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African Affairs:

Zaire Army Advances on Shaba Rebels; Other Developments

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Backed by Moroccan troops, the Zaire army April 25 retook its former command center of Mutshatsha from rebels of the National Front for the Liberation of the Congo (FNLC) who had invaded Shaba Province March 8. [See 1977 [Zaire: Moroccans Arrive to Fight Rebels](#)]

The recapture of the strategic village, on the railway along the southern border of Shaba (formerly Katanga), was achieved with little fighting since most of the FNLC forces and the civilian population had fled before the approaching troops. Nevertheless, it was described as a psychological boost for the Zairian army and for President Mobutu Sese Seko in the campaign against the secessionist forces.

Fighting had been at a standstill since the arrival of 1,500 Moroccan soldiers April 9, according to government reports and Western diplomatic sources. Major fighting resumed April 15 at Kazenze, a village midway between Mutshatsha and Kolwezi, the principal mining town in the copper-rich province. The Zairian troops apparently began the fighting at Kazenze and were followed by about 400 Moroccans the next day. In the days that followed, Zairian troops continued their offensive, moving forward from Kolwezi as the FNLC retreated to the border towns they initially had captured.

Most of the fighting reportedly was carried on by the Zairian troops, including a company of 150-200 pygmy bowmen with poisoned arrows. The Moroccan soldiers apparently provided organizational and logistical support to improve the morale and effectiveness of Zaire's army, which had been described as disorganized and unprepared.

The government troops met with little resistance from the retreating Katangan secessionist forces. A press tour of the war zone April 25 showed little evidence of fighting, and there were indications the rebels had not been equipped with advanced weapons as Mobutu had reported. Captured weapons displayed April 20 in Kinshasa, Zaire's capital, had included old automatic rifles and a box of four Soviet-made antitank mines.

Two prisoners of war displayed in the capital April 20 told reporters they had been trained in Angola by Cubans, who had escorted them to the Zaire border. However, according to a report April 26 in the Washington Post, when the prisoners had been captured they had said no Cuban troops had crossed into Shaba. They had said they had been given assistance by "whites" in Angola who were presumed by observers to be Portuguese.

From the start of the conflict, Mobutu had charged the Soviet Union, Cuba and Angola with masterminding the invasion by the Katangan rebels. All three countries repeatedly had denied the charges, calling the conflict a purely internal uprising. Mobutu April 20 announced the termination of an educational cooperation program with the Soviet Union and charged Moscow with using diplomats in Kinshasa as espionage agents. Mobutu also charged the Soviet Union with the April 11 bombing of a hospital in neighboring Zambia. [See 1977 [Zaire: Moroccans Arrive to Fight Rebels](#)]

King Hassan II of Morocco April 18 said he had direct proof of Cuban involvement in the conflict. At an interview with French reporters, he said a Moroccan commander in Shaba had interrogated a prisoner who had revealed the presence of "white Angolans and Cubans" among the Katangan secessionists. Hassan also voiced concern that the crisis in Zaire might adversely affect chances for a Middle East peace settlement. The spread of fighting in Zaire, he warned, could involve Sudan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Moroccan Foreign Minister Ahmed Laraki added that an extension of the Zaire conflict could split the Organization of African Unity (OAU) between the moderate and radical African states. In an interview published April 23 in the New York Times, Laraki upheld the importance of maintaining existing borders in Africa and condemned "all subversion from the outside," a reference to the Soviet Union.

Because most African countries were composed of diverse and sometimes hostile tribes, their governments reportedly felt threatened by any separatist movement. President Idi Amin Dada of Uganda April 22 arrived in Kinshasa to pledge his support for Mobutu, offering to send Mobutu whatever supplies and troops he

needed. Amin added that he thought Angola had violated the provision of the OAU charter forbidding any member state to harbor enemies of another member state.

Brezhnev Warns Against Meddling

Leonid Brezhnev, Soviet Communist Party general secretary, April 18 warned against foreign meddling in the internal affairs of Zaire. In a statement welcoming Syrian President Hafez al-Assad to Moscow, Brezhnev warned against the emergence of "a new and dangerous source of tension...in the center of Africa...." A commentary that day by Tass, the Soviet news agency, charged that Israel was organizing Zaire's security forces and instructing Zaire army units. Tass added that the West was trying to involve Arab states in the conflict. [See 1977 [Middle East: Arafat, Assad Visit Moscow](#)]

An official statement of the foreign ministers of the European Economic Community April 18 condemned "any action by any state aimed at setting up a sphere of influence in Africa," an apparent reference to Soviet activities. The statement supported "territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs" in the case of Zaire.

The ministers "reaffirmed the willingness of [the EEC] to cooperate insofar as any African state wishes them to do so," a reference to France's airlift of Moroccan troops to Kinshasa and other French aid to the Zairian army. The French government April 17 said all planes used to ferry the troops had left Zaire the night before. The next day, the government announced that 20 French officers who had been handling supplies in Kolwezi had been recalled after all the supplies had been delivered.

The FNLC April 15 had reported that two French soldiers had been killed by FNLC forces near Kolwezi. The day before, the rebel forces had announced that captured Zairian troops had said that 50 French pilots were flying Mirage bombers in the conflict. Both claims were denied by the French government, which said no French troops were engaged in the fighting.

(According to a report April 21 in the Washington Post, French paratroop instructors and intelligence agents were helping Zairian troops and Moroccans in Shaba. According to sources cited in the report, the French undertaking in Zaire had been prompted by U.S. reluctance to get involved in African conflicts.) U.S. President Carter April 22 said it was "unlikely" his Administration would approve the sale of 10 M-60 battle tanks and 10 armored personnel carriers to Zaire. He was commenting on a report the day before that the Administration had requested \$30 million from Congress for the equipment and another \$2.1 million to instruct the Zairian army in using the tanks. Carter said the report of the sales was based on a study made by the previous administration. He repeated the U.S. position that Zaire would receive only "nonlethal" aid. [See 1977 [Zaire: Moroccans Arrive to Fight Rebels](#)]

(The State Department April 21 said it had turned down a request by Mobutu to include 16,000 cases of Coca-Cola, worth \$60,000, in its military assistance package to Zaire. Mobutu the next day explained he wanted the soft drink for his troops to avoid risks from water supplies poisoned by the Katangan rebels as they withdrew. The order was for cans, instead of bottles [which Zaire already produced], because cans were easier to transport to the battlefield, Mobutu said.)

Meanwhile, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency April 17 denied being involved in recruiting mercenaries to fight the Shaba invaders. A CIA spokesman denied a report that the agency had ties with David Bufkin, a mercenary who had recruited soldiers for southern Africa and recently had advertised in the U.S. for mercenaries to fight in Zaire. [See 1977 [Canada: Prior Cuban Probe Revealed](#)]

Zaire officials April 7 had denied recruiting U.S. and British mercenaries. The government press agency had said Zaire's ambassador in Washington had been instructed to lodge a formal protest over Bufkin's activities. It was believed the aid sent by Morocco, France, the U.S. and other countries might have led the Zaire government to abandon initial plans to recruit Western mercenaries. It was a criminal offense in the U.S. to recruit U.S. citizens for service in foreign armed forces or for a U.S. citizen to enlist in another army.

In a related development, West Germany April 14 had announced it would fly \$2.1 million worth of "humanitarian and medical aid" to Zaire.

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