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PROSPECTS FOR THE CONGO

CONCLUSIONS

A. President Joseph Mobutu is currently providing a greater measure of political stability and internal security to Congo (Kinshasa) than that troubled country has known since independence. But the fabric of government is still fragile. There are persistent popular discontents and frustrations, and no great enthusiasm for Mobutu personally. The opposition to the regime is, however, diffuse and unorganized. We think Mobutu stands a better than even chance of retaining office over the next couple of years, and perhaps longer. His departure, if sudden, would probably result in prolonged political turmoil and a sharp decline in internal security.

B. Mobutu's main base of support is the Congolese National Army (ANC), which holds a virtual monopoly of coercive power but is poorly trained and disciplined and often is as much a threat to, as a preserver of, security. Any significant improvement in the ANC is likely to be gradual and could take many years.

C. The obstacles to a restoration of the economy to preindependence levels of activity are great. If tolerable internal security can be maintained, monetary stability preserved, and foreign aid at about current rates obtained, the Congo will probably be able to function for some time at about the present pace. A considerable improvement in the economy would require a substantial additional input of foreign financing, much of it for the infrastructure.

D. Mobutu has recently shown a tendency to involve himself in the internal affairs of his neighbors. After a period of acrimony, Belgian-Congolese relations are improving, and Mobutu will probably gain limited economic and technical benefits from the detente. Belgium will remain the predominant foreign presence in the Congo, although it is unlikely to be as deeply involved in internal affairs as

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in the past. Mobutu will continue to look to the US for important military and economic assistance and unless US aid is cut off, he will regard the US as his main foreign backer.

DISCUSSION

I. THE POLITICAL ORDER

1. Considering the Congo's chaotic history since 1960, President Joseph Mobutu in his three years in office has had some modest achievements. A major accomplishment has been the mere survival of his regime, which owes something to the exhaustion of the Congolese populace after the prolonged civil strife and to the continued disarray of rival political factions, and a good deal to Mobutu's political skills.

2. Mobutu's regime, like many others in Africa, is characterized by a heavy concentration of authority in the hands of the President. Remnants of earlier regimes, including national and provincial assemblies, have been swept away in favor of a highly personal style of rule virtually devoid of an institutional framework. Mobutu shares power with no one, but he does consult with his old cronies, a group of seasoned and durable politicians known as the Binza Group. This clique forms the core of his cabinet and serves in a few other key administrative posts. None of his civilian associates are in a position to challenge him, and all are kept off balance by cabinet changes and administrative reshuffles.

3. Mobutu has invested considerable time, money, and effort in bolstering his stature as a great national chief—both by displaying the trappings of office (e.g., a yacht, prestige projects) and, more importantly, by being ruthless and decisive. He has shown some response to advice from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the US designed to introduce greater financial responsibility. He has also made efforts to grapple with basic internal problems. He keeps in touch with the grassroots by holding informal palavers with groups of clergy, students, labor, businessmen, the army, and others who air their grievances and recommend reforms. He has also established a national political party and has included in it some regional politicians who had been largely excluded from active politics since his takeover. This party is, however, principally an instrument of the regime, and provides a means of dispensing patronage and a cheering section.

4. The capabilities of the central administration in Kinshasa have probably improved slowly under Mobutu. Control of the provinces is probably stronger than under previous regimes. Mobutu selects provincial governors—a fairly competent group on the whole—gives them vice-regal powers, shifts them about, and makes it a practice to send them to areas where they are not native. But this has not necessarily improved provincial government, for the governors fre-

quently lack the expertise, the staffs, and the resources to deal with the complexities of local situations. Moreover, the governors often do not know the local languages and are regarded as foreigners by the local populace. Corruption, though less flagrant than in earlier regimes, is widespread and has a debilitating effect in the provinces as in the capital.

5. Mobutu's principal base of support is the Congolese National Army (ANC), an organization that is feared and generally hated. Some of the ANC's unpopularity rubs off on the President. He lacks a firm tribal base and is unable to arouse much enthusiasm for himself or his policies. Urban wage-earners, suffering from inflation, grumble at their lot and some resent Mobutu's lavish personal outlays. Many university students are opposed to him, criticize his policies as pro-Western and too moderate, resent his reliance on advisers whom they consider out of tune with the needs of the Congo, and fear that their ambitions for positions of influence will be thwarted. He, in turn, has used the army to put down student demonstrations. The young intellectual elite at one time welcomed Mobutu as a nationalist innovator, and some have lost the important posts they held in the early days of his regime, and have become disillusioned and estranged. In addition, some of the Congo's most important tribes, e.g., Bakongo, Baluba, and Balunda, feel excluded from what they regard as their rightful share of jobs and benefits.

6. There is, however, a considerable difference between the kind of chronic discontent which is prevalent among most Congolese, and active dissidence. Tolerance for corruption, maladministration, and economic failure is high. Moreover, dissatisfied urban masses as well as most of the people in the interior are unlikely to revolt so long as they believe that the ANC would move against them. Thus far, popular discontent and frustration, though persistent, is unorganized and is mainly confined to unarmed civilian elements without allies in the army. Generally speaking, the survival of Mobutu's regime is likely to depend largely on the action or inaction of the ANC at critical moments.

II. INTERNAL SECURITY

7. The ANC holds a virtual monopoly of coercive power in the Congo, but it is a poorly trained and disciplined force and is militarily unreliable. Throughout much of the country, it is as much a threat to security as a preserver of order. Soldiers often set up roadblocks to "tax" travelers, and there are frequent instances in which they beat and rob the populace. Many of the officers line their pockets by organizing rackets. Nevertheless, the ANC generally keeps the provinces under a rough kind of control.

8. No major security problems currently confront the ANC. There are some pockets of rebels in the eastern Congo and in the forests of Bandundu Province, but these groups act more like bandits than insurgents and tend to avoid contact with the ANC. There is no evidence of any significant resurgence of politically-inspired dissidence which could touch off a new revolt against the government. The rebel leaders have mostly fled the country and have little contact with their

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former followers in the bush. While some of them are in countries east of the Congo and may have some Cuban or Chinese support, they are at odds with each other and appear to pose little threat of renewed insurgency.

9. The question of the loyalty of the ANC to the regime and its responsiveness to orders from headquarters or field commanders are key considerations in assessing the political stability of the Congo. Officers and men are paid regularly and Mobutu is responsive to their grievances. Under these circumstances the ANC is reasonably loyal. Though Mobutu came to power in 1965 through a military coup, he has carefully excluded the army from participation in government. The top positions in the ANC are largely filled with long-time associates of Mobutu, who are for the most part incompetent, corrupt, and lazy, but are probably more loyal than the younger officers. The latter, particularly those trained abroad, are far more capable and many are thoroughly disgusted at serving under ignorant and corrupt commanders, but they are not a cohesive group and there is little evidence of plotting against Mobutu.

10. Mobutu probably wishes to reform the ANC but he recognizes that any major shakeup might arouse enough discontent among the older group of officers to threaten the stability of the government. He is therefore more likely to tackle the army problem piecemeal through limited and step-by-step reorganizations and reassignments rather than a clean sweep. The foreign training programs will bring some improvement of the capabilities of some units, but it would be unrealistic to expect any significant progress in the discipline, capabilities, or responsiveness of the ANC in the next several years.

11. The national police also has a security role, primarily in the cities. There are several foreign training programs under way, including one supported by the US, and the police force is in general a bit better disciplined than the ANC. It also has better relations with the populace. In times of emergency (as during the mercenary revolt in 1967) it is subject to the authority of the ANC.

12. The fact remains that the ANC is both the main bulwark of the regime and the greatest potential threat to it. Indeed, the most likely challenge to Mobutu would come from within the ANC or from a combination of military and civilian dissidents. So long as he holds the allegiance of the bulk of the ANC, particularly the "elite" First Paracommandos in the capital, he is not likely to be overthrown except by assassination. But there is no assurance that even the elite troops would stand their ground if confronting an armed and determined opposition. It is difficult to estimate political stability in the Congo with any confidence because in the past the shift from apathy to violence has been abrupt, and major uprisings have stemmed from trivial or unforeseen incidents. But there is currently no indication that Mobutu is heading for serious trouble. On balance, we think he stands a better than even chance of retaining office over the next couple of years, and perhaps longer.

13. If Mobutu were removed from the scene in the near future, it would probably destroy the relative stability and order now prevalent. Any successor, military or civilian, would have to have the backing of the ANC or most elements

of it simply to hold office. Moreover, because of the highly personal autocratic type of rule employed by Mobutu, the whole structure of government would be shaken. His successor would probably have to start from scratch, either to fashion a new hierarchy based on personal loyalties, or to begin to construct some institutions of government. In either case there would probably be prolonged confusion and instability.

III. THE ECONOMY

14. The overriding economic problem of the Congo has been to halt the downward slide which began just before independence. The natural resources of the country are enormous, but so are the obstacles to their exploitation. Post-independence governments have proved unable to muster the administrative skills needed to operate a complicated and extensive economy. Rebellion, civil disorder, and neglect have hampered production, particularly on the plantations, and have also taken a heavy toll of the transport system. Bridges were destroyed, equipment rusted, channels silted, and roads overgrown; reconstruction and repairs have been slow. This is an important factor in a country where the principal mines and the most potentially productive plantations lie some 900 miles from the seaports through which much of their output must move. Finally, in the years immediately preceding the devaluation of June 1967, the currency was grossly overvalued; this dampened the incentive to produce, not only for export but for the domestic market as well.

15. In consequence, current agricultural production is less than half the pre-independence level, with cotton, rice, and corn from small farms suffering the most. As for minerals, the output of gold and tin suffered substantial losses. Diamond production was less affected, but a third of the output was smuggled out of the country, thus depriving the government of revenue. A new marketing structure for diamonds has served to cut down this smuggling, and the prospects for both the mineral and the agricultural sectors have been improved by the 1967 monetary reform.

16. Probably the brightest spot in the economic picture is the continued high output of copper, zinc, and cobalt from Katanga. Exports of these minerals have been maintained at about preindependence levels; indeed, copper exports in 1967 exceeded those in 1959, and are rising. Katangan minerals now account for some 80 percent in value of all Congolese exports, and the revenues derived from minerals provide half of government income. Yet revenues have been affected by the drop in copper prices which have fallen from a high of 70 cents a pound in early 1968 to about 45 cents. Prices are unlikely to rise much in the next few years, and may drop further.

17. A complicating factor in the effort to arrest the economic decline is the national financial situation. Years of deficit spending after independence disrupted commerce and hastened inflation. The country has been kept going only by the infusion of over \$1 billion in economic and military assistance, 60

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percent of it from the US much of it through the UN.¹ Last year the IMF sponsored a sweeping monetary reform. By-and-large the reform has worked, partly because high world copper prices provided a windfall in revenues. Furthermore, Mobutu has taken steps to strengthen the Finance Ministry. But the recent downturn in copper prices and the uncertain outlook for efforts to control governmental expenditures, including Mobutu's propensity for lavish personal and prestige spending, are likely to raise again the spectre of budgetary deficits and perhaps another round of financial instability.

18. Over the years the US has delivered far more economic and military assistance to the Congo than to any other sub-Saharan African country. In the last few years the levels of aid have fallen off, amounting in fiscal year 1968 to only \$2.4 million in military assistance and \$30 million in economic aid.² This included \$12 million in PL 480 commodities. The balance financed imports of trucks, spare parts, and industrial supplies. Continued US aid at about this level, together with Belgian and other foreign financial and technical assistance, would probably maintain economic activity at something like the current pace, provided there is no serious decline in internal security, no major deterioration of the monetary situation, and no substantial decrease in the number of expatriate specialists.

19. A program designed to regain the pre-1960 level of economic activity would require massive financing over five years or so. It has been estimated that at least \$175 million would be needed to restore the internal transport system alone. An additional sum of at least \$125 million would be required to provide water and power, restore communications, and provide other public services. Some outside aid, though far short of the magnitude required for such a program, could be expected from Belgium, the EEC, the IBRD, and other sources, but they as well as the Congolese would look to the US for a major contribution. The success of such a program would depend heavily on the preservation of internal security and political stability, and on the related matter of finding the necessary technical and managerial personnel. Foreign experts willing to work in the bush are hard to find, and the Congolese now being trained for specialized jobs will not be available in sufficient numbers for a decade or more. If these requirements could be largely met, foreign private investors might come forward with the funds to exploit the great natural resources of the country. The economy could then even exceed preindependence levels of activity.

IV. FOREIGN RELATIONS

20. Mobutu has entered into African diplomatic affairs in a rather erratic and occasionally enthusiastic fashion. He clearly relishes attendance at OAU summit gatherings, where he mingles with other African chiefs in prestigious surround-

¹ Roughly \$700 million was economic assistance; the US accounted for about one-half.

² This compares with US economic and military aid of \$50 million in fiscal year 1967; \$52 million in 1966; \$32 million in 1965; \$64 million in 1964; \$112 million in 1963; \$129 million in 1962; and \$144 million in 1961.

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ings. Though he has little interest in more distant parts of Africa, such as Nigeria, he seems to be acquiring a taste for becoming involved in the affairs of his neighbors. He has come to believe that the Congo, as a major African state, has an important role to play in central Africa. For a time he lavished attention on the *Union des Etats de l'Afrique Centrale* (UEAC), an embryo customs union joining Congo (Kinshasa) with Chad and Central African Republic, though more recently he seems to find Congo (Brazzaville) politics more interesting. We do not know at this stage whether Mobutu's involvement in the activities of neighboring states is a passing fancy or a new phase of foreign policy. We are inclined to believe it is the latter.

21. Congolese relations with Portugal, though normally bad, tend to fluctuate between inactivity and the trading of threats. For some years various Congolese governments have afforded training facilities and safe haven to Holden Roberto's Angolan liberation movement, but Mobutu, like most Congolese, is not deeply committed to the liberation cause. He is aware, moreover, that the Portuguese have the means and occasionally the will to retaliate against the Congo. He has not forgotten the brief foray of mercenaries from Angola into Katanga last year, and has been concerned about bands of Lunda tribesmen from Katanga now in Angola, which he believed were armed and held in readiness by the Portuguese. By-and-large, neither Mobutu nor the Portuguese are keen on worsening relations with each other. The Congo depends on the Benguela railroad through Angola for the export of Katangan copper, and Angola benefits from the revenues.

22. The Soviet diplomatic mission in Kinshasa, which recently opened for the third time, has been very careful in its relations with Mobutu. Neither trusts the other. It is doubtful that the Soviets really expect to develop close relations with Mobutu's regime. They are likely to offer some aid, and Mobutu will find the Soviet presence useful in his efforts to garner more aid from the West. If he fails to get particularly desired items such as military aircraft from the West he might turn to the USSR.

23. Relations with the Belgians are particularly important for the Congo. After several years of acrimony, Mobutu is now doing what he can to increase Belgian aid and investment. He seems to have learned that no other country or group of countries can replace Belgium, and that the prolonged absence of key Belgian technicians has damaged the Congolese economy and public services. He is therefore willing to risk some domestic displeasure including charges of neocolonialist collaboration in order to regain the services of Belgian specialists and lure Belgian capital back to the Congo.

24. The outlook for the next year or two is for a cautiously forthcoming response to Mobutu's overtures. Brussels wants good relations and will continue to provide at least technical assistance but will not quickly forget Mobutu's anti-Belgian campaigns of recent years. Belgian aid has consisted principally of payments on preindependence Congolese debts (\$21 million in 1967) and the furnishing of technical assistance (\$25 million in 1967). The number of Belgian

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technicians dropped sharply in 1967 but is now beginning to increase. Belgian private investors will react cautiously to begin with and look for quick returns. Investors will, however, wish expatriate personnel to manage investments and the degree of security and stability throughout the country will be an important factor in determining the availability of such personnel. If relations continue to improve and the Congo maintains reasonable stability, there will probably be some new investment, although mainly for the expansion of existing enterprises rather than the establishment of new ones.

25. With the disappearance of the mercenaries and the liquidation of the issues revolving about the role of Union Miniere du Haut Katanga (UMHK), two of the principal sources of friction between the two countries subsided. Belgium has, however, to a considerable extent disentangled itself from the Congo and is unlikely to be as deeply involved in internal Congolese affairs as in the past. Nevertheless, Belgium will remain as the major foreign presence in the Congo.

26. Mobutu's attitude toward the former metropole could change suddenly as it has in the past. It is always possible, therefore, that for fairly obscure reasons or simply to divert popular discontent from himself, he might launch another hate campaign that would endanger the lives of the 24,000 Belgians in the Congo. In these circumstances other Europeans and US citizens would also be in danger.

27. The US enjoys a high degree of prestige and influence in Kinshasa, based in part on the massive aid provided over the years and on a long working association of US officials with Mobutu. The ANC relies on the US for transport equipment and for some technical training, and the Congolese economy would be in worse shape than it is without US assistance. Mobutu believes that his policies in the Congo and in Africa correspond with those of the US and he is occasionally miffed when the US fails to provide funds for his pet projects. Mobutu would like the US to provide him with some jet aircraft and eventually a few transport planes to move ANC units more rapidly to remote trouble spots. In any future crisis, as in the past, he would almost certainly turn first to the US for military assistance. Unless US aid ceases altogether, Mobutu will continue to regard the US as his most important foreign backer.

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