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French Airlift for Moroccan Troops

in Paris where a first request for military aid was said to have been received from Zaïre on March 15—it was announced at the Presidential Office on April 10 that, in response to an urgent plea by Morocco and Zaïre, France was placing 11 transport aircraft (10 Transall C-160s and a DC-8) at the disposal of Morocco to help with the transfer of troops and arms to Zaïre, which had been “the victim of armed subversion” launched from across its borders.

This operation had, in fact, begun on April 7, and the arrival of about 1,500 Moroccan troops in Shaba province was confirmed in Kinshasa on April 10.

King Hassan on the same day explained to the ambassadors of the five permanent member-countries of the UN security Council—Britain, China, France, the Soviet Union and the United States—that Morocco had sent the troops “to help safeguard Zaïre's territorial integrity”.

On April 11 it became known in France that, in addition to the aircraft made available to Morocco, 170 French airmen were taking part in the airlift to Zaïre and at the Elysee it was stated that among weapons ordered by Zaïre in the past were 17 Mirage V fighter-bombers, 290 AML light armoured cars and five Puma and Alouette helicopters, while it was understood that considerably more arms had been supplied since it had become evident that President Mobutu's regime was threatened.

The French Foreign Ministry stated on April 11 that France had no defence agreements with Morocco or Zaïre and that the provision of military transport was “temporary”; that it had no connexion with “existing co-operation agreements” but was a response to a precise request by King Hassan and President Mobutu; and that it was “not in contradiction with the principle established by the President that the Africans must settle their own affairs themselves”.

President Giscard d'Estaing himself (who had visited Zaïre in 1975—see 27324 A) said in a television interview on April 12 that France had no intention of becoming involved in a “Vietnam-style” war in Zaïre; that the French aircraft sent to Morocco and Zaïre would complete their mission within that week and return to France; and that no French troops would take part in any military operations in Zaïre. The decision to send the aircraft, he added, had been taken on April 6, and its implementation had begun on the following day, at the request of two friendly African governments. France did not want to abandon its friends in Africa but wanted to assure them of European solidarity, and it had acted independently and without the agreement of the United States or any other country. He preferred that France had acted without such agreement, as there were times when Europe must act alone, but France had acted in the name of Europe, after consulting its European partners, and this was a sign of an independent and responsible policy. He rejected the view that the fighting was only a local insurrection against the Kinshasa Government and claimed that the invaders were not “former Katangese gendarmes” (who, having left their country 12 years earlier, were too old to take part in such an operation) but “highly trained troops supplied with arms and trained by others outside the country”.

In France, President Giscard d'Estaing's action was widely criticized, mainly by the left-wing opposition. M. Gastón Defferre, the leader of the Socialist and Left Radical group in the National Assembly, stated in the Assembly on April 12 that the President had ignored both Parliament and the Government. (It was pointed out in *Le Monde* that shortly after his election the President had promised on May 30, 1974, to inform the parliamentary opposition of “the factors which determine certain great national decisions, especially in foreign affairs”.)

The Communist Party attacked the decision as liable to “lead France into a colonial adventure”, to “endanger peace”, to “reduce the prospect of friendship and cooperation with African countries”, and to “transform our country into the spearhead of imperialist strategies in Africa”.

In the weekly *Nouvel Observateur* it was commented that it was “a dangerous mistake to save Mobutu” in order to restrain Soviet influence, for “if the collapsing and corrupt Zaïre becomes the symbol of western civilization then all the masses of Africa will turn their hope towards Moscow”.

In the United States the French action was initially received with some reservations but President Carter later, in a message to President Giscard d'Estaing on April 15, expressed his approval of and support for the French initiative.

A spokesman for the White House said after the French announcement that the US Government had “neither encouraged nor discouraged France”.

The State Department announced on April 11 that the French Government had advised it of its intentions but that there had been no prior consultation about the airlift, and it was also categorically denied that the Moroccans in Zaïre were using the US-made weapons with which they were normally equipped.

Mr Hodding Carter, a spokesman for the State Department, said on April 12 that the USA had decided not to send arms to Zaïre, as requested by President Mobutu, but to increase shipments of “non-lethal” military equipment to the value of \$13,000,000 (including a C-130 transport aircraft). Mr Carter explained that the United States was “attempting to provide assistance to help Zaïre to stabilize the situation and protect its borders and the integrity of the nation”, and that it saw a “need for an end to the fighting, and not an expansion of it”. In a further statement on April 20, he said that “as far as we know no Cuban is taking part in the fighting inside Zaïre”. (This remark was contrary to a claim made by King Hassan in an interview published in Paris on April 19.)

President Carter declared in Washington on April 22 that it was “highly improbable” that he would recommend the supply of tanks and other armoured vehicles to Zaïre as promised by the previous Administration, which had fixed military aid to Zaïre at \$30,200,000 for the 1976–77 budgetary year [see below].

In Belgium, the French action to assist a country which had been a Belgian colony until 1960 was also received with reserve.

M. Léo Tindemans the Belgian Prime Minister, said on April 11 that, contrary to President Mobutu's assertion, Belgium had not sent military advisers to Zaïre and that the only aid sent to Zaïre by Belgium had been negotiated with that country's Government before the fighting began. A Belgian government official was reported as saying that there was no evidence of any participation in, or support for, the invasion by Cuba or the Soviet Union

M. Renaat van Elslande, the Belgian Foreign Minister, stated in an article published in the Flemish review *Knack* on April 20: “France is especially interested in the wealth of Zaïre, and Belgium resents this as international rivalry. We have always said that Belgium must leave France alone in the areas where it is historically at home. We have asked France to adopt the same attitude towards us.” He also said that France had merely advised, but not consulted, Belgium in advance of its action, and he continued “I have insisted on receiving full information, for everything that France might do in Zaïre might affect the 25,000 Belgians who still live there.”

In connexion with a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the member-countries of the European Communities in London on April 18 it was reported that the Danish, Dutch, Irish and Italian ministers did not share the view of their Belgian, French and German colleagues that the French initiative had been justified and should be supported.

M. Louis de Guiringaud, the French Foreign Minister, disclosed at the meeting that only the Belgian, British and West German Governments had been informed in advance by President Giscard d'Estaing, and added that the latter had not intended to convey that France had acted in the name of Europe but that he had been trying to uphold the solidarity which existed between Europe and Africa.

(The West German Government had decided on April 14 to send food and medical supplies worth the equivalent of £1,250,000 to Zaïre in response to an appeal for humanitarian aid.)

African Governments which, in addition to those of Morocco, Egypt and the Sudan, supported the French action included those represented at the Dakar Franco-African conference on April 20–21, 1977 [see 28376 A].

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, the President of the OAU, said in Paris on April 15 that he approved the French and Moroccan initiative and added: “Almost all of Africa has a feeling of solidarity towards President Mobutu.” (In its first official reaction the OAU stated on April 16 that there was “great danger” that the crisis in Zaïre might be internationalized, which would make it impossible to find an “African” solution for it.)

After it had been reported on April 10 that an Egyptian military mission had been sent to Zaïre, President Sadat announced on May 1 that he was ready to give military aid to Zaïre, and in particular to its Air Force, though without sending troops to that country. In a speech in Alexandria he added: “We think that the invasion of Zaïre from Angola, supported by the Soviet Union, constitutes a direct threat against the Sudan, with which Egypt has a common frontier and very close historical links, and against the sources of the Nile, some of which are in Zaïre.” [The northern province of Haut-Zaïre border southern Sudan]

President Nemery of the Sudan said on April 11 that he was ready to give Zaïre any help which it needed to repel the invaders, adding: "Any danger to which Zaïre is exposed will have a direct effect on the Sudan, its security and its national unity."

Support for President Mobutu came also from President Amin of Uganda, although the latter had at first appeared to be unwilling to be involved in the conflict.

On March 30 the Ugandan President, refuting Tanzanian reports that he had sent weapons to Zaïre for use against Katangese rebels and stating that he had sent only 40 tonnes of food to Zaïre by air, declared that he never had sent, and never would send, "arms or troops to an African country to kill fellow Africans".

On April 8 he had written to King Hassan asking him whether it was true, as had been rumoured, that he was sending troops to Zaïre "for the sole purpose of killing Innocent people and murdering the followers of the heroic son of Africa, Patrice Lumumba, who was murdered by imperialists". [see page 18419]

On April 22, however, President Amin arrived in Kinshasa and promised Zaïre "all possible aid". On April 28 he paid a further visit to Zaïre, being accompanied by Major-General Isaac Lumago (Ugandan Chief of Staff) and Colonel Juma Oris Abdalla, his Foreign Minister. On that date Radio Uganda announced that a Ugandan "suicide striking force" had been sent to help the Zaïrese Army, that it had brought food and equipment and that it was led by Lieut.-Colonel Francis Itabuka, chief of military intelligence, but two days later this force was said to have returned to Uganda.

According to the AZAP agency President Amin was "convinced that the Soviet Union should be accused of international piracy and barbarism". On May 1 President Amin was reported to have said that six Ugandan battalions had gone to the Mutshatsha area to form a joint military command with the Zaïrese and Moroccan forces.

During this time Mr Nguza Karl I Bond, the Deputy Chairman of Zaïre's Executive Council (Government) and Commissioner of Foreign Affairs, had visited Senegal, Togo, the Sudan and Saudi Arabia with messages from President Mobutu. The Government of Iran, furthermore, announced on April 25 that it would give financial aid to Zaïre if the latter so wished.

A critical attitude, however, was adopted in Algeria and Nigeria.

In Algiers the Moroccan intervention was immediately afterwards described as a "precipitate and adventurous decision, like that which caused the war in Western Sahara" [see 27746 A].

In Lagos it was officially stated on April 14 that the Nigerian Government had not promised any aid to Zaïre and that it had made it clear to the US Government that it would not tolerate any US or European presence alongside President Mobutu's forces.

The intervention by Morocco and France was, moreover, opposed by Angola, Cuba and the Soviet Union. The Angolan Foreign Ministry on April 8 condemned "with extreme vigour foreign interventions, be they African or not, in Zaïre's internal affairs". It claimed that Angola was "not connected" with events in the neighbouring country, where there was "a general rising joined by a growing number of battalions of the Army of Zaïre", and it warned those who intervened, and in particular Morocco, against "the grave consequences" which might ensue. In a message to King Hassan on April 10 President Neto stated that Angola would hold responsible any state which, directly or indirectly, helped "to transform an internal affair of Zaïre into an international affair".

In Cuba it was claimed on April 14 that "the USA, China, France, Belgium, South Africa and other countries such as Morocco, Egypt and Israel" had come "to the aid of Mobutu's regime ... in its struggle to crush the people's uprising which began last month", and it denied that there were "any foreign troops in Shaba province operating with the forces opposing Mobutu".

The Soviet Union declared, in a Tass statement on April 12, that the fighting in Zaïre was "a strictly internal conflict which need not concern anyone outside that country" but that "a number of Western countries, as well as China, are urgently sending arms and military equipment to the central Government of Zaïre". It added that the Soviet Union "resolutely rejects any allegations of its complicity with events in Zaïre".

Mr Stepan Chernovenko, the Soviet ambassador in Paris, told President Giscard d'Estaing on April 14 that the Soviet Union was opposed to any foreign intervention in Zaïre and that neither his country nor Cuba was involved in the invasion of that country.

Mr Brezhnev, the Soviet leader, said in Moscow on April 18: "If anew and dangerous source of tension arises in central Africa, all responsibility will be borne by those who violate one of the fundamental principles governing relations between states—that of non-intervention in internal affairs. We are categorically opposed to such acts, wherever they take place."

Tass claimed on the same day that Israel had been charged with reorganizing Zaïre's security services and that Egyptian military personnel had already arrived in Zaïre, and that Cairo was thus "acting in common with the Israeli militarists".

Chinese support for the Zaïre Government was expressed on April 26 by Mr Tan Chen-lin, a Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Chinese National People's Congress, in the course of discussions with Mr Bomandeke Bonyeka, first secretary of the permanent committee of the Zaïrese National Legislative Council.

Mr Tan Chen-lin said that China had sternly denounced Soviet social-imperialism for its aggression and interference in Zaïre and that the struggle of the people of Zaïre to safeguard national independence and defend state sovereignty had "the support of the revolutionary people of the Third World and the whole world".

The Government of Zaïre had either suspended its diplomatic relations with Cuba, and this was followed by its suspension of relations with East Germany (established in 1972 see 26635 A) and by a further deterioration of those with the Soviet Union.

It was announced in Kinshasa on April 4 that, after documents "proving" Cuban involvement in the invasion had been found on a Cuban diplomat (later named as "Fernindez"), all Cuban diplomats had been ordered to leave the country and relations between the two states had been suspended by Zaïre.

On April 29 the AZAP agency accused East Germany of supplying arms and ammunition to the insurgents, and it added that public opinion in Zaïre demanded that diplomatic relations with East Berlin should be severed, as had been done in the case of Cuba. The East German Government officially denied the Zaïrese accusation on April 30 but two days later the East German diplomats in Kinshasa were given 48 hours to leave the country after Mr Nguza Karl I Bond had informed 49 foreign ambassadors in the capital that large quantities of East German arms had been recovered by Zaïrese troops and that Zaïre was suspending its relations with the German Democratic Republic and closing its embassy in East Berlin.

With regard to the Soviet Union, President Mobutu announced on April 21 that he had severed relations with that country in the fields of education and information. He accused the USSR of using the Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow to train agents who were later placed in Zaïre's postal and telecommunications network and in certain sectors of the civil service. He declared that he would no longer allow Zaïrese students to be sent to Soviet institutions, and he added: "I do not even mention Cuba because it is not an important agent. The No. 1 enemy of this country is the Soviet Union.

All French aircraft used for the airlift of Moroccan troops had left Shaba for France by April 16; from then on the combined Zaïrese-Moroccan forces gradually began to advance westwards, and on April 25 it was officially announced that they had retaken the town of Mutshatsha.

It appeared, however, that the retreating rebels had mined roads and the railway line, thus slowing down the advance of the government forces. Burnt-out villages in the area were attributed variously to a scorched-earth policy on the part of the rebels or to a "settling of accounts" by Zaïrese troops. Among refugees from rebel-held territory were over 500 who fled to Zambia and some 28 European and American missionaries who reached Luanda (the Angolan capital) on April 29, asking for repatriation to their own countries and stating that they feared retaliation by advancing government forces.

President Mobutu was on April 29 reported to have promised that there would be no reprisals against western Shaba's Lunda people, whose chief, Mwat-Yav, had sided with the Government throughout the conflict. By means of leaflets dropped from helicopters people were exhorted to return to their villages. Of the fighting, in which pygmy bowmen were reported to be involved on both sides, few detailed reports reached the outside world; no more than 12 members of the government forces were reported killed by April 27; rebel casualties were not mentioned; and only three prisoners were referred to.

Two alleged Katangese prisoners were presented by President Mobutu at a mass meeting in Kinshasa on April 20, and they asserted later before journalists that "Cuban soldiers and Soviet military advisers" had taken part in the invasion, and that they had been trained first by Portuguese and later by Cubans. General Bumba (the invaders' leader), however, denied on April 21 that these two men were members of his Army. With regard to a Zambian complaint that Zaïrese aircraft had bombed villages and a hospital in Zambia on April 9 and 11, President Mobutu claimed on April 14 that the bombing had been carried out by Soviet planes "to cause us difficulties with friendly Zambia".

US nationals evacuated from Shaba province during March began [see above] to return there on April 27.- (Times - Daily Telegraph - Financial Times - Guardian - International Herald Tribune - Le Monde - Neue Zürcher Zeitung - New York Times - Cape Times - BBC Summary of World Broadcasts - Peking Review -

UN Information Centre, London) (*Prev. rep. Zaïre- Angola Relations,28226 A; Proposed US Aid to Zaïre,; France-Zaïre Relations,27324 A; Zaïre, Internal Security, 27385 B: Other Internal Developments,28287 A*)

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