

Issue Date: March 26, 1977

# Zaire:

## Province Invaded from Angola

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Zaire's Shaba (formerly Katanga) Province was invaded March 8 by unidentified "mercenaries" from neighboring Angola, according to a government broadcast March 10. The invaders were reported to have seized Kisengi, Kapanga and Dilolo, strategic towns in the mineral-rich southern province.

The Congolese National Liberation Front (FLNC) March 11 claimed responsibility for the attack. In a communique issued in Paris, the group said the invasion was "a national uprising by the Congolese people." (Before independence in 1960, Zaire had been the Belgian Congo. The FLNC had been organized in 1963 by Katanga secessionists who had fled to Angola after the defeat of the separatist movement led by the late Moise Tshombe.)

Zaire March 11 charged that Angolan troops were among the invaders, and the next day it called Angola "a base for aggression against Zaire." Angola denied the charges. (Angola had charged Zaire with harboring guerrillas of the National Front for the Liberation of Angola [FNLA] who were continuing to fight the Angolan government in the north. Zaire had backed the FNLA during the Angolan civil war.)

The situation in Shaba remained unclear as the fighting continued. Estimates of the number of invaders varied from 500 to 5,000, and there was no information on casualties of either side. The attack on the three cities apparently had been planned in advance and had been well coordinated, according to reports March 17. The Zaire army, said to number 40,000, was described as disorganized and lacking equipment, spare parts and transportation. The invaders were said to have penetrated along the southern border of Shaba to within 50 miles of Kolwezi, a central copper-mining town. Their rapid advance was attributed in part to support from the local population, which was said to harbor some separatist feeling.

President Mobutu Sese Seko March 19 flew to Kolwezi. He expressed confidence that the population of the province was loyal to the government, saying the invaders held "a small region with 150,000 people while there are 3 million in Shaba." Mobutu added that his forces were inflicting "heavy losses" on the invaders and had recaptured a town west of Kolwezi.

Responding to a request from Zaire March 14, the U.S. government announced the next day that it would send emergency aid. The State Department said about \$1 million in aid already approved by Congress for Zaire would be used to send medical supplies and other equipment, excluding arms and ammunition. (Zaire received arms from Belgium March 17, and the French government agreed the next day to send weapons. France and Belgium were two of Zaire's major trading partners.)

U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance March 16 told the House International Relations Committee that the fighting in Zaire represented "a dangerous situation" for Zaire's copper-mining industry. (Copper mining in Shaba accounted for 7% of the world's copper output and over 60% of Zaire's total exports.) Vance said U.S. aid during the crisis would total "less than \$2 million," revising the earlier aid figure of \$1 million. Despite earlier charges by Zaire that Cuban soldiers in Angola were leading the invasion force, Vance said the U.S. had "no hard evidence" of Cuban involvement.

The State Department March 18 said Angola was providing the invading force with logistical support. A department spokesman reported that the force was led by white officers but did not say whether their nationalities had been discovered.

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