REFORM, CONFLICT, AND SECURITY IN ZAIRE

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FOREWORD

During the Cold War, the U.S. Army developed a deep institutional understanding of the politics, economics, security concerns, and cultures of the areas where it was heavily engaged, particularly Europe, the Asia-Pacific region, and Latin America. But as the global security environment changes, the Army is increasingly involved in regions where it has less experience. Sub-Saharan Africa is a classic example. The Army is likely to play an important role there in the coming years, whether through humanitarian relief and peace operations or military-to-military contacts in Africa's new democracies. To prepare for this, the Army must augment its understanding of the African security environment.

U.S. foreign policy in Sub-Saharan Africa seeks stability, democracy, and economic development. Despite recent positive trends, it is clear that not all African countries will move in this direction; some will sink into greater violence and misery. In the central part of the continent, Zaire is the linchpin. Because of its great size and natural wealth, Zaire has the ability to serve as either the locomotive of development or an agent of destabilization.

If Zaire collapses, the U.S. Army may become involved in a major humanitarian relief operation. On the other hand, if Zaire succeeds at political reform and democratization, the Army may be tasked to reinvigorate military-to-military contacts. This study is designed to offer Army planners and leaders an understanding of the current crisis in Zaire and provide recommendations on future U.S. policy and Army activities.

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SUMMARY

To a great extent, the larger states in Sub-Saharan Africa will shape the region's future security environment. Among Africa's giants, none is more crucial than Zaire. Since Zaire has the potential either to lead regional development or drag the process down, helping stabilize that nation is a pressing task for all states and organizations interested in Africa.

For nearly 10 years, Zaire has experienced a sustained political and economic crisis. In April 1990, President Mobutu Sese Seko, who had ruled Zaire since the 1960s using a combination of corruption, patronage, and repression, announced the beginning of political reform and democratization. When it became clear that the reform process would destroy Mobutu's personal power, he attempted to derail it. The result has been five years of political stalemate, economic collapse, and violence. But in 1995, Mobutu and some of his opponents hammered out a compromise. Today, movement toward democracy is underway again, with national elections scheduled for 1997.

U.S. Policy.

Although Mobutu was the most important American ally in Sub-Saharan Africa during the Cold War, both the Bush and Clinton administrations recognized that his regime was a source of great danger for both Zaire itself and for Central Africa. The primary objective was preventing wide-scale violence that could spill over to neighboring states and spark a massive human disaster.

Recent U.S. policy toward Zaire has been to support reform and democratization. Washington's limited leverage prevented this from being effective. But today, the chances of real reform in Zaire are the best they have been for some time. The United States should thus undertake a major review of its policy toward Zaire. Such a review must answer a number of key questions:

What is the appropriate extent and form of U.S. involvement? The United States should play a major but not dominant role in a Zaire support coalition or contact group. Washington should work to broaden the support coalition as much as possible, with particular stress on the role of other African democracies. The support coalition should focus on helping Zaire build democratic institutions before and after the 1997 elections. The United States should publicly repudiate Mobutu during the campaign, but should not intervene in the election using covert means.

How should the United States respond if Mobutu wins the 1997 elections? Mobutu is likely to win the election. If he does, Washington should continue to keep him at arm's length. If he

allows the consolidation of democratic institutions, relations should be cool but normal. If he does not, current restrictions on aid and travel to the United States by Mobutu should remain in place.

How should the United respond if the electoral process collapses? If this process fails, the United States, in concert with democratic African states, should engineer a complete economic and political quarantine of whoever seizes power.

How should the United States respond if Zaire disintegrates? The United States should not encourage the division of Zaire. But if Zaire dies of its own volition, the United States would have little choice than to accept any new states that emerge while encouraging them to eventually consider reunification. If the central government fails to reform and a break-away province clearly committed to democracy appears, the United States should accept and help the democratizers but make clear that it prefers eventual reunification in a single democratic state rather than permanent division.

The Army Role.

The U.S. Army's current role in Zaire is limited to providing analysis and recommendations for policymakers. If, however, the situation in Zaire *either* gets better or worse, the Army's involvement could escalate.

To prepare for a multinational peace support or humanitarian relief operation in Zaire, the Army should:

• Identify potential coalition partners, encourage American policymakers to open channels of communications and begin consensus-building, and begin the writing and refinement of plans. EUCOM should, of course, take the lead on planning but the Army staff and USAREUR can provide vital support.

• Strengthen cooperation with African militaries that might participate in a peace support or humanitarian relief operation. This should include the holding of regular staff exercises dealing with a potential peace support or humanitarian relief operation in Zaire.

• Encourage an increase in the number of defense attaches in Africa and that liaison officers be assigned to key African militaries.

• Explore the possibility of pre-positioning vital but difficult-to-transport equipment necessary for relief operations.

If democratization and reform in Zaire stays on course, the Army should:

• Recommend the quick reopening of military-to-military ties.

• Develop a plan for using such ties to cultivate greater professionalism and political neutrality in the Zairian officer corps.

• Recommend that American policymakers press Zaire to move toward a reserve-based military and to undertake a wholesale reconstruction of its officer corps.

Conclusions.

The United States must approach Zaire in a strategic fashion and plan for the long term. Political and economic conditions in that nation are so dire that fundamental change will take decades. Ultimately, only Zairians can determine the fate of their nation. But Zaire is at a crucial point today where a well-designed American policy might be able to tip the scales in favor of reform. To do so would diminish the chances that the United States might be forced to participate in an expensive peace support or humanitarian relief operation if reform in Zaire fails. Preemption and preparation should thus be the focus of U.S. strategy as Zaire struggles to emerge from its time of crisis.

REFORM, CONFLICT, AND SECURITY IN ZAIRE

Introduction.

Sub-Saharan Africa is at a crossroad. For several decades economic decay, corrupt and repressive governance, and violent conflict dominated the region. Then Africa seemed to turn a corner. Some long-running conflicts lurched toward resolution due, at least in part, to the end of the Cold War. A tide of democracy swept away some of the region's longest ruling dictators.[1] And, according to the World Bank, economic policies in Africa are getting better with discernible payoffs.[2] This is all good news, but it is much too early to predict a rosy future: in Africa, instability, conflict, and violence always lurk one step behind progress. Great efforts will be required to consolidate recent gains.

Understanding the security environment of Sub-Saharan Africa is the first step toward finding permanent solutions to the region's conflicts. For instance, security must be viewed from a regional perspective rather than a country-specific one. The continent is characterized by permeable borders with ethnic groups overlapping national boundaries and extensive flows of people and goods--whether legal or illegal--between states. This makes stability in any one nation contingent on conditions in neighboring countries. Instability, conflict, and violence have repercussions outside the state where they originate. The larger countries in particular serve as bellwethers for wider trends and tendencies. An old African proverb holds that when elephants fight, the grass gets trampled. This certainly applies to the security environment: if the continent's giants stumble, small nations also suffer the consequences.

Among Africa's giants, none is more crucial than Zaire. Even on a continent that has experienced more than its share of crises and conflicts, Zaire is particularly tragic. Unlike many of the small African nations that seem doomed to poverty, Zaire is potentially rich. It has large reserves of cobalt, industrial diamonds, and copper as well as substantial deposits of zinc, tin, manganese, gold, tungsten-bearing wolframite, niobium, and tantalum.[3] It also has coastal petroleum reserves, some coal deposits, and immense agricultural and hydroelectric potential. Zaire is Sub-Saharan Africa's third most populous state and one of the largest, sharing borders with nine other countries. (See Figure 1 and Figure 2.) Its despair is strictly man-made: where it could be the economic locomotive of Central Africa, corrupt, incompetent, and repressive leadership have driven it to the edge of disaster.

Given Zaire's potential to either lead regional development

or drag the process down, helping stabilize that nation is a

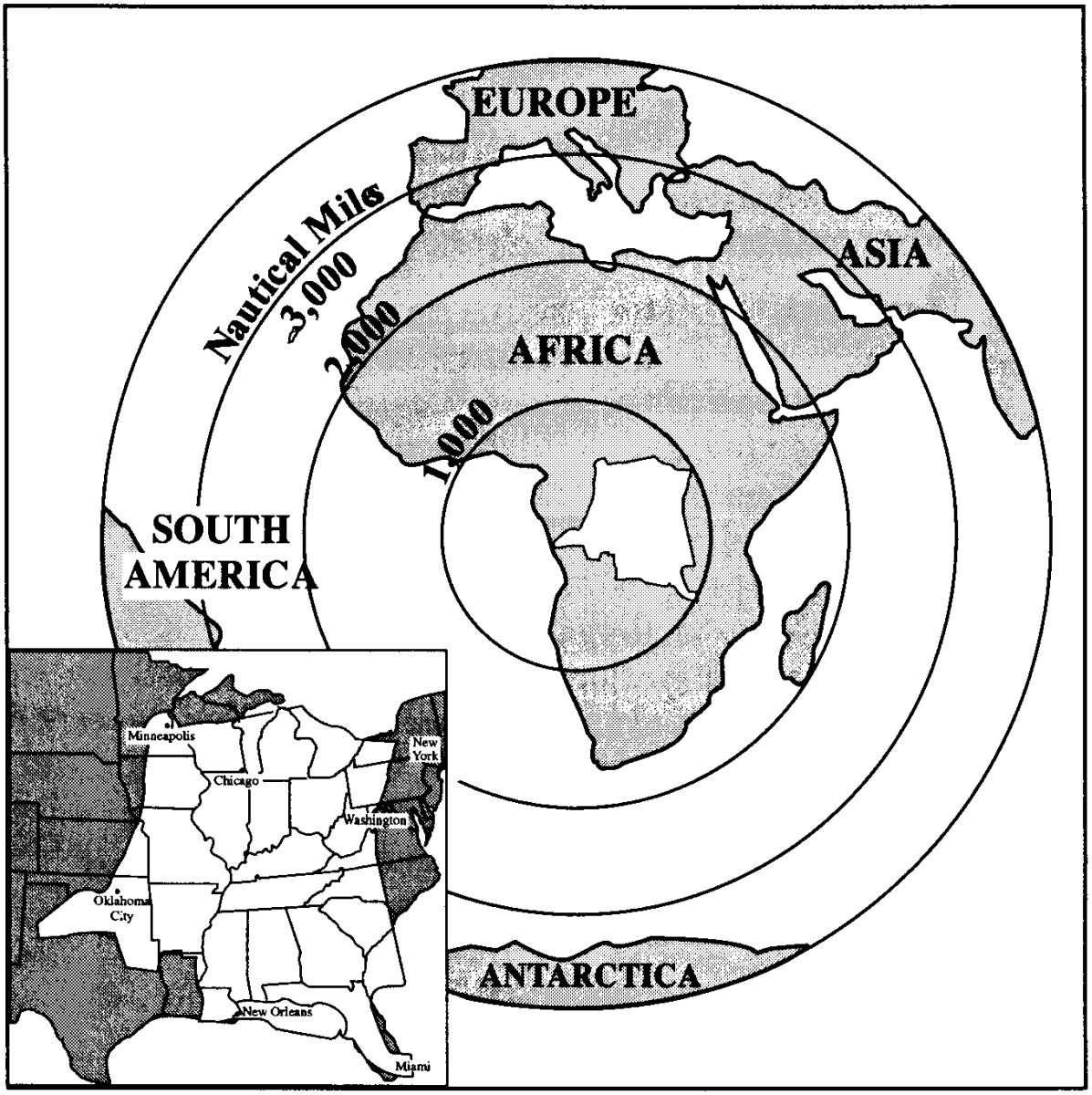

Figure 1.
Zaire location map and overlay on the United States.

pressing task for all states and organizations interested in Africa. Ultimately, only Zairians can decide their future, but outsiders can facilitate reform and conflict resolution. Because of this, encouraging stability in Zaire should be a centerpiece of U.S. policy in Africa. But few problems anywhere on earth are more complex or frustrating. As the United States simultaneously seeks to prod Zaire on the path of reform and plan for the

Figure 2. Map of Zaire.

failure of reform, coherent and creative strategy is imperative. If the United States is to both encourage reform in Zaire and prepare for multinational relief if reform fails, the U.S. Army may have an important role and thus should actively seek to augment its understanding of reform, crisis, and security in Zaire.

The Roots of Crisis.

The eminent Africanist Crawford Young called Zaire "the crippled, ill-starred giant of Central Africa."[4] To a large extent, this condition was inevitable given that nation's grim history. Zaire was born when Belgium's King Léopold II hired explorer Henry Morton Stanley to form a colony under the auspices of the International Association of the Congo. At the Conference of Berlin in 1884-85, the European powers recognized the Congo Free State as Léopold's personal fiefdom, beginning a period of ruthless, often brutal, exploitation immortalized in Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*.[5] This changed only slightly when Belgium annexed the Congo in 1908 in response to international criticism of the way the colony was administered.[6]

Among the colonizers of Africa, the Belgians matched the Germans in their disregard for the development and well-being of their subjects. Several characteristics of Belgian rule set the stage for Zaire's post-colonial conflicts. One was basing the modern sector of the economy almost solely on the export of minerals. This had several adverse effects. For instance, it gave foreign companies and individuals a central role in Zaire's economy, thus stifling development of local technical and managerial skills. Second, it made the national economy heavily dependent on world commodity markets without giving Zairians much of a role in determining the price their minerals brought. A small change in something like the world price of copper could have a tremendous effect on the Zairian economy. And third, reliance on mineral exports caused uneven development within Zaire. Mineral producing regions like Shaba (formerly Katanga) saw the building of a relatively extensive transportation and communications infrastructure, while most of the country did not. This heightened inter-regional competition and later sparked intense political conflicts as less-developed regions sought a greater share of power and national wealth.

The Belgian style of imperialism had other detrimental effects as well. Colonial administrators relied on a group of "modernized" Zairians--the *evolues*--to assist with running the colony while paying very little attention to the education or development of the rest of the citizens. Even though the *evolues* were only minimally educated and filled menial positions rather than important ones, this process helped open an immense gap between the Zairian elite and mass public that persists today. And, the Belgians based the security of their colony on the *Force Publique* which combined Belgian officers with enlisted personnel from what the colonial administrators considered "martial" ethnic groups like the Ngala and Tetels. This began a pattern of antagonistic relations between the security forces and the

Zairian public with the army more a repressor of the citizens than their protector.[7]

The way the Belgian Congo was decolonized further propelled it toward disaster. While Britain and France cultivated educated elites in their African colonies, Belgium did not, assuming instead that preventing the emergence of a Zairian elite would stifle any desire for independence. This proved wrong. With independence movements gaining steam all over Africa, riots in Leopoldville led to an agreement granting the Belgian Congo independence as the Republic of the Congo on June 30, 1960. The fragile new state, born without an educated elite, plunged immediately into crisis as the *Force Publique* mutinied against its Belgian officers while Katanga and, later, Kasai seceded. In the capital, a power struggle between leftist Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba and President Kasavubu sparked further violence.

Led by Moise Tshombe, the Katanga secession posed the most serious threat. International support from Belgian commercial interests and other sources gave Tshombe the means to resist the central government. Reflecting Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold's activist approach to peacekeeping and conflict resolution, a United Nations force, initially invited by both Lumumba and Kasavubu, arrived in the Congo seeking to prevent full-scale civil war and assist with the reintegration of Katanga.[8] When confronted by government and U.N. troops as well as an insurgency from the Balubas of North Katanga, Tshombe hired a mercenary force from ex-French Foreign Legion paratroopers left unemployed by the end of the war in Algeria and English-speaking soldiers recruited through Rhodesia.[9] However much this might have added to the military effectiveness of Tshombe's government, it eroded any international backing he had outside Rhodesia and South Africa.

Eventually the United States assumed an active role in quelling the violence. In fact, the Congo crisis represented the first serious entry of the United States into African affairs.[10] The Kennedy administration was convinced that chaos and conflict in the newly independent parts of the world offered rich opportunities for the spread of Soviet influence. The problem was finding a way to shape events in a region with no tradition of American involvement in security affairs. Kennedy approved the use of U.S. aircraft, a small military mission, and a CIA element to assist U.N. forces and government forces in suppressing the Katanga rebels in 1963.[11] This established a precedent for Washington's preferred method of dealing with instability in Africa: a combination of CIA activities, military airlift, security assistance, and surrogates--whether African or European--to support a regional client or ally.

Unfortunately, defeat of the Katanga secession did not end

the Congo's time of danger. Almost as soon as Tshombe was defeated, insurgencies broke out in Kwilu and other regions. Again, total collapse seemed imminent. Rebel forces controlled much of the eastern part of the country; other areas had no government at all.[12] Ironically, Moise Tshombe, who had been recalled from exile in 1964 and named prime minister, was the central figure in defeating the rebellions. He reconstructed his force of Katanga gendarmes and white mercenaries, and launched an offensive against the eastern rebels. After Belgian forces using American airlift attacked the rebels in their capital of Stanleyville to free a number of European hostages, the insurgency quickly disintegrated.[13] Despite this tactical success, the use of foreigners discredited Tshombe and exacerbated the conflict between the prime minister and president Joseph Kasavubu. By the latter part of 1965, the government was almost totally paralyzed. On November 25, the army commander Joseph-Desire Mobutu removed both Kasavubu and Evariste Kimba, who had been nominated to replace Tshombe, and assumed power. The United States (and many other African states) breathed a sigh of relief and concluded that finally a figure had emerged who was strong enough to control the Congo's fractious tendencies.

A Long March To Crisis.

Once in power, Mobutu undertook two broad tasks. First was to forge a sense of national identity in the Congo--something that the Belgians deliberately resisted during their rule. Zaire was an artificial entity from the beginning, cobbling together diverse and sometimes hostile ethnic groups. Like many African states, it lacked the normal bases of nationhood, whether a shared language, culture, religion, or economic system. To transcend this, Mobutu attempted to invent a national identity by blending elements of local traditions with components of the emerging ideology of Pan-Africanism. Initially this was manifested in a rather straight-forward nationalism, but by the 1970s had evolved into a more radical program called "authenticity." Symbolic remnants of Belgian rule were expunged. Every street, location, individual, and the country itself was renamed. Congo became Zaire, Leopoldville became Kinshasa, and Joseph-Desire Mobutu became Mobutu Sese Seko. Western business dress was banned. By the late 1970s, "authenticity" had mutated into "Mobutuism," which attempted to create a cult of personality glorifying the acts and sayings of the president. While the more extreme components of "Mobutuism" were not taken seriously by the educated elite, Zaire was clearly more a nation after a decade of Mobutu's rule than it was before.

The second of Mobutu's broad tasks was to establish order in a country that had undergone 5 years of violence and near-anarchy. Because the Belgians had prevented the formation of an

experienced administrative and managerial elite during their rule of the Congo, Mobutu had little to build on. His solution was consolidation of power in his own hands by placing members of his ethnic group in many key positions, banning opposition political activity, and ruling by decree. To create an institutional framework for this, Mobutu formed the Popular Revolutionary Movement (MPR) and, out of admiration of the success that the Bolsheviks and Chinese communists had in forging stable states out of large, heterogenous nations, proclaimed it Zaire's only political party. In 1974, all public institutions became subsidiaries of the MPR.

Mobutu's primary tools for concentrating political power in his own hands were patronage and fear. Loyalty was lucrative. Opposition brought exclusion from opportunities for personal enrichment, often exile, and sometimes torture or death. To fuel this process, Mobutu accumulated and disbursed one of the largest personal fortunes on earth, largely by controlling the state's finances and contracts, particularly those dealing with the extraction of Zaire's massive mineral wealth. The state was seen as the "personal fiefdom of the president."[14] Mobutu played the role of puppet master, frequently shuffling officeholders and administrators to allow as many sycophants as possible their time at the money trough, and to make perfectly clear that the president could take power and wealth away as easily as he distributed them. According to Shawn H. McCormick, "By careful manipulation of the players on the political stage, Mobutu was able not only to solidify his own power base but to eliminate any prospective challengers. Senior statesmen were exiled, posted abroad, or given local sinecures where they could be closely monitored."[15] And to further reinforce his support, Mobutu played on primal ties, allocating offices and contracts to family members and ethnic kinsmen.[16] Eventually, there was no political opposition in the normal sense.

For the short-term, this ruthless combination of carrots and sticks proved effective. The only important organization that remained outside the system of corruption and patronage was the Roman Catholic Church.[17] Due to the success of missionaries during the colonial period, Zaire has one of the highest proportions of Catholics in Africa. In most of the country, the Church was the most important or only provider of schools and health services, making it an integral part of daily life and further augmenting its popularity. But Mobutu's cultural nationalism quickly led to conflicts with the Church leadership. At the height of the friction in 1974, Mobutu nationalized the Church's schools and hospitals. He reversed this when the state proved incapable of operating them, but throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, Church leaders were the only group inside Zaire able to criticize Mobutu and his regime. When Mobutu's authority began to slip in the late 1980s, the initial opposition leaders thus emerged from the

Catholic clergy.

Patronage and corruption were not Mobutu's only tools. Control of the security forces was also crucial. As is common among personalistic dictators, Mobutu created a web of competing and overlapping security forces, each with its own prisons, informer networks, and resources. These were designed as much to balance, control, and watch each other as to deal with dissidents.[18] The most important of the internal security forces descended from the small, special police force created by the Belgians. Its name changed several times--from the National Documentation Centre (CND) to the National Documentation Agency (AND) to the National Service for Intelligence and Protection (SNIP). SNIP communicated directly with Mobutu rather than reporting to any other government agency or official. The disciplinary arm of the official party--the "Corps of Activists for the Defense of the Revolution" (CADR)--also played a role in internal security and the intimidation of opponents.

Reflecting its roots in the Belgian *Force Publique*, the Zairian military was designed more to safeguard the regime than to defend the national borders or counter insurgents. "Rather than protecting the Zairian people," Meditz and Merrill write, "the armed forces and security forces prey upon them and are perceived, justifiably, as instruments of repression."[19] In fact, the Zairian military largely failed when faced with traditional military missions, whether the suppression of guerrillas in the east during the 1980s or repelling invasions of Shaba province (former Katanga) from Angola-based forces in 1977 and 1978. This was not surprising: most military units were poorly trained, equipped and led despite substantial American, Belgian, French, and Israeli security assistance. Pay was erratic; the result was low morale, predatory behavior such as imposing "taxes" on travellers and businesses, and sometimes outright mutiny.

For Mobutu, the regular armed forces (FAZ) were less important than several well-equipped, regularly-paid, and foreign-trained special units. Again, Mobutu created several of these to check each other, thus preventing the emergence of a praetorian guard. The most important of the elite units were the Civil Guards, the French-trained 31st Parachute Brigade, and the Israeli-trained Special Presidential Division (DSP). To assure the loyalty of the DSP, Mobutu paid it regularly and saw that his own ethnic group--the Ngbandi--predominated.[20] While this structure of counterbalancing forces did not prevent coup attempts, it kept them from succeeding. In general, the Zairian military was a secondary player in political machinations rather than a dominant one as elsewhere in Africa. As with Mobutu's "divide and conquer" approach to the civilian political elite, the way he built and used and the Zairian military succeeded in protecting his regime over the short-term but set the stage for

eventual political crisis.

The Edifice Collapses.

By the late 1970s, Mobutu's blend of patronage and repression, in combination with his personal charisma, had led to one of the most effective dictatorships in Sub-Saharan Africa. Every plot and coup--and there were many--was quashed. Toward the end of the 1980s, though, the authoritarian edifice began to weaken under pressure from several directions. One important factor was Zaire's continued economic decay. Despite the nation's great natural wealth, the inefficiencies inherent in Mobutu's system of statism and corruption hindered economic development. Poor decisions exacerbated the problem. In the early 1970s, for instance, a visit to China and North Korea inspired Mobutu to nationalize the Belgian-owned businesses and industries which formed the bedrock of the modern sector of the Zairian economy.[21] When economic chaos ensued, Mobutu reversed his decision but could not undo the damage to international investor confidence. Reflecting the economic development programs of several other African states, Mobutu then attempted large-scale industrialization. This also failed, leaving Zaire with a massive foreign debt when the industrial projects proved uncompetitive and world prices for copper--the commodity that provided much of Zaire's foreign exchange--dropped precipitously.

As debt mounted, creditors became important players in Zaire's politics. In 1976, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) designed the first of a series of economic stabilization programs. Each was supposed to reduce corruption, rationalize and control government expenditures, limit imports, boost production, improve the transportation infrastructure, eliminate arrears on interest payments, ensure that principal payments were made, improve financial management, and facilitate economic planning. Private creditors also rescheduled Zaire's debt several times between 1976 and 1987. None of these structural adjustments or debt rescheduling schemes worked. Admittedly, Zaire was victimized by a long-term decline in the price of the primary products it exported relative to the manufactured goods it imported. More importantly, though, the reforms necessary for economic stabilization were antithetical to Mobutu's patronage system. Corruption was the lifeblood of his rule. Mobutu thus continued his Dorian Gray bargain, mortgaging Zaire's long-term economic health to sustain political power.

By the end of the 1980s, Zaire's private creditors as well as international financial institutions began to lose patience with Mobutu's unending and unmet promises of economic reform. In 1991, the IMF announced that Zaire was behind in payments of about $81.7 million to the organization and could no longer

borrow.[22] Three years later, the IMF expelled Zaire. With nearly all commercial credit dried up, Zaire had no source of new capital to improve its decaying infrastructure. While this did not touch Mobutu personally--his palaces and luxury riverboat provided sanctuary from the decay--it did undercut his ability to reward loyalty, thus taking away one pillar of his power.

The second major blow to Mobutu's power was the end of the Cold War. After Angola became independent and pro-Soviet in 1976, Mobutu solidified his position as the closest ally of the United States in Sub-Saharan Africa--a role that brought him both prestige and personal satisfaction. American security assistance, economic aid, and political support, which were the price Mobutu exacted for allowing the Central Intelligence Agency to use Zaire as a conduit for support of Jonas Savimbi's Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), became an important element of the dictator's power. Mobutu also followed other policies that garnered favor with Washington. He was, for instance, the first African leader to reestablish ties with Israel after the Six Days War and sent troops to Chad in an effort to counter Libyan expansionism.[23]

So long as the Soviets and Cubans were active in Africa, the United States, along with Belgium and France, tolerated Mobutu's corruption and repression. But after the end of the Cold War, U.S. concern with Angola evaporated. South Africa, the Soviet Union, and Cuba lost their willingness or ability to support their Angolan allies and the war in that country moved toward settlement, due in part to the prodding of U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Chester Crocker.[24] As the Cold War receded from Africa, Mobutu's strategic significance declined and his western backers lost their tolerance for his faults. The Bush administration attempted to communicate this. For instance, Secretary of State James Baker personally urged Mobutu to open and reform the Zairian political system during a trip to Africa.[25] The U.S. Congress evinced even less stomach for the Zairian despot and, in 1990, ignored lobbying by the Bush administration and cut off all military and economic aid to Zaire.[26] This further diminished the resources Mobutu could use to reward political loyalty.

As the pressure mounted, the fragility of Mobutu's authoritarian edifice became clear. By 1990, the Zairian president faced the most intense challenge of his tenure in power. All across Africa, old-line dictators were giving way to political reform and elected governments--a point not lost on Zairians. "Mobutuism" had faltered in the face of economic decay and was increasingly held in contempt. Mobutu's patronage system eroded as the money to fuel it became scarcer. But what had not changed was Mobutu's phenomenal political skill. With his power and popularity disintegrating, the beleaguered dictator embarked

on the most radical change of strategy seen in his 25 year rule.

Reform Stillborn.

Faced with pressure from his external allies such as the United States and internal disintegration, Mobutu declared an end to single party rule in Zaire and the beginning of a transition to democracy on April 24, 1990. While similar steps were taking place throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, few nations faced a more daunting task than Zaire with its deeply ingrained corruption and repression. Nonetheless, Mobutu's announcement generated great excitement, particularly among educated Zairians. Throughout the country, open political debate erupted for the first time. Opposition figures returned from exile to participate in the transition process. With the political floodgates open, over 200 political parties had registered by mid-1991.

Announcing a transition to democracy proved much easier than making it happen. For guidance, Mobutu looked to his neighbors. Following a precedent which had been established in Benin and then become popular elsewhere in French-speaking Africa, Mobutu created a broad-based national conference to craft a new constitution and oversee the process of political reform. Many Zairians were particularly influenced by the national conference in the neighboring Republic of Congo. Zaire's Sovereign National Conference, which opened in August 1991, included 2840 delegates representing a cross-section of society. Archbishop Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya was selected the leader of the Conference, largely due to his neutrality and lack of further political ambition. The ultimate goal was the revolutionary reconstruction of Zairian political life. Twenty-three committees were established to attempt the transformation of not only the government but of Zairian political culture. The debates were carried live on radio and television.[27] In August 1992, the Sovereign National Conference passed the Transitional Act to serve as a provisional constitution, created a provisional legislature called the High Council of the Republic (HCR), offered Mobutu a power-sharing arrangement, and elected Etienne Tshisekedi wa Mulumba--whom the U.S. State Department called Mobutu's "most implacable foe"--transitional prime minister.[28]

Almost immediately, Mobutu showed misgivings about the political forces he had unleashed. "It was evident from the outset," write Shawn McCormick and Bruce Whitehouse, "that Mobutu had convened the conference out of expediency rather than a commitment to democratic principles."[29] Mobutu soon showed that he would go to great lengths to protect his remaining power. With few "carrots" available, he relied on the "stick." Only weeks after the announcement of political reforms in 1990, violence broke out during anti-Mobutu demonstrations at the University of

Lubumbashi and government security forces killed up to 150 students.[30] Mobutu tried--with limited success--to control and manipulate the deliberations of the Sovereign National Conference. While only about 900 of the delegates represented the opposition, this proved to be a determined group. By the beginning of 1992, the opposition controlled the conference and Zairian politics had become rigidly bipolar, with pro-Mobutu and anti-Mobutu forces locked in an apparent death struggle.[31]

After a few months of increasingly hostile maneuvering, Tshisekedi attempted to gain control of Zaire's Central Bank. This exceeded the limits of Mobutu's tolerance. Losing control of the bank would have endangered his remaining access to the flow of money and thus been the *coup de grace* of his regime.[32] Mobutu's reaction was to announce the dismissal of Tshisekedi (even though he had no legal authority to do so). The dictator had clearly decided by this point that the challenges to his power and prerogative arising from democratization were greater than the costs of derailing the process. Mobutu found, however, that stopping reform once it is unleashed is an extraordinarily difficult job. His strategy for political survival combined direct confrontation with Tshisekedi with kindling violence throughout Zaire to make the point that only his leadership brought stability to the country.[33] But the opposition refused to submit. Its three principal groups formed a coalition called the Sacred Union that became the vanguard of the anti-Mobutu forces. The Sacred Union received some international recognition, but could not force Mobutu and his allies from power without control of key institutions like the Central Bank, the state-owned media, and the security forces. The result was near-anarchy as Zaire was cursed with two parallel, rival governments, each more intent on countering the other than running the country.

Nadir.

Zaire's political stalemate made an already-bad economic situation worse. In September 1991, unpaid troops went on a rampage in Kinshasa. While elite security forces such as the Civil Guard and DSP were able to quell the uprising, this made Mobutu aware of how dangerous conditions had become and was the first indication that popular discontent could threaten or even unseat him as had happened to his friend Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania.[34] The violence also exterminated the remaining modern industry in Kinshasa and drove away 20,000 foreigners, including many key medical, educational, industrial, and aid workers.[35] Four months later a coup attempt by rebel soldiers required a violent response.[36] Mobutu's core support coalition of elite security forces and close cronies remained intact, but he could no longer count on the backing of institutions like the FAZ.

In 1990, Mobutu had abandoned all attempts at economic reform.[37] In response, Belgium and France suspended development assistance, leaving only humanitarian relief flowing into Zaire. But Mobutu still needed money to fuel the patronage system and preserve his tattered power base. His solution was to print more money. In 1992 he purchased 31 tons of bank notes from a German company to pay restive troops.[38] With exports, revenues, and industrial production all at record lows, there was nothing to back the currency. The inevitable result was hyperinflation and a free-fall in exchange rates. During one 3-month period in 1993, the *zaire* fell from 8 million per U.S. dollar to 110 million.[39] Inflation was so bad that senior government ministers could not make a living on their salaries. Teachers demanded payment from students in empty bottles rather than currency and even elite security units like the DSP were forced into rackets.[40] Urban transportation was so expensive that passengers often hijacked buses rather than attempting to pay the fare.

Gecamines, the state-owned mining company which had once been one of the world's largest, fell into such disrepair that its only output was scavenged scraps of copper, thus choking off another potential source of income for the beleaguered government (or governments).[41] The major remaining source of foreign exchange was diamond exports, most outside official channels and therefore not a source of government revenue (although a substantial proportion of the proceeds found their way to Mobutu or his cronies).[42] In general, the formal economy vanished.[43] Many parts of the country returned to the barter system.[44] The Central Bank had no reserves, most other banks were closed, and those that remained open dealt only in cash. The tax system was defunct. Most state institutions, including hospitals and schools, closed. Unpaid civil servants, teachers, and health care workers quit in large numbers. Unemployment was pervasive; up to 80 percent of Zairians lived in dire poverty, most subsisting on one meal a day.[45] As the medical system eroded, AIDS, malaria, sleeping sickness, and other diseases reached epidemic proportions. The only thing that prevented wholesale starvation was the fact that most Zairians were involved in subsistence agriculture. But even the countryside was not immune from the economic crisis, and malnutrition spread.[46]

As central authority collapsed, ethnic conflict, which had been controlled during the height of Mobutu's power, flared. This was not coincidence. "President Mobutu," writes Bill Berkeley, "fighting for his political survival, has managed to exploit well-founded bitterness toward his own rapacious regime by deflecting it on to others."[47] Ethnic conflict reached its peak in Shaba with violence directed against the minority Kasai people who had been brought to the region as mineworkers in the early 20th century.[48] Since Tshisekedi's family was of Kasai origin, inflaming resentment on the part of the Katangese natives of

Shaba provided Mobutu a way to strike at his major enemy. In October 1992 the provincial governor Gabriel Kyungu Wa Kumwanza, who was a Mobutu ally, publicly called for Kasaians to leave Shaba.[49] In what Amnesty International labeled a deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing, over 200,000 Kasaians were forced from their homes and either fled the province or clustered in wretched refugee camps.[50] And, there were other, less publicized ethnic conflicts. For instance, Amnesty International also reported that about 7,000 people had died in ethnic violence in North Kivu by 1993.[51]

Against this backdrop, the political stalemate in Kinshasa dragged on with both Mobutu and Tshisekedi claiming the right to rule Zaire.[52] The two sides negotiated continuously, but so long as each of the major antagonists demanded the ouster of the other, there seemed to be no ground for compromise. Because of Mobutu's long-standing program to prevent the emergence of political rivals through cooptation and outright repression, no individual or group had the popular support and image of objectivity necessary to play the role of arbitrator. All were either pro-Mobutu or anti-Mobutu. Eventually Mobutu, in another attempt to outflank the opposition, resurrected his old single-party parliament.[53] This political "conclave" was composed of Mobutu cronies and charged with drafting a new constitution. It named Faustin Birindwa as prime minister and announced that Tshisekedi was removed from the premiership. While Tshisekedi refused to recognize the authority of the "conclave" to remove him, control of the security forces allowed Mobutu to evict opposition ministers from their offices. The end result was that neither Mobutu nor Tshisekedi could develop and sustain anything close to the degree of legitimacy necessary to effectively govern Zaire.

In January 1993, a dispute between Mobutu and Tshisekedi led to another mutiny by the armed forces. Again, control of the currency was the proximate cause. Mobutu had ordered the Central Bank to introduce a new 5 million *zaire* note. Tshisekedi demanded that these be withdrawn. When this was ignored, he called on merchants to refuse the new notes.[54] The troops found their pay worthless and went on a rampage of looting. This led to an estimated 1000 deaths, mostly FAZ soldiers killed by the DSP.[55] Among the other casualties was Philippe Bernard, the French ambassador to Zaire, killed by a stray bullet as he stood on a balcony.[56] Many of the remaining foreign merchants and aid workers left.

Bernard's death while he helplessly watched the violence in Kinshasa was symbolic. As Zaire disintegrated, the United States, France, and Belgium could do little.[57] All had cut off aid and seen the withdrawal of most of their commercial firms leaving them few political tools. In addition, none of the three saw a

clearly preferable option. On one hand, all had clearly lost faith in Mobutu. In a July 1993 meeting, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State George E. Moose told Mobutu that by refusing to relinquish power, he endangered not only the lives of his countrymen, but also the stability of all of central Africa.[58] On the other hand, Tshisekedi was not an attractive alternative. The French were particularly disillusioned with the autocratic and rigid opposition leader.

This combination of confused objectives, limited interests, and minimal tools of influence led to ineffective policy on the part of the Western "troika." According to an anonymous writer for *Africa Confidential*:

> Western governments . . . remain ambivalent about whether to go for Mobutu's jugular. For some (particularly the USA) there is still the hope that Zaire's descent into the economic and political abyss can be halted by reasoned diplomatic intervention and that a Somalia-style intervention will not be necessary. For others (particularly elements in the Belgian, French and South African governments) there is the belief that the chaos in Zaire brings economic opportunities in a resource-rich area of the continent. Until this ambivalence is resolved, Western policy will be an irritation rather than an obstacle to Mobutu and give him the room for manoeuvre he requires.[59]

Thaw.

In 1994, Mobutu's prestige and power underwent something of a renaissance. One reason was the civil war and genocide in Rwanda.[60] As millions of refugees flowed into Zaire, Mobutu was again a necessary ally for the international community--a position he had lost with the end of the Cold War--and used this to revive his domestic and international reputation.[61] The international aid flowing to the Rwandan refugee camps also provided opportunities for Zairian officials to take a cut, thus partially reinvigorating the patronage system for Mobutu and some of his key cronies in the eastern regions. Mobutu's involvement in the reinvigorated negotiations to end the civil war in Angola also helped repair his image.[62]

Within Zaire, the intransigence that characterized the opposition eased somewhat in 1994, opening the way for compromise. Tshisekedi's refusal to make concessions and inability to bring concrete results caused the opposition coalition to erode. Many of its members shifted their allegiances in a search for a new leader capable of striking a bargain with Mobutu and reinvigorating the transition to democracy. According

to *Africa Confidential*, "Once rich in personalities and ideas, the radical opposition is increasingly beginning to look like one man and his entourage: Etienne Tshisekedi."[63] Several opposition parties finally admitted that their showdown with Mobutu was a failure, and signed an accord with the "conclave" to form a government of national reconciliation and merge the two rival parliaments.[64] While Tshisekedi denounced this, the High Council of the Republic gave its approval.

In June 1994 the transitional parliament formed by the accord between the HCR and the "conclave" named Leon Kengo wa Dondo prime minister. Despite protests from Tshisekedi's radicals who insisted that the new organization had no legitimacy, Mobutu approved the deal and Kengo assumed office.[65] He was widely regarded as a centrist and a technocrat with limited personal political ambitions.[66] The key question was the extent to which Mobutu would allow Kengo to change the system. Kengo certainly did try. He immediately took steps designed to check Zaire's debilitating corruption, decentralize political power, control the military, remove restrictions on the media, and bring a degree of fiscal responsibility to the government. At the same time, he sought to end Zaire's diplomatic isolation, reform the vital Central Bank, and rehabilitate the nation's collapsed infrastructure, especially the transportation system, schools, and hospitals. Kengo was able to fire the Mobutu-appointed, blatantly corrupt director of the Central Bank.[67] He then severely rebuked senior officials of a number of state companies.[68] Enraged by the deliberate ethnic violence in Shaba, he travelled there in August 1994 to reprimand Kyungu, the governor.[69] And, in early 1996, Kengo removed Mungul Diaka, the governor of Kinshasa, for mismanagement and abuse of power.[70] But despite his good intentions, Kengo could not bring a sea change to Zairian politics. Problems that had accreted over more than three decades could not be swept away so easily.

Overall, Kengo's constraints and problems dangerously outweighed his political capital. His lack of an ethnic power base, for instance, made him an acceptable leader to the major groups, but also weakened him. The majority of Kengo's ministers remained strong Mobutu supporters. Ministerial budgets were meaningless in the face of an inflation rate as high as 24,000 percent.[71] In an attempt to resurrect Zaire's international financial and credit standing, Kengo presented an austerity budget in late 1995 but, with the relentless downward spiral of the currency forcing daily adjustments in the exchange rate, it was impossible to know whether the budget was being implemented.[72] The collapse of Zaire's formal economy during the early 1990s meant that most of the nation's economic activity was beyond the ability of the government to regulate or tax. The ineffectiveness of the provisional parliament also hampered reform. A year after its formation, it had failed to pass of the key legislation

called for in the 1994 accord.[73] And, more than anything, Kengo has had trouble finding effective and uncorrupt lieutenants. In May 1996, for instance, the transitional parliament recommended the inidictment of a former finance minister and governor of the central bank--both appointed by Kengo--on corruption charges.[74]

In some ways, these were not even the most dangerous problems Kengo faced. Early in 1995, tension was high in the armed forces over a new salary scheme that further widened the gap between enlisted soldiers and commissioned officers, fueling rumors of another round of looting.[75] In the spring of 1995, Shaba governor Kyungu was arrested and charged with importing arms to be used in a secession attempt.[76] As if to exacerbate these already serious difficulties, Mobutu and Tshisekedi insisted on roiling the political waters. The radical opposition stuck to the position that Tshisekedi rather than Kengo was the legal prime minister.[77] Some of their most intense condemnations were aimed at Kengo's foreign backers. According to Tshisekedi, "We were shocked when the troika lent its support to Kengo. No mention was made of Zairian public opinion, of the people, of the law."[78] Overall, Zaire's political and economic situation in 1996 seemed rosy compared to what it had been two or three years earlier, but was still grim by any objective standards.

Reform Again.

Zaire's national elections are now scheduled for July 1997. While this date represents a postponement arising from disagreement over the composition of the electoral commission, the elections are more likely to actually take place than at any time since the reform process began.[79] Talks are underway to gain support from international organizations to help finance and manage the process.[80] A plethora of groups have arisen within Zaire to help increase public understanding of democracy. There are, however, many hurdles still to be cleared. The procedures for the elections and the exact form of government that is to emerge remain vague. At this point the focus of both Zairians and external actors is simply on holding elections rather than long-term objectives. Moreover, the slate of candidates is not yet clear. In February, the radical opposition stated that Tshisekedi would be its candidate and called on other groups to rally behind him rather than dividing the anti-Mobutu vote.[81] This is unlikely since Kengo has indicated he will not run. It remains to be seen whom, if anyone, the moderate opposition will back.

Mobutu remains the lodestar of Zairian politics despite the best efforts of both internal and external opponents to marginalize him. "He is the great survivor," one diplomat said, "after everything that has been thrown at him he is still on top."[82] Even at the nadir of his power, Mobutu retained control

of key institutions like the Central Bank, state radio and television, security police, and the Special Presidential Division. In a state bereft of a unified opposition, a politically mobilized populace, or an economically strong middle class, these were enough to sustain power, even if just barely. There were probably times in the early 1990s when concerted effort by the "troika" could have toppled Mobutu or enticed him to leave, particularly during the 1993 troop mutiny, but none of the three were willing to run the risk. By 1996, Mobutu's tarnished international reputation was largely revived. When the United States sent an ambassador to Zaire in 1995 after leaving the post vacant for 2 years, it was the first step.[83] In April 1996, Mobutu paid a discreet visit to French President Jacques Chirac in Paris to discuss a resumption of aid.[84] Despite criticism from Belgium, Mobutu continued to express optimism that he would be able to re-open ties with Brussels, thus reconstituting the key elements of his Western support.[85]

With national name recognition, charisma, and vast network of clients and allies, Mobutu is the clear frontrunner in the electoral process. Divisions within the opposition have allowed Mobutu's party to retain its domination of the state apparatus and provincial governments, thus giving him a ready-built political machine to mobilize support.[86] Bayona Bameya, who was named president of the electoral commission in March 1996, is a Mobutu loyalist (although one of Bameya's two vice presidents backs Tshisekedi) and is likely to do all within his power to skew the rules in favor of his patron.[87] Essentially, the elections will be a popular referendum on Mobutu. As is typical in Zairian politics, personalities rather than ideologies or issues will matter most. Rather than pitting parties with competing ideas or visions of the future, the campaign will simply be one more battle between Zaire's two major political "families"--that of Mobutu and that of Tshisekedi. The victors, along with their cronies, relatives, and ethnic kinsmen, will control the state and the economy while the losers fade into at least temporary political insignificance or resign themselves to exile.

The Balance Sheet.

No one knows whether Zaire has truly turned the corner and can now extricate itself from crisis and decay, or is simply experiencing a pause in the ongoing process of self-destruction. Some factors suggest that successful reform is possible. All of Zaire's leaders, for instance, know that relatively free and open elections are the *quid pro quo* for international acceptance, a resumption of aid, and renewed access to loans and investment. Both Mobutu and Tshisekedi may have concluded that holding constrained political power in a recovering nation is better than

holding absolute power in a pariah state with no functioning economy or chance of building one. There are also signs that Zairians themselves are losing their tolerance for political stalemate, and thus will mobilize behind the reform process. The rapid growth of civil society and the explosion of nongovernmental political groups supports this argument.

Unfortunately, the obstacles to reform are even deeper and more ingrained than the motives for it. At the most basic level, Zaire totally lacks the sort of political culture necessary to sustain democracy. The notion that political leaders have both the right and the responsibility to use state resources to reward their family, ethnic kinsmen and political supporters is common. Every nation experiences some degree of political corruption but in Zaire it is the norm. The public would be surprised if political leaders did *not* skim state resources rather than being shocked or outraged when they do. The rewards of restraint cannot match the potential rewards of corruption. Along the same lines, Zaire has never developed the clear distinction between partisan and nonpartisan political activity that democracy requires. Even the nongovernmental organizations undertaking political education are widely seen as members of one or the other of the political "families." The media, which has experienced explosive growth during the reform process, is unabashedly partisan. So, too, are most elements of the government. Without a bedrock of nonpartisan organizations, whether educational institutions, security forces, or the judiciary, it may be impossible to build a democracy.

In open political systems, voters must look for some way to identify candidates to support. In stable democracies, the educational system, the political parties, and the media help voters gather enough information to gauge which party or candidates most closely match their own beliefs and preferences. Zairians have never received the political education to make such judgements. They are likely, then, to vote based on one element of identity that they do understand--ethnicity. And, so long as the state dominates the economy, elections will degenerate into winner-take-all contests whereby the victor's ethnic group gains control of the nation's wealth. Zaire would then discover, like many other African states, that the ethnicization of politics does not allow the compromise, bargaining, and acceptance of electoral defeat that forms the lifeblood of democracy.

The fact that there are powerful individuals and institutions in Zaire that would see their influence shrink if an effective national government emerged also hinders the reform process. Many regions and provinces today are nearly autonomous. Local leaders, whether civilians or military officers, have developed their own sources of wealth, whether through the smuggling of diamonds or arms, direct taxation, or skimming off international assistance.[88] For the various warlords and regional

satraps around the country, an end to the political crisis in Kinshasa would pose a challenge, perhaps an unacceptable one. They are likely to hinder the emergence of an effective central government.

The state of the Zairian economy also complicates the consolidation of stable democracy. Most economic activity is in the informal sector, whether day-to-day barter or sophisticated smuggling schemes. It would take a massive capital influx to reinvigorate the formal economy. Zaire is unlikely to attract this. The nations, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations involved in crisis resolution and nation assistance all undertake some form of triage, concentrating their assets where there are expected payoffs. For them, Zaire is seen as such a basket case that it is not worth great expenditures. Many Zairians believe or hope that the world community will eventually extricate them from their political and economic crises. This simply will not happen. There will be no shortage of advice, but a dearth of money. Without adequate revenues, the ability of the state to build infrastructure and provide basic services (including security) is limited. Even a government chosen through fair and open elections might be essentially irrelevant to most Zairians. Like the Queen of England, the new central government might be tolerated, perhaps even popular, but have little real power. The various power barons might encourage the emergence of an elected government to attract renewed foreign aid, but leave it bereft of any real power.

What, then, are the possible outcomes? When the elections do take place, Tshisekedi is unlikely to win. Even though he currently has the widest national recognition after Mobutu, he has never had access to the amount of money and power it takes to build a political machine. Few if any foreign organizations are willing to fund his campaign. Even more importantly, he has alienated much of Zaire's political elite, even those opposed to Mobutu, through his stridency and autocratic methods. In May 1996, even the Sacred Union rejected Tshisekedi as their leader, leaving him no institutional base of support.[89] There is also the possibility that a moderate anti-Mobutu candidate might emerge and galvanize the public. But Zaire's recent political history, with its tendency to push political leaders either into the Mobutu camp or into the radical opposition, has not encouraged the emergence of popular moderates. There is no Zairian Nelson Mandela.

Most Zairians as well as foreign observers assume that Mobutu will find a way to win the election. He would probably prefer to do it cleanly, relying on his charisma and stockpile of political debts. But if there appears to be the slightest chance that he might lose a fair election, he would probably pursue

other routes to victory. In fact, evidence is already mounting of a campaign of coercion and dirty tricks. According to an April 1996 letter by the International Human Rights Law Group, ". . . President Mobutu has not taken meaningful steps to ensure the neutrality of the Zairian security forces . . . Despite repeated promises not to obstruct his country's transition to democracy . . . President Mobutu continues to do just that."[90] So long as Zairian politics remains a winner-take-all game where the victors control both power and wealth and the losers have neither, candidates will be pushed toward intense, unrestrained campaigns. The stakes are simply too high to not take all possible steps to assure victory. Reform of this distorted political system will take decades.

Finally, there is always the possibility that the electoral process might spark such bitterness and conflict that it cannot be completed and the groups and individuals whose power would be threatened by the emergence of an effective central government act to derail the process. There is always the possibility of a military coup d'etat but the chances are fairly slim. During his dictatorship, Mobutu went to great lengths to defend against military intervention in politics. He did this by creating overlapping and competing security forces, and by carefully preventing the emergence of strong and politically active senior military leaders. With only one exception, officers were not placed in positions of authority in Mobutu's regime.[91] Today, the various security forces and the cliques that subdivide them counteract each other and make it difficult for any ambitious general to muster enough force to gain control of the country. Moreover, most army leaders probably recognize that the economic and social recovery of Zaire is contingent on international support which a military government could never attract.

Even if an organized coup is unlikely, Mobutu has made enough enemies that assassination is always a possibility. There is simply no way to assess what impact this might have on the reform process. Zaire has yet to overcome the deleterious impact of Mobutu's strategy of linking the nation's stability to his personal power. His death might conceivably remove the obstacles to democratization, but it is just as likely to spark civil war. Whatever the cause, if the election process collapses, disintegration is a real possibility as various provinces and regions abandon the central government altogether. Recognizing that the centralization of power that characterized Mobutu's rule does not reflect Zaire's conditions, the draft constitution completed in May 1996 proposed moving toward a federal system.[92] This may be only a stopgap. Many analysts hold that Zaire is such an artificial nation that unity is ultimately impossible.[93] This is a depressing but persuasive argument. The upcoming elections, then, may be the final test of Zaire's viability and the last chance for unity and stability.

Policy Choices.

From Zaire's independence until the late 1970s Washington's overriding concern was stability. The United States did not ask much of Mobutu other than to hold his nation together. His eccentricities and repressive behavior were not unusual among African leaders of that time, and tolerating him was seen as the best way to contain communist influence in Africa and assure Western access to Zaire's strategic minerals. Mobutu, in other words, was seen as the least of the available evils. After the withdrawal of the Portuguese from Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea Bisseau in 1976, American policymakers concluded that a major Soviet strategic offensive was underway in Sub-Saharan Africa. Mobutu's active cooperation was needed on a range of issues. The United States sought to assure this by increasing his security assistance and augmenting his prestige. Toleration was thus replaced by outright embrace. Since the end of the Cold War, the West has less need for African allies and Zaire's geostrategic importance has faded. At the same time, the collapse of the Zairian mining industry means that it is no longer an important supplier of strategic minerals. With the exception of the Rwandan refugee problem, there are no issues where the United States needs Kinshasa's active cooperation. Ironically, then, Zaire's ability to influence the United States has declined just as radically as Washington's ability to influence Zaire.

Today, Washington's primary concern is preventing Zaire's political and economic crisis from generating widescale violence that could tax the world's capabilities to provide assistance and derail reform in Zaire's neighbors.[94] The core dilemma is finding a way to balance short-term and long-term considerations. Actions and policies that might lead to long-term gains can be destabilizing in the short term. The goal for U.S. policymakers is thus to push as hard as possible for fundamental reform without causing outright collapse. It has taken several decades of U.S. relations with Zaire for this to become clear. Until the 1990s, U.S. policymakers accepted the argument that Zaire required a strong figure like Mobutu and subscribed to the condescending argument that Africans were "not ready" for democracy and thus their dictators should be tolerated. Today, American policymakers recognize that the stability Mobutu brought was ultimately self-defeating and unsustainable, his reliance on patronage and repression spawned the economic and political crises of recent years. But Washington is caught in the classic dilemma associated with unseating a dictator, whether a Castro, a Hussein, or a Mobutu. Skilled dictators prevent the emergence of effective challengers. Mobutu's talent for co-opting, dividing, and weakening Zaire's political elite left no obvious successor. American policymakers and U.S. allies thus agree that Zaire needs

fundamental change, but there is less consensus on how to bring this about without unleashing violence.

Early in the Clinton administration, Assistant Secretary of State Herman Cohen began talks with France and Belgium to coordinate pressure on Mobutu.[95] In October 1993, an interagency working group chaired by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Edward Brynn prepared a report which stressed the limits of U.S. leverage in Zaire and warned of the danger of anarchy if Mobutu were precipitously removed.[96] But the group offered no real alternative to the existing policy of encouraging reform, refusing aid, and ostracizing Mobutu. The emergence of Kengo seemed to offer a solution by providing the United States the opportunity to pursue what is almost always its preferred option in such situations: strengthening the political middle. The Clinton administration considered Kengo a sincere reformer and framed a new strategy designed to help him sever his ties to Mobutu and build an independent power base.[97] Soon after assuming office, Kengo visited the United States to seek a resumption of bilateral aid and to begin rebuilding bridges with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. In October 1994 Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott visited Zaire and hinted at a resumption of U.S. aid. The thaw in relations continued with the appointment of the new U.S. ambassador in 1995 and a 1996 visit to Washington by Kengo.

Recent U.S. policy toward Zaire is probably the best that could be expected. Washington could do little to decisively change the iron logic of Zairian history given the relatively limited economic and political resources the United States could bring to bear. Today, that may have changed: Zaire is more ripe for fundamental change than at any time since this 1960s. With a carefully constructed strategy, the United States might be able to make a difference with even limited economic and political resources. In terms of strategic triage, Zaire may have pulled itself from the "basket case" to the "could go either way" category. To form the sort of cogent approach necessary to draw the greatest utility from the resources the United States can devote to Zaire, the Clinton administration should instigate a comprehensive review to adjust American policy. This review must grapple with several key questions.

What is the appropriate extent and form of the U.S. involvement? U.S. interests in Zaire, whether economic or geostrategic, remain limited in comparison to many other parts of the world.[98] With American political, economic, and military resources taxed by global commitments and responsibilities, risks must be accepted in lower priority areas. Sub-Saharan Africa is one of these. While Zaire is critical to the security of Sub-Saharan Africa, the security of Sub-Saharan Africa is important but not critical to the United States. This means that there is

almost no chance of Washington pouring resources into Zaire for any contingency other than a Rwanda-type human disaster. But the United States should not abandon Zaire all together. Since Washington supported Mobutu as he was laying the foundation for the current crisis, the United States does bear a moral responsibility to encourage reform. Moreover, well-designed policies today can lessen the chances that an expensive relief operation will be needed later.

Some analysts contend that the United States should lead a multinational coalition to support reform in Zaire.[99] A more appropriate level of involvement might be to retain the role of full but not dominant partner in a support coalition or contact group--a "first among equals." Coordination with Belgium and France should continue. The role of the United Nations should expand. In the vital process of reforming Zaire's economy and reviving the mining industry, the United States should do what it can to aid the World Bank and other international organizations. More importantly, Washington should actively seek to broaden the coalition supporting democratization in Zaire by encouraging the involvement of other African states who have taken a similar path. African leaders have long sought African solutions to African problems while, in reality, relying on outside assistance. Today new leaders like Nelson Mandela seem intent on truly taking control of their continent's destiny. This should have the full backing of the United States. Assuming Mandela can abandon South Africa's traditional support for Shaba secession, Pretoria could assume a leading role in the Zaire support coalition or contact group. The United States should encourage and support this.

At a minimum, the "troika" of the United States, Belgium, and France should instigate a regular series of meetings of the Zaire support coalition or contact group involving foreign minister-level representatives from as many African democracies as possible. Other nations in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Asia which have undergone the difficult transition to democracy should be encouraged to help the Zaire support coalition or contact group. Often such states are more sensitive to the pitfalls of democratization than are long-standing democracies like the United States, France, and Belgium.

Many Zairians still associate the United States with Mobutu and blame Washington for their political and economic woes.[100] This attitude is an encumbrance to reform since it allows Zairians to hold the United States responsible for solving the nation's problems rather than placing the onus on the Zairian elite itself.[101] To begin overcoming the association between Washington and Mobutu in the mind of Zairians, the United States should never waver in its insistence on democratization. Still, the monumental obstacles Zaire faces in building and sustaining

democracy should not be underestimated. Altering something as ingrained as a political culture is extraordinarily difficult. There will be some regression. The best that can be expected is that there are two steps forward for every one back. While the United States cannot insist that Zaire *be* a democracy in the short-term, Washington can insist on continuous movement in that direction.

Within Zaire, the United States should coordinate multinational efforts to build democratic institutions before and after the 1997 elections. Zaire is a nation with no tradition of an independent judiciary, apolitical military, effective and unbiased civil service, free press, and autonomous political parties. Without these, it can hold an election but not sustain democracy. The U.S. Government, along with the other states in the Zaire support coalition or contact group, international organizations like the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity, and the European Community, and institutions like the National Endowment for Democracy, can help cultivate these vital building blocks of democracy.[102] Again, a central role should be accorded other states which have recently undergone the transition from closed to open political systems and better understand the process than Americans. And, because the Zairian security forces, more than any other institution (or collection of institutions), can derail democratization, the United States should consider re-opening military-to- military ties during the run-up to the election.

A more thorny issue is whether the United States should support a particular candidate in Zaire's upcoming elections. This is a dilemma with which American policymakers have struggled for decades. On one hand, support for a candidate constitutes meddling in the internal affairs of another state. On the other hand, there have been candidates ranging from French and Italian communists in the late 1940s to Roberto d'Aubuisson in El Salvador's 1984 elections whose victory would have proven inimical to the sustainment of democracy. Zaire is likely to repeat this. Neutrality in the elections of other countries is generally a good idea but not an immutable rule. The situation in Zaire is more desperate than most. Given this, the United States should publicly repudiate Mobutu during the campaign. Kengo and the moderates now have enough legitimacy that the available choices are no longer to either support Mobutu or accept anarchy. Even if Mobutu alters what appears to be his current strategy, campaigns cleanly, and wins a clear victory, his commitment to real reform and the institutionalization of open government will remain highly questionable. Put simply, the United States should seek the electoral victory of almost anyone except Mobutu if it wants a permanent resolution of the Zairian crisis. The electoral defeat of Mobutu will not assure successful reform, but his victory would likely prevent or postpone it.

In any case, long-term concerns must take priority. If Mobutu's opponent or opponents in the campaign are committed to reform and democratization, the United States should break with recent tradition and endorse them. But Washington should abandon tradition and eschew covert intervention in the election. Perceptions of the Central Intelligence Agency throughout Sub-Sahara Africa border on the paranoid with the organization seen as near-omnipotent and directly responsible for many of the region's problems. To begin dispelling this myth, the United States must abandon covert involvement, however appealing it might seem.

How should the United States respond if Mobutu wins the 1997 elections? Electoral success by an ex-dictator is not unprecedented in Africa--witness the 1996 campaign of former Marxist military leader Mathieu Kerekou in Benin.[103] In part, this is due to simple recognizability. In societies new to open political competition, candidates often find that even infamy is better than being unknown. But political success by ex-dictators also reflects the longing for stability that emerges from the turbulence of democratization. Stalin might do quite well in a Russian election today. People facing the trauma of fundamental political, social, and economic change often conclude that stability without political rights is preferable to the possession of rights in an atmosphere of instability. If this pattern holds in Zaire, Mobutu will win the 1997 election. The United States would have to accept the results of open and free elections. Should Mobutu win, however, Washington should keep him at arm's length. If he hinders further reform, the building of democratic institutions, and planning for future elections, all American aid except for humanitarian relief should remain frozen. If he does allow these things, Washington's treatment should be cool but normal with a focus on long-term efforts to build democratic institutions and reform civil-military relations in Zaire.

How should the United States respond if the electoral process collapses? In Zaire, the coalition of individuals and groups in favor of open elections is fragile. If any of the major components of this group become frustrated and bolt the coalition, the process may collapse. In February 1996, for instance, the rift between pro-Mobutu forces and moderate reformers in the Kengo government was so large that it threatened to reignite the political crisis of a few years earlier.[104] There is also the chance that a group that feels excluded or threatened by the democratic process may derail it. The military comes to mind. Finally, there is always the chance that electioneering in Zaire will become a surrogate for ethnic competition as it has in so many other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. If this happens, Zaire's elite may conclude that democracy in untenable and

abandon the political transition.

If the electoral process fails, the U.S. response should be contingent on the conditions surrounding the collapse. If an individual or discernible group derails a process that otherwise appeared on course, the United States, in concert with democratic African states which have a vested interest in seeing the consolidation of open government on their continent, should engineer a complete economic and political quarantine. It is often argued that economic sanctions are much harder on the poor than on their intended targets--the elite--which has enough money to find ways to acquire the goods and services that sanctions seek to deny. This is probably less true in Zaire than elsewhere. Most of the poor are already outside the formal economy, so sanctions similar to those already in place that allow the continuation of humanitarian aid would not substantially increase their misery. Sanctions are always a blunt tool but, if properly applied, could inflict pain on the elite. In any case, the United States should continue its program of denying travel visas to any Zairian who hinders democratization and encourage all other nations to do the same. Experience has shown that this is a fairly effective and low-cost way of pressuring anti-democratic or corrupt elites accustomed to international travel.

How should the United States respond if Zaire disintegrates? Disintegration and ethnic violence remain possible in Zaire. Even while the electoral process is proceeding, struggles are underway as various ethnic groups compete for control of vital state agencies like the secret service.[105] Some observers feel that today Zaire no longer exists as a nation--Kivu has redirected most of its economic activity east, East Kasai refuses to accept the national currency, and Shaba has been described as "a virtual extension of South Africa."[106] There is always the chance that such *de facto* disintegration will give way to formal secession.

U.S. policy should not encourage secession or the division of Zaire. But if Zaire suffers a total collapse of central authority leading to a declaration of independence or autonomy by various provinces or regions, the United States would have little choice than to accept any new states that emerge from it, offer diplomatic support to minimize the violence that would accompany national disintegration, and open channels of communication with the governments of the new states. Washington would face a more difficult situation if a province or region committed to democracy and economic reform chooses to abandon a central government that remains mired in stalemate, corruption, or repression. In the past, Zaire's stability and unity have taken priority over reform and democracy in American policy. This approach may now have reached the point of bankruptcy. If the central government fails to reform and a break-away province clearly committed to democracy appears, the United States should

accept and help the democratizers but make clear that it prefers eventual reunification in a single democratic state rather than permanent division. Supporting a break-away province or region in order to fuel reform would be an extraordinarily risky policy that might increase the chances of civil war. But if the other alternative is stalemate and a slow slide into anarchy, the United States might be forced to throw the dice and take the riskier route.

The U.S. Army Role.

With no security assistance program and no military-to-military contacts beyond those of the defense attache attached to the embassy, the U.S. Army's current role in Zaire is limited to providing analysis and recommendations for policymakers. If, however, the situation in Zaire *either* gets better or worse, the Army's involvement could escalate. For instance, if the reform process collapses and Zaire lapses into Rwanda-style ethnic conflict, civil war, or insurgency, the U.S. Army could be called on to lead humanitarian relief or peace operations. Because of the Army's tremendous performance in Rwanda and its wide range of capabilities, American policymakers would think of it first as they frame a response to any sort of wide scale disaster in Zaire.

If a major relief operation became necessary, the United States should seek to minimize its role. But if this proved untenable, extensive U.S. involvement could pose a significant challenge for the Army. Scarce human resources would have to be squeezed from a force already pressed by the Bosnia operation. And, Zaire would be an even more difficult environment than the Balkans because of its distance from established U.S. bases, lack of infrastructure, and the many health risks to U.S. personnel. If a Zaire relief operation were funded out of an existing defense budget without supplemental money, the repercussions for readiness and modernization would be immense.

Unfortunately, the Army itself can do little to preempt the need for a large-scale relief or peacekeeping operation in Zaire. Only Zairians can determine whether their nation moves forward or slides into disaster. The best the Army, the Joint Staff, and the European Command (EUCOM) can do at this time is prepare. Potential coalition partners should be identified now and channels of communication opened. Plans should be developed, refined, and tested through simulations, exercises, and wargames. Admittedly the European Command cannot develop detailed plans for every conceivable African conflict, but disaster in Zaire is probable enough and the potential repercussions immense enough to warrant attention. The Army Staff and the U.S. Army in Europe (USAREUR) should encourage and support this.

The Army should also strengthen cooperation with the militaries of African states that might play leading roles in any sort of Zaire operation. This would include augmented training and assistance focused on improving the skills and infrastructure needed for large-scale relief and peace operations. The Army should instigate regular staff exercises dealing with a crisis in Zaire. It could, for instance, use the simulation facilities of its Center for Strategic Leadership at Carlisle Barracks to perform a Zaire relief exercise involving U.S., European, and African military leaders and planners. To improve cooperation with African militaries, the Army should take the lead in seeing that the number of defense attaches in Africa expands beyond the handful now there. While the attaches do yeoman work, the assignment to key African states of liaison officers outside the attache system should be explored.[107] Liaison officers can do much more to augment interoperability than attaches. Strengthening the foreign area officer program would help the Army provide experts to fill these sorts of positions and to aid planning staffs. And, in cooperation with the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity, the United States should look into the possibility of pre-positioning heavy equipment required for humanitarian relief and peace support operations in Africa (even though such a program would entail immense political complications concerning the location and type of stocks that would be prepositioned).

The U.S. Army might also become more deeply involved in Zaire if reform and democratization *succeed*, primarily through expanded military-to-military contacts and security assistance programs. The Army has the most natural affinity with the army-dominated Zairian military and is developing extensive expertise in programs designed to help states in the midst of a democratic transition reform their civil-military relations. To help policymakers decide on the wisdom of renewing military-to-military contacts during the lead up to the election, the Army Staff should draft a plan for this which would include specific activities designed to educate Zairians on the need for political neutrality and the role of a military in an open political system. The Army should encourage policymakers to re-open military-to-military ties as soon as possible during the reform process.

If American policymakers renew Zaire's security assistance after the election, the Army should recommend the near-wholesale reconstruction of the Zairian armed forces rather than simply improving the capabilities of the FAZ and other existing units. The current senior leaders of the Zairian security forces are incapable of shedding their tradition of corruption and repression. In fact, the Zairian military has consistently proven incompetent when faced with what might be considered "normal" military missions such as defending the nation against periodic

invasions from Shaba separatists living in Angola or quelling insurgencies in the eastern regions. To sustain any form of democracy, Zaire must develop a model of civil-military relations that stresses civilian control of the military *and* military professionalism.[108] The relationship must be one of mutual respect rather than the sort of master-lackey relationship that existed during Mobutu's dictatorship. The current security forces are unlikely to mutate into an apolitical professional organization, so the only viable solution is to start from scratch and form a new military retaining only officers who can demonstrate a record clear of corruption or human rights abuses, and a commitment to political neutrality.

At the same time, the U.S. Army should advise American policymakers to urge Zaire to adopt a reserve-based force. Reflecting its roots in the Belgian colonial force and its tradition of serving more for repressing internal dissent than protecting the nation, the Zairian military has eschewed reserves. But a military based on a very small permanent force and a somewhat larger body of reserves would have a number of advantages. First, it would help with national reconstruction by having reservists trained by the military working in their villages where their skills are most needed. Second, it would improve civil-military relations by helping the military become the protector of the people rather than their repressor. A strong reserve system is one of the reasons that American civil-military relations have been cordial throughout the nation's history. Others can emulate this. And, a reserve system could help Zaire control military spending by giving it the potential to mobilize military forces when threatened without having to bear the expense of a large standing force. Members of a smaller officer corps could be adequately remunerated, thus diminishing the temptation for corruption. Should Zaire adopt such a reserve-based model, the U.S. Army, with its deep tradition of reliance on reserve components, could play a central role in educating and training Zairian civilian policymakers and military leaders to build, sustain, and use military reserves.

Conclusions.

Zaire faces a crucial time in it history. Decisions made over the next few years will have far-reaching effects. If democratization and reform continue and take root in Zaire, its neighbors will have an easier time preserving their own programs of stability, reform, and development. But if Zaire regresses or disintegrates, great strains will be placed on the stability of Central Africa and movement toward reform and development endangered. In the broadest sense, Zairians may choose from three paths. One leads toward reconciliation, reconstruction, reform, and democracy. Another leads toward more-or-less peaceful

fragmentation of the nation, whether through deliberate agreement or through simple admission that unity is impossible. The third path is that of violence, whether insurgency, militia-based ethnic conflict, or civil war involving regions, ethnic groups, or the personal armies of warlords. The United States should seek the first outcome, accept the second if necessary, and prepare for the third. While Washington should push for elections and make them the *quid pro quo* for the resumption of normal relations (including security and economic assistance), it is unrealistic to expect an immediate, revolutionary transformation of Zaire's political culture and system. The current one took nearly a century to form and will take years, perhaps decades, to change in any fundamental way. On the day after the 1997 elections Zaire will look very much like it did the day before.

Given these realities, the United States must approach Zaire strategically, taking a long-term perspective. The crux of the matter is not simply holding elections in 1997, but encouraging the fundamental transformation of a dysfunctional political culture and system. The success or failure of American policy toward Zaire in the 1990s will not be clear for 20 years. In addition, a strategic approach requires preparing for disaster. The chances that Zaire can avoid disintegration and wide scale violence are at best even. The United States and its allies should not stumble into another Rwanda-type situation where all planning must be done on the fly. The more done now and the greater the involvement of other African nations, the better. For the United States in general and the U.S. Army in particular, a moderate investment in the short-term will at least slightly lower the chances that a major effort will be required later. And, should disaster occur and a major relief or peace support effort become necessary, time and effort devoted to early planning will pay off. Preemption and preparation should thus be the focus of U.S. strategy as Zaire struggles to emerge from its time of crisis.

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