

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
April 21, 2005

S/S 7205947

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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April 1, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. HENRY A. KISSINGER  
THE WHITE HOUSE

Subject: Zaire President Mobutu Warming Up  
To Soviets

President Mobutu Sese Seku of Zaire has decided to have friendlier and closer relations with the USSR and the Eastern European socialist states. He recently received Ceausescu of Romania on a state visit, and in an unprecedented gesture of warmth, invited the Soviet Ambassador to lunch. Other steps, such as exchanges of high level visits between Kinshasa and Moscow, are expected soon.

Mobutu's flirtation with the "safer" socialist countries like Romania and Yugoslavia is nothing new. He has utilized his relationships with these countries in the past to help project a non-aligned image. You will recall that Mobutu visited Bucharest and Belgrade immediately after his official visit to the US in August 1970. But what is new is Mobutu's initiative toward the Soviet Union which can be attributed to the following underlying motives.

1. Mobutu ejected the Soviets twice since 1960 because of their political machinations against him. He is still distrustful, but believes he can handle them. He feels he is at the zenith of his personal power, and has sufficient confidence in his intelligence apparatus to consider himself virtually invulnerable to plotting. He calculates, therefore, that the potential benefits outweigh the potential dangers.

2. Zaire's financial and budgetary situations will remain precarious from the present through 1975 when new mines begin producing. Copper prices are weak, import requirements are high, and political patronage costs are constantly inflating. The

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Government is borrowing heavily from US and European commercial banks. Supplier credits are being requested for all major purchasers. The Soviets are now viewed as a major source of untapped assistance.

3. If Mobutu fears anyone these days, he fears the People's Republic of China. Peking radio beamed to Africa lists Mobutu as running dog number one. His intelligence net in east Africa talks of expanding Chinese influence on his borders. While Mobutu understands the American opening toward Peking, it still makes him uneasy from the optic of his own security. The USSR's fear of Peking, and Moscow's opposition to the expansion of Chinese influence in Africa fit in nicely with Mobutu's own concerns about security.

Mobutu has been meticulous about keeping us informed of his initiatives. He has reassured us that his actions are carefully calculated and that all safeguards are in operation. He has reiterated previous assurances that Zaire has special relationships only with the US and Belgium. In short, these are the only two governments he considers trustworthy.

From the point of view of US interests, we always feel a higher degree of safety on Mobutu's behalf when the Soviets are kept safely behind Embassy walls in Kinshasa. But their emergence was inevitable in this day of hard economic and political realities. Mobutu is better prepared now than at any previous time to handle subversion. If the Soviets make any false moves in their search for instant gratification, we can be certain that Mobutu will clamp down hard.

  
Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.  
Executive Secretary

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