



Director of  
Central  
Intelligence



# Zaire: Is It Reformable?

Interagency Intelligence Memorandum

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ZAIRE: IS IT REFORMABLE?


Information as of 11 June 1980 was  
used in the preparation of this paper.


Text not applicable

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PREFACE

This Interagency Intelligence Memorandum is limited in scope and addresses four basic questions: is Mobutu's Zaire "reformable" 



Included is an annex on the importance of Zaire's cobalt to the West.

This memorandum was prepared under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer for Africa with contributions from the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Defense Intelligence Agency. It has been coordinated at the working level.

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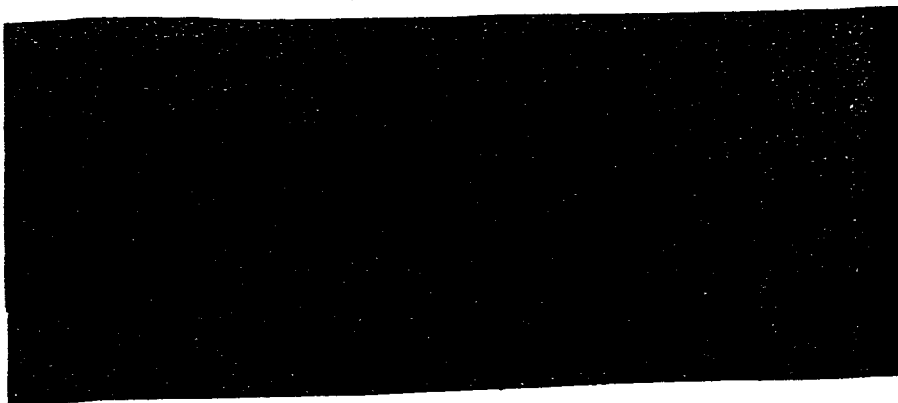
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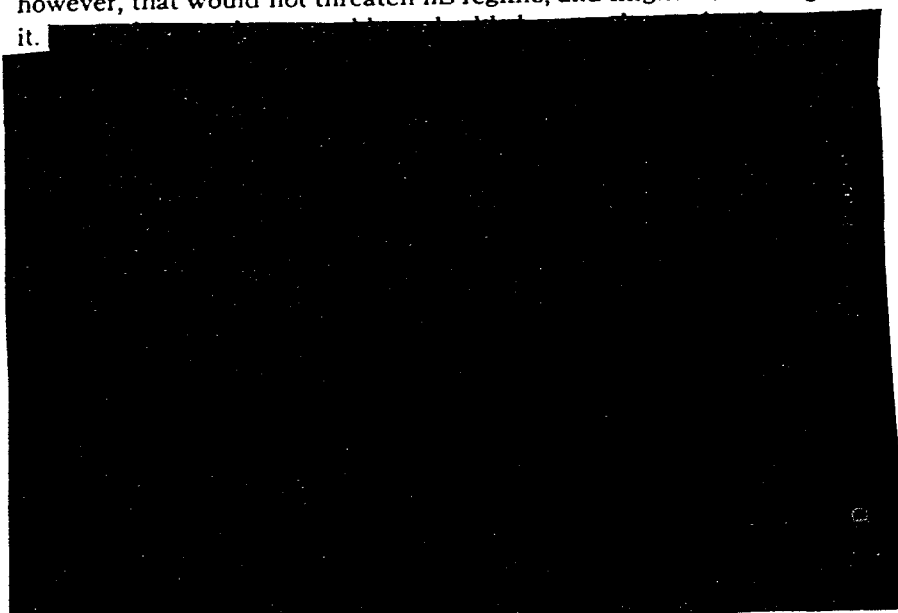
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## KEY JUDGMENTS



There are limited economic, political, and military reforms, however, that would not threaten his regime, and might well strengthen it.



Moreover, African social institutions provide safety valves that relieve somewhat the intense pressures of urban poverty.



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Kinshasa to other parts of the country, reviving secessionist tendencies. Turbulence or disintegration in Zaire could hardly fail to have an impact on Zaire's neighbors in a variety of ways, not the least of which is the possibility that Zaire would again become a theater for rivalries among external powers.



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## DISCUSSION

1. Zaire's problems loom larger to the United States and other Western countries than those of most other African nations, even though similar difficulties can also be found elsewhere on the continent.

[REDACTED]

2. The military incursion into the mineral-rich Shaba region in March 1977 by Zairian exiles based in Angola revealed the extent to which the Mobutu regime had been weakened by a combination of world market factors and poor management since its zenith in 1972-73. In response to growing domestic and international pressures,

[REDACTED] Mobutu announced in July 1977 that major political, military, and economic reforms would be implemented. The most significant political reforms proved to be the holding of competitive elections to fill seats in the legislature, the members of which had previously been appointed, and the creation of the office of prime minister. Responsibility for upgrading Zaire's armed forces was placed primarily on the Belgian and French military missions. The resultant Belgian-trained 21st Infantry Brigade and the French-trained 31st Paratroop Brigade represent a significant strengthening of Zaire's military capability. The central elements of economic reform in Zaire have been adherence to an International Monetary Fund standby agreement and reliance on expatriates to staff key positions at the Bank of Zaire, the Ministry of Finance, and Customs.

3. [REDACTED]

### The Belgian Legacy: The Early Years in the Congo

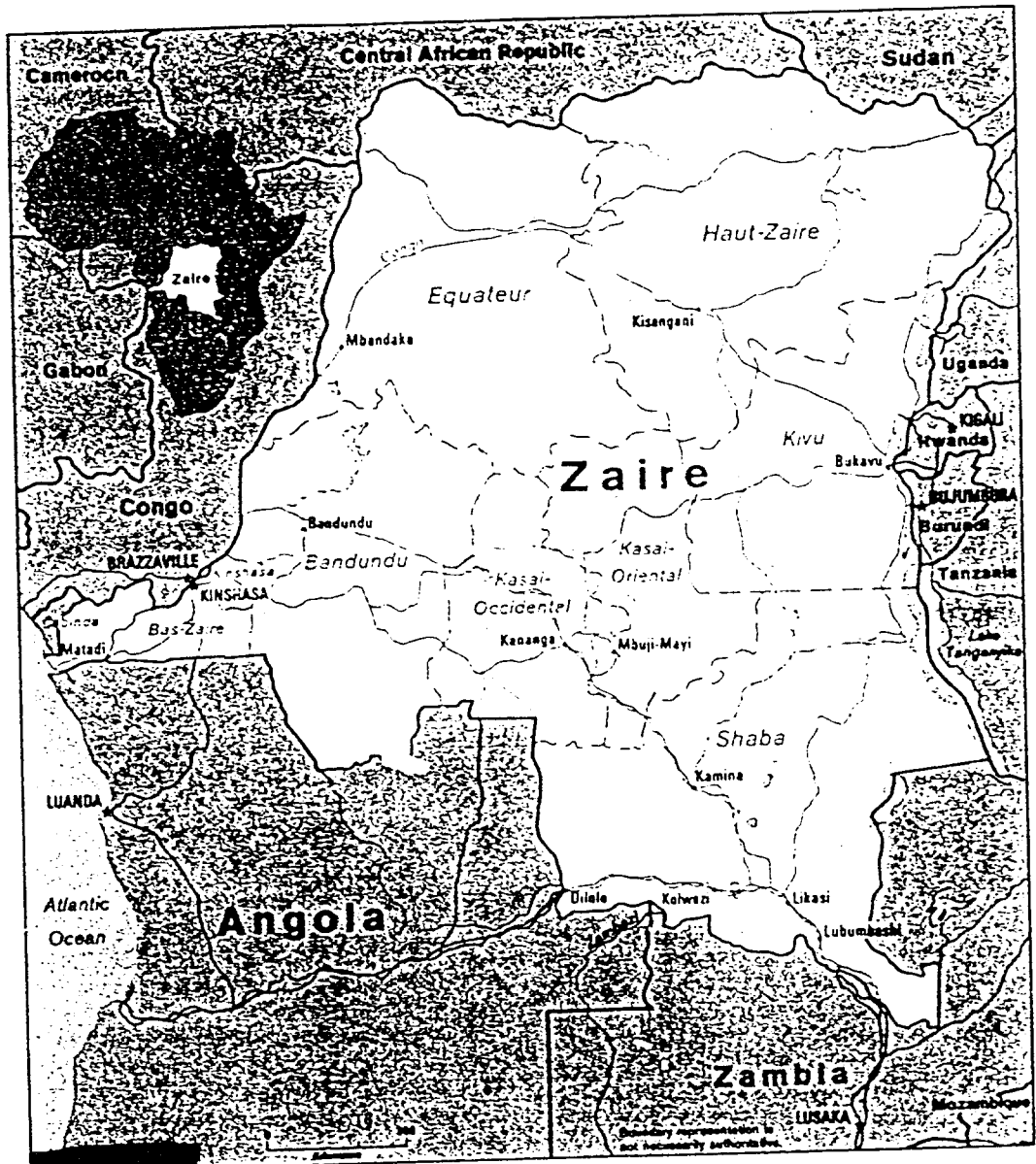
4. Although the difficulties that President Mobutu and his predecessors have faced in trying to establish Zaire as a viable and cohesive state are hardly unique in Africa, the legacy of Belgium's colonial paternalism and its hasty retreat from its principal African territory virtually assured an inauspicious beginning. In contrast to the relatively orderly preparations for independence that were instituted by the French and British—in which political parties took root and aspiring politicians were gradually brought into the administrative and political systems—the Congolese were grossly ill prepared to take over the administration of the new state.

5. By the time Mobutu seized power in 1965, Zaire had experienced practically everything that could go wrong in a newly independent African country. Independence was followed by an Army mutiny, debilitating political infighting, fragmentation of the country along ethnic lines, three regional secessions, and a series of peasant uprisings. Many of these developments were exacerbated by outside interests,

[REDACTED] economic, and social life of the country in ruins.

6. The pre-Mobutu regimes depended heavily on external economic and technical assistance, including the continued service of large numbers of foreign civilian and military specialists. Indeed, the foreign rescue operations that were mobilized to maintain the country's viability during the tumultuous early 1960s—ranging from economic inputs from aid contributors and private investors to UN peacekeeping forces—have remained permanent features of Zaire's history. They were manifested more recently by the French, Belgian, and Moroccan involvement in the Shaba crises of 1977 and 1978 and by international efforts to maintain the government's solvency. Unlike many other African countries where foreign involve-

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ment is rebuffed as neocolonialism, or at least is less visible to the outside world, Zaire welcomes it—albeit selectively.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

10. [REDACTED]

### The "Pax Mobutu"

7. Even Mobutu's harshest critics grudgingly acknowledge his success in maintaining a reasonable degree of domestic peace and order in Zaire. Except for opponents within the Zairian elite, many observers until recently found few faults with Mobutu's efforts at maintaining stability. They viewed the political system he began to construct after he came to power as being not markedly unlike regimes that were emerging in other parts of the continent as African leaders replaced the political frameworks left behind by the former metropolises. Such moves as the establishment of the MPR (Popular Revolutionary Movement) as the sole political party and the gradual extension of Mobutu's control over the armed forces were seen as logical steps to strengthen the central government and prevent a return to chaos.

In the early 1970s, when Zaire had emerged from a decade of internal rebellions, Mobutu embarked on a series of political changes that were intended to create the framework of a one-party state, to introduce into Zaire something of the aura of an African "radical" state, and to give himself the legitimacy that came from identification with the African political mainstream. Perhaps the best known of these enterprises was his unsuccessful attempt to carry out his campaign for "authenticity"—a kind of cultural revolution which had precedents in other African countries and which emphasized political solidarity by stressing the introduction of "authentic" indigenous practices to replace "colonial" ways (for example, changes in personal names from Europeanized to vernacular forms). This was also an attempt to create a sense of national unity, no doubt inspired by Mobutu's confidence that he was in full control and by the vague philosophies of other African leaders who have sought to construct a framework for their own particular style of rule. In the event, neither authenticity in its various ramifications nor any of the other innovations that Mobutu attempted to introduce in the early 1970s took deep root and Zaire's political system has remained a highly personalized one.

8. Neighboring states were relieved that "the Congo problem" no longer threatened their own stability and shared the general African satisfaction that a blemish had been removed from Africa's record. During the "Pax Mobutu" period that lasted through the early 1970s and was marked by relatively substantial revenues from copper and other mineral resources, few private investors or others in the international community seemed to worry about how Zaire was governed, but instead were more concerned with the investment climate.

### The Current Malaise and Mobutu's Response

9. [REDACTED] the basic details of how his system works are generally known and have not changed significantly since he took power. He rules more as a paramount tribal chief than as a head of state in the Western sense. He is secretive,

11. After 15 years, "Pax Mobutu" is still little more than a truce enforced through Mobutu's domination of the instruments of power. Tribal and regional tensions persist, and social and economic problems—including inflation, unemployment, labor and student unrest, periodic shortages of necessities, and deteriorating infrastructure—are now acute.

[REDACTED]

12. Many factors contribute to Zaire's current difficulties—including a severe deterioration of the terms of trade, the invasions of Shaba, costly economic blunders, the burgeoning foreign debt, and the pilfering of scarce foreign exchange. The resulting deterioration of the economy and public services has stimulated public discontent, while international concern over human rights has rallied some of Mobutu's detractors around the central theme of reform.

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[REDACTED]

13.

[REDACTED]

14.

[REDACTED]

15.

Although he realizes that no reforms will satisfy the Zairian intellectual elite, both this group and the United States tend to advocate structural changes in the government that accord with Western conceptions of how reform is induced.

Among other things, he has appointed a Prime Minister and given him some responsibilities in the day-to-day operations of the government. The legislature has been allowed to voice some criticism of the regime. A number of corrupt officials have been replaced by competent technocrats, and a cabinet shakeup earlier this year appears to have improved the overall competence of the government's ministers. Against this backdrop, some judicial reforms have been enacted and amnesties for criminals and political dissidents have been announced in order to placate those who point out the repressive nature of his rule. Nevertheless, each move has usually been fol-

lowed at some point by other actions that are intended to signal to domestic critics that Mobutu is not prepared to go too far.

[REDACTED]

16. Mobutu has delegated major responsibility for solving the economic crisis to Western advisers and governments that are deeply involved in Zaire.

[REDACTED]

17. Mobutu has pursued a similar strategy in the military sphere.

[REDACTED]

Economic constraints weigh against any substantial arms expenditures, and a need for continuous security has ruled out replacement of existing forces by totally new ones. Instead, prompted partly by Western pressure and partly by his own recognition of the need for improvement, Mobutu has put in train a series of important, though less sweeping, measures—reduction in the number of troops, creation of three new brigades, improvements in messing and pay, streamlining the chain of command, retraining a poorly disciplined infantry division, and establishment of a logistics corps. With the exception of the last two of these, measurable albeit halting progress has been made.

[REDACTED]

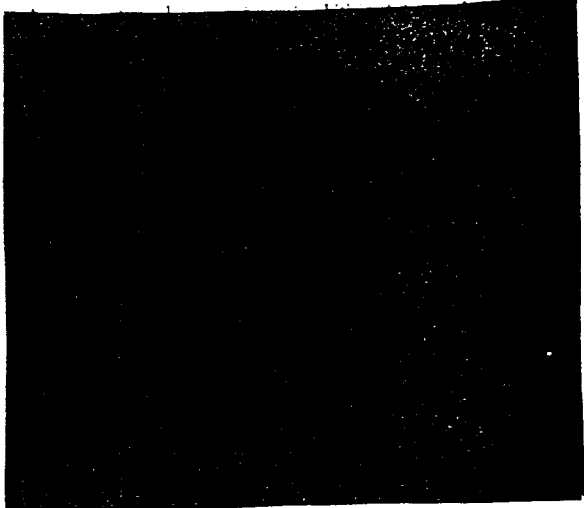
Mobutu and key armed forces officers hope the reforms already made will become sufficiently institutionalized to last beyond the tenure of these advisers. One of the most significant of the reforms—the infusion of discipline in the armed forces—has proved less effective. Thus far, with the exception of the Belgian- and French-advised units, there does not seem to have been a significant crackdown designed to impress on the troops the importance of discipline.

Prospects for Reform

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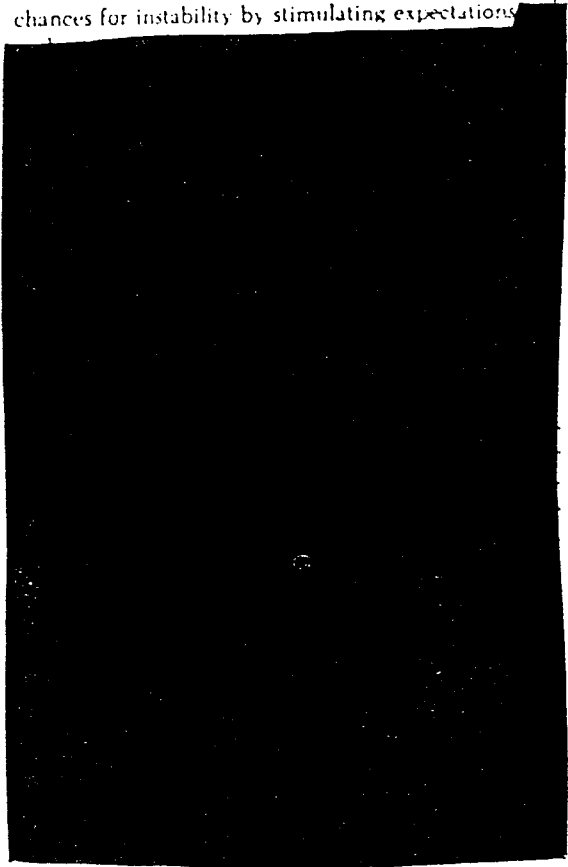
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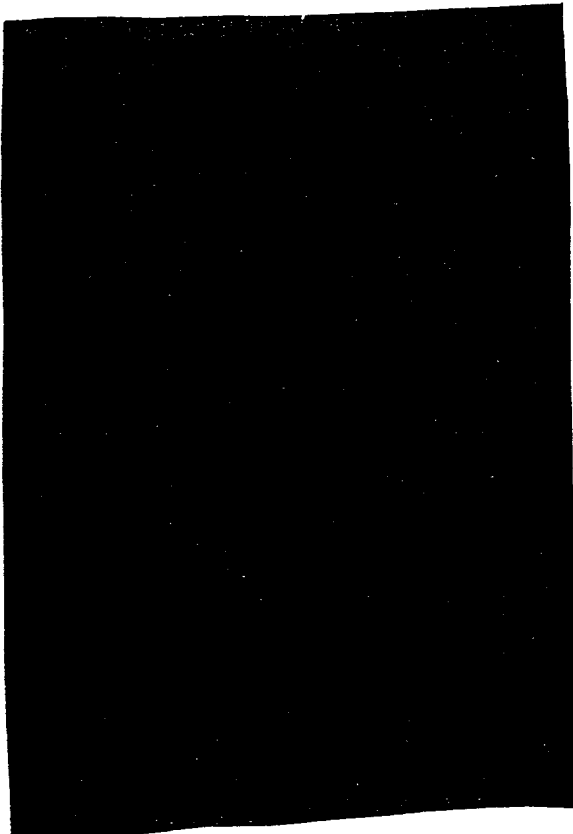
#### The Impact of Reform on Stability

22. Fundamental political changes designed to liberalize the regime would substantially increase chances for instability by stimulating expectations

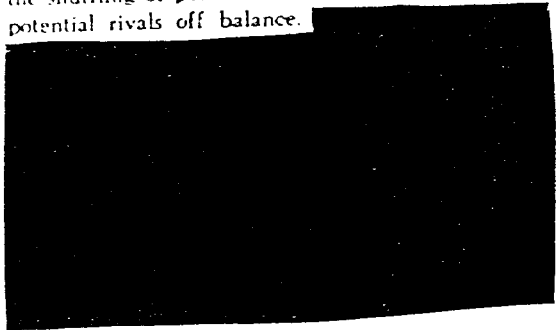


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27. During his 15-year tenure, Mobutu has been extraordinarily successful in controlling military plotting and political intrigue. Through a variety of methods—arrests, intimidation, bribery, rewards, and the shuffling of portfolios—he has been able to keep potential rivals off balance.



30. Another factor is the effectiveness of the security services—the Army and security police. Although ragtag and unprofessional by Western standards, they can contain limited local uprisings and are able to monitor antigovernment activities both at home and abroad. Moreover, their reputation for brutality also acts as a deterrent.



32. An additional important factor that probably limits the potential for revolt is the population's fear of a repetition of the internal violence that characterized

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Zaire in the early 1960s [REDACTED]

35. [REDACTED]

Although disgruntled, many Zairians simply are apolitical; others believe that things could get worse without Mobutu.

33. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

34. The country's size, diversity, and lack of social cohesion helps prevent the coalescence of a viable opposition. The central government's presence in Zaire's diverse regions, tenuous at best since independence, has deteriorated still further in recent years. Several of Zaire's regions are so physically and psychologically separated from Kinshasa that they are part of the country in name only. Deteriorating roads, shortages of fuel, and limited contact between the capital and the outlying regions contribute to their relative isolation and lessen the likelihood that a revolt would spread.

35. Ethnic and regional cleavages that migrants bring with them to the cities remain deeply rooted. This insularity helps to prevent the coalescence of a broadly based dissidence in Kinshasa or in other urban areas.

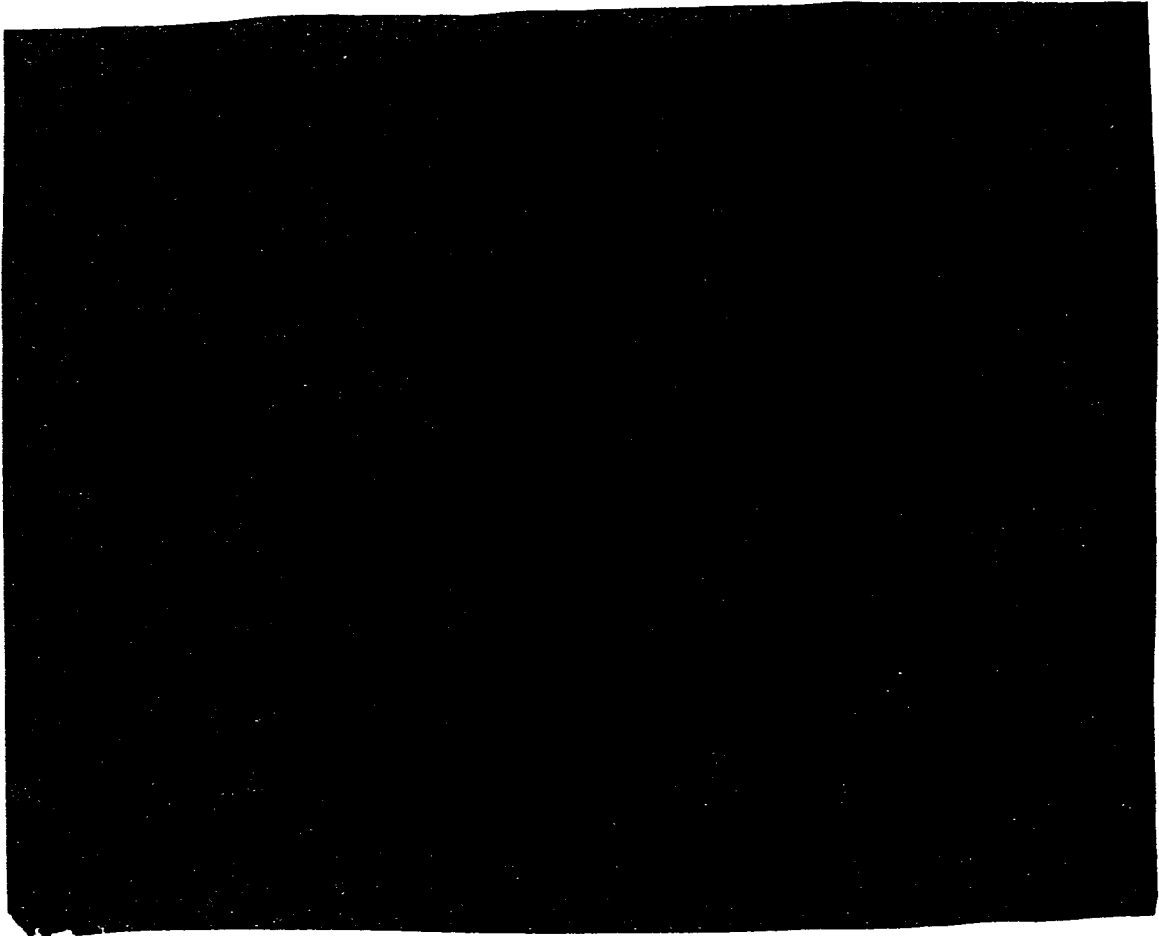
36 "Safety valves" to ameliorate economic hardships in the urban areas to some degree belie the statistical indicators pointing to ever declining living standards. Principal among these safety valves is the village origin of many urban dwellers. In times of shortages or hardship, family members go to their home villages to be fed and cared for; when they return they bring food mostly for family consumption but for sale as well. Some observers point out that 80 percent of all urban women are engaged in some sort of market activity; this contributes in small degree to alleviating the distress of urban workers.

[REDACTED]

37. Because of the responsibilities inherent in the extended family system, those members with jobs or other resources must help less fortunate relatives. This is in effect an informal but effective income redistribution and welfare system that relieves an otherwise bleak economic situation.

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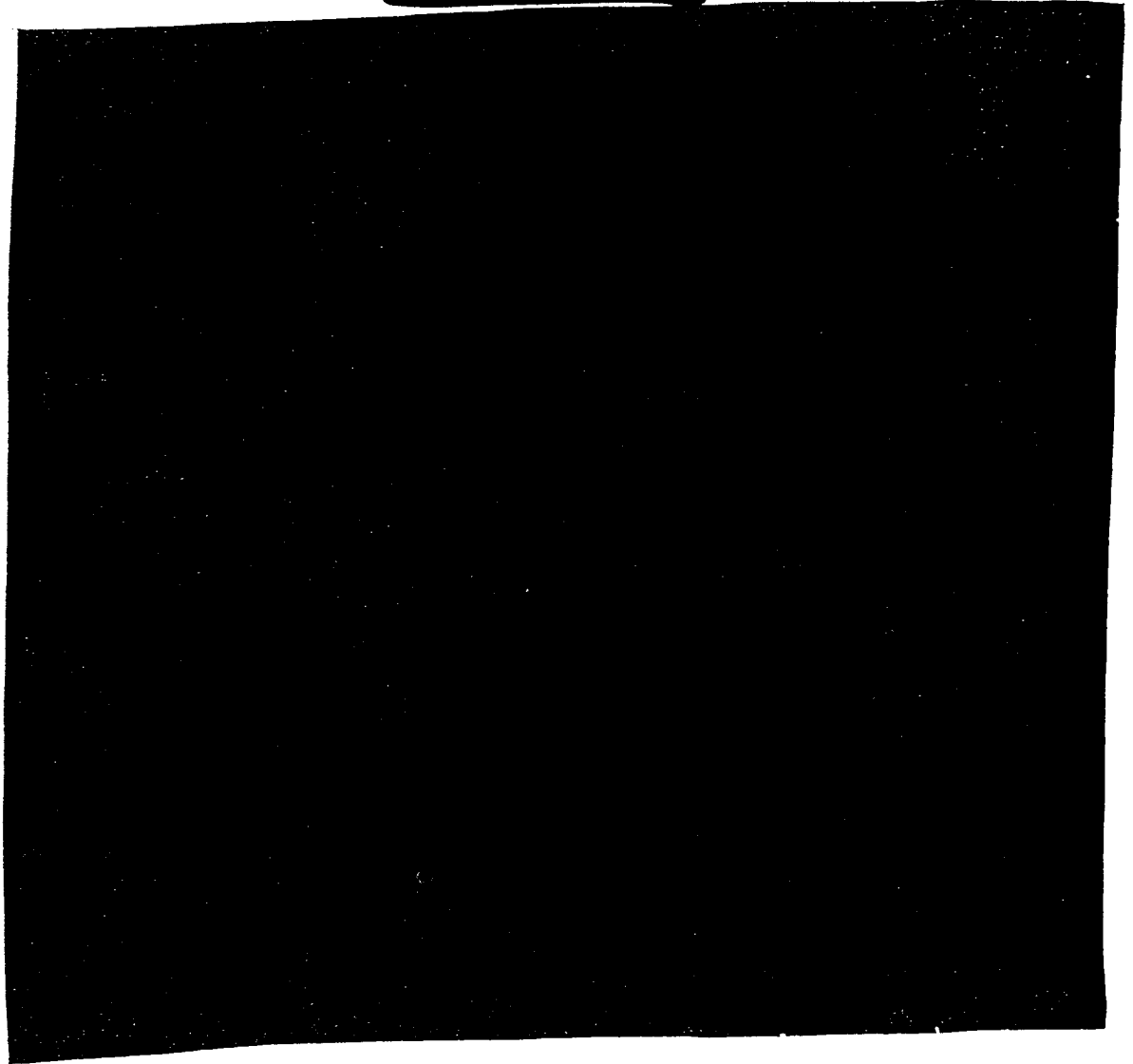


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ANNEX



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