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**ZAIRE:
SO MUCH TO GIVE,
SO LITTLE TO SHOW**

BY

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For nearly half a century, the focus of the United States' foreign policy has been the containment of the Soviet Union and communism. The collapse of the Soviet Union has forced the U.S. to rethink its strategic vision and revise its foreign policies. Since the independence of Zaire in 1960, the United States has been a strong supporter of the country and its leader, President Mobutu Sese-Seko. There were many reasons for this support; not the least of these was its border with Angola and our concern about a communist regime in Africa. However, Mobutu's 28 year regime has been one of universal corruption, greed and brutal suppression of freedoms. The country is totally bankrupt and its people are starving and suffering greatly from the AIDS epidemic. Mobutu tenaciously clings to power, yet only recently has the U.S. withheld aid and encouraged a democratic process of government. The purpose of this paper is to examine the U.S. policies toward Zaire, past and present, and suggest a cautious approach for future policy.

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ZAIRE: SO MUCH TO GIVE, SO LITTLE TO SHOW

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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ZAIRE: SO MUCH TO GIVE, SO LITTLE TO SHOW

The United States was present at the birth of this nation and we have been a proud partner ever since

Henry A. Kissinger

You see a demonstration. What do you do. You are not going to wait for the gendarmes, you are not going to wait for the soldiers. . . You have shoes, kick them. I'm not saying disorder, but kick them. I'll say it again, kick them. You have hands, hit them. You remove them from the road in the name of peace

Mobutu Sese Seko, 25 April 1988

The world of 1993 is not the same world the United States knew at the beginning of this decade. Our biggest threat-- the USSR-- no longer exists as we knew it, and the effects of its dissolution are far reaching. Indeed, much of the political, economic and military strategy of the U.S. was based on "the Soviet threat". Our relationships with other countries were based on a perceived threat-- quid pro quo-- with the USSR. Now that the threat is gone, the United States must perforce reassess much of its thinking and reshape much of its strategic thinking.

One subject in this reconsideration of world order is the African continent. Africa is undergoing its own recasting. One major player remains Zaire. Since that country's independence, the U.S. has habitually supported Zaire economically, militarily, and politically. However, it is a country where corruption and disregard of human rights are commonplace-- and no significant changes are being made. Thus, it is also time for the U.S. to rethink its foreign policy toward that country. The U.S. must clearly articulate and consistently recognize our strategic interests in Zaire, both separately as a country and collectively as a part of the continent. We must also weigh short-term policies against potential long-term gains.

Ever since Zaire's independence as the Congo in 1960, the United States has had an interest in the country. Although the motives behind our interest have changed over

the years, the US has consistently supported Zaire and its dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko. The purpose of this paper is to examine the basis for our support and to determine if U.S. national strategy toward Zaire is on course in the new world order or should be changed.

ZAIRE: third largest country on the African continent; fifth in the world in mineral production; Its Zaire River basin is the most important water system in central Africa, possessing a capability of producing most of the electricity needed for all of central Africa. A geographically diverse country, containing savanna, tropical rainforests, grasslands and receiving plenty of rainfall. It is a country that began its independence from Belgium in 1960 with a solvent bank account. Its size, resources and location give it the potential to be a major player in the shaping of sub-Saharan Africa.

Yet, by 1990, the World Bank classified the country as the twelfth poorest in the world. Its per capita income is now a mere \$220. Inflation is 10,000%. Zaire is the world's largest producer of cobalt and the second largest producer of industrial diamonds, yet exports have fallen 50% in the last two years. Zaire is now a country in both financial and political bankruptcy; the economy of its capital Kinshasa has ceased to function. The "chief of state" is a brutal dictator in power for the past 27 years. It was a country that had so much to offer the world, and now offers very little. What happened? Why? What was the United States' part in all of this?

To understand U.S. foreign policy, one must understand that priorities change with the changing world situation. Also, with each administration comes a new strategic vision, although this vision may remain constant across administrations, with only some fine

tuning occurring. Regardless of what the strategic vision is, U.S. foreign policy is determined by national security concerns, political and economic factors, and humanitarian aspects. For the past forty years, the major factor in our foreign policy was the containment of the USSR, or, communism. The vision remained relatively constant; the execution changed. One approach was to seek to contain the "threat" at every location in the world threatened by the USSR/communism; another was to concentrate our efforts only in those locations threatened that were of vital or major interest to our national security. As the events in 1989-1991 in the USSR and eastern Europe unfolded, it became apparent that the "threat" as we had known no longer existed. Thus, we must now redefine our strategic vision.

HISTORY

Africa is the second largest land mass in the world, occupying 20% of the earth's land surface. Zaire is located in the south-central part of the continent, is strategically located, and shares borders with nine other African countries; its longest border is shared with Angola. It is a country blessed with great mineral deposits, and has huge agricultural, logging and hydroelectric potential. Zaire is potentially one of the wealthiest of the African countries.² Zaire's independence came about abruptly in 1960 and found the Zairian people unprepared for the drastic changes that would take place. Belgium, as the colonial power of the former Belgian Congo, had inadequately trained the colony's people to manage such a country. Native peoples were not established within the hierarchy of the infrastructure. Belgium emphasized economic development; little attention had been paid to political rights.³ Some steps were taken in 1959 for a program of self-government, but ensuing riots quickly dispelled any

further attempts in this direction. When independence was declared in July, 1960, Belgium expected "uneventful evolutions," such as the former British and French territories experienced. "They believed that this massive gesture [early granting of independence] would win the confidence of the Congolese, who would continue to rely heavily on Belgian administrative, technical, and financial support following independence."⁴ This was not to be. Within a week of independence, there was a collapse of authority, followed by a five-year period best described as "chaos." The economy, once the strongest in Africa, began to subside.

The newly created First Republic, in existence from 1960-1965 was a period of retreat— a retreat from centralization in that significant powers were yielded to provinces. Six provincial areas became 21; these provinces were determined through a "process tantamount to ethnic or local self-determination."⁵ The result was the inability of the central government to exercise power. It experienced the loss of budgetary and fiscal authority. Ethnicity permeated all levels of politics. With the breakdown of central authority came a period of provincial "fragmentation" and rebellion.⁶ The country was a zone of disorder.

The years of rebellion were years of struggles for power amongst the future potential leaders. One front leader, Moïse Tshombe, saw his political ambitions fulfilled in a remarkable fashion. Only two weeks after the country's independence in 1960, Tshombe declared the mineral-rich province of Katanga independent. UN intervention helped crush the secession in 1963 and Tshombe went into exile in Madrid. Tshombe's militia, known as the 'Katanga gendarmes,' retreated into neighboring Angola.⁷ In a phenomenal turn of events, Tshombe came out of exile in 1963 and was

named Prime Minister. Meanwhile, insurgents had eliminated the central government's authority in several of the provinces and Tshombe established a coalition with a platform to combat U.S. influence and negotiate a settlement with insurgent forces. His former militia returned and were integrated into the national army; however they were later forced out again and would continue to plague the country for many years. Tshombe's efforts against the insurgents initially failed, but with assistance from mercenaries and Belgian advisors, plus U.S. logistic support, the insurgents were pushed back. In November, 1964, in part to carry out a NEO (non-combatant) evacuation, Belgian paratroopers, again supported by the U.S., captured the insurgent capital of Kisangani.⁸ The rebel leadership fell apart. This enabled the legitimate government to establish a new constitution, hold national elections, and form a new parliament. This new constitution designated the President as the CEO of the nation, while the Prime Minister attended to the daily conduct of government affairs. However, a power struggle was waged among various leaders, including Tshombe and Joseph Kasavubu, the man initially elected President in 1960. Subsequent bickering among the major politicians doomed the First Republic, and paved the way for a coup.

The coup occurred in November, 1965 and General Joseph Desire Mobutu (later Mobutu Sese Seko) became "Chief of State." It was a bloodless coup, and Mobutu told the press that it was not a military coup, "but a duty performed to save the country from anarchy and chaos."⁹ The U.S. embassy knew in advance of the coup, and, in fact, encouraged it. The CIA was involved. To the U.S., Mobutu appeared to "promise both stability and reliability."¹⁰ Thus, the First Republic abruptly became the Second Republic. The country's future appeared to be on a steady course, but soon it became

uncertain.¹¹ Mobutu quickly returned the country to a territorial organization similar to that of the colonial period, and eliminated the numerous provincial legislatures and police forces. Governors were named by Mobutu, not elected by the people, served outside their area of origin, and were rotated frequently. Mobutu banned all political parties, except one, the Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution (MPR), of which he was the president. "As long as I live, I will not authorize the creation of another party,"¹² Mobutu stated in a 1980 speech.

An apparent attempt was made to reconstruct the economy by nationalization of copper production and a major currency reform. Mobutu attracted foreign investors and wooed the world's financial institutions, arguing that the country's problems were only temporary and not a fundamental weakness.¹³ In 1973, Mobutu "Zairianized" foreign commerce and agricultural enterprises by giving them to individuals, usually fellow politicians. These individual owners quickly ravaged their "property", with catastrophic effect on the economy. Supply and distribution networks were disrupted as the new owners fired the Zairian workers who had served the old owners. No taxes were paid; state revenues declined. Retail prices soared. Capital gains were used for personal expenses, not reinvested back into business ventures. By 1974, the economy was on its back, and Mobutu nationalized businesses again, but things didn't get better. Additionally, Mobutu's attention was spent on business and industry and little attention was paid to agriculture. In 1978, the GNP per capita was \$360; by 1987, it had dropped to \$150. The average inflation rate from 1980-1987 was 53.5%. In 1987, it was 106.5%.¹⁴ Mobutu instigated seven stabilization plans, but "the bottom line was that Mobutu had mortgaged Zaire's future and had to contract new loans merely to service the already existing debt."¹⁵ All of Zaire's infrastructure has suffered,

but the nutrition and health fields suffer long-term effects that will haunt the country well into the 21st century. 44% of the population suffers malnutrition, while over half the population suffers hunger between harvests. The child mortality rate for children under 5 is 50%, with "common" childhood diseases taking a large number of children each year. AIDS has been particularly hard on Zaire, not only claiming thousands of children, but also killing many of the middle class cadre-- the future of Zaire.

THE U.S. ROLE

Since its independence, Zaire has been politically, economically and militarily dependent on the U.S. In return for this support, Mobutu took an anti-Soviet stance and provided the U.S. support in international fora.¹⁶ In the early 70's, Mobutu tried to diversify his sources of support, causing strained relations with the U.S. The fall of copper prices in the early 70s caused considerable damage to Zaire's already unstable economy. IN 1975, the U.S. Ambassador to Zaire, Deane Hinton, was blunt with Mobutu in telling him to get his economic house in order. While Ambassador Hinton was correct in his reproach to Mobutu, conflict in neighboring Angola was ongoing, and the U.S. was forced to focus its efforts on events in Angola. This new focus enhanced Zaire's strategic location, and thus its strategic importance.

Ambassador Hinton was recalled and replaced by someone more to Mobutu's liking. Relations continued to be strained during President Carter's administration, principally because of Carter's stance on human rights. After internal uprisings in Zaire in 1977 and 1978, Shabas I and II, and the internal communist threat gone, Carter pushed for reform. Carter sent long dispatches to Mobutu, demanding political liberalization, improvements in human rights, and economic reforms.¹⁷ With the Reagan and Bush

administrations, it was to some degree a return to normalcy. Mobutu was the first African head of state to visit President Bush, who called him "one of Africa's most experienced statesmen."¹⁸ Mobutu was partly instrumental in the 17-nation peace conference which resulted in the Angola cease fire. President Bush raised the human rights issue with Mobutu, but no public pronouncement was made until 1991. In March, 1991, President Bush sent Mobutu a personal letter urging him to reconvene the National Conference in Zaire— a forum used in some other African nations to unseat serving heads of state. For Mobutu, this was "a kiss from Judas."¹⁹

Since 1989, Zaire has been experiencing much unrest. Hyperinflation caused a rise in costs of virtually everything, and numerous demonstrations have occurred, protesting the state of the economy and demanding that Mobutu do something about it. Over the past few years, Mobutu has been forced to change governments often, but one of Mobutu's survival skills has been his ability to corrupt those who oppose him.²⁰ He is deft in allowing his former opposition positions within his government— to keep control over them and to buy them off. He still manages to control the dissension within the army and police, but there are indicators that his total control is slipping, and Zaire, along with the rest of the world is wondering how much longer he can retain that control.

Since 1990, Mobutu has operated outside Kinshasa for the most part. For over a year he conducted business on his yacht on the Congo River, but has now relocated his power base from Kinshasa to his equatorial jungle palace deep in the country's

interior, in Gbadolite, nearly 700 miles from Kinshasa. This frustrates the opposition who see Mobutu as "controlling the Government apparatus while virtually never entering the city [Kinshasa]."²¹

DEMOCRATIZATION OF A SORT

In response to unrest, in 1990, under internal pressures for political liberalization, Mobutu promised "sweeping" reforms.²² Included in these reforms would be multipartyism, and limited liberal democracy. A new constitution was to be adopted within a year, and Mobutu resigned as leader of the MPR. In June, three opposition parties were permitted to register, and by October, 1990, limitations on the number of parties were removed. There are now 150-250 political parties in Zaire; however, as many as 100 of these so-called opposition parties are financed by Mobutu himself. This "multi-Mobutuism" is an attempt by Mobutu to dilute the strength of his political rivals.²³ The remaining non-Mobutu backed parties remain ineffective due to their inability to agree on anything, except that Mobutu must be removed from power.

Bowing to international pressure, most notably from the U.S., Belgium and France, Mobutu, in April, 1991, authorized the creation of a National Conference made up of a wide range of elements in the country. The National Conference convened in August, 1991, but quickly stalled because of disputes over which political and civic groups would attend. Consequently, the conference was suspended in September. This touched off a mutiny by soldiers, ending only when the Belgians and French intervened to evacuate their personnel— with U.S. help. This bought Mobutu time. In October, 1991, Mobutu opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi was appointed interim

prime minister; Mobutu remained the head of state and in control of the armed forces and security forces. Within two weeks, Tshisekedi was out: he refused to accept Mobutu's authority. On 26 Oct 91, Tshisekedi was replaced by Bernardin Mungul Diaka. This caused Tshisekedi to form an alternative administration, and to name himself prime minister.²⁴

While the political turmoil continued in Kinshasa, Mobutu was also facing international problems. In September, 1991, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) suspended Zaire's credit eligibility due to its failure to pay \$81 million in loan payments in arrears. In October, France also suspended financial aid. At the 1991 level, it would take 62% of the national budget alone to service the national debt. By March 1992, virtually all world financial support, excluding humanitarian aid, was suspended.

The National Conference reconvened on 17 Nov 91. On 4 Dec 91, Mobutu remained in office even though his constitutional "mandate" expired. He remained in office pending elections, but by late December, Zaire's main opposition party, the Holy Union, gained positions in the National Conference. Fellow African leaders were concerned about the situation in Zaire, and, in a rare move, the Organization for African Unity (OAU) issued a statement that Mobutu must accept democratic change. An envoy was sent to talk to Mobutu and broker peace. The Conference was shut down again in January, 1992, as the opposition felt Mobutu was packing the conference with his supporters. In February, Mobutu indicated he was willing to resume talks about sharing power. In April, 1992, a reconvened Conference attempted to proclaim itself sovereign, but Mobutu refused to recognize it as such. Things have been at a stalemate since then, and a transitional legislature formed was

suspended in December, 1992, by Mobutu, and he has thwarted any attempts by the opposition-led government to carry out its duties. Mobutu's troops block government ministers from entering offices. The "official" government is in Kinshasa, headed by Tshisekedi, but it has no funds with which to operate and is ineffective.

Mobutu still controls the Zaire Radio and Television Organization, and every evening broadcasts show Mobutu as he receives visitors, issues decrees and performs actions as if he were still in total control.²⁵ Legitimate opposition parties have so far been unsuccessful in gaining public support. Their lack of control of television and radio is a contributor. Mobutu has stated that he now has no plans to relinquish power. He is an astute politician, and may make some surprise moves, such as to call for elections before his unprepared opposition can organize an effective campaign against him.²⁶ Just as important as this political astuteness is the fact that Mobutu still controls the Special Presidential Division and the Civil Guard— two sections of the military that are organized and armed. These two organizations are manned predominately by Ngbandi soldiers, from Mobutu's own ethnic group. In the past two years, there is evidence of an "ethnic cleansing", as more than 100,000 Baluba have been forced from their homes in Shaba— and the Baluba are the tribe of Mobutu's main rival, Etienne Tshisekedi.

PAST U.S. POLICY

The United States has basically looked at Africa as an offshoot of our strategic interests in Europe. Our priorities were to minimize further Soviet influence in the area and to encourage former colonial powers to maintain their ties with the former

colonies. Most of the U.S. military aid given to African nations was for education and training programs.²⁷ However, since Zaire gained its independence, the U.S. has had more than just cordial relations with the nation. \$230 million in economic aid was given to Zaire during its first three years of independence; money continued to flow into Zaire. As a result of our concern of Soviet influence in the area, the conflict in neighboring Angola caused us to funnel arms and money to the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) in the 1970s and the National Union for Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) in the 1980s. Zaire supported the FNLA; Mobutu allowed it to operate and stage military operations from Zaire's southern borders. As previously mentioned, Mobutu played a role in getting negotiations on peace in Angola.²⁸

U.S. assistance has not been limited only to monetary aid. U.S. logistical support has been provided, along with Belgian and French soldiers, to help combat internal insurrections and a 1978 incursion from Angola.

PRESENT U.S. POLICY

Our policy followed a sometimes hazy line for a number of years, but in the last two years, it has become more clearly defined. The U.S. is now firmly linking aid to democratization; Mobutu stubbornly refuses to assist his country toward democracy, and the U.S. now has publicly denounced his actions. On 24 October 1991, the State Department issued the following statement:

The US Government believes that an effective and credible government in Zaire is an immediate necessity. We further believe that such a government must be formed

and led by a prime minister having broad popular support and coming from and having the support of the major opposition parties. The US Government has no candidate for Zairian prime minister; it supports the process of true democratization which must, at this stage, involve the opposition leadership in the decision-making of the government.

We deeply regret that President Mobutu and the opposition have not been able to resolve this impasse by agreement on a candidate. . .²⁹

Following the events of the National Conference and the shuffle of prime ministers—and Mobutu's refusal to accept them—Congress weighed in. On 18 March 1992, the Senate approved Senate Resolution 80, whereby Congress called for Mobutu to step down and allow a transitional government to return to a democratic rule. Resolution 80 also condemned all human rights violations and gave support to the desires of the Zairian people for democratic change.³⁰ As further unrest and lack of progress continued in Zaire, the State Department released an updated, formal statement on 14 December 1992 concerning our position toward Zaire:

The United States remains concerned by the deadlock between the Prime Minister and the President of Zaire. Zaire's National Conference ended on December 5, and its president, Archbishop Monsengwo, was elected president of the High Council of the Republic. The Council has been established to ensure that the decisions of the National Conference are implemented; differences, however, remain between President Mobutu [sic] and Prime Minister Tshisekedi.

The US Government believes that President Mobutu [sic] should recognize the legitimate authority of the prime minister chosen by the sovereign National Conference. President Mobutu should transfer day-to-day authority to the transitional government headed by Prime Minister Tshisekedi so it can begin its essential work of preparation for elections and the long and difficult road to economic recovery.

As the Governments of France, Belgium, and the United States stated jointly on December 1, the transition government should assume full control over the central bank, major public enterprises, and all other economic activities essential to Zaire's economic recovery. It should also establish an economic stabilization plan acceptable to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund without further delay.

The United States calls upon all of Zaire's political leaders to dedicate themselves unconditionally to the democratic transition underway in the country.³¹

These statements clearly indicate that the U.S. is concerned about democratization and political order in Zaire. The most recent philosophy adopted by the U.S. is that it is providing support other than strictly humanitarian aid only to those countries that are making attempts toward democracy.

CONCLUSION

If the United States wants to live up to these stated political aims, then we must now cease providing aid to Mobutu, be it monetary, military, or political. Friendly relations with Mobutu have served their purpose; times have changed, yet Mobutu refuses to change. Reform has no future while Mobutu is in power; he does not want reform efforts to succeed.³² The corruption and adverse exploitation ongoing within the country are impossible to ignore. Blatant human rights abuses continue to abound. The U.S. has sanctioned other countries for much of the same state of affairs. However, the United States must use care and caution when dealing with Mobutu. The infrastructure of the country is gone; yet, Mobutu may still be the glue that holds the remnants together. If he is removed, any semblance of "order" may go with him.

As order goes, the country would find itself ripe for a repeat of the 60's, when the richer provinces attempted to break free and become independent.

On the other hand, Zaire may have a resiliency and continue to proceed toward democracy as have Panama and the Philippines, both of whom were also ruled by dictators. There are similarities: both the Panamanian and Philippine dictators were supported by the U.S. The U.S. reconsidered its policy toward the country and political leader, and withheld support. Each dictator eventually fell from power. Both countries survived and are now on the road toward democracy. Zaire has able people now in country who may be capable of leading the country: Etienne Tshisekedi, and a former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Nguza Karl-i-Bond are examples.³³ Zaire differs greatly from the Philippines, however, in that in the months surrounding the fall of Philippine President Marcos, opposition parties were able to mass support of the people and stage overwhelmingly large anti-government rallies that drew hundreds of thousands of people. Unfortunately, the fragmented opposition parties of Zaire haven't been able to draw this massive support. Zaire also differs radically from Panama, where Noriega was forcibly removed by the United States as a result of Operation Just Cause. While there may be those inside or outside Zaire that would like to see that happen, the circumstances are very different from those in Panama, and the U.S. has no plans to take the same type of action.

A military coup is possible. Various perturbations in Zaire have come close to toppling Mobutu's regime, had not Western powers intervened. Mobutu could choose to leave or step down. However, there are only a few examples in Africa where virtual dictators, have been allowed to "retire" and be considered as elder statesmen. Examples are

Siaka Stevens of Sierra Leone, Leopold Senghor of Senegal and Nyerere of Tanzania.³⁴ There may still be a role for Mobutu in overseeing a peaceful transition. A fear exists that with Mobutu gone, the country could degenerate into a chaotic and bloody power struggle, such as has occurred in Liberia and Somalia. For the sake of world order and the people of Zaire, a solution must be found.

The United States has looked at Africa consistently as one of the lowest, if not the lowest, priority of foreign policy. African foreign policy has been crisis driven and "... last issue considered, the first aid budget cut."³⁵ Policy toward Zaire has, at times, not been well coordinated within the U.S. Government. In determining our post-Cold War foreign policy toward Zaire, we can no longer afford to compartmentalize the issue for the sake of the Zairians, as well as for our own sake.. For example, in the past, CIA., the Defense Department, AID., the State Department, and financial sectors all have provided support to Mobutu, sometimes with little central overall coordination, to insure that all organizations were in harmony with each other. Recognizing that the U.S. Government does not coordinate policy with private interests, we must still find a way to incorporate all sectors into the planning process. As a new policy concerning Zaire gets developed, all players must be working together, heading toward a common, long-term goal. "Jointness" must be a part of the planning process.

Our interests in Zaire are no longer what they were thirty years ago or even three years ago. Zaire still has strategic minerals needed by the U.S., and has a potential for great mineral, hydroelectrical and agricultural development. The U.S. private sector can be a key player in the development of these resources. The geography of Zaire makes it of interest to the military, and U.S. military support can further cement relationships for

the use of facilities and overflight privileges. Each of these initiatives must be fine tuned and coordinated among all players so that one policy toward Zaire is applied and as many of our actions as possible are in harmony with that policy. The United States must continue to support the democratization process and refuse to provide Mobutu support. We must support the International Monetary Fund (IMF) efforts to achieve financial stability in Zaire through a balance of economic, political and military support. We must provide humanitarian support if required, and logistical support where appropriate for peacekeeping efforts, if needed. Our long-term goal should be to encourage the development of a future Zairian government with a democratic base.

END NOTES

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- ⁵ Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 41.
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- ⁷ Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe, Conflict and Intervention in Africa, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 113
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