

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE ZAIRE MISSION

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INTRODUCTION

The recent crisis in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa was the latest in a series of humanitarian emergencies in which armed forces were called upon to facilitate the delivery of aid in dangerous environments. While each operation is unique, an examination of the Zaire mission suggests that countries such as Canada are in some ways well placed to lead the formation of certain multinational military coalitions. The operation also revealed, however, the difficulties involved in managing military operations in humanitarian emergencies, particularly for smaller countries like Canada. This paper will make some observations on the Zaire operation, and suggest ways to improve the capability of the international community to respond more quickly and more effectively in the future. We will also make some suggestions that address Canada's reaction capability.

OBSERVATIONS

Political Issues

Observation 1: Though the international community had ample early warning that the situation in the Great Lakes Region would degenerate, the response to the crisis was still slow.

Though it was clear at least since the 1994 civil war in Rwanda that the entire region was volatile, and that the refugee camps were a source of serious instability, the international community was unable to take real action preceding the crisis in Zaire to address its root causes. Even when clear and ample early warning was sounded that hostilities were imminent, the international community remained inactive. In the absence of the Canadian proposal for a multinational force under Canadian command, the international community is unlikely to have organized a force to intervene. The problem was not lack of warning, but lack of political will among some to sacrifice