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MOBUTU'S ZAIRE: THE END OF AN ERA?¹

Introduction

Zaire, arguably, is the quintessential reflection of the current malaise affecting Africa. In Mobutu's vast empire all these and more are reflected - from corruption, nepotism and kleptocracy to ethnic conflict and an absence of democracy; from economic stagnation and environmental degradation to foreign intervention. It is for this reason that it is so important to understand the unfolding crisis in the Zairian state: understanding Zaire is understanding Africa.

But there is a more pressing reason to seek to analyse the situation in Zaire. Zaire is potentially Sub-Saharan Africa's superstate, covering a total area of 2,345,410 square kilometres. It shares its land boundaries of 10,271 kilometres with eight states. These are Angola (2511 km); Burundi (233 km); Central African Republic (1577 km); Congo (2410 km); Rwanda (217 km); Sudan (628 km); Uganda (765 km); and Zambia (1930 km)². Thus, the spill-over effects of the conflict occurring within Zaire could affect the entire region. Already Tanzania, Uganda, Angola

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1. The article was submitted to *BIISS Journal* just before the fall of Mobutu - Ed.
2. Central Intelligence Agency, *World Fact Book*, CIA, Washington, DC, 1995.

and Zambia are home to thousands of Zairian refugees fleeing from their war-torn land³. This trickle has turned into a flood of humanity as the situation worsens in Zaire. This, in turn, holds adverse implications for regional stability.

This article is divided into three sections. The first seeks to briefly explore the roots of the present conflict in Zaire. Next, some assessment is given on the possible future trajectory of the conflict. The third, and the main thrust of the paper is to reflect on some of the lessons learned from the Zairian crisis.

The Genesis of the Conflict⁴

The roots of the present crisis in Zaire lie in the fifteenth century when Nilo-Hamitic Tutsi pastoralists moved southwards and the majority settled in the territory today called Rwanda and Burundi; with a minority opting to settle in present-day Zaire⁵. At the end of the nineteenth century, some of these Tutsi fell out with their Mwami (King) Yuhi and decided to settle in the southern Kivu highlands of Zaire. They called themselves the Banyarwanda (those from Rwanda). They settled in the Uvira region by trading their cattle for land belonging to the Bavira tribe⁶.

In 1959, a Hutu revolution occurred in Rwanda resulting in thousands of Tutsis establishing themselves in Uganda and in northern and southern Kivu in Zaire⁷. For years, these Tutsis lived peacefully with their neighbours and with the Zairian state. Just

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3. 'Zairian Refugees Arrive in Southern Zambia', *Panafrican News Agency*, 2 January 1997.
 4. This section owes a huge intellectual debt to the writings of the journalist Belgian Misser.
 5. 'Nzo Calls for Urgent Steps to End Conflict in Zaire', *The Star*, 2 November 1996.
 6. Francois Misser, 'Rwanda/Zaire: Anatomy of Crisis', *New African*, No. 347, December 1996, p. 12.
 7. 'Rwanda Circle is Almost Complete', *The Star*, 22 November 1996.

how good these relations were is underlined by the fact that one Banyarwandan, Bisengimana Rwema, became one of Mobutu's most trusted advisors. Moreover, in 1972, a new nationality law gave Zairian citizenship to all Banyarwanda resident in the country prior to 1950. It was then that those Banyarwanda living in southern Kivu chose to call themselves Banyamulenge (those of the Mulenge mountains)⁸. This indicated a willingness on the part of these Tutsis to integrate totally with their adopted homeland.

From 1970s onwards, Mobutu faced increasing domestic tensions. This was given practical expression in the two Shaba rebellions of March 1977 and May 1978. However, Mobutu managed to weather the storm with the assistance of France and Morocco in the former, and French paratroopers in the latter. However, the wily Mobutu's survival skills were not only based on the benevolence of his French patrons. Like all despots, Mobutu sought to deflect criticism away from himself and towards some other source. Ethnic Tutsis became such a scapegoat and from 1981 they found themselves maligned by government propaganda and seen as the source of all Zaire's ills. This is not a uniquely Zairian phenomena. For Nazi Germany, it was the Jews; for Idi Amin, it was the Indians; and for the Khartoum regime, it is Christians.

In 1981 Kinshasa promulgated a new nationality law depriving citizenship to the Banyamulenge. These were ethnic Tutsis who have resided in the Kivu region for generations⁹. This was followed by a policy which sought to dislodge the Banyamulenge from the land they legitimately occupied.

In Zaire with a population in excess of 45 million, a population growth rate of 3.18 per cent and only 3 per cent of

8. Francois Misser, *op.cit.* 1996, p. 12.

9. Francois Misser, 'Rwanda/Zaire: Anatomy of Crisis,' *New African*, No. 347, December 1996, p. 12.

Zaire's total land area being arable¹⁰, land hunger and the tensions surrounding it are never far below the surface of Zaire's turbulent polity. Therefore, it came as no surprise when local tribes decided to exploit Kinshasa's new policy towards the Banyamulenge by aggressively pursuing land claims against the Tutsis. The inevitable result was war which soon engulfed the whole of Kivu province. By 1993, there were tribal clashes between the local Hunde, Tembo, Nyanga and Nande tribes and the Banyamulenge¹¹.

Meanwhile, in neighbouring Rwanda events were coming to a head which was to have far-reaching consequences for the Zairian state. On 6 April 1994, Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana's aeroplane was shot down. Tutsi involvement was suspected and was the pretext used by the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR) and their Hutu extremist allies - the *Interahamwe* militia - to kill an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus¹². This slaughter came to an abrupt end in July 1994 when the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) defeated Hutu government forces. Fearing retribution for the genocide, two million Hutus fled Rwanda; with 1.2 million settling in refugee camps in neighbouring Zaire. These camps soon came under the control of the *Interhamwe* militia who used them as bases from which to launch assaults against the Tutsi-led Kigali government. This prompted Rwandan Vice President and Defence Minister, Paul Kagame to warn Zaire that if the attacks continued, the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) would retaliate and exercise its right of pursuit¹³.

Meanwhile, the pogrom against Tutsis escalated in intensity. In May 1995, a new legislation was passed forbidding Banyamulenge from acquiring homes or land in their adopted country.

10. Central Intelligence Agency, *op. cit.*

11. Misser, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

12. 'Rwanda Circle is Almost Complete', *The Star*, 22 November 1996.

13. Misser, *op. cit.*, p.13.

This was followed in December 1995 by an announcement of the Zairian Army Chief of Staff, General Eluki Monga Aundu, that the local Hunde, Nyanga and Tembo people have the right to "expel the foreigners" from the land. This served to further escalate the tribal conflict on the vexing issue of land. But, it was not only local tribesmen the Banyamulenge had to face; but also the *Interahamw*, the FAR, and the Zairian army. These forces combined to escalate the genocidal campaign against the Tutsis. Thus, in May 1996, one hundred Tutsis seeking sanctuary in Mokoto church were slaughtered. In June 1996, five Tutsis were arrested and jailed in Luberizi army camp. In July the same year, Tutsi children were not allowed to take their examinations, and in September, 35 Banyamulenge were murdered by Zairian troops¹⁴. In fact, between September and October 1996, an estimated 2000 Banyamulenge were massacred by the *Interahamwe* militia, FAR and Zairian troops¹⁵.

But the real catalyst for the Banyamulenge revolt occurred on 7 October 1996 when the Deputy Governor of Zaire's South Kivu province claimed that the 300,000 strong Banyamulenge community were destabilising the region and had to leave Zaire within a week or "be hunted down as rebels"¹⁶. This was the final straw and the Banyamulenge decided to fight back. On 10 October 1996, the Banyamulenge began their war with an attack on Lemera hospital in Bukavu.

Around this time the Banyamulenge became an integral part of and fought alongside Laurent Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL). From the 21 October 1996, the Banyamulenge and the AFDL began making

14. *Ibid.*, p.13.

15. 'Genocide? What Genocide?' *Africa Today*, Vol. 2(6). November/ December 1996, p. 46.

16. Anthony Goldman, 'Nowhere To Go But Home', *BBC Focus on Africa*, January-March 1997, p. 14.

lightning fast advances into the heart of Zaire. Thus, by December 1996, the rebels were in possession of Uvira, Bukavu, Goma, Bunia, Walikale, Butembo and Lubero. The AFDL's capture of Kindu¹⁷, placed them 320 kilometres west of where the rebellion started, but still about 2000 kilometres short of their ultimate objective - Kinshasa. By early May 1997, the town of Kenge, 200 kilometres from Kinshasa, fell into rebel hands. At the time of writing the present piece, rebels were reported to be less than 85 kilometres from the capital.¹⁸

The Murky Future

What does the future of the conflict hold for Kinshasa and the AFDL? Will the rebels be successful in achieving their aim of ousting Mobutu and his cohorts or will the Marshall Mobutu survive as he had in 1978 and 1993? These are difficult questions and there are no simple answers. However, an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the protagonists as well as an assessment of strategies adopted might go a long way in answering these questions.

Mobutu has responded to the crisis on the military, political and diplomatic levels. On the military level, Mobutu suspended the Zairian Army Chief of Staff, General Eluki Monga Aundu, on 20 November 1996. He was replaced by Lieutenant-General Mahele Bokungo Lieko who has a history of successfully crushing armed rebellion¹⁹. The army was also considerably strengthened by the transfer of the Presidential Division and the Civil Guard under Mahele's direct command. The significance of this move lies in the fact that both these units have been provided with superior quantities and qualities of arms²⁰.

17. 'Zairian Rebels Push Into Heart of Country', *The Star*, 5 December 1996.

18. 'Rebels Close in on Kinshasa', *The Citizen*, 7 May 1997.

19. 'Mobutu Appoints General Mahele Chief of Staff', *Panafrican News Agency*, 20 December 1996.

20. *Ibid.*

However, there are several reasons to doubt the effectiveness of these initiatives. If anything, the last six months have unequivocally revealed that Mobutu's Achilles Heel is his armed forces. Adebayo Williams put it succinctly when he noted :

Armies founded on internal pacification are always better at bullying and terrorising the local populace than fighting a well-disciplined force. The Zairian army rapidly disintegrated, exposing Mobutu's soft underbelly²¹.

At both Goma and Kindu, when confronted with people willing to fight back, Zairian forces turned on their heels and ran looting and raping their own citizens as they fled²². This could prove disastrous for Kinshasa: because of the army's actions, Zairian citizens have been alienated, driving them into the rebel camp. In Goma, for instance, residents fear the rebel occupiers less than Mobutu's army which was supposed to defend the city. One young Zairian resident put it this way:

The rebels are not as bad as the Zairian soldiers. Zairian soldiers were terrible. The Zairians took everything: radios, televisions, everything. The Rwandans just steal money from us²³.

It is clear that Laurent Kabila has exploited this pervasive negative feeling towards the Zairian army, his eastern Zairian insurrection could gather popular support and turn into a national insurrection against the despotic Marshall. For ordinary Zairians, however, it is also clear that the rebellion is, to a certain extent, perceived as something extra-national or extra-territorial. The

21. Adebayo Williams, 'The Twentieth Century's Symbol of Failure', *Africa Today*, January/February 1997.

22. William Wallis, 'Taking Defeat Badly', *Africa Today*, January/February 1997, p. 16.

23. *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 15-21 November 1996, pp. 18-19.

rebels are seen as Rwandans or Rwandan-backed. Recognising this, Mobutu has tried, ineffectively, to play the national card and in so doing to localise, isolate and crush the rebels. One possible reason accounting for this strategic failure is the fact that after decades of Mobutu's exploitative and oppressive despotism, he lacks all credibility in portraying himself as a national leader.

But Kinshasa faces other problems of a military nature. The rebel alliance are proceeding on three fronts towards the capital. The first is Tshikapa, the most important town in Bandundu province. The significance of this is that it supplies Kinshasa with most of its food. The second front is Dowete which commands direct road access to Bandaka, a Zairian river port controlling important traffic to Kinshasa. The third is Ilebo - the largest inland port and a vital link of supply of goods to Kinshasa²⁴. Should the AFDL also capture the airport at Kinshasa, it could lay a very effective siege to the capital and have it surrendered without the firing of a single shot. Given the daunting military balance, it is difficult to see how Mobutu can avoid certain military defeat. It is also clear that even with the military plan, Kinshasa would not have the available soldiers to transport to the battlefield. Willam Wallis²⁵ explained the problem thus,

Officially, there are 100,000 regular troops in the Zairean army and gendarmerie, but these figures are as much as double the reality. For years, dead or deserted soldiers have remained on the payroll, their tiny salaries slowly filling the pockets of their superiors. Now that Zaire really needs troops to defend its interests, there is only the ghost of an army to send to the front.

24. 'Kinshasa Faces Rebel Squeeze', *The Star*, <http://www.inc.co.za/online/star/headlines/1997>, 25 April 1997.

25. *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 15-21 November 1996, p. 16.

The problem was seen as so serious that just before his suspension, General Eluki employed *Ingilima* warriors from North Kivu, armed with spears and naked apart from a sprig of leaves covering their genitals, to fight alongside the regular army²⁶.

But Mobutu's strategy also relies on a political offensive against the AFDL. For instance, in December 1996, Mobutu pledged that Zaire would recognise the inalienable right to citizenship and nationality of all the people within its borders, including Tutsis²⁷. This was obviously a tactic on Mobutu's part to break the Banyamulenge, and hopefully their Rwandan backers, away from the AFDL alliance. Once again, this resulted in failure. It could be argued that the spoils of victory far outweigh any largesse Mobutu may offer; and this fact could account for the AFDL standing united. However, it is also self-evident that should Mobutu leave or be removed from the political scene, there is a possibility that the AFDL could break up into a number of squabbling sub-entities which would not bode well for the future stability of Zaire.

Recognising the importance of the business community, Mobutu has gone to great lengths to woo this section of the community. Prime Minister Kengo wa Dondo (before his dismissal), for instance, noted that ample gratitude will be displayed to those businesses who remained in the country during these difficult times. The government even hinted at favouring these die-hard businessmen when it embarks on the privatisation of public assets in key sectors²⁸. There is, however, evidence to indicate that, recognising the current military balance, various multi-national corporations have preferred to deal with Kabila.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

27. Africa's Weekly Press Review, *Panafrican News Agency*, 20 December 1996.

28. Francois Misser, 'No Panic Despite Pandemonium', *African Business*, No. 217, January 1997a.

Mobutu's diplomatic strategy was informed by his perception of the nature of the security threat he faced. This perception, however, was fundamentally flawed and it could be argued that Kinshasa's diplomatic success was, therefore, inappropriate to the crisis at hand. From the very beginning, the Zairian state refused to recognise the indigenous nature of the rebellion, preferring to see it as a Rwandan-inspired uprising to annex Kivu province²⁹. As such, they focused their diplomatic activity on acquiring international support for the territorial integrity of Zaire. Certainly Kinshasa was successful in this, when at the Nineteenth African Summit, there was agreement on the territorial integrity of the Zairian state. But Mobutu missed the point. There was no support amongst the rebels for eastern Zaire to be annexed to Rwanda or secession along the lines of another Biafra or Katanga. What Mobutu was dealing with was a national movement with national aims and objectives. Laurent Kabila, the leader of the AFDL, expressed his organisation's aims and objectives in the following manner:

The war, in which our troops are engaged, has as its aim : the removal from power of a government which has led its people to unprecedented poverty, a government whose army has lost its head and is no more than a soldiering force inflicting suffering on the people and pursuing individual ends. We have been forced by the obstinacy of Mobutu to have recourse to the same means that he uses to keep himself in power, which is nothing other than force. We need, for the next twelve months, a transitional government that will organise free elections to give the country democratic institutions from which all forms of power can draw their authority, with universal

29. 'Zaire Loses Key Airport to Tutsis', *The Sunday Times*, 3 November 1996.

suffrage. Zaire has to return to becoming a legal state³⁰.

But there other reasons to illustrate that this is indeed a national movement. Contrary to media speculation, the AFDL is not an entirely Tutsi organisation. In fact, it consists of four main groups. First is the Democratic People Alliance (DPA) consisting of Banyamulenge fighting for their right to Zairian citizenship. A second member of the AFDL coalition is the Revolutionary Movement for the Liberation of Zaire whose leader, Mr. Masasu Nindanga, is a member of the Bashi ethnic group based in southern Kivu. The National Resistance Council for Democracy is the third member. It is led by Andre Kisase Ngandu, a Kasaian and the military commander of all AFDL forces. Finally, there is the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) under the leadership of Laurent-Desire Kabila, a Luba from northern Katanga³¹. All AFDL members fall under his political leadership.

While this is a national uprising, it does have certain regional overtones. This is not surprising given the interconnectedness of the central African region. For years, Zaire, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Angola and Tanzania have been caught up in a vortex of ever spiralling conflict. This resulted, in early November 1996, in the Rwandan army 211 Brigade led by Lieutenant-Colonel Nzaramba, of the RPA 7th Battalion, attacking Kibumba refugee camp near Goma³². In the same vein, Uganda shelled the area around Kasindi in Zaire. These regional overtones, however, should not detract from the fact that the conflict is intra-state as opposed to inter-state. In the case of Rwanda, the attack on Kibumba refugee camp was in line with Kigali's strategy of ridding the camps of control by the *Interahamwe* and FAR troops

30. 'Why We Rebelled', *Africa Today*, January/February 1997.

31. Francois Misser, 'Who Are The Rebels?' *African Business*, No. 217, January 1997b.

32. Francois Misser, *op. cit.*, 1996, p. 13.

who posed a security threat to Rwanda as attacks into Rwanda was launched from these camps³³. From the perspective of Kampala, similar concerns led to the artillery barrage on Kasindi. For years, Kinshasa provided sanctuary to Ugandan rebels who proved to be an increasing menace to the Yoweri Museveni regime. The attack on Kasindi was deliberately aimed at destroying the Ugandan rebel bases³⁴. Thus, any support the AFDL is receiving from regional states is more due to Mobutu's counter-productive foreign policy of destabilising his neighbours³⁵ than any regional designs of annexing Zairian territory which Mobutu claims.

But Kinshasa has made other diplomatic blunders. Confident of French support, which had bailed him out of difficult situations before, Mobutu has snubbed African initiatives to resolve the impasse. This was graphically illustrated when Zaire refused to attend the Nairobi Summit convened by Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi in December 1996 to mediate in the stand-off between the Kinshasa and the AFDL³⁶. This was a terrible miscalculation on the part of Mobutu: he alienated regional states at the same time placing his faith in French power, which, as will be explained below, is on the wane in Africa.

If Mobutu was shooting himself in the foot in the diplomatic terrain, Laurent Kabila certainly was not. He realised that his movement was dependent on financial support and arms from neighbouring countries. Thus, recognising the importance of holding the moral high ground, Kabila declared a unilateral cease-fire the day before the 5 November Nairobi Summit occurred with eight African leaders attending³⁷.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

34. *Reuters*, 1 December 1996

35. War-torn Angola is a case in point.

36. South African Aid for Rwanda and Zaire, *Panafrican News Agency*, 23 December 1996.

37. Anthony Goldman, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

At the political-military level, Kabila has also launched new initiatives. First, the AFDL has launched a massive recruitment campaign. The success of this was testified to by journalists in the area who noted witnessing truck loads of new recruits flocking to the banner of the AFDL³⁸. Recent press reports indicate that more than 100,000 new recruits have joined the rebel alliance³⁹. The success of the AFDL's recruitment drive could be attributed to their having broken Zaire's "passivity syndrome." Herbert Weiss puts it this way :

There has been astonishingly little violent political protest in Zaire in the last 30 years. This "passivity syndrome" was the reaction to the bloodletting which occurred in the mid-1960s. Of course, authoritarian rule, playing ethnic group against ethnic group, bullying security forces and the impression that the West would always bail out the Mobutu regime, also helped produce this result⁴⁰.

War is an expensive occupation: one needs to purchase weapons, pay one's troops, feed and clothe them and purchase fuel and a plethora of other things. In this, the rebels have been fortunate to capture a number of mines. According to one analyst the rebels are in possession of between 150 and 250 tonnes of gold metal reserves⁴¹. The rebels, however, will need Western know-how and equipment if they are to make any money from the mines. But, many of these foreign mineworkers and owners have fled from their mines in the wake of the fighting. In order to entice them back, the AFDL has embarked on a carrot and stick

38. *Reuters*, 1 December 1996.

39. *Zaire Watch*, <http://www.marekinc.com>, 20 April 1997.

40. Herbert Weiss, 'What Now for the Zairian State?' *Africa Today*, January/February 1997, p. 36.

41. Francois Misser, *op. cit.*, 1997b.

strategy. The carrot is that rebels would leave mining concessions untouched in the areas they control, provided mining companies paid taxes to the rebel administration⁴². The stick is that those foreign mining companies who do not resume operations within rebel-held territory, risk losing their leases⁴³. The success Kabila has achieved in wooing international businessmen is self-evident. This, in turn, has given the AFDL's war effort a massive boost.

Reflecting on the crisis in Zaire brings to the fore several vexing questions facing the international community.

Refugees

The issue of 'armed refugees' and 'fortified refugee camps' constitutes a challenge to international refugee agencies and humanitarian assistance. Since 1994, international agencies fed, clothed and provided medical assistance to the *Interahamwe militia* together with *bona fide* refugees. This *militia* was responsible for the genocide of almost 800,000 people, in addition to launching attacks on neighbouring Rwanda and conducting a reign of terror against its own people within the camp. Clearly, this is an untenable state of affairs.

What is needed is a firm policy to separate *bona fide* refugees from combatants inside refugee camps. At the very least, such combatants need to be disarmed. Failure to do so results in refugees and their camps to be targeted for attack. Rwanda's attack on refugee camps was not the only such instance. South Africa, for example, regularly attacked camps in Angola, Botswana, Zambia and Lesotho; Vietnamese forces repeatedly shelled Cambodian refugees encamped along the Thai border. Claiming that refugee camps were harbouring guerrillas and

42. *The Star*, 5 December 1996.

43. 'Tutsi Rebels Hit Mobutu Where it Hurts Most' *The Sunday Times*, 5 January 1997.

subversion, the Guatemalan army crossed the border into Mexico in the early 1980s and ruthlessly attacked settlements in Chiapas. Ethiopia has regularly carried out raids against refugees inside Sudan⁴⁴.

Several more examples can be cited, but the underlying point is that where refugee warrior communities exist in fortified refugee camps, using such camps as launching pads to attack neighbouring states; they themselves become military targets. In the process, the sovereignty of the host state is compromised and the international refugee regime is undermined.

Issues in Peacekeeping

The crisis in Zaire also highlighted various problem areas in international peacekeeping. This was revealed in the ambiguous nature of the Western response: the United States (US) and Canada got bogged down in detail such as the size of the force, their mandate, and the duration of their stay in the operations area⁴⁵. Finally it was scuttled on the US insistence that there be a cease-fire first before they commit their troops⁴⁶ thus underlining the fact that the US is still suffering from the 'Somali Syndrome'. Recent events, however, *have* seen the US, in conjunction with South Africa, playing a more assertive role in the crisis in Zaire. One possible reason accounting for this US *volte face* could be that US domestic public pressure to play a more constructive role in the unfolding Central African tragedy is becoming a factor in US foreign policy-making circles. This US public opinion, in turn, could have been brought about by a sense of guilt. The US media

44. G. Loescher, 'Refugee Movements and International Security', *Adelphi Papers* 268. International Institute for Strategic Studies. London. 1992. p. 50.

45. 'Plans for Zaire Relief Mission Bog Down over Details', *The New York Times*, 15 November 1996.

46. 'U.S. Wants Zaire Truce Before Sending Force', *Reuters*, 14 November 1996.

has repeatedly exposed the US role in supporting Mobutu's authoritarian regime this past three decades.

But Zaire also highlighted the crisis inherent within African peace initiatives - at both the regional level seen in the Nairobi Summit as well as at the level of the Organisation for African Unity - which generally was too slow and too inadequate to deal with the situation. Within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), for instance, the Zairian crisis revealed deep organisational problems. As the situation in eastern Zaire deteriorated, South Africa, as Chair of SADC, called a meeting of all member states to discuss the situation. To this Zimbabwe reacted negatively. As Chair of the SADC Organ, Harare felt that it should be its prerogative to convene a meeting. As a result, no SADC meeting was convened - and hence there was no SADC position on the unfolding tragedy in Zaire even though three SADC member states - Angola, Tanzania and Zambia are severely effected by the crisis. Clearly, this dichotomy in SADC leadership has to be resolved. When South Africa finally decided to act, some observers noted that it was more due to pressure being placed on South Africa by the United States than any other fact. This does not augur well for the development of a viable regional security regime.

At the continental level, Mobutu's Zaire illustrated how fractured the OAU as an organisation is when the Francophone African states decided not to attend the Nairobi Summit. Instead, they reportedly convened their own summit to establish their own separate peace initiative⁴⁷.

The crisis in Zaire brought into sharp relief the traditional dilemma facing international peacekeeping efforts: the unresolved issue of national sovereignty versus the humanitarian imperative. This was underlined when Zaire insisted that it approved the

47. *Ibid.*

nations participating in the proposed peacekeeping force⁴⁸ and when it later refused to grant the international force permission to overfly or enter its territory⁴⁹. It is imperative that this dilemma be resolved speedily if the world does not intend to idly watch as human tragedy unfolds on our television sets, while it seeks refuge in the concept of sovereignty. In the words of one commentator, perhaps this impasse can be resolved by the United Nations developing a set of criteria to determine what constitutes a sovereign state. States failing to pass this *litmus test* (Zaire, Liberia, Somalia) will have their right to sovereignty waived.

But the Zairian crisis has also served to reveal the counterproductive nature of some international peacekeeping operations. Consider the following: rebels only attacked the *Hutu militia* holed up in the Mugunga refugee camp after news erupted in Goma that the multinational force being set up will not try to disarm *Hutu* fighters when they bring aid to the refugees displaced by the Tutsi rebellion. Some commentators believe that the rebels were trying to take on the *Hutu* fighters before the arrival of the proposed Canadian-led force⁵⁰. In other words, at the heart of another international peacekeeping in the dilemma : can there be long term peace where there is no justice?

Declining French Influence in Africa

The waning of Mobutu's power is mirrored in the decline of French neo-colonial adventurism in Africa. As the crisis in Zaire unfolded, France pushed hard for foreign intervention, seeing itself the leader of an international force. Zaire, after all, fell within the French sphere of influence. In this, Paris was rudely shocked.

48. *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 20 November 1996, p. 3.

49. *Reuters*, 1 December 1996.

50. 'Heavy Fighting in Zaire as World Readies Force', *Reuters*, 14 November 1996.

Recalling French intervention in Rwanda in 1994, which witnessed French troops protecting those guilty of genocide⁵¹, the United States and its allies pressed on Paris not to support Mobutu. In the face of U.S. pressure, France capitulated. As a face-saving device, Jacques Chirac informed Zairian Prime Minister Kengo wa Dondo that France would only help Kinshasa if it "restructured its army", an unrealistic goal which France knew only too well.

But international pressure was not the only impediment to French intervention. Peoples' attitudes in Francophone Africa had hardened towards French paternalistic benevolence towards its former colonies which saw it propping up undemocratic regimes. Hence one found that one of Kabila's demands was the ending of French support to Mobutu—a demand echoed by mutineers in Zaire's neighbour, the Central African Republic. Reflecting on these changed circumstances, the U.S. Ambassador to Zaire, Daniel Simpson succinctly commented, "France is no longer capable of imposing itself in Africa. Neo-colonialism is no longer tolerated. The French attitude no longer reflects the reality of the situation"⁵².

Zaire and the Legacy of Mobutu

In conclusion, it seems certain that Mobutu is on his way out of the Zairian political scene. Does this mean that we will be witnessing the end of the era of 'Mobutuism'? I would strongly argue that, this is not on the cards. Mobutu's legacy, bequeathed to the Zairian state, has been one of authoritarianism. This authoritarian impulse remains strong in Zaire's politics. Allegations of the

51. *Ibid.*

52. 'France Loses Grip on African Spoils', *The Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 13-19 December 1996.

AFDL killing Hutu refugees, allegations that Kabila ordered the assassination of his military commander, Major General Kasese Ngandu in a bid to consolidate his power base⁵³, as well as Kabila's attacks on other political parties are indicative of this authoritarian streak. This does not bode well for the future stability of the post-Mobutu Zairian state. It is my view that only if the AFDL effectively challenges this authoritarian legacy of Mobutu, would Zaire move into a post-Mobutu era.

53. *Zaire Watch*, 22 April 1997.