



# SPECIAL REPORT

## **ABOUT THE REPORT**

On January 16, 1997, the United States Institute of Peace and the U.S. Department of State co-sponsored a one-day roundtable discussion of diplomats, scholars, and nongovernmental organization specialists on the unfolding crises in Zaire—both the complex humanitarian emergency and civil war in eastern Zaire and the ongoing crisis of governmental legitimacy and capacity stemming from a lagging transition to multiparty democracy.

The conference was chaired by the chairman of the Institute's Board of Directors, Chester A. Crocker. This report summarizes the discussion and highlights the principal conclusions and policy recommendations offered by the seventy-five participants (a list of the fourteen presenters is provided at the end of this report). To facilitate frank discussion, the proceedings of the symposium were off-the-record; any quotations in this report have been cleared for publication. The views presented in this report reflect those of the participants and the report's author, Institute Program Officer Timothy Sisk; this report is not a statement of the Institute's views, nor is it a statement of official U.S. government policy. Throughout the text, bullets are used to highlight the principal conclusions and policy recommendations of the participants.

For a more extensive and detailed discussion of the crisis in Zaire, see *Zaire: Predicament and Prospects, A Report to the Minority Rights Group (USA)*, by J.C. Willame, et al., published by the U.S. Institute of Peace in January 1997. This publication contains essays on the economic and political structure of Zairian society, a survey of the extent of violence in Zaire and a framework of action for its further arrest, a description of how economic international aid can best be provided, a description of the extent of the refugee problem in Kivu, Zaire, and a chronology of events from 1960 to 1996.

For further information on the Africa activities of the Institute, contact program coordinator David Smock or Timothy Sisk.

*April 1997*

## **Zaire's Crises of War and Governance**

### **Summary of Principal Findings and Recommendations**

- Throughout much of Zaire, basic state services and the essential functions of government, such as effective judicial and criminal justice systems, have all but completely collapsed. Yet as the ability of the central state to rule has eroded, local sources of authority and, remarkably, a buoyant, homegrown civil society—civic and other non-governmental organizations—have emerged to meet basic social needs in recent years. These civic organizations are the glue that holds society together.
- Despite concerns that centrifugal tendencies in Zaire will result in the "Balkanization" of the country into several smaller states, participants generally agreed that this is not imminent. There are strong shared historical memories and common bonds that give special character to Zaire's resilience as a state.
- However, participants with knowledge of the situation in outlying provinces asserted that as the counter-offensive fails miserably, or if the planned elections are corrupt or stolen, secessionist tendencies in Zaire could gain momentum.

### ***The Military***

- The role of the military in Zaire's crises is critical. In the immediate term, the military's complete breakup is an acute danger, presaging widespread looting and anarchy, a coup d'état, or the deterioration of army units into organized criminal enterprises led by local warlords. In the near term, the role of the security forces in any elections must clearly be addressed, particularly to ensure that the armed forces play a salutary role, if any role at all, in providing election-related security. In the longer term, it is possible to envisage a process of military reform, but such an effort would take enormous internal and external political will, considerable financial resources and technical assistance for retraining that can only come from abroad, and close U.S.–European cooperation.

### ***Zaire and Its Neighbors***

- Participants agreed that the Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and more recently Angola have been deeply involved in the civil war. These states see common threats to their security based in Zaire and seek an end to the Mobutu regime. The coherent and powerful collaboration of these states in backing the Zairian insurgency effectively makes these states arbiters of Zaire's future.

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- Both Angolan government troops and the opposition UNITA (Union for the Total Liberation of Angola) have been extensively involved on opposite sides in the fighting, to the extent that Angola's civil war could reignite inside Zaire if these erstwhile foes meet on the battlefield.
- According to some participants, these entangling ties, if not full alliances, suggest a possible developing "polarity"—"axes of shared perceptions and interest"—in the relationships among the myriad armed factions in central Africa. Lined up on one axis are the governments of Zaire and Sudan, with implicit external backing by France and China. The opposing axis, implicitly supporting the rebels, includes the governments of Rwanda, Burundi, Angola, and Uganda, the southern Sudanese rebel factions, and the United States.
- Many participants disagreed strongly with a broad-sweep description of a polarity of forces. U.S. and French approaches may occasionally diverge with regard to Western policy toward central Africa, for example, but the goals are common, and much high-level cooperation and policy coordination takes place behind the scenes. It does no good to oversimplify the many complex, cross-border relationships in the region, these participants asserted.
- Many participants agreed that the insurgency in eastern Zaire and the close interrelationships with other cauldrons of instability in the region could potentially explode into wider violence and even into interstate war that could span a vast territory from Eritrea to Angola. A critical concern is a deepening perception of an Anglophone–Francophone split among African states, engulfing much of the continent in conflict. The United States and France must work to prevent such a conflict, and the United States must redress the view that it is backing the Zairian rebels, participants stated.

#### *Heightened International Engagement?*

- The crises of governance and war in Zaire offer an opportunity, some participants argued, for "heightened engagement" by the international community. Opportunities for positively influencing the situation include the new assertiveness of African states to manage the conflicts, closer U.S.–French coordination, new UN leadership, and the inevitability of a post-Mobutu era in Zaire.
- The need for security within Zaire is acute and achieving some form of internal security is essential. In particular, the United States and France must continue close collaboration on contingency planning for managing a security vacuum as the civil war spreads and as tensions in Kinshasa mount.
- To operationalize international coordination, one participant championed the creation of a contact group of key states that would directly work with the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and would coordinate the policies of key African and Western states. Several participants iterated that fundamental to enhanced international engagement is U.S.–French consensus and active coordination on goals and methods.
- Although participants generally agreed with the idea that any new government in Zaire needs to have a broad political base and needs to be as inclusive as possible, the critical question—for both Zairians and the international community—is whether a new government should be created prior to elections as a transitional device or whether a new government should be the outcome of such

elections. Serious doubts were raised about moving too quickly on elections, and a deep and strongly held warning was heard about the possible deleterious effects of early elections.

- Given the enormous difficulties of the current electoral process, some participants argued for the creation prior to elections of a government of national unity—through negotiations under UN auspices—to be formed as a transitional government that would manage a restructured democratization process leading to elections once conditions for them have been established.
- Participants were divided as to whether the United States in particular or the international community more generally—through the contact group mechanism, for example—should back the elections first or the approach of a transitional government of national unity.

### **Author's Introduction**

In the complex humanitarian emergency in the Great Lakes region of central Africa, the fate of Zaire—Africa's second largest country—is pivotal. Zaire's future as a viable state is deeply intertwined with the myriad armed conflicts that now beset central Africa: civil war in nearby Burundi, in which some 150,000 lives have already been lost; the unsteady, still-violent postwar Rwandan repatriation and reconciliation of more than a million refugees from Zaire and Tanzania since October 1996 (about 750,000 refugees from Zaire and about 485,000 from Tanzania), following the genocide in Rwanda in 1994; the limited armed resistance of several rebel groups to the government of Yoweri Museveni in some parts of Uganda; the grinding civil war in Sudan; and the fragile postwar peace process in Angola. Zaire's teetering on the brink of implosion is felt throughout virtually all the countries of eastern, central, and southern Africa. Zaire borders on no fewer than nine African states.

Moreover, no efforts to resolve or manage neighboring conflicts will occur without close attention to what happens in Zaire. Similarly, as long as these regional problems exist, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for Zaire to remedy its monumental problems. A further conflagration of the crisis in Zaire and its negative reverberations throughout the Great Lakes region could provoke even more intensified regional violence than currently exists, with humanitarian implications that go beyond the horrific consequences already seen in the civil wars in Rwanda and Burundi.

Zaire's crises of war and governance are multifaceted and are extremely complex, but they can be understood by focusing on three dimensions: the crisis of legitimacy and of the governing capacity of the Zairian state; the crisis of the insurgency and civil war in the eastern provinces; and the possibility of a wider regional conflagration that would further entangle Zaire's fighting with ongoing civil wars or ethnic tensions in Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Angola.

The legitimacy crisis is related to a moribund transition to multiparty democracy, a transition that has moved at a glacial pace since it was begun in 1991 and that has left the country without an effective central government whose writ is respected throughout the country. Since 1965, Zaire has been ruled by autocratic Mobutu Seso Seko, who is gravely ill. Mobutu has been convalescing in France amid a vacuum of presidential power in Zaire, but he recently returned to Zaire in an effort to save

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his regime and the country. The official institutions of government barely function, and in the hinterlands of this vast state there is effectively no central government authority at all. Those who do hold official offices primarily seek their personal security, aggrandizement, and wealth. There are tensions between Mobutu's supporters and the leader of the principal opposition faction, Étienne Tshisekedi. In early April, Mobutu sacked his prime minister, Kengo wa Dongo, and replaced him with Tshisekedi. This reshuffling has added confusion about who speaks for the government of Zaire. Under any scenario, a turbulent transition to a post-Mobutu era has begun. Elections to cap the transition are slated for between May and July, although this timetable was determined prior to the rebellion in eastern Zaire.

The crisis of civil war in the eastern provinces was sparked in October 1996 when Zairians of Tutsi origins, known as the Banyamulenge—aggrieved by threats of expulsion by Zairian officials—drew other ethnic groups into a broader resistance alliance. This alliance of opponents to Mobutu's rule has been augmented by alleged cross-border incursions by Rwandese and Ugandan troops who have provided logistical support and who have fought side-by-side with rebels.<sup>1</sup> The initial effect of the rebellion and alleged incursion was the ousting of the former Rwandese army (known as the ex-FAR) and of the perpetrators of the 1994 genocide there (the interahamwe) from the sprawling UN-administered refugee camps they had controlled.<sup>2</sup> In the melee, the largest human migration in modern history occurred when some 720,000 refugees fled the new fighting and trekked back to Rwanda, even as thousands more scattered throughout the countryside of eastern Zaire, along with the remaining ex-FAR and interahamwe forces. A massive, confusing refugee crisis persists in the east as the civil war continues.

The insurgents—the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFLCZ), led by former Katangese politician Laurent Kabila—have pressed their campaign northward, westward, and southward vowing to take Zaire's capital, Kinshasa. The rebels have taken control of a piece of "liberated" territory almost 1,000 miles long and 400 miles wide and growing. In early February 1997 a Zairian military counteroffensive was launched to defeat the insurgents, which included bombing some major eastern cities. Human rights monitors have reported widespread abuses by both the routed Zairian military forces and the rebels.

The third crisis involves the possibility of a broader regional war. Zaire's internal crises are inseparable from the broader regional dynamics of war and peace. The crises within Zaire reverberate in the continuing civil war in Burundi,<sup>3</sup> the perilous if stable situation in Rwanda, and the insurgencies in Uganda. Moreover, the effects of crises within Zaire are felt throughout much of eastern and southern Africa as well, particularly in Sudan and Angola.

Angola's two principal political and military factions—the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) government of President José dos Santos and the UNITA rebel movement led by Jonas Savimbi—have been extensively involved in

<sup>1</sup> The Tutsi ethnic group retains effective control of the governments of Rwanda and Burundi, despite its being a relatively small (about 14%) minority in each state. In Rwanda, Tutsis and moderate Hutus (the other principal ethnic group in these two countries) were the primary victims of the 1994 genocide.

<sup>2</sup> For a previous Institute Special Report on the Rwanda genocide, see "Rwanda: Accounting for War Crimes and Genocide" (January 1995).

<sup>3</sup> In September 1996, the Institute held a similar co-sponsored conference with the Department of State on the civil war in Burundi. Papers from that conference are available on the Institute's home page on the World Wide Web: <http://www.usip.org>.

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the Zairian civil war. The MPLA government has been backing the Kabila-led rebel forces, and some 2,000–3,000 Katangese troops (erstwhile Zairian rebel forces exiled in Angola since 1978) have reportedly been dispatched in support of the rebels. Similarly, there are reports that Savimbi's UNITA has sent troops to shore up the Zairian army, with which it has been involved in extensive black market diamond trading and gun-running. Policy makers are worried that MPLA-backed Angolans and UNITA-allied Angolan forces could meet on the battlefield in Zaire, upsetting the very fragile UN- and U.S.-backed peacebuilding effort in that country.

The international community is urgently engaged to stave off a further deterioration of the critical situation in Zaire, and several events have occurred since the conference discussion. Kofi Annan, recently selected secretary general of the United Nations, appointed veteran diplomat and regional troubleshooter Mohamed Sahnoun as his special representative for the Great Lakes region. The OAU also named Sahnoun as its envoy, and many African and European states—along with the United States—had previously named special envoys on the crises in central Africa. South Africa's President Nelson Mandela, in concert with other African heads of state and with senior U.S. officials, is playing a leading role in attempts to broker talks between Zaire's government and rebel leaders.

The discussion at the January 16 conference centered on the three dimensions of the crises described above and on appropriate international responses.

## **Report on the Conference**

### *The State of the Zairian State*

Conference discussion was premised on a diagnosis of the current state of governance and national unity in Zaire. The Zairian state as an effective system of governance has been in steady decline for at least the past twenty-five years—since the period just after the “Congo Crisis” of 1960–64, University of Wisconsin scholar Crawford Young reported in his presentation.

- Throughout much of Zaire, state services and the essentials of governance, such as effective judicial and criminal justice systems, have all but completely collapsed. However, according to Young and many conference participants, as the ability of the central state to rule has gradually eroded, local sources of authority and, remarkably, a buoyant, homegrown civil society have emerged to meet basic social needs.

According to Young, the principal challenge is to reverse the “predatory” nature of central governmental authority in Zaire. Two examples were cited to illustrate his major point. Fuel supplies for the military rarely find their way to the intended units; instead, the supplies are diverted along the way for personal use or are sold on the informal market. A second indicator of the problem is the utter lack of faith in the Zairian currency (the Zaire). Widespread unofficial trading in U.S. \$100 bills is coupled with a nearly worthless Zairian currency, which was radically devalued in late 1996 following years of rampant hyperinflation.

Despite a popular belief in the West and in other parts of Africa that Zaire is experiencing total social chaos, this is not the case, participants agreed. That is, Zaire is not yet a totally failed state. Unlike collapsed states such as Somalia, Liberia, or Afghanistan, the Zairian state still enjoys international recognition and sovereignty in a formal, legal sense. Although the state has no positive administrative or military ca-

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capacity, government officials have the power to disrupt and to cause mayhem. For example, Zairian officials have deftly manipulated access by international relief organizations to the Rwandan refugees in the east and have used the emergency to create a situation in which humanitarian aid is dependent on their nominal authority, participants said. One participant likened the Mobutu government to a “cleverly twitching corpse.”

Beyond the faltering government, participants pointed out that a relatively robust civil society keeps a weak economy functioning and basic social services provided, albeit in an informal and unregulated manner. Civic or nongovernmental organizations have emerged within the past six or seven years as the principal mediating force in society, providing minimal services in disparate aspects of everyday life such as banking, health, transportation, and education. A vast array of personal networks and loose community organizations have sprouted up.

With a vacuum of central government capacity, and with a secessionist history (the province of Katanga sought independence in the early 1960s, prompting the Congo Crisis; Katanga, renamed Shaba, was in secessionist turmoil again in 1977–78), fears have been expressed in Zaire and elsewhere that the state could break apart.

■ Despite concerns that centrifugal tendencies in Zaire will result in the “Balkanization” of the country into several smaller states, there was general consensus among participants that this is not imminent. Despite the virtual decomposition of the central government, there are shared historical memories and common bonds—more urban than rural, more in Kinshasa than elsewhere—that bind Zairian society and inhibit those provincial leaders with potential separatist sentiments from unilaterally seceding. Zaire has a special, resilient character, participants reported.

■ Zairians are fed up with autocratic, kleptocratic rule from the center—central rule is seen as synonymous with corruption—but their disdain for the government does not lead them to advocate a breakup of the country, it was generally agreed.

The enduring Zairian national identity is not a fictional one, several participants argued. The attachment of the people to Zairian nationhood is very real, in part a legacy of a relatively successful effort by Mobutu in early years to create “authentic” symbols, values, and traditions in the postcolonial era. The 1992 Sovereign National Conference in Zaire generally reinforced that sense of Zairian unity, another participant added.

Jean-Claude Willame reported that “most elites [in the regions] are looking for a state-rebuilding process, not a breakup of the Zairian state; most of the populace is looking for this too.” There is a fundamental tension in many provinces of Zaire—especially North and South Kivu, Kasai, Shaba, and Bas-Zaire—between wanting to maintain the fundamental territorial integrity of the Zairian state but at the same time wanting to end the decades-long grip on power by the center, Willame added. New forms of autonomy are developing in the vacuum caused by the collapse of service delivery to the provinces.

■ There are warning signs, however, that portend scenarios in which the continued territorial integrity of Zaire is threatened, Willame and other participants said. The most immediate and significant of these signs is the impact of the war in the east and the consequences of the counteroffensive against the Kabila-led rebels.

In the pivotal eastern city of Kisangani (even prior to its fall to rebel forces subsequent to the conference) Armed Forces of Zaire (FAZ) troops looted and pillaged the city. Some local civil society figures had called for the formation of militias to protect themselves from both the ragtag Zairian army and the advancing rebel forces, according to Jean Mbuyu. "They are caught in the middle," he said. Militias have also been formed in Shaba and Lubumbashi, and the authority of the central government has disappeared completely in the rebel-held territory of North and South Kivu and in portions of Haut-Zaire. In Kasai, for example, Mbuyu notes that the people are moving from "the defense of Zaire to the defense of themselves." Central government administrators in many provinces harbor no shame that their role is essentially one of an occupying power, Peter Rosenblum of Harvard University's Human Rights Program added.

- As the counteroffensive fails, or if the upcoming elections are corrupt or stolen, secessionist tendencies in Zaire will gain momentum, participants with knowledge of the situation in the provinces asserted. Precipitating situations such as these could lead regional leaders to believe that their futures would be better served if Zaire were "Balkanized," despite all the uncertainties and the ripple effects throughout Africa that such "Balkanization" would entail. Peter Rosenblum said that "it is very easy to imagine how the spark of separatism could be reignited in Shaba [Katanga]."

"It is a very perilous time for Zaire," one participant said, adding that "Zairian identity is at a crossroads." The relative sense of communality may dissipate if a defeated FAZ breaks up completely and runs amok, if regional warlords emerge and see secession as a viable alternative, or if the legitimacy of the central authority is not soon restored, several participants said. In the meantime, Zaire's remarkably adaptive civil society is the glue that holds the country together.

With national identity at a crossroads, so, too, is the state of regional governance. A palpable vacuum of power is increasingly being filled by ethnic and regional assertions. Willame argued that the collapse of the Zairian state goes along with a revival of former sentiments and ties, especially given the fact that most of the new provincial boundaries (the new constitution expands the number of administrative units from eleven to twenty-six) roughly coincide with the boundaries of the old colonial districts, reviving dormant, colonial-era territorial affinities.

- Locally initiated roundtables such as those held in North Kivu in 1993-1994, stimulated and managed by civil society with international assistance, are seen as a potential model for reconstituting basic governmental services in Zaire's regions, participants familiar with the situations in the outlying provinces of Zaire said.

Mbuyu noted that the roundtable "created a climate for people to help themselves, and it spread to other provinces, such as Bas-Zaire." The principal threat to such initiatives is a widening civil war, which would likely crush any unofficial coordinating structure that might evolve.

- The longer-term answer to Zaire's crisis of governance is, most participants agreed, some form of regional autonomy, federalism, or devolution of power through a power-sharing system. The new constitution moves in that direction, although its features fall short in terms of power sharing at the central level of government, these participants added.

Elites in Kinshasa worry that allowing greater autonomy for the regions is a slippery slope leading toward the "Balkanization" or fragmentation of the state. Striking an appropriate balance for governing Zaire's vast territory and complex multiethnic society is a critical long-term challenge facing the country, it was widely agreed.

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### **A Pivotal Player: The Zairian Military**

In addition to reconstituting the state, much discussion hinged on the critically important task of reforming the Zairian military. Participants pointed to the FAZ's long history of malfeasance, its parasitic relationship with Zairian society, its current state of disarray and incapacity, and its potential for domestic and regional destabilization and troublemaking.

The military is facing a clearly negative future. Participants expressed concerns that with a failed counteroffensive against the eastern rebellion, the military might run amok. Widespread looting and anarchy could occur, factions of the military could begin fighting one another, or local or regional warlords could quickly emerge. The remnants of the Zairian military is a major challenge for the international community, participants said. The military's potential for mischief is further complicated by the involvement of foreign mercenaries, the ambiguous line of command that presently exists, and the uncertain outcomes of recent command reshuffling, participants familiar with the Zairian military said.

The longer-term issue is whether the Zairian military can be reformed. James Woods and other security analysts present at the conference agreed that reform and professionalization are possible, but they would require significant external engagement, and political will, and substantial financial and human resources. The aims of such reform include reorienting the military toward the protection of basic human rights. Any reform process must be linked to significant changes in the political "superstructure" as well as to wide-reaching reforms in the civil administration and justice system. Any reform process also should include the gendarmerie and other regionally based paramilitary forces.

Critically important is addressing the cost of such a reform program up front, Woods said. International bilateral donors and the international financial institutions would need to commit in advance some \$150–\$200 million over perhaps five years to support the kind of sustained engagement a military-reform program would entail, he estimated. Even with all the right domestic political elements in place, any concerted, internationally backed process of reform and professionalization would be "long term, difficult, and subject to reversal," Woods concluded.

### **Zaire, Its Neighbors, and Entangled Relations**

Zaire's internal crisis is closely related to the outcome of the military operations in the east and to the complex regional dynamic in which the country is embroiled, according to Belgian specialist on Central Africa Filip Reyntjens. What happens in Zaire affects each one of its nine neighbors. In the current fluid environment, critical information is lacking by which outsiders can make appropriate assessments. For example, the extent of popular support for rebel leader Laurent Kabila and his ADFLCZ and whether Kabila and his forces are being primarily buttressed by cross-border support are unknown. The nature and the extent of ties among the various political factions, state armies, militias, and rebel groups are often unclear and mysterious.

- Participants generally agreed that the armed forces of Rwanda and Uganda, and possibly Burundi have been engaged in the fighting in eastern Zaire. The involvement of Angola has subsequently become apparent. The United States has called on all foreign forces to withdraw, which some participants viewed as a sign that these countries' direct involvement has been externally verified. Participants

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disagreed as to whether such cross-border incursions constitute aggression or whether these countries are acting on the basis of legitimate self-defense interests.

The insurgency in the east has been manipulated by Rwanda and is closely related to the ongoing ethnic conflict that has beset that country, Reyntjens asserted. The Rwandese government, whose security policies are directed by Vice President and Defense Minister Paul Kagame had clear interests in backing the Tutsi (or Banyamulenge) rebellion in October 1996 and has continuing interests in backing the rebel movement, he said. These interests are (1) to destabilize the Rwandese refugee population, which some would construe as a legitimate security concern, in order to break the grip the ex-FAR and interahamwe have on the camps and to stimulate the refugees' repatriation, and (2) to create a security zone (similar to the Israeli-occupied zone in southern Lebanon) to prevent cross-border attacks by these forces on Rwandan territory.

The Zairian government accuses Rwanda and Uganda of blatant aggression and charges that Rwanda harbors irredentist claims on its territory, according to a participant close to the government's policy. This participant cited Rwanda's need for land to accommodate its dense, burgeoning population. Zairian officials also allege Uganda's involvement in the fighting, and they assert that Uganda is fomenting instability in eastern Zaire as a means of getting at the rear bases of its own limited rebellions.

The linkages with Burundi and its ongoing civil war are also clear, participants noted. Various military militias linked to Burundi's majority Hutu ethnic group—such as the Committee for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD) and Palipehutu—had been using eastern Zaire as a safe haven, as a staging point for raids into Burundian territory, and for logistical supply, Reyntjens said. Zaire was also the site of camps of refugees fleeing the fighting in that country. The success of the Kabila-led rebellion changed the circumstances dramatically, and Burundian rebels either have been forced back into Burundi, escalating the fighting there, or have been pushed further westward in Zaire with a destabilizing effect. Some Burundian rebels have also fled to Tanzania.

As the rebellion in Zaire spreads north in Haut-Zaire, it also touches on the continuing civil war in Sudan. Sudanese officials, having suffered recent military setbacks in their long-standing war with southern Sudanese rebel factions, have traveled to Kinshasa, Reyntjens said. He noted that Zaire and Sudan share an interest in rolling back insurgents that have captured and that hold significant amounts of their respective territories. Rumors are also rife of close ties between the southern Sudanese rebel factions and the Kabila forces, he reported. Participants who are analysts of other states in the Horn of Africa point out that Uganda, Ethiopia, and Eritrea have developed a common alliance with regard to Sudan and that these states, too, have shared interests in stimulating major changes in the politics of the region, including the destabilization of Zaire.

Similarly, to the south, the linkages to the just-ended civil war in Angola and its nascent peace process are apparent, according to Reyntjens.<sup>4</sup> The linkages with Angola are extensive, and it is believed that Mobutu continues close cooperation with Jonas Savimbi, the leader of Angola's erstwhile rebel movement (now political party), UNITA. Indeed, Kabila has accused UNITA of direct engagement in fighting his forces. Similarly, some participants believe that the ruling MPLA party in Angola is backing the Kabila insurgency. The extensive involvement of the Angolan factions in Zaire raises the specter that the now-concluded civil war between the

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MPLA and UNITA—where mutual antagonism remains high—could reignite on Zairian ground.

■ These entangling ties, if not full alliances, suggest a possible developing “polarity” in the relationships among the myriad armed factions in central Africa, according to some participants. Scholars such as Reyntjens point to a belief by some that “axes of shared perceptions and interest” are emerging. Lined up on one axis are the governments of Zaire and Sudan, with implicit external backing by France and China. The opposing axis, implicitly supporting the rebels, includes the governments of Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda, the southern Sudanese rebels, Angola, and the United States.

“What,” Reyntjens postulated, “keeps these strange bedfellows [the regional actors] together?” He argued that the shared interests that suggest a polarity of forces in the region are conjunctural, not structural, and he emphasized that collusion among various forces in the region could shift quickly and that any ties that exist are weak.

Participants reported that there is a widespread view in central Africa and elsewhere that the cause of the emerging polarity is an intense rivalry between the United States and France for influence and for commercial access in Africa. Many—including some French diplomats in Kinshasa, it was suggested by participants—believe there is a U.S.-based conspiracy, a charge U.S. diplomats at the conference said they find outlandish, illogical, and confounding. Because of the U.S. backing for the states of Uganda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia in opposition to the Islamist regime in Sudan, and because of the U.S. dialogue with the governments of Rwanda and Burundi, it may appear that the United States is involved in the active coordination of some of these states in support of the Zairian rebellion. U.S. officials categorically rejected such claims.

■ Many participants disagreed strongly with the broad-sweep analysis of a polarity of forces. U.S. and French approaches may occasionally diverge with regard to Western policy toward central Africa, but the goals are common, and much high-level cooperation and policy coordination take place behind the scenes. It does no good to oversimplify the many complex, cross-border relationships in the region, they added.

Each conflict and relationship needs to be disaggregated, and the issues at play should be considered separately, participants said.

■ Many participants agreed that the insurgency in eastern Zaire and the close interrelationships with other cauldrons of instability in the region could potentially explode into wider violence and even into interstate war that could span a vast territory from Eritrea to Angola. A critical concern is a deepening perception of an Anglophone–Francophone split among African states, engulfing much of the continent in conflict. The United States and France must work to prevent such a conflict and the United States must redress the view that it is backing the Zairian rebels, participants added.

Contrary to some perceptions in the region, most participants at the conference agreed that there is no concerted conspiracy and that the ties among combatants and neighboring forces are highly volatile.

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<sup>4</sup> For further information on the peace process in Angola, see the U.S. Institute of Peace *Special Report*, “NGOs and the Peace Process in Angola,” April 1996.

As Reyntjens summarized, the regional dynamic at play involves this calculus by the parties: "The enemies of my enemies are my friends." Even if conspiracies and firm alliances do not exist, the persistent belief in a broader conspiracy perpetuates the armed conflict on the ground and seriously complicates international peace-making efforts.

Participants generally agreed that the most important long-term task for stabilizing the central African region is managing the internal problems of Zaire, Rwanda, and Burundi. The creation of more secure borders and negotiated settlements and broad-based power-sharing agreements to manage the myriad dimensions of these ethnic conflicts would give the region the best chance of stability. With regard to Zaire, one participant observed that as long as the ex-FAR and interahamwe remain active and receive Zairian support, there will be continuing tensions between Zaire and Rwanda and the ingredients will remain present for wider, interstate violence between these regionally pivotal states.

### **Heightened Engagement by the International Community?**

Most participants agreed that the international community—in particular, the directly affected African states, the West, and international organizations such as the United Nations and OAU—have clear interests in preventing the collapse of the Zairian state. Their interests are also to prevent further escalation of the armed conflict in the east into engulfing eastern, central, and southern Africa. As one participant said, "If Zaire goes into the category of Somalia or Liberia, it is a serious problem for us all."

- The crises of governance and war in Zaire offer an opportunity, some participants argued, for "heightened engagement" by the international community. Limits to international actions to stem the fighting, address the humanitarian fallout, and promote a broader regional peace include unpredictable personalities, lack of cohesion among the parties, too many players, shifting allegiances of the factions, deep insecurity and fear, and logistical constraints. However, levers of influence do exist.
- The opportunities for positively influencing the situation include the new assertiveness of African states to manage the conflicts, closer U.S.-French coordination, new UN leadership, and the inevitability of a post-Mobutu era in Zaire, one participant argued.

A "heightened engagement" policy would be based on a number of Zairian realities, according to Steve Morrison, a State Department Africa analyst. First, there are accelerating systemic changes coming about in the Zairian polity—the de facto end of the long period of Mobutu's rule is imminent—and these systemic changes will occur with or without greater external involvement. Second, the enduring sense of Zaire as a nation persists, ruling out partition as a viable or desirable option. Third, despite initial expectations, the Kabila-led insurgency has not sparked a general, spontaneous uprising throughout the country as the rebels had initially hoped.

From the perspective of the international community, two other realities stand out, said Morrison. First, there is a great deal at stake for the global community. Second, collective action is required because no single state can muster sufficient leverage on all the parties. In some ways, the eastern rebellion has already broken the passivity syndrome. However, heightened international engagement would, of course, require considerable political and financial investment and carries risks of failure or of unintended consequences, several participants warned.

*Contrary to some perceptions in the region, most participants at the conference agreed that there is no concerted conspiracy and that the ties among combatants and neighboring forces are highly volatile.*

*"If Zaire goes into the category of Somalia or Liberia, it is a serious problem for us all."*

Chester Crocker viewed the decision as critical: "We are at a crossroads: Are we [the international community] going to have concerted international action or not? If we don't, we are walking away from the most important crisis in independent, modern Africa." He argued that the risks of inaction are clear. In addition to mounting chaos within Zaire, two dangers are especially ominous: the development of "predatory warlordism" that would make the implosion of Zaire even more difficult to stem and the enhanced threat of widening violence throughout the region. Crocker and several other participants made the following points:

- There is a brief window of opportunity for international engagement in planning and managing the inevitable transition to a post-Mobutu era in Zaire and creating the conditions in which a recovery of the Zairian state, society, and economy is possible.
- The need for security within Zaire is acute and achieving some form of internal security is imperative for the international community. The United States and France, in particular, must begin close collaboration on contingency planning for managing a security vacuum as the civil war spreads and as tensions in Kinshasa mount.
- To operationalize international coordination, one participant championed the creation of a contact group of key states that would work directly with the UN and OAU and coordinate the policies of key African and Western states.

According to Morrison, the critical first tasks would be to (1) achieve a cease-fire and promote national reconciliation between the armed, warring forces of the government and the rebels, while ending the incursions of foreign troops and rebel groups across international borders; (2) facilitate a dialogue within Zaire, with the aim of moving quickly toward holding elections or establishing a transitional government; (3) consolidate international backing for the efforts of the UN and African leaders to broker talks; and (4) achieve greater consultation among the French, U.S., and African states in ameliorating tensions in the region. A contact group could also help ensure that humanitarian relief was provided to buttress peacemaking efforts.

Subsequent to the initial goals of a formal contact group, the tasks would include the creation of a "Friends of Zaire" coordination group of donors to support international assistance—for example election-related assistance, economic reconstruction, and reform of the military, and the holding of a regional conference on other peace-building issues such as migration and refugee policy, environmental protection, and fostering the development of regional trade for the purposes of postwar reconstruction.

- Several participants iterated that fundamental to enhanced international engagement is U.S.-French consensus and active coordination on goals and methods, as well as coherent, working-level ties among these two states, the UN, and key African leaders, especially those now involved in brokering talks to end the civil war (and who had been involved in previous regional mediation efforts, known as Nairobi I and II).

One participant cautioned that Western leverage on the parties directly involved in the fighting is weak and highly dependent. However, Western powers may have indirect levers. For example, the United States could exert some pressure on Rwanda and Uganda to help contain any escalation of fighting in the east; the French may be in a position to influence Mobutu and the military. Still, Africans are very sensitive to Western intrusion.

- Participants were in broad agreement that the essential aims of Western engagement should be to support African initiatives to achieve a cease-fire and to end cross-border incursions by armies of neighboring states and the movement and supply of insurgent groups across international frontiers.

Participants warned against Western states or the United Nations seeking to organize a comprehensive, international conference on Zaire and the Great Lakes, for example, unless such a conference were to be the outcome of a concerted African initiative.

- Some participants warned that there is a need in cease-fire negotiations to consider the security needs of the Zairian parties as well as the security needs of key regional players—Rwanda, Uganda, Angola, and Burundi. Principally, this involves implementing border security arrangements and curtailing the cross-border transactions that fuel the conflict in Zaire and reverberate in the neighboring states.

According to security analyst Woods, options for securing sensitive border regions in the event of a cease-fire include the stationing of international monitors along the frontiers, the creation of zones of exclusion or demilitarized zones, the establishment of joint border commissions with internationally controlled check points, and the implementation of practical confidence- and security-building mechanisms such as commander-to-commander communications and prior notification of potentially threatening troop movements.

A view also heard was that there is a strong need for extensive African—especially East African (Kenyan and Tanzanian)—military participation in any proposed force. Indeed, some participants thought that an international military force to help monitor a negotiated settlement might be a good way to achieve further progress on the establishment of a proposed African Crisis Response Force or alternatively of a Multinational Force discussed at the height of the refugee crisis in October and November 1996.

Yet some concern was raised that the creation of a demilitarized zone separating the parties territorially within Zaire might give further impetus to would-be secessionists in the eastern provinces. Concern was also expressed that any such force would need to have a peace-enforcement mandate, given the continuing presence of ex-FAR and interahamwe militias in the region, and would need to have clear and effective rules of engagement that would allow it to deal with military threats from these forces.

- Further, another participant argued that a credible financial commitment from the international community to implement a peace agreement and a subsequent peace process would be a powerful incentive to the parties for them to reach an agreement.
- Also expressed was the view that any cease-fire agreement for Zaire should be part of a broader framework and sequencing process to give an international imprimatur to the transition in Zaire. That is, a cease-fire should be linked to a much more extensive pact to alleviate the insecurities of the parties as they transition to the post-Mobutu period and conduct elections.

### **The International Community and the Post-Mobutu Transition**

The Sovereign National Conference of 1992 and subsequent travails of the lagging transition to democracy in Zaire have led to a situation in which a referendum for a

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draft constitution was slated for early 1997, and fresh general elections to the National Assembly and regional parliaments are planned for sometime between May and July 1997. A critical issue is whether the current schedule for elections will hold, whether the timetable will slip, or whether elections will be postponed indefinitely because of the civil war. Participants favoring and opposing the election process according to this timetable tended to agree that if they were held, the elections would be a pivotal event; they would either clarify the political situation and imbue the government with long-lost legitimacy, or they may precipitate new tensions, and possibly lead to state collapse or fragmentation.

■ Although participants generally agreed with the idea that any new government of Zaire needs to have a broad political base and needs to be as inclusive as possible, the critical question, both for Zairians and the international community, is whether a new government should be created prior to elections as a transitional device to manage them or whether a new government should be the outcome of such elections.

Some participants argued vigorously in favor of maintaining the present election timetable. The election of a new government is the only way, they contended, to provide for a political transition that would accord both external and internal legitimacy to a central Zairian government. It is also the most effective way to weed out the current political class, according to one participant, who said that the incumbents would be more than happy to see the poll delayed. The only way to keep up the momentum of change in Zaire is to push forward with elections, this participant added.

The rationale is that there is no preferable alternative to elections, and without elections a real possibility of widespread popular upheaval could occur. Moreover, proponents of elections under the current timetable argued that the potential benefits are substantial: A new legislature, imbued with international and domestic legitimacy, is a necessary step in laying the groundwork for a revival of the Zairian state and economy, providing a partner with whom potential international donors and investors could work. Finally, they argued that a successful election may reinforce a broader sense of national identity and purpose.

Those advocating international backing for the current election process and timetable also pointed out that given the rules under which the vote for president will be held—a plurality system with a built in run-off, ensuring that the triumphant candidate will have a clear majority—whoever wins would have a clear mandate to govern. One participant suggested that given this electoral system, “Whoever wins . . . will be strong.” An “enlightened president with a strong mandate, combined with a legislature with broad representation” would be the likely outcome of the voting, this participant suggested. In this view, the purposes of international engagement should be to improve the election process, leveling the playing field for all candidates, and making the process transparent, peaceful, and meaningful.

Other participants argued that there are many barriers to a free and fair election in Zaire, not the least of which is the fact that considerable swaths of territory are under rebel control. They also pointed to a number of factors inhibiting credible elections: the illegitimacy of the current national electoral commission; the absence of a free voter registration process; the existence of “no-go” zones, in which some candidates do not feel sufficiently secure to circulate; the absence of equitable and universal access to mass media by all parties and candidates; widespread reports of large cases of new currency notes given by Mobutuists to buy votes and influence;

and the absence of a reliable and politically neutral security force. Until basic, minimal criteria for acceptable elections are met (such criteria have been carefully identified by three U.S. organizations on a field assessment mission) the international community should not support the current process and timetable.<sup>5</sup>

Participants opposed to the current timetable were deeply concerned that elections under such conditions would precipitate dangerous outcomes. A failed poll may stimulate widespread violence and upheaval or fragmentation of the nation. Another scenario—perhaps the most likely one—is the reelection of residual, Mobutuist-dominated parliament without solving the crisis of legitimacy and governance. These participants argued that Mobutu and the incumbent authorities start with a huge advantage in terms of control over resources and over the electoral machinery. One skeptic of the elections remarked that an election that legitimizes the present political elite “doesn’t get us beyond the impasse in which we currently find ourselves.”

- Given the enormous difficulties of the current electoral process, some participants argued for the creation prior to elections of a government of national unity—through negotiations under UN auspices—to serve as a transitional government to manage a restructured democratization process leading to elections once conditions for them have been established.
- Similarly, some participants argued that agreement on a preelection transitional authority should be coupled with an agreement on post-election power sharing and a broadly based national unity government, aimed at defusing the stakes of the election and preventing tensions from reaching a high boil.

Proponents of the creation of a government of national unity argued that it is impossible to trust the current government administrators with running the election, that opposition figures are likely to boycott (or even violently “spoil”) the polling, and that some authoritative, responsible control over the security forces (the FAZ, DSP, and gendarmarie) needs to occur prior to any voting. The only way to mount a legitimate election process, they asserted, is a through a national unity government to guide the transition to a widely acceptable outcome. A legitimate government can be restored if, prior to elections, a broadly based authority is created to manage the political process as well as to begin to get a grip on the country’s faltering economy. Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja argued that a broad-based transitional regime could “set Zaire on the path toward reconciliation.”

Participants raised a number of questions about the concept of a government of national unity. Who would be included, and who would determine who would be included, or, perhaps more important, excluded? What should be done about the current military elites? Is it possible to form a government of national unity without current civilian and military elites who are tainted by kleptocracy and corruption?

Other participants sympathetic to the idea of a government of national unity, also raised questions about how broadly representative such a government should be. Salih Booker, senior fellow in Africa studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, asked, “Is civil society missing from this equation?” Without civil society—that is, with just members of the current Kinshasa-based political class—could a unity gov-

*Participants raised a number of questions about the concept of a government of national unity. . . . Is it possible to form a government of national unity without current civilian and military elites who are tainted by kleptocracy and corruption?*

<sup>5</sup> See the report by the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening, *Zaire: Joint Pre-Election Assessment Mission*, available from the Washington-based International Republican Institute, International Foundation for Election Systems, or the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (September/October 1996).

*[I]t is important to take a balance sheet approach to the outcomes of heightened international engagement.*

*To what extent do elections produce an internally legitimate government in Zaire, establish external legitimacy for the state, and begin a process of social and economic recuperation and restoration to solve the crisis of governance in Zaire?*

ernment be legitimate enough to garner international recognition and domestic support?

- Some participants considered both a preelection power-sharing pact (to get wide agreement on the terms, structure, and timing of the elections) and a postelection power-sharing pact (to provide for a national unity government after the vote) to be critical aspects of turning any cease-fire agreement into a more structured, internationally backed and reinforced, and enduring peace process.

These participants suggested that given the depth of enmity and the lack of trust among the various parties, as well as the diminished capacity of the Zairian government, it is important that international mediators—not just the Zairian parties—design the framework and sequencing of the peace process. Other participants noted that while this approach is perhaps desirable, it may not be possible. International mediators should not let lack of agreement on a transition process in Zaire frustrate efforts to achieve a more immediate cease-fire and address the extensive humanitarian calamities caused by the civil war.

### **Further Participant Recommendations for International Action**

- Coordinated international action is necessary to influence the trajectory of events in Zaire; a lack of international consensus is too easily used by the parties to play members of the international community against one another.
- It is important that the UN secretary general appoint a special representative (a move which was taken subsequent to the conference).
- The international community must link support for any electoral process to clear requirements that would ensure the fairness of the election process; establishment of an international trust fund for donor support may maximize the ability of the international community to reinforce these requirements.
- The most promising avenue for international engagement is to further support the budding civil society in Zaire, including local initiatives and the media, in order to provide monitoring, voter education, and direct involvement of non-governmental organizations in aspects of electoral administration.
- Security during the election process is critical, and the international community should help identify particular units and individuals who could be placed under the authority of a restructured election commission. Significant international monitoring must also be ensured.

Some observers, such as Crawford Young, cautioned that the therapeutic and transformative effects of elections should be de-emphasized. The international community should accept that such elections inevitably will not be perfect, and should aim for a minimally acceptable vote. Furthermore, once elections take place, there are enormous pressures on the international community to verify the results, if only to justify the huge sums from abroad that it takes to organize them. Thus, Young and others said that it is important to take a balance sheet approach to the outcomes of heightened international engagement. He and others identified this standard for assessing the success of international intervention: To what extent do elections produce an internally legitimate government in Zaire, establish external legitimacy for the state, and begin a process of social and economic recuperation and restoration to solve the crisis of governance in Zaire?



**Presenting Participants**

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Stephen Morrison, Policy Planning Staff, U.S. Department of State

Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, Professor of African Studies, Howard University (former Vice Chairman of the National Election Commission of Zaire)

Filip Reyntjens, Chairman of the Board, African Studies and Documentation Center (CEDAF), Brussels

Peter Rosenblum, Project Director, Human Rights Program, Harvard University

Daniel Simpson, U.S. Ambassador to Zaire

Jean-Claude Willame, Catholic University of Louvain

James Woods, former official of the U.S. Department of Defense

Crawford Young, Professor of Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison