeping mission outside the auspices of the United Nations.¹ The IAF, financed and supported by core Western bloc countries, particularly France and the United States, came as a response to two invasions, in 1977 and 1978, of the southern Zairian province of Shaba by rebels known as the "Katangan Gendarmes," or *Tigres*, based in Northern Angola.

The Shaba invasions seriously threatened the survival of Mobutu's regime. In both instances, foreign military interventions saved Mobutu and forced the rebels back across the border. In 1977, this help came principally in the form of Moroccan troops, with France both organizing the operation and providing logistical support. The following year, a French airborne assault stopped the invaders under the pretext of protecting the European expatriate population in Kolwezi, Shaba's most important mining center.

The two invasions, combined with Mobutu's highly corrupt personalized rule and appalling economic conditions, brought Zaire to the edge of collapse. The country's economy lay in ruins and its army was broken. The mostly-European expatriate community, necessary for the proper functioning of Shaba's mining operations, threatened to flee in droves. Meanwhile, the *Tigres* across the border seemed poised to mount a third attack. To make matters worse, Mobutu's Western allies feared that the *Tigres* were communist proxies and that their invasions represented a concerted Soviet-Cuban effort to destabilize Central Africa.

Thus, in order to stabilize the situation and prevent a renewed invasion, Western bloc states, led by France, oversaw a major international effort to secure and rebuild Mobutu's regime. This included an attempt to use IMF loans and other forms of financial assistance as leverage to obtain both significant economic reforms and a partial expatriate takeover of the major organs of Zaire's economy. This effort also involved assistance in retraining Zaire's ineffective military, as well as regional

* The author would like to thank Miles Larmer and Erik Kennes for generously sharing British and Belgian archival material. A significantly shorter and more narrowly focused version of this paper appeared in French as: Nathaniel Kinsey Powell, "La France, les Etats-Unis et la Force interafricaine au Zaïre (1978–1979)," *Relations internationales* 150 (2012), 71–83.

¹ I. William Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 162.

moves to find a diplomatic solution to neutralize the country's immediate external threats. Meanwhile, Zaire's international backers hoped that the IAF would buy time for Mobutu's regime to get back on its feet.

This paper examines international efforts in the aftermath of the Shaba invasions aimed at safeguarding Mobutu's position. In particular, it looks at how the politics of Zaire's stabilization revealed divergent priorities among Western policymakers. The latter were mainly motivated by fears of perceived communist expansion in Africa. Nevertheless, they often disagreed on both the means and level of commitment required to contain it. This paper also addresses the role played by Mobutu and other African leaders and elites in seeking to manage, and even undermine, broader Western security goals.

After briefly outlining the Shaba crises, this paper will first examine Western efforts to stabilize Mobutu's regime, particularly through a combination of pressure for economic reforms and financial assistance from the IMF. It will show how this assistance benefited Mobutu in more ways than one as he enriched himself from the aid flows and exploited his perceived indispensability to his donors, both public and private. Next, the paper will examine parallel Western efforts, led by France, to organize, fund, and assist the deployment of the IAF along Zaire's southern frontier to prevent a third Shaba invasion. The IAF played a key role in Western, particularly French and American, strategy aimed at buying time for Mobutu as other assistance took effect. The paper will describe how tensions within the IAF, increasing demands by troop-contributing countries, and local conditions, limited the extent to which this force could sustainably further Western policy goals.

Finally, this paper will look at the wider African political dimension as French and deeper Western involvement in Zaire triggered significant diplomatic reactions from numerous "moderate" and "progressive" countries on the continent. Ultimately this served to decisively undermine broader French security aims in Africa. Taken together, the underlying argument of this paper is that the strategies and policies of Western bloc actors, particularly France, were severely constrained by local and regional realities. Western proxies in Africa were anything but that. They could play important roles in determining the extent of success or failure of the policies of their Western backers, and Mobutu played this game better than most.

The Shaba Crises

The Shaba invasions were launched by the "Katangan Gendarmes," or *Tigres*. This group, led by former Katangan police chief Nathanaël Mbumba, called itself the *Front de libération nationale du Congo* (FLNC). As the Katanga reference implies, the group represented the political and military descendants of Moïse Tshombe's secessionist Katangan regime who had fled to Angola in the early and mid-1960s. Initially the FLNC allied itself with the Portuguese during the Angolan independence war. Starting in 1975, as the Portuguese withdrew from Angola, the group found new allies in the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). In a vicious, see-saw military campaign preceding and following Angola's independence on

November 11, 1975, the Marxist MPLA emerged victorious thanks to a substantial Cuban military intervention, bolstered by significant Soviet support.

For Mbumba and the FLNC, this represented a favorable occasion with which to make themselves useful to the MPLA by countering the Zairian backed *National Front for the Liberation of Angola* (FNLA), which the MPLA had defeated in 1975–1976. Based in Northern Angola, along Angola's border with Zaire's Shaba province (formerly, and now again named Katanga), the FLNC constituted a significant threat to Mobutu's security.²

This threat arose for several reasons. As the political descendants of the Katangan secessionist forces, the presence of these "Katangan Gendarmes" near the border again raised the ugly specter of territorial fragmentation and secession. Mobutu's relationship with this faraway province had always been fraught with difficulties. Its large copper, cobalt, and tin deposits, combined with its advanced mining infrastructure, made it Zaire's richest province, producing 60 percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings. It was thus imperative that Shaba remain under Mobutu's control.³

Nonetheless, the aftereffects of the province's secession attempt had not entirely subsided. In the interceding decade and a half between the secession and the Shaba crises, Mobutu had consistently alienated Shaba's population through military exactions, discrimination, and political marginalization.⁴ This dangerous situation evolved into a potential powder keg, which the FLNC seemed ready to light at any moment. As André Ross, France's ambassador to Zaire at the time, noted, "Shaba is [Zaire's] weak point: without Shaba, Zaire loses most of its current resources, with Shaba, it contains an explosive ferment."⁵

The first invasion of the *Tigres*, launched from Angolan territory, began in early March 1977. Apart from a few small engagements the Zairian Army, the *Forces armées zaïroises* (FAZ), fled its positions without a fight. Despite a slow advance, within a month, the Katangans controlled a large swathe of Shaba and threatened to move eastwards to Kolwezi, the province's mining center. Kolwezi was also home to some 3,000 expatriate workers and their families, mostly working for Zaire's

² For an overview of the history of the Gendarmes, see Miles Larmer, "Local Conflicts in a Transnational War: The Katangese Gendarmes and the Shaba Wars of 1977–78," *Cold War History* 13, 1 (2013), 89–108.

³ Jimmy Carter Library (henceforth JCL), Atlanta, White House Central File, Box CO-67: Zaire, Folder: (CO 177 Executive 1/20/77-1/20/81), Document (number unknown), Memorandum from Tom Thornton to David Aaron, "O'Neil Briefing," Zaire talking points, 5.6.1978, p. 2.

⁴ French Foreign Ministry Archives (henceforth MAE), Nantes, Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Lubumbashi Consulat, Dossier 1978, "Situation au Shaba à la veille de l'attaque de Kolwezi," 18.05.1978, p. 8–11.

⁵ MAE Nantes, Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Lubumbashi Consulat, Dossier 1978, Dépêche d'actualité from Ross to la Direction des affaires africaines et malgaches, "Le Zaire après Kolwezi," 02.06.1978, p. 5. N.B. Unless noted otherwise, all translations from French are the author's.

parastatal mining conglomerate, the *Générale des Carrières et des Mines* (Gécamines) which dominated Shaba's economy. A worried Mobutu asked for assistance from his African and Western allies.

American officials in the newly inaugurated administration of President Jimmy Carter hesitated about whether, and how, to support the Zairian leader's embattled regime. Officials close to Carter did feel that the invasion posed a serious threat to Mobutu, and that his overthrow could have catastrophic consequences in the region. In the assessment of Admiral Stansfield Turner, the newly-appointed director of the CIA, Mobutu's downfall "could not fail to be perceived as a major 'loss' for the US in Africa [...] if not [an] actual 'gain' for the USSR, Cuba, and the radical socialist club in Africa."⁶

Deliberations of Carter's National Security Council (NSC) in mid-March highlighted the quandary that American policymakers felt. The NSC concluded that:

The dilemma is a simple and traditional one. How far do we go to support a regime that is very imperfect but is friendly to us, with which we have been deeply involved, and which is seen to be our 'ally'? To what extent is our credibility at stake? Will our help have any real chance of success in making the FAZ a capable instrument?⁷

Ambiguous views on a commitment to Mobutu's survival would remain a constant feature of American policymaking throughout the Carter administration. Ultimately, Carter consented to provide some 15 million dollars of "non-lethal" military assistance.⁸ The early Carter administration's public emphasis on human rights goes a long way in explaining the tepid nature of US support to Mobutu during this crisis. The US Congress also had concerns about Mobutu's human rights record. Shortly after the first Shaba crisis, and despite Mobutu's relative fragility, these considerations led it to cut the ceiling for its annual security assistance to Zaire in half, from 20 million dollars in 1977 to 10 million for 1978.⁹

French policymakers had far fewer qualms about supporting Mobutu's regime. Although not a former French colony, Zaire grew substantially in importance to France during the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974–1981)¹⁰ For some

⁶ CIA CREST Database Document NLC-17-77-8-5-6, "Implications of the Collapse of the Government of Zaire," 17.03.1977, p.2.

⁷ JCL, CREST Database Document NLC-12-61-1-8-2, Memorandum for the File from Thomas P. Thornton, "Zaire Situation," 16.03.1977, p. 1.

⁸ JCL, White House Central File, Box CO-67: Zaire, Folder: (CO 177 Confidential 1/20/77–1/20/81), Document (number unknown), Memorandum from Christine Dodson to Denis Clift, "Vice President Mondale's Meeting with Zairian Commissioner for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Nguza Karl-I-Bond," 26.07.1977, p. 2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ For a detailed evaluation of the drivers of French policy in Zaire, see Nathaniel K. Powell, "The Cuba of the West? France's Cold War in Zaire," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 18, 2 (2016).

observers, French interest derived principally from economic motives.¹¹ Undoubtedly, potentially lucrative investment possibilities attracted serious French attention. For instance, Giscard had personally helped negotiate an important contract between Mobutu and Thomson-CSF, a major French telecommunications company. The French parastatal, the *Bureau de recherches géologiques et minières*, one of the largest mining concerns then operating in Africa, also owned important shares in several mining consortia in Shaba province. Various French private investments in the construction industry complemented this presence. By the mid-1970s, France also imported a third of its copper supply from Zaire.¹² Additionally, a number of French companies investing in Zaire and elsewhere in Africa had close ties to the French political elite.¹³ Most notably, the head of Thomson-CSF was none other than Giscard's cousin, Philippe Giscard d'Estaing.

Nonetheless, while potentially lucrative investment possibilities certainly played a background role in French interest in the Zaire, economic interests cannot explain the high level of political commitment to Mobutu's survival. Indeed, French investments in Zaire only totaled some 20 million dollars by 1977. The French economic presence was paltry compared to the 800 million dollars of Belgian investment and 200 million dollars of American investment.¹⁴ Furthermore, French and Belgian mining elites surprised French intelligence officials by their complete unconcern about the prospect of Mobutu's overthrow and a communist Zaire, given that buyers dominated the international mineral markets.¹⁵ Even Zairian cobalt, an important strategic mineral, had little importance to French industry, whereas it supplied some 70 percent of American needs.¹⁶

Instead of clear-cut economic motives, the most important impulse for French involvement lay in Cold War-inspired considerations. Thousands of Cuban troops in neighbouring Angola and the presence of Soviet advisors in support of the MPLA regime there fed presumptions that the Katangan invasions represented an effort to

¹¹ See Theodore Trefon, *French Policy Toward Zaire During the Giscard D'Estaing Presidency* (Brussels: Centre d'étude et de documentation africaines, 1989); and Jean-Claude Willame, "La France au Zaïre: Le grand 'safari technologique'" in François Maspero, ed., *La France contre l'Afrique* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1981).

¹² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note pour le cabinet du ministre, "A/S: Présence économique française dans le Shaba," 23.03.1977, pp. 1–2.

¹³ Trefon, *French Policy*, 84–85.

¹⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 21, 21/3, Note "A/S: Zaïre," 27.12.1978, p. 3.

¹⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Fiche du Groupe Permanent d'Evaluation de Situations du Secrétariat General de la Défense Nationale, No. 21/CER/B/CD, "Evolution de la situation au Zaïre," 07.04.1977, Annexe.

¹⁶ France imported most of its cobalt from Morocco. See Galen Spencer Hull, "The French Connection in Africa: Zaire and South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 5, 2 (1979), 225.

expand the influence of communism in Africa by destabilizing Zaire. French officials in the Foreign Ministry felt strongly that the Soviets viewed Zaire as a “perfect target” whose destabilization would, “contribute to undermining the confidence of moderate African countries with respect to Western protection, and test the American will to retaliate.”¹⁷ If successful, this would also deal a severe blow to French prestige and credibility on the continent, particularly with its francophone client states.

In contrast, in the first months of the Carter administration, détente with the Soviet Union had not yet found itself “buried under the sands of the Ogaden.”¹⁸ The administration wanted to avoid making Shaba I into a Cold War issue.¹⁹ In the first weeks of the war, Carter administration officials even put pressure on Mobutu to lower the tone of his accusations against the Soviets and Cubans.²⁰ These admonitions had little effect as Mobutu’s verbal attacks against the Eastern bloc increased in intensity as the days went by and as the FAZ continued its retreat.

Mobutu continually cited FAZ radio intercepts of Spanish and Portuguese speakers communicating with the attacking forces. American Ambassador Walter Cutler viewed this as an attempt by Mobutu to force the hand of his western backers into increasing their support. He felt that Mobutu’s effort “carries obvious risks [...] in that a tepid or no response from us could be viewed by his enemies and domestic opponents alike as a signal that the West will not in fact back up his regime. But given Zaire’s vulnerable position and Mobutu’s real uncertainty as to whether he can count on any further help from us, he probably feels it is a risk worth taking.”²¹ Mobutu’s efforts to pin the invasion on the Cubans and Soviets may not have worked on the Americans, but it did help to push the French into thinking about broader options.

Thus, in March and early April 1977 as the Katangans advanced, and despite American scepticism and relative Belgian disinterest (Brussels sent Mobutu a C-130 with some spare ammunition),²² French military officials, diplomats, and policymakers both in Kinshasa and in Paris, began to push for some kind of

¹⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Note pour le cabinet du ministre, “A/s. Situation au Zaïre,” 18.03.1977, p. 3.

¹⁸ For this phrase, see Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977–1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), 189.

¹⁹ JCL, National Security Affairs, 15, Box 2 (Brzezinski Office File Country Chron, Africa: 1-5/78 through Angola: 1979–1980), Folder: (Africa 10–12/1978), Document 3, Memorandum from Thomas Thornton to David Aaron, “African Chiefs of Mission Panel,” 10.10.1978.

²⁰ JCL, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material 12, Box 61 (General Odom File: Zaire 3/77 through Zaire 5-8/78), Folder: (Zaire, 3/77), Document 30, Telegram from Cutler to Vance, forwarded to Brzezinski, “Shaba Invasions: Consultations with Mobutu,” 23.03.1977.

²¹ Ibid.

²² MAE Nantes, Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 49, “Guerre du Shaba,” “Opérations du Shaba: Déroulement sommaire,” 20.05.1977, p.1.

intervention on Mobutu's behalf. Pressure on Giscard to intervene became particularly intense as the *Tigres* drew near the town of Kolwezi, whose expatriate population of over 3,000 included some 600 French citizens.²³

Ultimately fearing the potentially negative international consequences of unilateral French involvement, Giscard decided to avoid a direct intervention. Instead, French diplomats helped to persuade Morocco's King Hassan II to send troops. Hassan shared French fears of communist influence on the continent, particularly given his struggle with Polisario in the Western Sahara and its left-leaning Algerian supporters. Giscard offered to transport vehicles and equipment for the 1,500 Moroccan troops sent to defeat the Gendarmes.

Despite public affirmations that he had limited French military assistance to providing logistical support to the Moroccans, French involvement was actually far more substantial.²⁴ This included advisors attached to the Zairian ministry of defence to help manage war planning, training of airborne and mortar units, taking control of the entire FAZ logistics chain, maintenance and repair of FAZ vehicles and aircraft, and conducting aerial reconnaissance missions.²⁵ French aid, stiffened by the presence of a large Moroccan force, helped to improve both the capacity and morale of FAZ units who began moving into *Tigre*-held territory. The slow advance of the FAZ and its Moroccan allies allowed the Katangans to withdraw back to Angola. By the end of May 1977, Mobutu could declare victory as the last of the Gendarmes left Zaire.

French policymakers congratulated themselves for what they perceived as their decisive contribution to Zairian "victory." However, soon it became clear that this represented little more than a respite. The *Tigres* had suffered few casualties and had regrouped. Over the course of the next year, numerous intelligence reports filtered into Kinshasa, and onwards to Paris, indicating a substantial Cuban role in arming, training, and planning the FLNC's next moves. This led to heightened anxieties linked to Cold War concerns over communist threats to Zaire. A number of cross-border raids also presaged a renewed invasion of the country.

This materialized on May 13, 1978, when some 2,000–2,500 Katangan Gendarmes, having bypassed the Angolan border through Zambia, struck directly at Kolwezi itself. Local FAZ units quickly collapsed or retreated. Suddenly, the Katangans had control of the most important mining center in Zaire, and a city containing over 3,000 European expatriates. Within less than a week, geopolitical fears about the breakup of Zaire and communist expansion combined with reports that the Katangans had started executing Europeans in the city. This prompted

²³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Dêpeche d'actualité, "A/s : Le temps des oppositions?," 31.03.1977.

²⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre," 1975–1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note, "A/s. Transport d'éléments militaires marocains vers le Zaïre," 28.04.1977, p. 2.

²⁵ Powell, "Cuba of the West?"

Giscard, on the advice of Ambassador André Ross and Colonel Yves Gras, the head of the French military mission in Zaire, to launch an airborne assault on Kolwezi.

Meanwhile, the threat to their expatriates also led the Belgian government to organize a military intervention. Both France and Belgium required American assistance in the form of heavy-lift capacity to effectively project force at such a distance from their home countries. While they had planes for their own troops, they needed American C-141s to transport fuel, ammunition, and equipment. The Carter administration quickly agreed to both countries' requests, not least because some eighty American citizens also worked in the Kolwezi area, though Washington stipulated that its aircraft could not enter the combat zone.²⁶

Despite American agreement to support both interventions, French and Belgian policymakers had opposing goals. Apart from rescuing the city's European (and particularly French) population, the primary aim of French officials was to stabilize Mobutu's regime.²⁷ This meant two things. First, it meant defeating the FLNC and driving it out of Zaire. Second, it meant encouraging Kolwezi's expatriates to remain in Shaba, as their presence was crucial to Gécamines' operations and thus, the Zairian economy. Brussels though, exhibited less willingness to risk the lives of its soldiers in defence of Mobutu. Instead, the Belgian government ordered a pure evacuation operation. For this, a large crack force of Paracommandos would land at Kolwezi's airstrip, recently retaken by Mobutu's troops, and evacuate the city's European population, only using force if the Katangans proved uncooperative.

This plan infuriated French officials, since they feared that the removal of the highly skilled European labor force would have an enormously negative impact on Shaba's economy. French observers feared that a massive evacuation of expatriates from Kolwezi would trigger similar evacuations among the European populations living in Likasi, Lubumbashi, and other important mining centers in Shaba. Partly as a result of these disagreements, along with confused attempts at coordination, the first wave of the French 2nd *Régiment étranger de parachutists* (2nd REP) attacked Kolwezi in the late afternoon of May 19, 1978, a day before the Belgians. The following day, the 2nd REP's second wave jumped on the city, while the Belgian Paracommando Regiment landed at the airfield to begin evacuating the European population.

Lack of coordination and communication between the two forces resulted in confusion and led to at least one friendly fire incident.²⁸ After Colonel Yves Gras,

²⁶ JCL, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material 6, Box 87 (Country File Yugoslavia: 3-5/80 through Zaire 1/79-1/81), Folder: (Zaire 1-5/1978), Doc. 44, Chronology, undated.

²⁷ Intervention of Yves Gras, in Samy Cohen and Marie-Claude Smouts, eds., *La politique extérieure de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1985), 321.

²⁸ Thomas P. Odom, *Shaba II: The French and Belgian Intervention in Zaire in 1978* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1993), 79–80.

who oversaw the French operation from a flying command post, and Colonel Rik Depoorter, the Belgian commander, realized the dangers, they briefly met on the ground at Kolwezi's airfield. Gras insisted that the Belgians halt their evacuations of Europeans, to no avail.²⁹

By the time the French and Belgians arrived, the Katangans had already mostly retreated. Nonetheless, French forces lost five killed and twenty wounded in a series of sharp engagements in and around the town.³⁰ Meanwhile, the Belgian troops focused on their evacuation mission, and avoided combat. The death toll was grim. French troops counted some 131 dead European civilians,³¹ of whom fifteen were French.³² In retrospect, and given the available evidence, it seems likely that the killings did not stem from a deliberate FLNC plan, but rather due to a breakdown in discipline, revenge-taking, and simultaneous FAZ killings of expatriates, possibly in order to trigger a Western intervention.³³ Furthermore, French forces had killed some 250 *Tigres*.³⁴

Worst of all, French officials reported that nearly 1,000 Zairian civilians lay dead. They blamed much of the killing on the Katangan invaders who apparently targeted people who did not belong to the locally dominant Lunda community.³⁵ One British RAF officer, sent to Kolwezi in the days following the French and Belgian interventions to investigate the deaths of several British citizens, wrote that the bloodbath was such that, “you can smell Kolwezi from many miles away.”³⁶

Within days of their arrival, Belgian forces had evacuated nearly the entire European population of Kolwezi.³⁷ Colonel Philippe Erulin, commander of the 2nd REP, complained in a letter to his wife, “The Belgian intervention has been catastrophic, and hurt our efforts with the Europeans. I had succeeded in containing

²⁹ Ibid., 81.

³⁰ See list in Pierre Sergent, *La Légion saute sur Kolwezi: opération Léopard: Le 2e R.E.P. au Zaïre, mai-juin 1978* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1978), 227.

³¹ Ibid.

³² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 29, Note, “Français disparus et décédés: Situation au 22 juin 1978,” 22.06.1978.

³³ See my discussion of the evidence in Nathaniel Powell, “France’s African Wars, 1974–1981,” (Ph.D. Diss., Graduate Institute of International Studies (IHEID), Geneva, 2013), 121–132.

³⁴ Gras, “L’Opération Kolwezi,” p. 702n; and Sergent, *La Légion*, 228.

³⁵ Erulin claimed the figure was closer to 700. See Erulin in Boissonnade, *Le mal zaïrois*, 441; and MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier “1978,” *Dépêche d’actualité*, “A/S: Le mois de Mai 1978 au Zaïre,” from Ross to Paris, 08.06.1978, p. 8.

³⁶ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew (henceforth TNA), FCO 31/2290, “Zaire—Shaba Invasion 1978,” Telegram from Lusaka Embassy to Foreign Office, 22.05.1978.

³⁷ Général Yves Gras, “L’Opération Kolwezi,” *Mondes et Cultures* 45, 4 (1985), 702.

the panic until their arrival. I wonder if Zaire will survive after this fatal blow to its economy.”³⁸

Although the invasion damaged some of Kolwezi’s mining infrastructure, the damage was less widespread than initially feared. Apart from surface structures such as workshops, and some vehicles, the Gendarmes seemed to have committed no acts of deliberate destruction. A temporary loss of electricity meant that water pumps had stopped working and some of the mineshafts flooded in consequence. It seemed though that the mines could return to working order within a matter of weeks.³⁹ Despite this, without the crucial presence of expatriate technicians within Gécamines, the entire mining economy of Shaba ran the risk of ruin. For French officials then, it became imperative to stabilize Shaba and provide enough security to encourage the expatriate population to remain or return.

In the immediate term, Colonels Erulin and Gras tried to assuage the fears of Europeans in other parts of Shaba. Erulin sent detachments of legionnaires to different towns and settlements throughout the province as far to the east as Likasi, to calm the European population and to make a show of force to dissuade further FLNC attacks or a popular uprising.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, expelling the Gendarmes did not suffice to restore a climate of security and confidence for the Europeans.

As soon as the fighting had ended and the 2nd REP had secured Kolwezi from the Katangans, elements of FAZ units who had regrouped took vengeance upon the local population. Erulin lamented to his wife upon leaving Kolwezi on May 28, “I’ve left the city in the hands of the looters of the Zairian army.”⁴¹ The remaining European expatriates in Shaba made it clear to local French authorities that they feared the FAZ nearly as much as they did the Katangans.⁴²

Not everyone appreciated the French presence either. Belgian soldiers, already suspicious about French motives, complained about the rough treatment that French troops appeared to mete out to some of the local population.⁴³ Allegations of bad behavior followed French troops as they withdrew to Lubumbashi, Shaba’s capital. There, the rabbi of the local expatriate Jewish community offered his home, as well as the adjoining synagogue to Colonel Erulin to serve as his headquarters in the city.

³⁸ Erulin cited in Euloge Boissonnade, *Le mal zaïrois* (Paris: Hermé, 1990), 434.

³⁹ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Dossier “1978,” Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Etat des installations minières à Kolwezi,” 27.05.1978.

⁴⁰ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier “1978,” Note from Thauvin to Ross, “A/s: Situation au Shaba,” 03.06.1978, also see Erulin cited in Boissonnade, *Le mal zaïrois*, 440.

⁴¹ Erulin cited in Boissonnade, *Le mal zaïrois*, 434.

⁴² MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I.Africaine et aide militaire, Telegram: “Maintien de la Force Africaine,” from André Ross to Paris, 07.12.1978.

⁴³ Odom, *Shaba II*, 81.

The French deputy consul later reported, though, that the legionnaires had pillaged the rabbi's house, stealing electronic equipment, money, and jewelry, and had damaged furniture and the electrical system.⁴⁴ The FAZ apparently did not have a monopoly on looting.

Despite the dramatic intervention at Kolwezi and the repulse of the FLNC, the Katangan Gendarmes managed to withdrawal in good order.⁴⁵ This meant that little could prevent a Shaba III at some future date.⁴⁶ Clearly the FAZ was in no position to prevent, or even effectively combat a renewed invasion. Its abysmal performance and lack of discipline contributed to the total lack of confidence placed in it by Shaba's European expatriate community.

Interestingly, French military intelligence noted that the FAZ had in fact suffered few losses from the Gendarme invasion. This resulted from the fact that:

Most of the units disbanded at first contact with the FNLC [sic]. Some troops even joined the rebel ranks. Because of this fact, losses were negligible. No structural reform, dissolution, merger, or creation of new units has been undertaken in recent days, even though numerous units, including the 14th Brigade, literally vanished.⁴⁷

General Babia, the Zairian chief of staff, informed the military attachés of the French, Belgian, and American embassies that the FAZ could not hold Kolwezi in case of a renewed attack. He estimated that he would need at least three months to effectively reorganize the Zairian 14th Brigade, the unit charged with Kolwezi's defense, and deploy the infantry units that Belgian officials had agreed to train.⁴⁸

Furthermore, Mobutu's actions following Shaba II threatened to worsen an already tense situation. Mobutu removed politically unreliable officers from the FAZ, despite their level of competence. He also tried and convicted the 14th Brigade's commander, General Tshikeva, of cowardice and sentenced him to death. French intelligence officers viewed this move with approval. They lamented Mobutu's later

⁴⁴ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," Note from Guth to Ross, "A/s.: Grand Rabbin," 20.07.1978.

⁴⁵ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," "Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi," Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978, p. 12.

⁴⁶ JCL: Donated Historical Material, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Box 28 (Meetings—SCC 50, 1/9/78 through SCC 100: 8/10/78), Folder (Meetings—SCC 80: 5/26/1978), Document 1C, Memo from William Odom to David Aaron, "SCC Working Group Meeting on Zaire, May 22, 1978, 22.5.1978.

⁴⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 21, 21/2, Fiche "Zaïre: Perspectives après le retrait des forces françaises et belges," Annexe, "Les Forces Armées Zaïroises en mai 1978," Groupe Permanent d'Evaluation de Situations, Secrétariat Général de la Défense Nationale, 05.06.1978, p. 1.

⁴⁸ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Dossier "1978," Telegram from MilFrance Kinshasa to Armées Paris, 26.05.1978.

decision to commute the sentence to a prison term, fearing that, “this clemency risks being interpreted as a sign of weakness.”⁴⁹

Furthermore, Mobutu’s decided to impose martial law in Shaba. As a “security” measure, he declared in a press conference that “Agriculture will no longer be practiced and the population will no longer live along the Zairian-Angolan border.”⁵⁰ Additionally, the only valid identity papers for Shaba residents would be their working documents. As the UNHCR noted, only salaried workers had such documentation available, which made the vast majority of the population extremely vulnerable to officially sanctioned persecution.⁵¹

A “Strongly Paternal Line” and the IMF

Despite the relatively limited damage to Kolwezi’s mining infrastructure, Zaire’s economy teetered on the brink of catastrophe. Zaire’s Western backers struggled to develop a strategy aimed at stabilizing the country and preventing renewed conflict. The words of J.A.N. Graham, Deputy-Undersecretary for the Middle East and Africa in the British Foreign Office, well summarize the general attitude of many Western policymakers in Kolwezi’s aftermath:

In the longer term some improved co-ordination with our European partners might contribute to general improvement in government in these countries. Part of the problem is that some of these countries which are regarded as friendly to the West are in themselves neither admirable nor stable. If our aid is not to be wasted, and if we are not to find ourselves in the position of defending the indefensible, we need perhaps to take a more strongly paternal line, as indeed the French Government does in many of the francophone countries. Again, this is extremely delicate and could not be applied unless the government concerned was prepared to co-operate. But it is with this thought in mind that I believe it would be a great mistake to allow the IMF and Belgian effort to do something about the Zairian economy to be

⁴⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 21, 21/2, Fiche “Zaïre: Perspectives après le retrait des forces françaises et belges,” Annexe, “Les Forces Armées Zaïroises en mai 1978,” Groupe Permanent d’Evaluation de Situations, Secrétariat Général de la Défense Nationale, 05.06.1978, p. 1.

⁵⁰ *Salongo*, 26.05.1978, in UNHCR Archives, Fonds 11, Series 2, Box 1029, 600.ZRE, Protection and General Legal matters (1974–1979) (Vol. 6), Doc. 371, “Mesures de contrôle de la population au Shaba,” 19.06.1978.

⁵¹ UNHCR Archives, Fonds 11, Series 2, Box 1029, 600.ZRE, Protection and General Legal matters (1974–1979) (Vol. 6), Doc. 371, “Mesures de contrôle de la population au Shaba,” 19.06.1978.

delayed. Getting that right seems to me the first step to improving the situation in Zaire.⁵²

In mid-June, Belgium hosted a conference on Zairian economic recovery and stabilization. Along with Zaire, Belgium, France, and the United States, delegations from Canada, West Germany, Iran, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the World Bank, and the IMF attended the meeting. The so-called “Mobutu Plan” constituted the main object of discussion. Although Mobutu’s “diplomacy of bankruptcy”⁵³ does not directly concern this study, a brief outline does serve to illustrate the ways that Mobutu managed to game the system to his own benefit. Also, IMF records show how Mobutu’s Western backers and their “strongly paternal line” contributed in some ways to exacerbating the regime’s corruption and the country’s economic woes.

Of course, Western officials did not quite see it this way. Henri Simonet, Belgium’s foreign minister, saw the IMF as a useful tool for safeguarding Western political and economic interests. In late May 1978, he met with Fund officials to discuss the upcoming meeting in Brussels. In Simonet’s view, “The economic considerations will need to go hand in hand with political ones and, in that connection, the IMF could play a vital role in paving the way for economic and financial stability.”⁵⁴ Simonet noted that though Zaire’s Western partners had planned this meeting long before Shaba II, the timing was now perfect since Mobutu had no choice but to accept Western “advice” and that “it would be wise to act while the iron was hot.”⁵⁵

Mobutu deftly exploited this sentiment. His “Mobutu Plan” consisted of precisely those measures that his Western backers demanded, and even lay some of the blame for Zaire’s fiscal and economic problems on governmental corruption and incompetence. To address these issues, the Zairian regime promised to improve Zaire’s state institutions, to prepare an economic stabilization program, and to increase productivity in agriculture, mining, and manufacturing.⁵⁶ The regime also declared itself willing to accept the appointment of a foreign expert as a chief

⁵² TNA FCO 31/2291, “Zaire—Shaba Invasion,” 1978, Memo from J.A.N. Graham to Department, no subject, 29.05.1978, p. 2.

⁵³ See, Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

⁵⁴ IMF Archives, Africa Department Fonds, AFRAI Country Files, Box 141, Zaire—Correspondence, 1971–1978, Memorandum for Files—Draft, from J.B. Zulu to Managing Director, “A Short Minute on the Meeting with the Belgian Foreign Minister on Zaire in Mr. Dale’s Office,” 30.05.1978, p. 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁶ IMF Archives, African Department Fonds, AFR Country Division Desk Files Zaire, Box 67, “Lignes de Force du Plan Mobutu,” undated, June 1978.

comptroller in the finance ministry, with full control and veto power over public spending.⁵⁷

Unfortunately for Mobutu, apart from emergency humanitarian assistance, most donor countries seemed unwilling to provide much economic assistance until he had agreed upon a stabilization program with the IMF. The IMF, on the other hand, did not want to draw up a stabilization program until it had received serious funding commitments from Zaire's donors. Though this commitment problem prevented an agreement on a stabilization program until 1979, Mobutu did take measures that signaled an apparently serious effort to reform. In addition to a comptroller, Mobutu had, in theory, agreed to foreign control or supervision of the customs administration and the central bank. French officials wanted these foreign technocrats to coordinate their policies on a steering committee, which would report directly to the IMF. Mobutu, however, managed to dilute this into an advisory commission within the Zairian government.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, over the course of the next few months, he made other moves demanded by the IMF as prerequisites for contributing towards the financing of a stabilization program.

One of the most important policies, in the IMF's view, consisted of a major exchange-rate devaluation aimed at reversing Zaire's balance of payment problems, improving Gécamines financial situation, and increasing productivity.⁵⁹ This devaluation became the subject of some debate as IMF head Jacques de Larosière met with Erwin Blumenthal, the newly appointed West German principal director of the Zairian Central Bank in early October 1978.

Blumenthal explained to Fund officials that, though he felt that Zaire needed a large currency devaluation, "a very large one-step devaluation would be counterproductive. It would have many undesirable social and political repercussions" He also indicated that a large part of Kinshasa's population lived at starvation levels. While the prices of luxury products were at black-market rates, most low-end consumer goods, particularly basic food and fuel, remained close to official prices. Thus a major devaluation would introduce immediate price increases in an already fragile socioeconomic situation. Instead, he argued for a staggered devaluation, eventually reaching 50 percent over six months.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ IMF Archives, African Department Fonds, AFR Country Division Desk Files Zaire, Box 67, Office Memorandum from E.L. Bornemann to Managing Director, "Zaire—Meeting in Brussels," 19.06.1978, p. 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁹ IMF Archives, African Department Fonds, AFR Country Division Desk Files Zaire, Box 64, "Note on the Economic and Financial Situation of Zaire," undated, early June 1978, p. 4.

⁶⁰ IMF Archives, Central Files Collection, Economic Subject Files S872, Box 306, Memorandum for Files, "Meeting with Mr. Blumenthal, Principal Director, Bank of Zaire, in the Managing Director's Office," 12.10.1978, p. 1.

Fund officials initially balked at this, fearing that drastic measures would be required before they could sign onto a stabilization package. Nonetheless, Blumenthal emphasized that, “if donors wait too long, and insist that every last reform measure be in place before giving any further aid, it may be too late to stabilize anything.”⁶¹ He convinced Larosière that, “if the donors waited too long, they might kill the patient in the process.”⁶² Larosière insisted in return that for this to happen, “it was very important to convince aid donors that a change in attitudes in Zaire was taking place,” and noted that devaluation and budget controls were the best ways to do this.⁶³

Mobutu did enact a series of devaluations, beginning at the end of October 1978, and eventually reaching 50 percent versus the SDR⁶⁴ by January 1979.⁶⁵ Despite Blumenthal’s efforts to minimize its impact on the population, the Bank of Zaire reported that prices of basic goods in shops and markets increased drastically during this period. From October 1978 to April 1979, the Bank reported that shop prices increased on average over 50 percent, and food prices in markets increased by nearly 35 percent. These rates were significantly higher than the inflation experienced the previous year, and the Bank attributed this principally to the devaluation.⁶⁶ Despite the hardships this program inflicted upon many of Zaire’s urban poor, it signaled Mobutu’s apparent seriousness to the IMF and Zaire’s donors. This led to an IMF agreement to finance an eighteen-month “stabilization program” with 118 million SDR in July 1979. This triggered lines of credit from other donors and significantly bolstered Mobutu’s regime.⁶⁷

The process by which this took place provides a fascinating illustration of the ways Mobutu managed his international relationships. In September 1978, a World Bank assessment mission visited Gécamines in Shaba. It returned with a very pessimistic evaluation. It reported that the Zairian government’s interference with Gécamines seriously threatened its autonomy. The regime also diverted much of the company’s earnings into special accounts. Management had collapsed, employee morale had fallen, and staffing problems threatened productivity. Furthermore, the

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 3.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 4.

⁶⁴ Special Drawing Rights—While not a currency in itself, the SDR represents a claim upon currency held by member countries of the IMF. Its value is determined by a “currency basket” of major currencies, which aims to limit the effects of exchange rate fluctuations.

⁶⁵ IMF Archives, Database files, “Zaire—Recent Economic Developments,” 04.04.1979, p. 57.

⁶⁶ IMF Archives, African Department Fonds, AFR Country Division Desk Files Zaire, Box 70, Banque du Zaïre, “Evolution des prix dans les magasins et aux marchés de Kinshasa entre novembre 1978 et mars 1979,” 04.05.1979, p. 2.

⁶⁷ IMF Archives, Database files, “Zaire—Staff Report for the 1981 Article IV Consultation,” 15.12.1981, p. 4.

lack of expatriate staff occasioned by the Shaba invasions had impaired maintenance work and contributed to a gradual decline in production.⁶⁸

Before 1978, Gécamines had sold its products through SGM, a Belgian marketing company, which pre-financed 70 percent of the various minerals' market value, and settled the remaining difference after sale. The regime altered this procedure in January 1978. Now the difference would accrue to the office of the presidency, i.e., Mobutu. Meanwhile, cobalt prices tripled during the year, and thus the regime reaped an enormous profit. The World Bank mission estimated that this included a shipment of 5,000 tons of cobalt, which would bring the presidency some 100 million SDR by year's end.⁶⁹ This of course would not be used to plug budget shortfalls or service the country's ballooning debt.

In the same vein, the World Bank mission discovered that some 10 percent of Gécamines' copper went unsold. Instead the regime "ceded" it in barter agreements to a number of different countries, including 10,000 tons to France in exchange for helicopters and 24,000 tons to Italy in exchange for aircraft.⁷⁰ This of course meant that Zaire could not benefit from the sale of this copper to mitigate some of its balance of payment difficulties. It also illustrated the willingness of some of Zaire's Western partners, notably France, to facilitate Mobutu's ability to sacrifice his country's financial and economic credibility to enrich himself and those around him. Barter agreements like this provided an easy way for Mobutu to avoid the kind of public expenditures for military equipment, which drew the ire of foreign creditors.

Unfortunately for Mobutu, international assessment missions like that of the World Bank, threatened his credibility with donors. It remained important for him to maintain the appearance of external supervision and control, even while subtly removing the real power held by figures like Blumenthal. In his negotiations with the IMF for a stand-by financing agreement for a stabilization program, Mobutu attempted to do just this. In a letter to Larosière in February 1979, Blumenthal vehemently protested what he saw as a blatant attempt by Zairian authorities to undermine his real role by changing the scope of his mission. Blumenthal scathingly criticized the wording of the Zairians' draft "letter of intent," which represented the initial step towards an IMF loan agreement, as an "anti-Blumenthal law in disguise."⁷¹ The letter's wording removed responsibility for monetary decision-making from the Central Bank, and placed it in the hands of a government committee. Blumenthal observed that this represented a clear demonstration of

⁶⁸ IMF Archives, African Department Fonds, AFR Country Division Desk Files Zaire, Box 72, Memorandum for Files, "Zaire—Meeting with the IBRD and the Zairian [sic] Delegation, September 29, 1978, 2:00 p.m.," 04.10.1978, p. 1–2.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷¹ IMF Archives, Central Files Collection, Economic Subject Files S872, Box 306, Letter from Blumenthal to Larosière, 24.02.1979, p. 1.

Zairian intentions.⁷² It removed even the nominal degree of independence afforded to the Central Bank, yet the IMF seemed to accept the implication.

Although the wording in the letter eventually did change to reflect Blumenthal's concerns,⁷³ he informed IMF officials that he no longer thought he could effectively perform his job.⁷⁴ His situation grew worse over the coming months. In April, a candidate for the comptroller in the finance ministry had finally been found, but without the agreed veto powers over expenditure.⁷⁵ This left Blumenthal increasingly frustrated and he soon left his position in disgust.

In a famous report written several years later,⁷⁶ Blumenthal detailed the level of corruption in the regime and the ways in which Mobutu managed to gut his onerous international commitments of their substance, while still maintaining appearances in the eyes of international partners. Blumenthal was even once threatened at gunpoint to hand over Central Bank money to a FAZ general.⁷⁷ Blumenthal wrote this report in early 1982 after the IMF had agreed to several major loans in the course of the preceding years.

His report highlighted the enormous lack of credibility in Zaire's political, economic, and financial institutions. It warned creditors, particularly states, that, "Mobutu and his government mock the question of debt reimbursement and the public debt. Above all, they count on the generosity of their creditors and on the indefinite renewal of loans and their reimbursement."⁷⁸ Indeed, by the end of 1980, Zaire's external debt had reached 4.5 billion dollars.⁷⁹ Blumenthal noted that every single IMF program to date had failed in Zaire, which begged the following questions:

why hasn't the IMF, why haven't the donor countries abandoned rather than renewed their commitments each time? Why has there been such a failure that will certainly continue if no radical change occurs? [...]

⁷² Ibid., pp. 1–2.

⁷³ IMF Archives, Central Files Collection, Economic Subject Files S872, Box 306, Letter from Larosière to Blumenthal, 09.03.1979.

⁷⁴ IMF Archives, Central Files Collection, Economic Subject Files S872, Box 306, Letter from Blumenthal to Larosière, 24.02.1979, p. 2.

⁷⁵ IMF Archives, Central Files Collection, Economic Subject Files S872, Box 306, Letter from Blumenthal to Larosière, 15.04.1979.

⁷⁶ IMF Archives, Office of the Managing Director Fonds, Jacques de Larosière sous-fond, County Files Zaire, Box 90, "Zaire: Rapport sur sa crédibilité financière internationale," 20.04.1982. See also leaked copies of this report in: Erwin Blumenthal, "Zaire: Rapport sur sa crédibilité financière internationale," *La Revue Nouvelle* 77, 11 (1982).

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

And for what reasons do Western countries persist in giving not only loans, but also non-refundable grants?⁸⁰

After listing numerous instances of corruption, Blumenthal warned that, “there is no, I repeat no chance on the horizon that Zaire’s numerous creditors recover their funds.”⁸¹ This blind commitment to Mobutu’s survival and other needs also translated into the post-Kolwezi security architecture that Zaire’s Western allies tried to implement at the same time.

A Western Coalition?

In the aftermath of Shaba II, neither French nor Belgian policymakers wished their troops to remain in the province indefinitely. As noted above, Belgian authorities felt uncomfortable about extending their mission beyond that of a simple evacuation of foreign personnel. This conflicted with the French desire to stabilize the province in order to encourage the expatriates to remain.

Nonetheless, many in the expatriate community made clear to anyone who would listen that they did not trust the FAZ to provide security, and would leave Zaire without a more disciplined and better trained stabilization force.⁸² In the weeks following the Kolwezi raid, Belgian military intelligence, the SGR, conducted long debriefings of Belgian civilian eyewitnesses. Their testimony illustrated the extent of their fears of the future.

Claude Renard, the Belgian Director of Gécamines operations in Kolwezi, saw the Shaba invasions and their consequences in racially-tinged and apocalyptic terms. His views are worth examining at length, as he was an important member of the local expatriate elite and his views echoed those expressed by many of his compatriots. Belgian intelligence officials also highly respected his opinions, and regarded him as a “good Belgian patriot.”⁸³

In his conversations with Belgian intelligence, Renard first highlighted the destructive behavior of the FAZ towards the local population, and partly blamed their activities for the outbreak of violence against expatriates and others. He likened the violence to the revenge killings conducted by certain Resistance groups following the Nazi occupation in 1945. However, unlike the Resistance, according to Renard’s racial prism:

Within a cowardly black mass, there is no noble aspect to vengeance;
it is score-settling, a free-for-all, a surge of hatred, sexual gratification.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 26.

⁸² MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Telegram: “Maintien de la Force Africaine,” from André Ross to Paris, 07.12.1978.

⁸³ Centre de Documentation Historique de l’Armée belge, Evere (henceforth CDH), SGR II Zaïre Shaba II, R.ZAIRE/36.351 21 JUN 78 MARC—B, “Témoignage de Mr RENARD, directeur et chef du siège GECAMINES KOLWEZI,” 21.06.1978.

Their race is like that. Even when the Russians become masters of Kolwezi, they'll have a lot of problems, especially if they entrust monitoring and occupation missions to Cuban chi-chi boys.⁸⁴

Renard emphasized that Shaba's importance for the West (particularly as a major repository of the world's cobalt) meant that the Kolwezi raid was a "Pearl Harbor," and the true beginning of the Third World War. He felt that the deployment of a Pan-African force to the province would be a "carnival" and next to useless. Instead, he strongly advocated maintaining an "organized white military force," since "white = seriousness = security." He also suggested that Gécamines should henceforth only employ single white men as expatriate workers, and arm them, since rebels "like to attack disarmed people."⁸⁵

Another Belgian Kolwezi resident, listed in the Belgian intelligence files as an unnamed teacher, declared that the FAZ was the "number one enemy" in Shaba and described them as "vermin." When the FAZ were in charge it was, "the reign of authorized banditry." He attributed at least some of the violence in Kolwezi to the FAZ itself, though partly on the basis of odd racial theories about the character of "Bantus." Like Renard, he pleaded the need for a "serious" security force deployed in Shaba, and would not return there without one.⁸⁶

One should note in passing that some observers linked local perceptions of expatriate racism to the violence meted out to Europeans by some of Kolwezi's population during the FLNC occupation. This overt racism, combined with severe food shortages and highly visible wealth disparities between locals and foreigners generated substantial resentment. When the Katangans "liberated" the city, desperate need for food and bitterness towards the expatriate elite certainly contributed to some of the atrocities.⁸⁷

Meanwhile, in the days following Shaba II, Belgian intelligence reports suggested that the Katangan invasion merely represented one element of a much broader threat to Zaire.⁸⁸ A small rebel incursion from Sudan towards the end of the month reinforced this perception.⁸⁹ These fears, along with the fears of their expatriates, may have helped to push Belgian policy in the direction of supporting a broader stabilization operation. Despite the initial 72-hour mandate given to the Belgian Paracommando Regiment, on May 22, the Belgian cabinet decided to leave

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ CDH SGR II Zaïre Shaba II, R.ZAIRE/36.451 10 JUL 78 MARC—B, "Interview de Mr....., ATG, professeur à KOLWEZI," 10.07.1978.

⁸⁷ Jean-Claude Willame, *Contribution à l'étude des mouvements d'opposition au Zaïre: Le F.L.N.C.* (Brussels: Centre d'étude et de documentation africaines, 1980), 37.

⁸⁸ CDH SGR II Zaïre Shaba II, Telegram sr 02/290578, "situation du zaire," 29.05.1978.

⁸⁹ CDH SGR II Zaïre Shaba II, Telegram from Embassy Kinshasa to Brussels, "évaluation de la situation dans le secteur faradje-aba," 30.05.1978.

one of the regiment's battalions at Kamina, a large airbase in north-central Shaba as the rest of the unit withdrew.

According to British observers, another reason that may have pushed Belgian policymakers into extending their commitment to Zaire related to their suspicion of French motives. Belgian officials may have viewed the French decision to prolong the stay of the 2nd REP as a means of gaining a "disproportionate political advantage" over the Belgian position in Zaire.⁹⁰ It was no secret that the French operation in Kolwezi had broader aims that went beyond the simple protection of European expatriates. French foreign minister Louis de Guiringaud explicitly told his British interlocutors that France had four aims in Shaba; protecting the European population, evacuating those who wished to leave, helping Zaire restore security in Kolwezi, and, "not to leave Kolwezi until the Zairians had the situation again in hand," though Guiringaud thought this would take little more than a week.⁹¹

The combined fears regarding their remaining (and returning) expatriates in Shaba, French motives, and Zaire's instability, led Belgian policymakers to reflect on the kind of broader commitment they could and should make in Zaire. To some extent though, divisions within the governing coalition in Brussels made it difficult to develop a coherent policy. Prime Minister Leo Tindemans, a Christian Democrat, seemed more sympathetic to French methods than Socialist Foreign Minister Henri Simonet, who took a harder anti-Mobutu line. This reflected the hostility felt within the Socialist Party towards Belgian support for Mobutu or association with what its membership perceived as France's "strong-arm methods" in Africa.⁹² The policy line that emerged from this disagreement within the Belgian government essentially revolved around achieving a level of stability in Zaire that would allow the departure of Belgium's remaining troops while permitting Brussels to credibly maintain that their intervention had solely humanitarian motives and had not aimed at propping up the local dictator.⁹³

To this end, Simonet outlined his view on possible post-Kolwezi options to Zaire's Western backers. He suggested that there existed four options available for stabilizing Shaba:

- (A) Security of Shaba to be guaranteed entirely by Zaire national forces.
- (B) A combined African force should be put together to do the job.

⁹⁰ TNA FCO 31/2290, "Zaire—Shaba Invasion," 1978, Telegram from Embassy Brussels to Foreign Office, no subject, 22.05.1978.

⁹¹ TNA FCO 31/2289, "Zaire—Shaba Invasion," 1978, Foreign Office Emergency Staff Memo, "Shaba: Kolwezi evacuation—situation at 0700 hours, 20 May," 20.05.1978, p. 3.

⁹² TNA FCO 31/2290, "Zaire—Shaba Invasion," 1978, Telegram from Embassy Brussels to Foreign Office, no subject, 22.05.1978.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

(C) An international force be assembled to include European forces.

(D) The Franco/Belgian military presence be maintained.⁹⁴

He ruled out option A as completely unrealistic and felt that option D would face too much political opposition. He saw option B as the most desirable, possibly under the framework of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).⁹⁵ Option C, seeing as it required a larger European and, perhaps UN commitment, also seemed like a nonstarter.

British policymakers, who had contributed to the Belgian evacuation effort by providing airlift assistance from aircraft stationed in Zambia, also preferred option B. British foreign secretary David Owen wrote that while he would “need convincing” that option A was unviable, he had a “strong preference” for option B if option A was unworkable. He felt that option C, “would be in my view misguided,” and worried that any deep British commitment in support of Mobutu would risk Britain’s relationship with neighboring Zambia.⁹⁶

Meanwhile, French policymakers, along with Mobutu, had already taken the initiative in organizing what Simonet had described as “option B.” French officials, despite feeling much less embarrassment for their support to Mobutu, faced the dilemma that their “humanitarian” mission could not turn into a long-term dissuasive presence or “pacification” operation without losing the character of its original publicly stated mandate.⁹⁷ This might threaten its international legitimacy, the important logistical backing it received from the United States, and other forms of overt support from France’s Western partners.

Thus French diplomats began pushing for the IAF. This would provide a wider African dimension to the internationalization of the Shaba crisis. It would also help to legitimize foreign military intervention in Zaire by giving it an African veneer. Shortly after the Kolwezi operation, Ambassador André Ross observed:

It is indeed from Africa, supported by Westerners that Zaire can hope to receive the military aid which it urgently needs. Only outside forces can sustainably guarantee Shaba’s security in the face of the non-negligible pressure that the FNLC [sic] continues to exert there.

⁹⁴ TNA FCO 31/2290, “Zaire—Shaba Invasion,” 1978, Telegram from Embassy Brussels to Foreign Office, “Maintenance of Stability in Shaba,” 22.05.1978.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ TNA FCO 31/2290, “Zaire—Shaba,” Telegram from David Owen to Foreign Office, “Shaba,” 22.05.1978.

⁹⁷ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Général Force Africaine, “La Force Inter Africaine au Shaba—bilan,” Kinshasa Embassy report on the IAF, 06.09.1979, p.3.

Several thousand men will suffice. The limited nature of the required means makes it all the easier for this defense force to be constituted.⁹⁸

American officials also began to see a need for such a force, but hesitated on the level of commitment. Immediately following Shaba II, a working group meeting of the National Security Council's Special Coordinating Committee (SCC) made several grim observations. First, the CIA noted that the Katangans could invade again, and the FAZ probably could not stop them. It also thought that the IAF could prove useful in detecting another invasion early enough to react. However, like their French and Belgian counterparts, the working group concluded, "The Zaire economy can be expected to spiral downward with the exodus of Europeans which will continue from all parts of Zaire unless the security situation can be changed. In a word, the outlook for the economy is disastrous."⁹⁹

On May 25, Giscard and Carter discussed Zaire's future on the occasion of a state dinner in Washington D.C. Giscard told a skeptical Carter that Mobutu was "courageous" and "a realist" and governed a country which, in Giscard's view, "will be sooner or later destroyed by tribal struggles." He worried greatly over the increase in Soviet and Cuban influence in Africa, which the French intervention served to deflect. Although he thanked Carter for the American logistical assistance provided in Shaba, he complained about the lack of a stronger American commitment to Africa's defense. He told Carter that:

Weaker countries have the impression that they can't count on your support. I think it important that the Western democracies clearly show that they are ready to act when certain lines are crossed ... People have to feel the presence of American power which should play an important role in the balance to be achieved. It's something which is very deeply felt ... As for us, we sent six hundred soldiers and that was enough.¹⁰⁰

The SCC met the following day to discuss the possible extent of American commitment to Zaire. It noted that the French and Belgians had begun developing ideas for an ambitious program of economic and political reform, supported by the presence of the IAF. Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, also observed that American participation in the Kolwezi operation had, "to some extent

⁹⁸ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Dossier Consulat Lubumbabshi, "1978," "Depêche d'actualité: 'Le Zaïre après Kolwezi,'" Ross to the Paris, 02.06.1978, p. 4.

⁹⁹ JCL, Donated Historical Material, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Box 28 (Meetings—SCC 50: 1/9/78 through SCC 100: 8/10/78), Folder (Meetings—SCC 80: 5/26/1978), Document 1C, Memo from William Odom to David Aaron, "SCC Working Group Meeting on Zaire, May 22, 1978," 22.05.1978.

¹⁰⁰ Archives de la présidence de la République, 5AG3-984, Archives nationales, "Entretien entre le président Jimmy Carter et le président Valéry Giscard d'Estaing," 26.05.1978, cited in Vincent Nouzille, *Des secrets si bien gardés: Les dossiers de la Maison-Blanche et de la CIA sur la France et ses présidents, 1958–1981* (Paris: Fayard, 2009), 445–46.

... identified us with European attempts to preserve the situation in Zaire.”¹⁰¹ A deeper American engagement along Franco-Belgian lines would mean “we will have committed ourselves to an undertaking that will be costly with only a 50-50 chance of success. Most importantly, even the fact of consultations starts us on the road to commitment.”¹⁰²

Despite questionable future reform prospects, the SCC, with strong backing from officials in the State Department, agreed that, “Zaire is too important and the global stakes too high for the United States to continue its past posture of marginal support for the Zaire economic effort.”¹⁰³ In Brzezinski’s somber analysis, “The alternative of not participating in this effort would probably lead to a rapid economic collapse in Zaire and political fragmentation of the country.”¹⁰⁴ However, Brzezinski warned Carter that, in his view:

deeper U.S. economic involvement will mean that Zaire will become politically more important to us and, success or failure, strategically more significant. In this connection, everyone agrees that, to the maximum extent possible, we should be junior partners to the Europeans and others in this development program.¹⁰⁵

Indeed, Carter’s talking points for his meeting with Giscard indicated that while the United States would support the airlift, the allies “must take care that this not seem to be a neocolonialist operation to protect our investments.”¹⁰⁶

This reasoning formed the basis of subsequent American policy towards Zaire and its relations with France and other Western partners regarding the deployment of the IAF in Shaba. American officials agreed to provide much of the airlift and some logistical support for the IAF’s deployment, but did not want to promise anything more.¹⁰⁷ By free-riding on the Europeans, American policymakers hoped that they could distance themselves from Mobutu, and avoid the fallout should the international effort to save his regime fail. This free-riding approach would mar American relations with French officials, who consistently felt that the United States should bear more of the burden.

¹⁰¹ JCL, Donated Historical Material, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Box 28 (Meetings—SCC 50: 1/9/78 through SCC 100: 8/10/78), Folder (Meetings—SCC 80: 5/26/1978), Document 1, Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, “Next Steps in Zaire,” 26.05.1978.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Donated Historical Material, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Box 28 (Meetings—SCC 50: 1/9/78 through SCC 100: 8/10/78), Folder (Meetings—SCC 80: 5/26/1978), Document 1A, “Attached Talking Points for Carter’s Meeting with Giscard,” 26.05.1978.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

The Inter-African Force

To lead the IAF, French officials again requested that the Moroccans return to Shaba. As discussed earlier, Morocco's King Hassan II greatly feared communist expansion in Africa and connected consequences of destabilization in Zaire with his own conflict with Algeria over the Western Sahara. He thus agreed to lead the operation.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, as Moroccan officials explained to their American counterparts, a Moroccan troop presence in Shaba would also "safeguard" Morocco's supply line to the UNITA rebels it was supporting against the MPLA regime in Angola.¹⁰⁹

Although Morocco would form the backbone of the IAF, Hassan wanted much broader African participation.¹¹⁰ This required a significant diplomatic effort on the part of both the French and the Zairians. Thus within days of the victory over the Katangan Gendarmes, Mobutu, with French support, began to push for the establishment of the IAF. At the closing session of the Franco-African Summit in Paris, on May 23, Mobutu forcefully made his case for an African multinational deployment to the assembled grouping of francophone African leaders. He followed this up with personal visits to several African capitals, starting with Rabat.¹¹¹

Getting enough African political support was not a straightforward task, particularly given Mobutu's general lack of popularity and legitimacy. Even Moroccan officials expressed doubts to their French interlocutors. King Hassan's ambassador to Paris, Dr. Youssef Ben Abbès, lamented Mobutu's complete lack of preparedness for the second Shaba invasion and privately wondered if there existed any Zairian who could replace Mobutu and conduct the necessary reforms.¹¹²

Before the first French troops had even landed in Kolwezi on May 19, French diplomats had begun to sound out the Senegalese government for a possible post-invasion deployment to Zaire. President Léopold Sédar Senghor agreed to send a unit in support of French efforts. However, his Army chief of staff, General Idrissa Fall, told the French military attaché in Dakar that this would pose a major problem. Senegal had already sent a large contingent of troops to Lebanon as part of the UNIFIL peacekeeping operation. This meant that any other major deployment would seriously tax the resources of the Senegalese army. The army could therefore only

¹⁰⁸ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, "La Force Inter Africaine au Shaba—bilan," Kinshasa Embassy report on the IAF, 06.09.1979, p.4.

¹⁰⁹ JCL, CREST Database document NLC-4-39-5-3-7, Telegram from the Situation Room to Ralph Sigler, "HW Intelligence Support Cable for 24 May 1978," 24.05.1978, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Dossier Consulat Lubumbashi, 1978, "Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi," 9.8.1978, p. 14.

¹¹¹ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, "La Force Inter Africaine au Shaba—bilan," Kinshasa Embassy report on the IAF, 06.09.1979, p. 4.

¹¹² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Compte-rendu d'audience, "A/S-Entretien avec l'Ambassadeur du Maroc en France," 30.05.1978, p. 2.

afford to send a small number of troops in symbolic support of a larger force.¹¹³ Furthermore, the mere fact of supporting Mobutu could provoke Senghor's domestic political opposition, due to Mobutu's unpopularity in the country resulting from his expulsion of Senegalese traders in 1971.¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, in early June, as the first Moroccan contingents prepared to deploy to Zaire, Senegalese officials decided to send a large "reinforced battalion." This move surprised French authorities, since they had made preparations to provide logistical and transportation assistance for a single company, as Fall had suggested.¹¹⁵ The French ambassador, Pierre Morizot, felt that this significantly increased number of troops represented an attempt by Fall to sabotage the deployment by forcing France to refuse support to a much larger contingent than planned. Although Fall was opposed to any deployment to Zaire, he had apparently told Senghor that in case the situation in Shaba deteriorated, a single company would not suffice for even self-defense purposes. As Prime Minister Abdou Diouf asked Morizot, "Between us, what confidence can we place in the Togolese and Gabonese companies? What would be my responsibility if I didn't take into account the advice of my military experts, and if the Senegalese detachment suffered a disaster because of that?"¹¹⁶

The military environment in Shaba also worried Senegalese officials. In addition to their lack of confidence in other African contingents, the FAZ posed a veritable threat. Senghor noted that Mobutu's previous military policy and consequent FAZ deficiencies might inspire disloyalty in the Zairian army. The IAF might have to prepare for a tense situation in Shaba where FAZ troops could turn on their erstwhile allies.¹¹⁷

Giscard paralleled these efforts with a meeting held in Paris on June 5, gathering representatives from the West German, American, Belgian, and British governments. Initially, he wanted this meeting to focus on developing a collective strategy towards Africa as a whole, particularly in light of the "destabilization" supposedly introduced on the continent by Soviet bloc activity.¹¹⁸ French officials

¹¹³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Dakar to Paris, "A/S: Proposition sénégalaise d'envoi de matériel," 22.05.1978, p. 1.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Morizot to Paris, "Force d'intervention africaine," 03.06.1978, p. 1.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Morizot to Paris, "Participation militaire sénégalaise au Zaïre," 14.06.1978, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 21, 21/3, DAM Note, "A/s. Zaïre," 09.06.1978, p. 2.

aimed to establish a military cooperation mechanism comprised of a joint general staff committee.¹¹⁹

Unfortunately for Giscard, the American delegation, implicitly backed by the other countries present, insisted that the meeting focus on Zaire's problems alone.¹²⁰ Although no one made any binding commitments, the participants did agree to a series of demands for reforms in Zaire. They collectively presented these to Mobutu as conditions for further Western aid to the country.¹²¹ These "recommendations," demanded an effort by Mobutu towards national reconciliation, improved institutions, improvements in the army, efforts at finding diplomatic solutions to Zaire's external problems, and reforms in Zaire's economic policy. True to form, Mobutu told Ross that "there was no point of disagreement" with these demands.¹²² Although this seemed to satisfy his interlocutors, as noted above, the future would demonstrate that Mobutu had little intention of following through with most of his promises.

On the same day, barely two weeks after the Kolwezi operation, the IAF began to deploy to Shaba.¹²³ At its full strength, it consisted of some 1,500 Moroccan, 560 Senegalese, 150 Togolese, and 50 Gabonese troops, all under the nominal command of Moroccan Colonel-Major Loubaris, the same officer who had commanded Moroccan forces during Shaba I. It also included a 200-man strong medical detachment from Ivory Coast.¹²⁴ French and American aircraft transported these troops, with both countries also providing some vehicles and other equipment to the units.¹²⁵ The French Foreign Legion also left behind vehicles used during their intervention for the Moroccans to distribute among the IAF.¹²⁶ In the meantime,

¹¹⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Paris to Dakar, "Force d'Intervention Africaine," 09.06.1978.

¹²⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 21, 21/3, DAM Note, "A/s. Zaïre," 09.06.1978, p. 2.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹²² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 21, 21/3, DAM Note, "A/s. Zaïre," 21.06.1978, p. 2.

¹²³ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, "La Force Inter Africaine au Shaba—bilan," Kinshasa Embassy report on the IAF, 06.09.1979, p. 4.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Note à l'intention de Monsieur l'Ambassadeur de France, "Problèmes relatifs au retrait de la Force Inter Africaine," from French military attaché, Kinshasa, 24.04.1979, p. 2

French officials agreed to train a Zairian rapid intervention airborne brigade, while their Belgian counterparts agreed to train infantry units.¹²⁷

While the IAF deployment could deter a third invasion, a broader reduction of tensions would require a substantial diplomatic effort to reconcile Mobutu with Angolan President Agostinho Neto and his ruling MPLA regime. In July 1978, with American encouragement Congolese leader Denis Sassou-Nguesso agreed to mediate between the two leaders.¹²⁸ On July 18, Mobutu and Neto formally met at an OAU summit meeting in Khartoum, and sketched the outline of an agreement.

Mobutu would end his support for a number of Angolan opposition groups, particularly the FNLA, FLEC, and UNITA. In exchange, Neto would disarm the Katangans, remove them from the border zone, and reopen the Benguela railroad, which linked Shaba's exports to the Atlantic Ocean. Furthermore, both sides agreed to normalize diplomatic relations. The two leaders made the accord public on August 19 as Neto made a two-day visit to Kinshasa.¹²⁹ Mobutu also made an amnesty offer, permitting some 150,000 Zairian refugees to return to Zaire from Angola.¹³⁰ This would help to undercut the *Tigres'* base of support in Angola, as many of the refugees were from Shaba's Lunda community, which formed the FLNC's main constituency.

Interestingly, while French officials approved of the accord, René Journiac, Giscard's chief Africa advisor, told Richard Moose, the US assistant secretary of state for African affairs, that UNITA should not be dropped. While Journiac viewed FLEC and FNLA as "not militarily serious," UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi should be, "kept available." Journiac regarded Savimbi as a "type of leader all too rare in the world and should at some time have a role to play in Angola." Given that UNITA represented the most powerful internal threat to the MPLA at the time, it seemed that the French at least had no intention of letting Mobutu's reconciliation with Neto interfere with their own destabilization projects.¹³¹

This reconciliation with Angola's leadership, which ostensibly removed or at least significantly reduced the external threat to Shaba, created concomitant problems for the IAF. The second Shaba invasion had worsened the uncertainty

¹²⁷ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, "Fiche sur la relève de la Force Interafricaine," from Colonel Yves Gras, Chef de la Mission Militaire, 26.8.1978.

¹²⁸ JCL, CREST Database document NLC-129-1-1-6-0, Telegram from US Embassy Brazzaville to Washington, "Das Walker Visit to Congo," undated, June 1979.

¹²⁹ Colin Legum, ed., *Africa Contemporary Record, 1978–1979* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1980), B579.

¹³⁰ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Note du ministère, "Sécurité au Shaba," 06.04.1979.

¹³¹ JCL, CREST Database document NLC-24-100-1-12-0, Memo from Thornton to Brzezinski, "Evening Report," 21.07.1978.

surrounding an already desperate economic situation in the province and insecurity was rife. The FAZ and Zairian police were unable to impose government authority and were even responsible for some of the insecurity themselves. Meanwhile, the IAF had become an important dissuasive presence for any attempted uprisings or rebellions. Nevertheless, this was not its original mission. This confusion, coupled with severe financial problems relating to Western and Zairian support would, in the following months, lead its member governments to push for an early withdrawal.¹³²

This move partly resulted from the situation of the troops of the various contingents on the ground. From the beginning of the deployment itself, questions over the nature of financing and logistical support remained unresolved. In early July, a delegation from the Moroccan defense ministry visited Paris in an attempt to address some of these problems. The Moroccans insisted that French diplomats should pressure their other Western partners to ensure that the IAF would be fully equipped and financed.¹³³ Indeed, the units suffered from a lack of both serviceable vehicles and spare parts. The Moroccan delegation made it clear to French defense officials that since the IAF was a French initiative, France should take charge of solving these problems.¹³⁴

Colonel Gras, on the other hand, felt that IAF complaints were largely unjustified. According to Gras, French instructors could successfully train the full Zairian airborne brigade of some 3,000 men by May 1979, but only if the resources requested by the French Military Mission were provided. However, the difference in resources allocated to the IAF relative to those provided to the French training mission was “disproportionately” large. Gras suggested that, “Such a policy risks extending the stay of the IAF.”¹³⁵ The Belgians had not even started their training mission yet, which aimed to prepare a Zairian infantry brigade within the same timeframe.¹³⁶

The lack of effective coordination between Zaire’s Western backers contributed to the problems of resource allocation and funding for the IAF and the FAZ training programs. In early August, Yves Vercauteren, the Belgian chargé d’affaires in Paris complained about the lack of cooperation between the “Western Five.” In a discussion with French military officials and diplomats, he noted that the interested powers had not created a coordination mechanism during their June meeting. Consequently, France was supposed to direct requests of the various African

¹³² MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Eventualité d’un retrait du contingent marocain,” 29.11.1978, p. 2.

¹³³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Note du ministre de la défense à Monsieur le Président de la République, 13.07.1978, p. 1.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Note from Gras to Paris, “Fiche sur la relève de la force interafricaine,” 26.08.1978, p. 1.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

contingents in Shaba to participating Western governments. However, either France had failed in this role, or participating African states did not use France as a unique interlocutor since they made financial and logistical requests to various state parties on a bilateral basis. Vercauteren wondered if this resulted from a misunderstanding over France's role, and suggested, on behalf of his government, that the Western states hold a new meeting to iron out this question, as well as to discuss the broader issue of the IAF's future.¹³⁷

In this vein, in September 1978 French, American, German, British, and Belgian officials agreed to a meeting in Paris to evaluate Zaire's situation in the four months following Kolwezi. French officials wanted to give the Zairian government responsibility for coordinating assistance requests to the five powers, rather than themselves playing this role.¹³⁸ Regardless, the meeting, held in secret on September 18, determined that all material requests would occur bilaterally, and that the five Western countries would exchange information through normal diplomatic channels.¹³⁹ Though less efficient, this allowed countries like the United States to avoid making a stronger commitment to the IAF through a more formal coordination mechanism.

In an October report to Ambassador André Ross, the French military attaché in Kinshasa, Colonel Larzul, noted that so far the IAF had succeeded in its mission. He waxed poetic that the IAF deployment had, "brought together, for the first time in post-independence African history, Moroccan units and black units, of different races, ethnicities, and mentalities, serving together in the same brotherhood of arms."¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, serious problems loomed on the horizon.

The contributing countries would soon need to relieve their troops in one way or another. As other observers had noted, no existing unit of the FAZ could relieve any IAF unit. According to Larzul, "All of the information that reaches us from Shaba not only highlights the FAZ units' zero value ..., but also their negative side (theft, pillage, etc.). It would be better in Shaba if the FAZ only existed to protect zones ...which have secondary strategic importance."¹⁴¹ Unfortunately, according to Larzul, the

¹³⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 21, 21/3, Fiche, "A/s. Force interafricaine-démarche du Chargé d'affaires de Belgique," 11.08.1978.

¹³⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 21, 21/3, Fiche N. 2, "A/s. Situation au Shaba," 14.09.1978, p. 1.

¹³⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 21, 21/3, DAM Note, "A/s. Réunion du 18 septembre sur le Zaïre," 19.09.1978, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, "Note à l'intention de Monsieur l'Ambassadeur de France, 'Maintien au SHABA de la Force Inter-Africain,'" 04.10.1978, p. 2.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, emphasis in the original text.

FAZ would not have any operational units prepared before the summer of the following year.¹⁴²

This state of unreadiness distressed officials from participating African countries. Togolese leader Gnassingbé Eyadéma complained to French Ambassador Bertrand Desmazières that the FAZ example might have “pernicious” effects on his own troops. This encouraged him to envisage soon withdrawing the small Togolese contingent.¹⁴³ Furthermore, contrary to Larzul’s panegyrics, serious tensions marred relations between the different IAF units, particularly between Moroccan forces and the rest.

Colonel Larzul noted that the Moroccan troops in Lubumbashi had become well integrated within the expatriate European community. Local expatriate organizations, clubs, and families frequently invited Moroccan officers to their events and homes. The Moroccans conducted a number of effective reconnaissance operations towards the Zambian frontier, and even crossed it on occasion. Generally, their presence seemed to inspire confidence among the Europeans. At the same time though, these same officers and men had virtually no contact with the local Zairian population who apparently feared them.¹⁴⁴

In mid-October, Colonel N’doye of the Senegalese army contingent and commander of the Kolwezi garrison visited Larzul and Gras in Kinshasa, the latter being an old friend. There, he harshly criticized the conduct of the Moroccans, particularly Colonel-Major Loubaris. According to N’doye, the Moroccan troops nominally under his command in Kolwezi refused to follow his orders. His vehicles lacked spare parts and Loubaris refused to help him with resupply. While, in N’doye’s view, his Senegalese unit had become close to and well integrated within Kolwezi’s Zairian population, the Moroccans remained apart. He felt completely powerless and blamed Loubaris for his troubles. N’doye made it clear that he would report his frustration to military authorities in Dakar. Larzul concluded, “A competent officer, Colonel N’doye is dynamic and perfectly able to fulfill his mission, but suffers from his dependence on the Moroccan headquarters.”¹⁴⁵

Problems within the IAF chain of command percolated down to the rank and file. A later report from the Ivoirian medical unit on the state of morale among the IAF troops highlighted the necessity of relief. The report requested that their home governments do more to look after their soldiers, noting, “If ‘dignity’ and ‘respect for others’ still characterizes our mission, it remains equally true that we continually experience a great number of difficulties, difficulties which deeply affect the morale

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 3

¹⁴³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Desmazières to Paris, “Entretien avec le président Eyadéma,” 11.10.1978.

¹⁴⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Note from Larzul to Ross, untitled, 20.10.1978, p.3.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.

of the men.”¹⁴⁶ The report explained that many of their vehicles no longer functioned and the mission lacked tarpaulins to waterproof crucial supplies.¹⁴⁷ Despite explaining this situation several times before, no one had done anything about it. Furthermore, the price increases resulting from the devaluation of the Zaire had a direct impact on the soldiers’ standards of living. This collection of problems obviously translated into a worsening morale. The report noted increasing incidents of indiscipline, nervous breakdowns, and, in the Moroccan contingent, even suicides.¹⁴⁸

These deteriorating conditions may have contributed to the rumors that Moroccan officers began to spread about the imminent departure of their force in October 1978. Such declarations sowed panic among Shaba’s expatriate population, who still very much feared the consequences of an IAF withdrawal.¹⁴⁹ André Ross shared these fears. In a late November handwritten note to René Journiac, he noted that the Moroccans had declared that they intended to leave Shaba at the end of the year. He also referred to rumors that the Senegalese had made similar moves. He felt that these might be bluffs on the part of the two countries in order to obtain more financial support from the West. Nonetheless, a Moroccan retreat would have “most serious” consequences for Zaire. Furthermore, French and Belgian efforts at retraining FAZ units had suffered significant delays. Also, Angola had apparently failed to disarm all the Katangan Gendarmes, as a dissident faction of the latter remained near the frontier. Ross urged Journiac to do everything possible to keep the Moroccans in Shaba until at least the middle of the following year.¹⁵⁰

In a meeting with his French, Belgian, and British colleagues in Kinshasa, American Ambassador Walter Cutler noted that the Moroccans probably had multiple reasons to leave. Apart from financial issues, the most important reason related to the fact that “after the reconciliation between Kinshasa and Luanda, this force no longer had the task of preventing outside aggression, but of maintaining order,” in Shaba.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, “Illème rapport moral du Contingent médical militaire du SHABA,” from Dr. Lt. Colonel ATIN ORIA, head of the Ivoirian Military Medical Contingent in Shaba to the Ivoirian Minister of Defense, 02.02.1979, p. 1.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

¹⁴⁹ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Memo from French Consul General in Lubumbashi, Pierre Guth, to the French Embassy, Kinshasa, “Départ des troupes marocaines,” 04.10.1978.

¹⁵⁰ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Letter from André Ross to René Journiac, 25.11.1978.

¹⁵¹ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Eventualité d’un retrait du contingent marocain,” 29.11.1978.

Alarmed by the possibility of the IAF's collapse, and at the request of Belgium's foreign minister, Henri Simonet, France reconvened a meeting of Zaire's major Western partners on December 13, 1978. French foreign ministry officials worried that without quick Western action, the withdrawal of the IAF would "plunge the country into insecurity" and cause the remaining 7,000 European expatriates in Shaba to leave. This would probably incapacitate the province's mines and thus compromise the regime's recovery.¹⁵²

The representatives from the four other Western powers present at the meeting agreed with this analysis. Furthermore, they agreed that the IAF should continue to operate until at least mid-1979 when the first capable FAZ units would theoretically become operational. Thus it became urgent that the Western Five begin negotiations with Senegal and Morocco in order to convince them to maintain their deployments.¹⁵³

As matters stood though, no one, apart from Belgian officials, seemed particularly interested in augmenting their financial commitments to the mission.¹⁵⁴ British diplomats insisted that their aid to neighboring Zambia already contributed to stability in Shaba. While they considered providing some bilateral aid to Morocco and Senegal to offset the costs of the deployment, they feared that high levels of overt assistance would incur high political costs on the IAF's Western backers. British policymakers, at least, did not seem willing risk their political standing in Africa by significantly committing to the mission.¹⁵⁵

At the same time, French officials found American reluctance particularly galling. Indeed, American officials found an interesting and relatively cost-free method of prolonging the IAF's deployment. As Senegal and Morocco made repeated requests for their troops' repatriation, the American administration simply refused to comply. The Americans considered these requests "inopportune" and wanted the troops to stay for fear of a power vacuum.¹⁵⁶ This left the troops stranded in Shaba for neither country had the transport capacity to extract them.

This also had much to do with American desires to place as much responsibility for the Shaba operation on African states themselves, and on their French and

¹⁵² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 21, 21/3, Note pour le ministre, "Affaire du Zaïre," 01.12.1978, p. 1.

¹⁵³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975–1978, Carton 21, 21/3, DAM Note, "A/s. Réunion du 13 décembre sur le Zaïre," 14.12.1978, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁵⁵ TNA FCO 31/2295, "Peace Keeping Force in Zaire," Telegram from Paris to FCO, "Five Power Meeting on Zaire," 13.12.1978.

¹⁵⁶ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Telegram: "Force d'intervention au Zaïre" from French Embassy Lomé to Paris, 19.12.1978.

Belgian backers.¹⁵⁷ One of the reasons for this was financial. The Carter administration worked under rather stringent budgetary restraints, which limited the amount of assistance it could provide for the IAF.¹⁵⁸ Bilateral foreign military aid could not go to states without specific earmarks for this kind of assistance.¹⁵⁹ In any case, the United States had already spent 13 million dollars on their contribution to the airlift during Shaba II and had granted 11 million dollars of Foreign Military Sales (FMS) credits to Zaire in 1978. American officials emphasized that Mobutu could use this to support the IAF.¹⁶⁰

Another reason for American reticence lay in their perception of Mobutu as a possibly hopeless case. Despite Mobutu's reconciliation with Neto, the State Department reported that "Shabans returning from Angola under Mobutu's amnesty are being arrested, and the necessary measures have not been taken to achieve military reform ... Meanwhile, Mobutu's army in Shaba continues to exhibit an almost total lack of discipline."¹⁶¹ American officials also felt that the pressure they put on the "Western Five," Zaire, and IAF-participating countries, had more or less paid off. They noted that the French had begun negotiating with Senegal over its financial and logistical needs, and that Mobutu had put a C-130 transport aircraft at the disposal of the mission.¹⁶² Furthermore, French officials had also managed to convince the West German government to finance one fifth of the operational costs¹⁶³ and the Belgian government agreed to provide more assistance.¹⁶⁴

French diplomats had indeed worked out a deal with the Senegalese government. In exchange for five million dollars' worth of military equipment for Senegalese army units in Dakar, Senegal, agreed to postpone its request for repatriation.¹⁶⁵ Morocco, on the other hand, posed more problems. French officials tried to convince King Hassan that he could use subsidies he received from Kuwait

¹⁵⁷ JCL, CREST Database document NLC-15-119-6-8-0, Department of State Briefing Paper, "Support for the Inter-African Force in Shaba," 29.12.1978, p.1.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Telegram: "Réunion du 13 décembre sur le Zaïre," from French Embassy in Washington to Paris, 12.12.1978.

¹⁶⁰ JCL, CREST Database document NLC-15-119-6-8-0, Department of State Briefing Paper, "Support for the Inter-African Force in Shaba," 29.12.1978, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 1–2.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, "La Force Inter Africaine au Shaba—bilan," Kinshasa Embassy report on the IAF, 06.09.1979, p. 6.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, "IAF et Sommet de la GUADELOUPE," handwritten note, 13.12.1978.

and Saudi Arabia to help finance the IAF mission. He replied that these funds went to the Moroccan military in general, and not the IAF. Hassan may also have intended to use a Moroccan withdrawal as blackmail in order to get more Western diplomatic support for his operations in the Western Sahara.¹⁶⁶ Although Western pressure led him to grudgingly agree to prolong his force's presence in Shaba, the threat of Moroccan withdrawal weighed heavily on the mission over the next months.¹⁶⁷

This only delayed the inevitable. Rapidly deployed without a specific mandate, nor an appropriate finance mechanism, the IAF could only serve as a temporary measure while Zaire and its allies worked out a more sustainable security strategy. By March 1979, the Moroccans made it clear that they planned to leave. After an absence of several weeks, Colonel-Major Loubaris, returned to Shaba and called a meeting of all the IAF contingent commanders. He handed each of them a letter, addressed to their respective heads of state from King Hassan II. The letter explained that, in Morocco's view, Shaba was secure, and the FAZ ready to take the place of the IAF. He no longer saw a reason for the continued presence of the mission in Zaire.¹⁶⁸ Hassan had also sent a letter to Mobutu announcing his decision, and asking for Mobutu's permission to withdrawal.¹⁶⁹

Mobutu negotiated an agreement with Morocco and the other contingents. The IAF would conduct a phased withdrawal over a three-month period from July to September 1979.¹⁷⁰ The newly trained FAZ infantry units would gradually replace the peacekeepers as they left. The Belgians, at least, thought that their training efforts of the FAZ 21st Infantry Brigade had largely succeeded. Belgian observers monitoring its deployment in Shaba in September 1979 noted that, "the population appreciates the presence of the 21st Brigade, whose men are behaving correctly," unlike other FAZ units in the province. Even the expatriate community felt confidence in them, as Belgian officers accompanied its units.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force Africaine, "Départ de la Force Interafricaine," Memo from Pierre Guth, French Consul in Lubumbashi to Kinshasa Embassy, 30.3.1979, p. 2.

¹⁶⁷ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, "La Force Inter Africaine au Shaba—bilan," Kinshasa Embassy report on the IAF, 06.09.1979, p. 8.

¹⁶⁸ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force Africaine, "Départ de la Force Interafricaine," Memo from Pierre Guth, French Consul in Lubumbashi to Kinshasa Embassy, 30.3.1979, p. 1.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, "La Force Inter Africaine au Shaba—bilan," Kinshasa Embassy report on the IAF, 06.09.1979, p. 9.

¹⁷¹ CDH SGR II Zaïre Shaba, Telegram no 372/229, "concerne situation au shaba," 30.09.1979.

Nonetheless, French officials still worried that the withdrawal of the IAF could cause an unacceptable political and military vacuum in the region.¹⁷² Thus, they began to look for a way to again reassure the European expatriate population, and provide some deterrent element to Shaba security that could bolster the presence of the newly trained, though untried, FAZ units.

As the IAF withdrew, French officers began to work out details of a joint Franco-Zairian military exercise to take place in Shaba shortly after the last IAF units had departed. Colonel Larzul, explained that this exercise:

will only have a deterrent effect on the rebel elements still existing in Shaba if it is planned and implemented with rigor, accuracy, and speed; that's the goal in certain Franco-African joint-exercises when the enemy is imaginary. Here, French airborne companies will maneuver in an operational zone with possible sharp reactions from an enemy whose strength is difficult to evaluate but is present in the towns and capable of launching guerilla actions.¹⁷³

This joint exercise, named “Opération Porc-épic” (Operation Porcupine), was to complement the deployment of the new Zairian units and serve as a warning to future interlopers that France could intervene again if necessary.¹⁷⁴ Although it only involved a relatively small number of French troops, it also meant to demonstrate French capacities to project force and provide security.¹⁷⁵

The French consul general in Lubumbashi, Pierre Guth, noted the effect that the “Porc-Epic” exercise had on the local population. He asserted: “Opinion is unanimous: by participating in these maneuvers, our government has confirmed its absolute support for President Mobutu and his regime. It was demonstrated that, in case of need, France would intervene like it did in 1977 and 1978.”¹⁷⁶

However, analyzing more closely the impact of these maneuvers, Guth made the point that one had to separate expatriate opinion from the Zairians. While European expatriates felt reassured by this demonstration of force, the Zairian response substantially differed. According to Guth, “For the Zairians, except for party activists, all deplore our support. For them, the action of our country, whatever its form, can only consolidate a regime which, in their opinion, causes misery for the

¹⁷² MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, “Fiche à l'intention de l'Ambassadeur de France, ‘Problèmes relatifs au retrait de la Force Inter Africaine,’” from Colonel Larzul, Attaché des forces armées in Zaire, 24.04.1979, p. 6.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 5 (emphasis in the original text).

¹⁷⁴ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier “Manoeuvres Zaïro-Françaises, ‘Opération Porc-Epic,’ Septembre 1979,” 12–19.9.1979.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Manoeuvres Zaïro-Françaises, “Opération Porc-Epic,” Septembre 1979, Report from Guth to Kinshasa Embassy, “Manoeuvres franco-zaïroises,” 04.10.1979, p. 1.

people.”¹⁷⁷ Indeed, some of the local population had suffered such trauma in the previous months and years that the “Porc-Epic” exercise itself scared communities living along the Zambian frontier into fleeing their villages.¹⁷⁸

African Diplomacy

While the IAF represented the first all-African peacekeeping operation, its existence exacerbated serious political divisions on the continent. The years 1977–1979 were a time of increased external military interventionism in Africa. The high levels of French and Cuban soldiers and “advisors,” as well as a large Soviet presence, ensured that the question of outside intervention lay at the core of debates at the OAU Summit in Khartoum in mid-July 1978. However, it was the French and Belgian interventions in Kolwezi and subsequent efforts behind the IAF that provoked the most concerns.¹⁷⁹

Several years later, Nigerian scholar Olajide Aluko lamented that, “one can see that the effects of African response to external intervention in Africa have been insignificant. External interventions in the affairs of the continent have continued.”¹⁸⁰ The historical record, though, does not completely bear out this pessimism. Although the OAU could develop little in the way of a concrete African response to foreign military interventionism, it did serve as a powerful tool for delegitimizing wider French designs to create a Pan-African security force outside of the OAU framework.

As early as the April 1977 Franco-African Summit held in Dakar, several “moderate” African states closely tied to France, raised the question of receiving French support for the creation of an Inter-African military force composed of francophone countries.¹⁸¹ This suggestion, coming at the height of the first Shaba crisis, responded to increasing fears of foreign, particularly communist, interventionism. Giscard declared that, “All African states have a right to security inside their frontiers, whatever their political orientation.”¹⁸²

Within days of the Kolwezi events, Paris hosted the Fifth Franco-African Summit. Clearly, security and the threats of external intervention lay at the heart of the Summit’s discussions. At this same Summit where France and Zaire managed to

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Zdenek Červenka and Colin Legum, “The Organization of African Unity in 1978: The Challenge of Foreign Intervention,” in Legum, ed., *Africa Contemporary Record*, p. A32.

¹⁸⁰ Olajide Aluko, “African Response to External Intervention in Africa since Angola,” *African Affairs* 80, 319 (April 1981), 174–75.

¹⁸¹ Červenka and Legum, “The Organization of African Unity,” A32.

¹⁸² “La montée des périls en Afrique (4ème sommet, Dakar, 1977),” website of French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/pays-zones-geo_833/afrique_1063/sommets-afrique-france_326/montee-perils-afrique-4eme-sommet-dakar-1977_1566.html (accessed on 9 March, 2011).

cobble together the IAF, Giscard, without a hint of irony, solemnly declared, “We must refuse to let the politics of the blocs ravage Africa.”¹⁸³ Togolese leader, Gnassingbé Eyadéma went even further and denounced, “the blind violence, the brutal interference of foreign powers in the affairs of sovereign countries”¹⁸⁴ Omar Bongo, the president of Gabon, suggested the creation of a common military assistance pact.¹⁸⁵

French officials, enthusiastic about this idea, wanted American support for the initiative. They brought up the idea of a Pan-African Force with several American diplomats shortly after the Summit meeting. However, undersecretary of state for political affairs, David Newsom, in Paris for consultations on the IAF, had instructions to “pour cold water on the idea.”¹⁸⁶ The Americans had no desire to get involved in an initiative that sounded like another appendage to French neocolonialism.

In a statement sent to a number of francophone African capitals, the Carter administration outlined its position on the issue of the Pan-African Force:

As we have told our Congress and stated publicly, our support of African forces is limited to the immediate crisis situation in Shaba, and we have no thought of support for an African mutual defense force. Any wider involvement by us would require high level policy decisions and close consultations with our African and European friends, as well as with the American Congress.¹⁸⁷

Regardless of American desires to distance themselves from French initiatives, the deployment of the IAF in Zaire served clear Western interests and saved Mobutu’s crumbling authoritarian regime. This provoked significant divisions among African countries.

It infuriated Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere. On June 1, 1978, he summoned the American chargé d’affaires. He had also summoned the UK high commissioner and the West German ambassador the previous day. The American Embassy reported that Nyerere, “would have great suspicions about a Western-

¹⁸³ “Sécurité et développement (5ème sommet, Paris, 1978),” website of French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/pays-zones-geo_833/afrique_1063/sommets-afrique-france_326/securite-developpement-5eme-sommet-paris-1978_1567.html (accessed on 9 March 2011).

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ JCL, White House Central File, Box CO-67: Zaire, Folder: (CO 177 Executive 1/20/77–1/20/81), Document (number unknown), Memorandum from Tom Thornton to David Aaron, “O’Neil Briefing,” Zaire talking points, 05.06.1978, p. 3.

¹⁸⁷ Archives Minaffet Rwanda Kigali, Cote 3.3.4.19, Coopération Rwando-Congolais dans les domaines: Politique, Comptabilité, Diplomatie, Education, Sécurité, 1967–1996, “Aide-Memoire to Rwandan Government from United States Government on Shaba II,” 14.06.1978.

backed force in Shaba, especially if [the] French [were] involved Nyerere wanted to warn us off altogether and would regard Western-backed military presence in Shaba as a dangerous first step in collaborating with France in what he would consider the military re-colonization of Africa.” Although Nyerere supported the idea of territorial integrity, his concern seemed “overshadowed in this case by his concern that Western intervention to prop up Mobutu’s regime (which he sees as hopelessly corrupt) would be a giant step backward for the African revolution.”¹⁸⁸

Other African leaders had serious suspicions of French motives. Nigerian policymakers, who often saw France as a competitor for influence, denounced Western intervention in Zaire. At the same time, their own experience of civil war and southeastern Nigeria’s attempted secession (supported by France) in the Biafran conflict ensured that Nigerian officials were conscious of dangers to territorial integrity, a concept enshrined in the Charter of the OAU. Thus, Nigerian leaders also attacked the Cuban and Soviet presence in Africa. President Olusegun Obasanjo, attacked the West and the East in equal measure:

The Soviets should, therefore, see it to be in their interest not to seek to perpetually maintain their presence in Africa, even after the purpose for which they were invited has been achieved. This way they run the risk of being dubbed a new imperial power as indeed they are already being called, even by those with whom they have had long association. Let the Soviets and their collaborators heed this timely counsel. To the Western powers I say [...] Paratroop drops in the twentieth century are no more acceptable to us than the gunboats of the last century were to our ancestors. Convening conferences in Europe and America to decide the fate of Africa raises too many ugly specters which should best be forgotten, both in our and in the Europeans’ interests.¹⁸⁹

Ultimately the Nigerian and Tanzanian positions prevailed in the OAU conference’s final resolution on the question of the Inter-African Force as drafted by the Council of Ministers. The “Resolution on the Inter-African Military Force of Intervention,” specifically attacked the French and Francophone states’ proposal to establish a Pan-African military force outside of the authority of the OAU. The resolution:

1. Affirms that Africa’s defense and security are the exclusive responsibility of the Africans;
2. Solemnly declares that the creation of an Inter-African force can be envisaged only within the context of the OAU’s objectives and priorities for the elimination of the racist minority regimes of Southern Africa, the

¹⁸⁸ JCL, CREST Database Document, NLC-16-19-1-20-1, Telegram from US Embassy Dar es Salaam to Washington, “Consultations on Recovery Effort for Zaire,” 02.06.1978.

¹⁸⁹ Obasanjo Speech at OAU Khartoum Conference, cited in Červenka and Legum, “The Organization of African Unity,” A35.

total liberation of the continent, and the safeguarding of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States.

3. Calls for the reactivation of the OAU Defense Commission to consider the desirability of establishing an Inter-African Military Force under the aegis of the OAU.¹⁹⁰

This clear position of the OAU against any external Pan-African defense force helped to “pour cold water” over the idea. Countries originally interested in the idea of a Francophone security force suddenly became more hesitant. Before a meeting of the OAU’s newly reactivated Defense Commission in April 1979, the Rwandan foreign ministry recommended prudence to its delegation due to “the bitterness and [...] general disapproval that the initiative to create a heterogeneous security force of foreign emanation had provoked.”¹⁹¹ Indeed, the OAU had laid an obstacle in the path of French efforts to circumvent it.

This became clearer during the proceedings of the 6th annual Franco-African Summit held in Kigali, Rwanda. During the preparatory ministerial meeting in late April 1979, the question of African security provoked a heated debate among the delegates. Several delegates representing some of the more “radical” states such as Benin, Congo, and Mali, opposed the idea of placing the question of African security on the Summit’s agenda. According to them, the Franco-African Summit was not the appropriate body to debate these issues since the OAU had created its own commission to address security issues.¹⁹² Also, they argued that the sensitive nature of the question would undermine African unity and would divide the Summit meeting.¹⁹³

During the Franco-African Summit the following month, the French and African heads of state only briefly discussed the matter. Senegalese President Senghor noted that the OAU suffered from too many ideological divisions for a Pan-African force to become practical or effective. Thus, Senghor concluded, Africans should abandon the idea of such a force and instead rely upon “security solidarity.” After a brief discussion, the summit decided to highlight, “the need for security for the economic development of African countries. This should be ensured within the

¹⁹⁰ “On an Inter-African Military Force of Intervention,” CM/Res. 635 (31), in Legum, *Africa Contemporary Record, 1978–1979*, C16.

¹⁹¹ Archives Minaffet Rwanda, Cote 3.8.2.0097, Correspondances relatives à l’OUA, 1979, “Mémorandum relatif à la réunion de la commission de la défense de l’OUA du 21 au 25 avril 1979 à Addis-Abeba,” undated, 1979.

¹⁹² Archives Minaffet Rwanda, Cote 3.10.8.0005, Sommet: Conférence Franco-Africaine, OCAM, Sommet régionale de l’Afrique Centrale et Orientale 1979–1991, VIème Conférence Franco-Africaine: Réunion préparatoire du Conseil des Ministres, Kigali du 24 au 26 avril, 1979, “Rapport sur les travaux du Conseil des Ministres,” p. 15.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

framework of bilateral solidarities.”¹⁹⁴ The Francophone Pan-African force had died, but “bilateral solidarity” could only mean one thing: reliance upon France. The legacy of this “solidarity” has persisted over the decades.

Conclusion

Western security priorities in Zaire, as elsewhere in Africa, focused on the need for “stability” against threats of communist expansion. This policy, though, depended largely on local actors. At the same time, the particular interests of these actors, Mobutu foremost among them, also undercut the long-term viability of externally backed stabilization policies. Ironically, while Western policymakers struggled to control their “proxies,” they assumed that local communist “proxies,” such as the *Tigres* or the Angolan government, had no agency of their own and were simple pawns in a larger chess game played by their Soviet or Cuban masters.

Indeed, American and French policymakers made much out of alleged Cuban efforts to arm, organize, and even lead the Katangan operations in Shaba. This even became the centerpiece of Carter administration justifications for their role in supporting the French and Belgian interventions. One should note, though, that more recent scholarship based on work with Cuban sources has largely debunked these assertions.¹⁹⁵ The CIA based its claims on circumstantial evidence. Meanwhile French officials, whose accusations of Cuban involvement went far beyond those of their American counterparts, derived their most important intelligence from Zairian government and military sources. In short, the available evidence suggests that the very basis of Western fears rested on a combination of distorted ideological assumptions and locally manipulated “intelligence.”¹⁹⁶ This observation leads to the broader theme of this paper, which emphasizes that local agency is important in understanding the ultimate nature, impact, and efficacy of Western policies.

The IAF deployment provoked serious tensions among African capitals and within the OAU. France played the lead organizing role, the United States provided significant logistical support, and Belgium, Britain, and West Germany helped to finance the endeavor. This meant that the IAF looked a lot like a Western proxy operation to many African observers. Parallel French efforts to establish a permanent African rapid reaction force intensified these suspicions and helped to sharpen political divisions already present in the OAU. Even American policymakers rejected such propositions, out of the fear of becoming a prop to French neocolonialism.

¹⁹⁴ Archives Minafet Rwanda, Cote 3.10.8.0005, Sommet, Conférence Franco-Africaine, OCAM, Sommet régionale de l’Afrique Centrale et Orientale 1979–1991, VIe Conférence Franco-Africaine, Sommet, Kigali, 21–22 Mai 1979, “Rapport sur les travaux du sommet,” p. 8.

¹⁹⁵ See Piero Gleijeses, “Truth or Credibility: Castro, Carter, and the Invasions of Shaba,” *The International History Review* 18, 1, pp. 70–103. (1996).

¹⁹⁶ See long discussion in Powell, “The Cuba of the West?”

At the same time, despite the material and political difficulties, the IAF deployment did help provide the breathing space needed for Western assistance and regional diplomatic efforts to achieve their short-term goals. In the face of economic weakness, regime corruption, and a lack of clearly defined and functional state institutions, Mobutu benefited from sufficient aid injections to ensure his political survival and continued access to international financial markets. Additionally, following the IAF withdrawal, French policymakers practically offered Mobutu an extended security umbrella, signaled through a series of military exercises aimed at communicating strong Franco-Zairian ties.

Ultimately though, Western obsessions with “stability” and intense paranoia of communist expansion fed policies that strengthened a dangerously corrupt and destructive dictatorship. Their actions and those of their European and African allies ensured their immediate collective security, at least as they perceived it. However, such short term and narrowly conceived objectives enabled a poisonous political and economic climate to persist, buying ephemeral stability at the price of enabling practices that led to long-term catastrophe.

The mutual attempts by Western governments and their African interlocutors to cajole and influence the policies of one another highlights an interesting aspect of their relationship. By making themselves indispensable to broader Western, and particularly French security interests, states like Morocco and Senegal could extract certain concessions and influence policies. African states also managed to sabotage French efforts at building a regional security architecture by attacking its legitimacy and making it difficult for even the most sympathetic of France’s African allies to sign on to the project. Mobutu himself also effectively used his position as a necessary pillar of Western security policy to ensure that he could avoid making the kinds of substantial reforms demanded of him, while reaping the benefits of protection and aid.

Zbigniew Brzezinski’s military assistant in the National Security Council, Brigadier General William Odom, harshly criticized multinational efforts at reforming Zaire. For Odom, the efforts to establish expatriate control over the economy and to improve the FAZ seemed both counterproductive and dangerous. He angrily noted that, “The traditional name for this was ‘Colonialism.’”¹⁹⁷ He thought that the “logical contradictions” in what the West was trying to achieve in Zaire would “condemn them to disaster.”¹⁹⁸ As Zaire’s subsequent history has shown, Odom may have been right.

¹⁹⁷ JCL, Donated Historical Material, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Box 28 (Meetings—SCC 50: 1/9/78 through SCC 100: 8/10/78), Folder (Meetings—SCC 80: 5/26/1978), Document 1D, Memo from William Odom to Brzezinski and Aaron, “State Paper on ‘Zaire: Options After Shaba II,’” 25.05.1978, p. 1.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Nathaniel K. Powell is a Research Associate at the *Fondation Pierre du Bois pour l'histoire du temps présent*. His research focuses on the history of French military interventions in Africa.