Zaire got embroiled in two crises in 1977-78, dubbed as Shaba I and Shaba II respectively. They gravely threatened the regime of President Mobutu. His army failed to cope with them. He had no option except invoking the aid of some outside powers to rescue him from the predicament. Aid poured from many directions. But the most vital and conspicuous help came from France under the tutelage of President Giscard d’Estaing.

Shaba I crisis cropped up when in late March, 1977, the erstwhile Katangese exiles belonging to the Front de liberation national congolaise (FLNC), numbering 5000, invaded Zaire’s Shaba province and swept through the south-western region without effective opposition from President Mobutu’s forces. By early April they had penetrated deeper and were just fifty miles away from Kolwezi, the principal mining centre of Zaire. The fall of Kolwezi could be disastrous for Mobutu. Hence, he turned to external sources for help. Morocco’s King Hassan II decided to bail out his friend. France backed the Moroccan venture.

In May 1978, once again the copper-rich province of Shaba was in flares. 4,500 FLNC irregulars invaded the region from their bases in Angola and seized Kolwezi. The seizure swung Mobutu in a state of despondency and helplessness. He desperately made an urgent telephone plea to President Giscard for help. Giscard sent 1,200 Foreign Legion paras to Shaba. Belgium also sent another contingent of paras. US furnished long-range C-141 aircrafts to transport the paras.

The Shaba crises were riddled with several complex
ramifications. This study primarily concentrates on the repercussions and reactions, controversy and consequences, and problems and prospects which the French intervention in Shaba occasioned. The study does dwell upon the socio-politico-historico-economic analysis of the Mobutu regime in order to explore the causes of the crises. But its focus is on the alarm and apprehension which the FLNCs led invasion provoked in West and the steps which the French President took to save the Mobutu regime, of course, in league with other powers.

It attempts to find answers to the queries: Why the Shaba crises provoked so much alarm and apprehension in Western capitals, particularly in Paris? Was there any Soviet grand strategy to supersede the Western influence on the black continent? How the debacle of Mobutu could affect the French interests in Africa as Zaire was out of the francophone zone? Of course, France had recently nurtured good relations with Zaire. But still its interests in the country were minimal, and any radical change in the Zairian polity and geography could not affect France much.

Notwithstanding, France jumped into the Zairian fray as if its most vital interests were in jeopardy, risking a possible confrontation with the Soviet Union. Such adventurous step of President Giscard raises certain cogent questions which have been dealt with in this study: Did Giscard intervene in Zaire militarily out of his own free will? Was his France so much capable that he could jump into the turmoil in which he had to compete with one of the super powers? Is there any truth in the remark that his France acted as the "Cuba de l'Occident"?
It was alleged that President Giscard was acting on behalf of the USA because the latter could not intervene directly as this could culminate into super powers conflict, paralysing the SALT talks with the USSR. No doubt, one is sceptical about such collaboration between US and France against the backdrop of the fact that anti-Americanism constituted the most obvious tenet of the French foreign policy. If it is true, then the questions come up: What were the factors and forces which persuaded Giscard to accept this role? What was the extent of collaboration? How and with what success Giscard was able to utilize this collaboration to promote the French national interests in Africa, and simultaneously to neutralize its negative impact on the traditional posture of independent action which was the sheet-anchor of the French foreign policy? This study also tries to probe them.

The other striking aspect to be covered by the study is that although the French intervention helped in the promotion of the EEC interests as whole, it was not welcomed by Belgium and UK since the French action was taken by them as a conscious attempt to lessen their influence in Africa. Particularly, Belgium had always been the dominant force in Zaire, but the French role during the Shaba crises relegated it to the background for the time being, and this irked the Belgian government, which though, took active part along with France in the Shaba expedition.

One significant issue the study seeks to probe is: Could the downfall of President Mobutu queer the pitch for the moderate African regimes, particularly the pro-French ones having military ties with France? The active participation of Morocco and other
African countries in the Shaba crises underscored their fear of Zaire also slipping into the hands of Marxist forces, thereby perpetuating their grip over Africa. Already, the case of Angola falling into the Marxist hands had disconcerted the pro-French African regimes.

Apparently, the Angolan scenario had spawned twin psychological factors. Firstly, the moderate African rulers had started feeling a decline of faith in the Western guarantee for their continuation in power. Secondly, the pro-Soviet African forces began to suspect the potential of the Western powers, particularly the metropolitan ones, to rescue any of their proteges, in the light of the vacillating approach of the US towards the African problems during the Carter regime. These factors could disrupt the cobweb of Western involvement and influence on the black continent that could be ruinous for the metropolitan powers, mainly France. But the Western leaders were now firmly determined to see that such drama was not staged again in Africa.

Against such backdrop, it can be presumed that the Zairian crises prompting the French intervention served the twofold purposes of restoring African faith in the Western capability to succour the allies during crises and as well reminding the radical African rulers of the determination and potentiality of the West to tide over 'Angola-like disruptions'. The study probes this complex phenomenon that opened up new horizons of diplomatic and military collaboration between Africa and the Western powers, led by France. Some take this as helping strengthen the neo-colonial network in Africa while some discern in it the emergence
of a positive symbiosis between Africa and Europe. Hence, the questions ensue: Did the Zairian imbroglio cement the naked neocolonial plexus of rapports between Africa and Europe? Or did the crises give the African moderate rulers latitude to manoeuvre and cajole the Western powers to sing to their tune otherwise their interests could be irreparably undermined? This study probes all such manifold dimensions of the crises.

Of course, much has been written about the Shaba crises. But actually, no in-depth and consolidated study has been undertaken in the context. Hence, the prime purpose of this thesis is to make an in-depth study of the subject, and attempt to coalesce all the fortuitous interpretations and factual information about the crises so that a systematic assessment could be made. Methodology, pursued in the prosecution of this study, is primarily historical-analytical based on the empirical data, facts and conclusions gathered after extensive study of primary and secondary sources of materials during the field study trips undertaken to Belgium, France, Kenya and Zaire.

The study spans out into seven Chapters dealing with different dimensions of the Shaba crises which are as follows:

Chapters I and II dwell upon the socio-economic-political-historical factors which led to the Shaba crises. However, the emphasis is on the analysis of the nature of the Mobutu regime whose economic and political policies mainly fuelled the crises by sapping the Zairian economy and polity.

Chapter III seeks a detailed analysis of the incidents that featured during the Shaba crises of 1977-78, viz; the FLNC strategy of assault, the Franco-Moroccan intervention, the French
intervention, and the controversy over the Kolwezi massacres. It also probes into the genesis of FLNC and its links with foreign powers like Angola and Cuba.

Chapter IV is devoted to the study of the concern and alarm which the Shaba crises created in certain African capitals. How the fall of Mobutu could affect their interests? What were the measures taken by the respective rulers of those countries to help Mobutu in coping with the crises? It has been also explored how the pressures mounted on President Giscard to rescue Mobutu by the French speaking African countries facilitated the French intervention.

Chapter V explores as to why the Shaba crises provoked so much alarm and apprehension in the Western capitals. It probes whether there was any Soviet grand strategy to supersede the Western influence in Africa or not, and as well what was the extent of Soviet collusion, if any, with the rebels? An in-depth analysis of the Western interests in terms of economy, diplomacy and strategy in Zaire has been undertaken and seen as to how the fall of Mobutu could affect the Western interests. A comparative study of the French interests in Zaire vis-a-vis other Western powers has been also done.

Chapter VI investigates why France jumped into the Zairian fray, although its vital interests could not be said to have been threatened. It probes whether President Giscard acted out of his free will or on behalf of USA! It also attempts to find why USA did not intervene and allegedly resorted to the proxy intervention through France!

Chapter VII scrutinizes the reaction and responses within
and without France to the French action in Shaba. It analyses the repercussions of the French action in Zaire on the EEC interests in general and the French interests in particular. Did France accomplish something more than its other EEC partners in terms of economy and influence? How and to what extent? These issues have been dealt with in this chapter. Additionally, it also studies as to why Belgium did not appreciate the French action! Did the French action affect its interests in Zaire?