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17 March 1977

Memorandum for: Mr. Thomas Thorne, INR

From: NIO/AF

Subject: Assessment of Developments in Zaire

1. Please find attached the assessment you requested regarding short-term developments around the Zaire problem. As you know, the paper is the product of an informal working group composed of interested experts from the NFIB agencies, but has not been coordinated formally within any of the departments and agencies nor by NFIB.

2. I know you will join me in thanking all the participants in the working group for turning to with a very short deadline and on very short notice. I hope the effort proves helpful to the Department.


William Parmenter

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MEMORANDUM

17 March 1977

ZAIRE: THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY SITUATION--
AN INTERAGENCY ASSESSMENT

I. The Military Situation

1. The invasion of Shaba Province has the appearance of a well-planned, professionally executed operation. The intentions of the invading Katangans appear to be, at a minimum, to enlist the support of sympathetic inhabitants in Shaba Province in an effort to occupy and sever a significant portion of the region from Zairian control, or failing that, to be in a position to carry on a prolonged insurgency. If the invaders reach Lubumbashi, the provincial capital, they would be in a good position to set up a political organization and announce secession.

2. A broader aim of the invaders may involve a phased campaign to topple Mobutu. Information received early this month indicates that the actual Katanga attack plan involved a two-pronged attack against Zaire by Katangan forces in northern as well as eastern Angola. Details of this attack plan are widely known in Kinshasa and Brussels, indicating it has probably been developed over a long period. The current thrust of the invasion in Shaba Province appears to be following part of the reported attack plan. Unconfirmed reporting indicates that some activity may be taking place across the northern Angolan border. Activity in this area could serve as a secondary attack, designed to tie down Zairian troops, or it could actually be a major route of advance as outlined in the reported "attack plan." Recent unusual military activity has been reported at various locations in Angola: Texiera de Sousa, Luso, Henrique de Carvalho, San Antonio do Zaire, San Salvador. It is impossible to determine whether this activity is related to possible action from Angola against Zaire or is in preparation for expected new offensives against Angolan insurgents. It could be both.

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3. The ex-Katangan gendarmes, based in Angola for more than ten years, are a highly disciplined, well trained fighting force which performed very effectively on the side of the MPLA during the Angolan war. The total force may number over 4,000 personnel, and includes older veterans as well as younger personnel. These gendarmes have been trained over the years by Belgian, Portuguese, and now Cuban advisers. In Shaba Province there may be about 2,000 Katangan troops. These gendarmes appear to be well equipped, and may be operating with Soviet-supplied armored cars and multiple-tube rocket launchers. White advisory personnel reportedly have been seen with the Katangan troops in Shaba Province. We do not know the extent of their logistical support; so far, they seem well-supplied.

4. The effectiveness of the Zairian forces is limited. Their chief shortcomings include marginal leadership, lack of discipline, poor training, high desertion rate, weak logistics and communications capabilities, and corruption. The Zairian armed forces are probably unable to operate above company level as a cohesive military unit. Moreover, Zairian forces are severely hampered by shortages of operational aircraft, petroleum, spare parts, ammunition, and other basic military supplies. It is unlikely that Zairian forces could offer significant resistance to the attacking force, at least at the present time.

5. Mobutu clearly intends to defend against the invading force, not only to recover Zaire's territorial integrity, but also to preserve his position as head of state. However, he has to move carefully, considering the low level of effectiveness and loyalty of his military forces. Furthermore, he must retain a capability to defend the capital and areas of the country other than Shaba. He will probably seek to shore up the short-term capabilities of his forces by requesting further assistance from Western sources; unless he were to receive pilots or tactical ground forces advisers, however, this assistance will not be fully effective.

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II. Political Impact in Zaire

6. The attack in Shaba Province is likely at the least to increase political uncertainty in Zaire. Much will depend on how far and how fast the attacking forces move. Shaba Province, with its rich mineral deposits, is the heart of the country's economy. Its loss would leave the country virtually bankrupt. This, in turn, would almost certainly lead to increased resentment and agitation against Mobutu. Indeed, Mobutu's maladministration and the excesses of his regime, particularly by the military, have already alienated numbers of Zairians. At the same time, however, Mobutu has been adept, albeit ruthless, in suppressing opposition and eliminating potential challengers. We do not expect him to be overthrown in the next month, unless there is an invasion of the capital area, but the fall of Shaba would make his position precarious.

7. As matters now stand, the attack is likely to deepen countercurrents already present within the country's elite. The precedent of the attack and the government's apparent inability to counter it have probably resulted in further loss of confidence in Mobutu. But there is also a consciousness that there is no very appealing alternative who would be any more able than Mobutu to keep the country together and cope with its problems. There is a fear that without Mobutu the country could be plunged into total chaos. Finally, although there are no indications that the attack has had the galvanizing effect of rallying the population to Mobutu, this could emerge, at least in the short term, particularly if the Zairian military were able to mount some effective counteraction.

8. Existing and potential opposition groups in the provinces will no doubt be encouraged by the precedent set by the Katangan move. We do not know what contacts may exist between such groups and the Katangans, but we expect that feelers will be extended, if they have not already occurred. Over the next month or so, however, it is unlikely that

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any other dissident or separatist groups will be more than an irritant to the Zairian government, although the threat of their becoming active might tie down some of Zaire's military forces.

9. The key to the political situation is the Zairian military. They are the ultimate arbiters of power. Mobutu has long recognized this and has given the military preferential treatment. Maintaining their privileged status and perquisites is a prime consideration among both officers and men. If they felt that Mobutu was losing control of the situation and that their position might be threatened in the process, they might become inclined to move against him. The situation has not yet reached this point and probably will not in the immediate future. If the military were to suffer major reversals, the possibility of a military move against Mobutu would increase.

10. Should Mobutu be ousted by the military, he would probably be replaced by a collegium of leaders, none of them outstanding figures. The military would be the driving force in such a collegium, but there would also probably be a sprinkling of civilian politicians and governmental technocrats. Whatever the initial atmospherics surrounding their taking control, such a group would have little prospect of coping any more effectively than Mobutu has with the country's problems.

III. Diplomatic Initiatives

11. Zairian diplomatic initiatives (or initiatives by other friendly states) aimed at building support for Kinshasa and a backlash against the Angolans will probably have mixed results in the short term. Mobutu has a good many enemies and detractors in Africa who are likely to react--at least initially--that he has gotten what he deserved for meddling in Angola. Some of the "progressive" regimes would probably be just as happy to see Mobutu go down, or suffer a setback.

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12. Furthermore, many African capitals are probably not yet deeply engaged in the situation and are waiting to see how events on the ground develop. In the initial stages at least, those African countries that would feel most strongly about the situation--moderate governments who fear the Soviet-Cuban role in Angola--are likely to be those that are least influential in Luanda.

13. On balance, the impact of Zairian diplomatic initiatives will probably be limited in the short term. These initiatives might, however, lay the groundwork for stronger diplomatic support in a longer time frame, when the problem may have made a greater impact in Africa. The Zairians have a good case to argue--anything smacking of regional separatism and foreign intervention is anathema to African governments, and many states (probably including some that are not hostile to Luanda) are uneasy about the Cuban potential.

14. In terms of possible influence in Luanda, key African countries would include Nigeria and the front-line countries. None of these are particularly friendly to Mobutu but all (except possible Mozambique) are leery of foreign intervention. Nigeria is sensitive to its perceived responsibilities to exercise leadership in Africa, is strongly opposed to secessionist movements, probably has some influence with Neto, and probably would be willing at some point to make an effort to mediate between Mobutu and Neto. We suspect, however, that Neto is not easily embarrassed, and that it would take a good deal of pressure on him to make him give up the Shaba enterprise. We believe that Neto's purpose here is serious, and that he likely has objectives beyond mere harassment of Mobutu.

15. US or other representations to the Soviet Union and Cuba probably would not produce concrete results. Both countries have resisted all pressures to date concerning their role in Angola. It is doubtful that Angola could continue to sponsor the invasion of Zaire without Soviet and Cuban support.

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16. At present, the Western European countries are taking a somewhat detached view of the Angolan situation.

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The emergence of strong European support for Mobutu would probably depend on the degree of US commitment to Kinshasa and on our making it clear to the Europeans that we regarded support of Zaire as an important issue for ourselves as well as for the Western countries.

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17. This assessment reflects the preliminary views of the Intelligence Community. It has been coordinated at the working level but because of the pressure of time, has not been reviewed by the NFIB principals.

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