

Congo Crisis, 1960-65

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Introduction

For five difficult years, from 1960 to 1965, the Republic of the Congo (now Democratic Republic of the Congo, or DRC) was the center of global conflict, the scene of a war of post-colonial chaos. At stake was the future of Congo—would it survive as a country? Could the suffering of its people be alleviated?—as well as the future of American and Soviet competition in Africa, and future role of the United Nations in world affairs.

The Congo Crisis was not the first war of decolonization in Africa, but it was the worst up to that point in time. And it was the first of a series of wars to shake the giant territory (a land equal in size to all of the United States east of the Mississippi River) and its huge population.

Had the Congo Crisis of 1960-65 been resolved differently, the country's history might have been much different, possibly for better, possibly for worse. Still in the future was the Congo War of 1996-1997 and the wars that followed—and continue to this day—were worse in human suffering and destruction.¹ But it was the Congo Crisis that did the most to shape the country, to show the potential benefits of regional separatism and ethnic conflict. Had the events of 1960-65 turned out differently, the history of Africa's largest territory would have been much different, possibly for the better.

The Congo Crisis did more than permanently divide the 250 ethnic groups and 700 languages and dialects of the Congo, creating fissures that

would lead to widespread warfare in the 1990s and after.² It showed the world that the process of decolonization was not going to be an easy one. The newly emerging states were as likely as not to be born into the horrors of war, as rival factions fought for control of territory, population, and mineral wealth.



Former colonial powers would be shoved to the side as has-beens, unable to influence events. And outside powers—the Soviet Union and United States—would have more influence over actual events, drawn in by the chaos of the situation and their mutual fears of each other,

¹ 'Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo', *Council on Foreign Relations*, 20 July 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violence-democratic-republic-congo>

² 'Democratic Republic of the Congo', *Minority Rights Group International*, n.d., <https://minorityrights.org/country/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>

working through proxies and allies to achieve their own goals of global influence.³



The Congo Crisis also was where United Nations peacekeeping and mediation fully emerged, with creation of the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC). Invented by UN leaders in response to the 1948 and 1956 wars in the Middle East, peacekeeping was a weak but promising tool, until Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld saw in the horrors of the Congo Crisis an opportunity for the UN to make a vital contribution to conflict resolution. For the first time, peacekeeping was authorized under Chapter 7 of the United Nations Charter, not the simply patrol between the lines, inhibiting the warring sides from return to violence, but to fight to stop a war that was tearing the newly born country apart.⁴

In reality, the UN intervention in Congo—small, undermanned and underequipped though force the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC) was—had major successes. It kept Congo from splitting into innumerable ethnic pieces, and by demonstrating the importance the commitment of the international community to

maintenance of existing borders, it set a precedent that helped save virtually every other country that de-colonized after. But it could do only so much to patch Congo together. The forces of disintegration and civil war emerged thirty years later and continue to haunt the 100 million people of Congo today. Hammarskjöld himself would die there, killed in a plane crash that remains controversial today.

Background

The situation was the result of the complexity of the enormous territory and ethnic divisions of the Belgian Congo when still a colony, as well as the rapacious nature of Belgian colonialism, and Cold War confrontation between the Soviet Union and United States, related to their battle for dominance over the non-aligned nations for more political power. The Congo Crisis came within days of independence from Belgium on 30 June 1960.

The conflict caused the deaths of over 100,000 people and would be the ripple effect that led to many other confrontations and tensions that last even today. But what led to the conflict and what can we learn from it? Is there anything we can take from the Congo crisis that we should take heed of towards fixing political and international conflicts? And could the United Nations—both its Member States and the Secretariate under Hammarskjöld—been more effective permanently resolving the underlying fissures, and setting a precedent to guide the international community through other conflicts of de-colonization later?

³ Lawrence S. Kaplan, 'The United States, Belgium, and the Congo Crisis of 1960', *The Review of Politics*, vol. 29, no. 2 (April 1967), pp. 239-56, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1405667> ; and Omapuwa Igho Natufe, 'The Cold War and the Congo Crisis, 1960-1961', *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e*

l'Oriente, vol. 39, no. 3 (September 1984), pp. 353-74, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40759745>

⁴ David N. Gibbs, 'Dag Hammarskjöld, the United Nations, and the Congo Crisis of 1960-1: A Reinterpretation', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1 (March 1993), pp. 163-74, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/161349>

The problems of Congo were inherent in the enormity and complexity of the vast territory and complicated population, virtually all of which was never united or even connected until 1885. In that year, King Leopold II of Belgium was awarded complete control over the entire basin of the Congo River the Berlin Conference. The newly declared Congo Free State was a Belgian colony run for Leopold's personal profit. Leopold's agents were pushed to maximize exports of ivory and rubber, ebony and other natural resources. Entire villages, communities and ethnic groups were enslaved to serve Belgian demands. The situation quickly deteriorated into humanitarian disaster, a disgrace acknowledged even by other colonial powers and widely protested by humanitarian activists around the world. Among the empires of Europe, Belgium's Congo had a well-deserved reputation for outright depravity.⁵



UN peacekeeper in Republic of the Congo, 1961

After Leopold's death in 1909, the situation in Congo gradually improved, but it never made great progress by any standard. Belgium made minimal efforts to prepare the territory for self-rule. At independence, Congo famous had fewer than 100 graduates from its first, newly established high school, and less than 500 miles of paved road. The country's first university had been created by the Belgians only six years before.⁶

At independence on 30 June 1960, there were no political organization, no media, nothing but a handful of ambitious former colonial officials and strong personalities. As they tried to quickly set up a new government, all of the country's long-standing issues relating to federalism and ethnic discrimination remained unsolved and got worse over time. It didn't take long for things to get out of hand. In the first week of July, the country broke into chaos.

The Congo's own army mutinied against the government, and violence quickly spread to ordinary people. Initially some of the violence was directed at the country's white civilians and their businesses, which prompted Belgium to intervene with its army to protect them against the angry Congolese. With thousands of Europeans fleeing the country, it did not take long for news about the atrocities against whites to appear in newspapers around the globe.

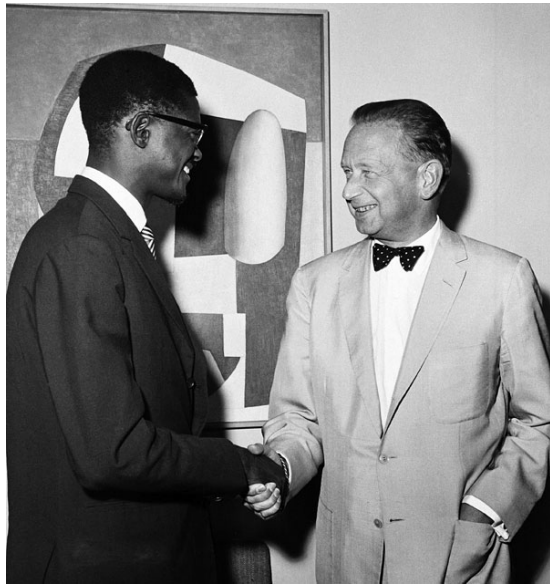
However, the Belgians made a big mistake, as they did not seek permission from the Congo's current leaders, President Joseph Kasa-Vubu, and Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, before sending the Belgian Army. Worse, the Belgian Army was there only to protect Belgian

⁵ Eduardo Montero and Sara Lowes, 'King Leopold's ghost: The legacy of labour coercion in the DRC', VoxEU, 14 August 2019, <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/king-leopolds-ghost-legacy-labour-coercion-drc> ; and Martina Schwikowski, 'DR Congo: King Leopold's legacy', *Deutsche Welle*, 29 July 2020,

<https://www.dw.com/en/king-leopolds-legacy-the-lingering-chaos-in-dr-congo/a-53982357>

⁶ Howard W. French, 'The African question: who is to blame?; the finger points to the West, and Congo is a harsh example', *New York Times*, 16 January 1999, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/01/16/arts/african-question-who-blame-finger-points-west-congo-harsh-example.html>

nationals. It also protected the businesses and property of other foreign residents. But it did nothing to help black Congolese, whom it continued to treat as colonial inferiors, without rights or needs.



A brief moment of optimism. Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba and UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld in 1960

In desperation, the Kasa-Vubu and Lumumba appealed to the United Nations for assistance removing Belgian troops, as they criticized as a violation of Congo's national sovereignty. Suspicious of the UN Security Council, which was controlled by the votes of France, the United Kingdom and United States, they appealed directly to the UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld.

While this was intended to encourage peace and order, the arrival of the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC) created tension between Kasa-Vubu and Lumumba. Lumumba believed that the UN should use force to bring order back to the government, but this was met with push back from Kasa-Vubu. The United States themselves supported the efforts of the U.N., however, the Eisenhower administration grew concerns that the Congo crisis would lead

to intervention from the Soviet Union. With them and the U.N. refusing to send troops to assist in the fight, Lumumba reacted by calling in support from the Soviet Union, who happily sent their own military support to them. This would then cause the Congo crisis to become tied up within the complexities of the Cold War.

The Congo Crisis became a proxy battle between the Soviet Union and United States, with the United Nations under Hammarskjöld struggling to maintain order. Lumumba's involvement with the Soviets was sudden and unspoken between him and Kasa-Vubu. The U.N., after hearing about the Soviet assistance, began refusing to assist the Congo with any peacekeeping efforts. The feud between Lumumba and Kasa-Vubu ignited a split between the central government, causing the country to break into 4 different smaller states, Katanga, Kasai, the Orientale province, and Léopoldville.



Congo's first President, Joseph Kasa-Vubu

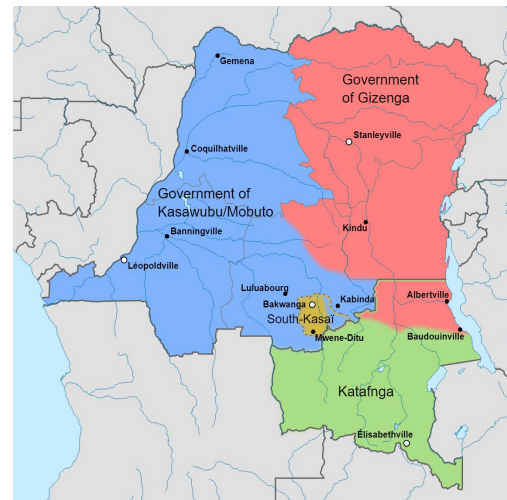
Kasa-Vubu would attempt to dismiss Lumumba, which would become successful due to the overwhelming U.S. support of the decision. But what's interesting is that Lumumba would also dismiss Kasa-Vubu as well, leading to a unique situation where the Republic of the Congo technically had no government at all.

Understandably, this caused nothing but even more chaos, which the United Nations sought to soothe to prevent any more issues happening. The remnants of the government were at each other's throats, with Lumumba's supporters in the Congo being outraged at Kasa-Vubu's supporters, and a civil war was being threatened due to the conflicting sides.

In order to prevent this, and any more blood to be split via civilian hands, Congolese Colonel Joseph Mobutu orchestrated a coup d'état on 14 September 1961, establishing his own government rule and ordered the Soviets out of the country. Mobutu was pro-Western, easily gaining the support from the United States, pushing Congo away from Soviet and non-aligned leaders and connections. His ties to the military also allowed him to learn of a plot to assassinate him. Mobutu responded by pinning the blame onto Lumumba, who was captured and executed in January 1961. Kasa-Vubu was reinstated as president.

The assassination of Lumumba on 17 January 1961 was one of the most important turning points of the conflict.⁷ It led to widespread outrage among his supporters, not just in the Congo but among oppressed peoples around the world, for whom he quickly became a martyr for freedom. Communists, socialists, and advocates of the Third World cause from Cairo to Moscow publicly criticized the role of Belgium, Britain, and the United States in Lumumba's assassination. Lumumba's supporters widely believed his murder was a plot to 'recolonize'

the Congo in order to control its vast supplies of natural resources.



Congo divided into four seemingly separate regions, 1961.

Following the assassination of Lumumba, civil war seemed unavoidable. When news of Lumumba's death spread, in February 1961, an angry mob broke into the UN headquarters in New York, threatening Dag Hammarskjöld for not protecting Lumumba.

After the deadlock caused by the rivalry between Lumumba and Kasa-Vubu, the country split into 4 sectors. The secession of *Katanga*, a mineral-rich province in the south-east had previously been orchestrated with Belgian assistance. Each sector stood headstrong in their own beliefs and passionate about dominating the future of the country. The forces loyal to Lumumba were weaker after his killing, and Katanga was forced to rejoin Congo. But tensions in other regions grew tense and conflict broke out all over the country.

⁷ Alanna O'Malley, 'The Congo crisis as the turning point for decolonization', *United Nations History Project*, September 2018,

https://www.histecon.magd.cam.ac.uk/unhist/image-of-the_month/image_of_the_month_Sept18.html



Scene of the airplane crash in Rhodesia that killed UN Secretary-General Hammarskjöld

At the request of President Kasa-Vubu and Prime Minister Lumumba, the UN Security Council mandated Hammarskjöld to intervene. But the Cold War constellation turned this into a mission impossible. Hammarskjöld was soon criticized by either the East or the West for almost every subsequent decision. He tried to maintain ownership over the UN's role by seeking the cooperation of as many states as possible from the non-aligned movement. India's Nehru, Egypt's Nasser, Guinea's Sekou Touré, Ghana's Nkrumah and Tunisia's Bourguiba, became important counterparts and at times even allies to bring a visible involvement of the South into the peacekeeping efforts. Moroccan, Swedish and Irish blue helmets also strengthened the operations. Appreciating Hammarskjöld's intentions, African leaders sought first to influence Lumumba towards measured interaction with the UN and later refused support to the Soviet initiative campaigning for Hammarskjöld's resignation.⁸

After Lumumba's death, the Security Council agreed to allow UN peacekeepers to use force to stop worse violence. It also urged all factions to overcome the impasse. Efforts sadly fell through, as the civil unrest seemed unstoppable. Eight months after Lumumba's execution, Dag Hammarskjöld and 15 others died in the wreck of his DC6 airplane *Albertina*. It crashed when

approaching the airport of the Northern Rhodesian mining town of Ndola in the night of 17-18 September 1961. Officially the result of a pilot error, suspicions that the plane was shot down or brought down by a bomb or sabotage have never disappeared.

With Hammarskjöld's leadership gone, but his example foremost in their minds, surviving UN officials worked to stabilize the situation. Over the next four years, the Congo saw endless instability and a series of short-lived governments. Mobutu, with help from the United States, gained control of the central government and the military by 1965. Although his rule was widely criticized and despised by many, the country stayed at peace through most of his thirty-one-year rule, before collapsing again in 1996.

An example of foreign intervention: *Operation Dragon Rouge*



President Kennedy and then-Colonel Mobutu meet, 23 May 1963.

The Kennedy administration played a special role in the Congo. After Stanleyville fell to rebel forces on 4 August 1964, U.S. military

⁸ Henning Melber, 'Lumumba, Hammarskjöld and the Cold War in the Congo', *New African*, 17 January 2017, <https://newafricanmagazine.com/14857/>

assistance increased. This was due to the rebel forces being backed by neighboring African nations, as well as Soviet and Chinese communists. In response, the U.S. made approaches to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), to secure support for the Congo. However, by late October, the situation grew dire, as by 28 October, the rebel forces placed all Westerners in the region under arrest and used lethal force against them. A significant enough number of hostages were enough to cause the U.S. to make a joint effort with Belgium to rescue the hostages.

Operation Dragon Rouge was the name of the rescue operation to save both Western and Belgian hostages from rebel rule. Negotiations with the rebel forces, known as the Simba rebellion, failed, due to the communist backing said rebellion was behind them. In response, the United States and Belgian military staged a combined assault on the early morning of 24 November 1964.

American war planes dropped a total of 320 Belgian soldiers onto the airfield in Stanleyville. This would lead to a very successful operation, as the combined efforts allowed them to rescue most of the hostages, killing many of the Simbas in return. The Prime Minister of the Congo at the time, Moise Tshombe, was left politically damaged, his political power was seen as ineffective by Kasa-Vubu and Mobutu.

As such, they missed Tshombe, causing the country to almost break into another civil war scare. Mobutu would attempt another successful coup d'etat, and remove both the President and Prime Minister, finally taking complete control over the government.

United Nations involvement

During the Congo crisis, the United Nations deployed a peace keeping force named the United Nations Operation in the Congo. (ONUC) This was the first sign in a major

peacekeeping mission and remains as one of the biggest UN operations to this day. As stated before, the invasion of Belgian troops broke Congolese law, causing Tshombe to ask the United Nations for military assistance. UN Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjöld called for a night meeting and asked the council to assist with the “utmost speed”.



United Nations peacekeeping fighter planes, helicopters and a transport provided by Iran, Philippines and Sweden, at Kamina Air Base, Republic of the Congo, January 1963.

There were multiple UN peacekeepers, all working together to end the crisis and keep Congo unified. The force behind the UN efforts came from Dag Hammarskjöld. As UN Secretary General, he had to abide rules set by the United Nations Security Council, which initially prevented intervention in the domestic affairs of a civil war. Previously peacekeeping only interposed neutral forces between warring sides to maintain a previously agreed peace. In this case, not only was this not an international conflict, but it on-going. UN forces would face actual combat to stop domestic challenges from trying to take over the country or secede.

There were many conflicts within the UN about what they could and could not do. The Permanent Members of the Security Council could not agree on a peacekeeping mandate, not surprising because the Congo situation was very different from previous situations. A great complication came when Patrice Lumumba approached the Soviet Union for help against the

peacekeeping force. Only after the Soviet Union reversed could a Security Council peacekeeping mandate be agreed.

But with the arrival of peacekeepers, the Belgian government withdrew its soldiers, leaving the UN's troops the largest force in the country, although still quite small compared to the scale of the country's territory and population. The UN never had more than 15,000 personnel for the entire country. In the secessionist province of Katanga, it had 5,200 personnel to deal with a territory the size of Texas.

After Lumumba's assassination in 1961, UN troops began to get even stronger in response. Noticing that the situation was getting increasingly worse, the plan directly centered on preventing any more civil war, allowing the government to restore order to the country. While it seemed to work, Tshombe's breakaway mercenaries fought back against the UN forces, causing multiple clashes.

The crisis reached another difficult moment on 17 September 1961, when UN Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjöld was killed in a plane crash while on a trip to neighboring Rhodesia to negotiate with Tshombe. He was succeeded as Secretary-General by U Thant, a Burmese diplomat, who took a more aggressive approach. He decided that removing Tshombe from Katanga would be the primary military objective. In late 1961, UN forces were fighting for control over Katanga's capital, and commanders of contents from India, Ireland and Sweden led heroic battles, against exceptional odds, becoming military heroes.

This would allow the Indian ONUC group to successfully take control of Katanga. The UN special representative in Katanga, Conor Cruise O'Brien announced that the Katanga secession movement was over, which caused most of the forces to believe that the UN forces defeated Tshombe's troops. However, this announcement was too early, as a group of Irish UN troops was attacked by foreign mercenaries in Katanga.

They were outnumbered, but they managed to hold out, inflicting heavy losses against Tshombe's faction.

After the Katangan event, the United Nations would launch Operation Unokat, putting pressure on Tshombe to enter negotiations. U Thant would create a plan to attempt to allow Katanga to rejoin a federalized Congo, which Tshombe accepted. Wary of Tshombe delaying the conversation, he sent Ralph Bunche to help with the plan to help eliminate the foreign mercenaries. Tshombe would later make it obvious that he did not indeed rejoin the Congo, as he began constructing new airfields and defensive positions. Major General Dewan Prem Chand launched Operation Grandslam, and by the end of it, UN troops took over Elisabethville. Tshombe would surrender soon after, declaring that the Katanga secession was over.

After the operation, the UN decided to cut the force, leaving a very small force in the country. Canadian Brigadier-General Jacques Dextraze was sent to the Congo to begin the process of withdrawing the remaining forces from the Congo. However, as they were doing so, the Simba rebellion would begin to form. He launched a small operation to save at least a few of the threatened aid workers that were under attack.

Crisis Characters



Ralph Bunche, 1904-1971, was an American political scientist, diplomat, and leading actor in the mid-20th-century decolonization process and US civil rights movement. He received the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize for his mediation in the Middle East. He was involved in the formation and early administration of the United Nations and played a major role in both the decolonization process and numerous UN peacekeeping operations.

Bunche served on the US delegation to the Dumbarton Oaks Conference in 1944 and the United Nations Conference in 1945 that drafted the UN Charter. He then served on the American delegation to the first session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1946 and joined the UN as head of the Trusteeship Department, beginning a series of troubleshooting roles and responsibilities related to decolonization. In 1948, Bunche became an acting mediator for the Middle East, negotiating an armistice between Egypt and Israel, for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950.

Bunch remained the top UN official for peacekeeping through the 1960s, but he was primarily a negotiator, not responsible for operational details of making peacekeeping work. His role was managing the politics and policies guiding the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC), getting the host government, donor governments and rebels to cooperate. He was not the operational leader, making peacekeeping actually happen. That task was left largely to Brian Urquhart.



Lieutenant General Dewan Prem Chand, 1916-2003, was an Indian Army officer. He served as Force Commander of United Nations peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cyprus, Namibia and Zimbabwe. With the rank of Lieutenant General (three stars), Chand was the senior foreign military commander in Congo, although he had no authority over the forces of other countries.

In the Congo Crisis he commanded a force of some 4,500 Indian Army personnel. Chand commanded troops in the United Nations Operation in the Congo in the breakaway Republic of the Congo (Léopoldville) province of Katanga in 1962 during the Congo Crisis. He was awarded India's Param Vishisht Seva Medal for distinguished service during this operation.

Chand commanded United Nations forces during two of their most sensitive peacekeeping operations, and later was widely acknowledged

as the United Nation's most successful mission in Namibia.



Jacques Alfred Dextraze, 1919-93, was a Canadian military officer. He served as Chief of the Defence Staff of Canada from 1972–1977.

He served in World War II in Northwest Europe where he was granted command of his regiment in action and was awarded two Distinguished Service Orders. In 1950 he was called back from a civilian career to build, train and command the 2nd Battalion, Royal 22nd Regiment, in the Korean War. His battalion won considerable acclaim for its stubborn stand at "Hill 355" when other allied troops withdrew, leaving the "Vingt deux (22nd)" surrounded but unshaken.

In 1962 he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General (one star). In 1963 he was the first Canadian to be Chief of Staff of the United Nations Operation in the Congo in Congo (Léopoldville). The military component headquarters, coordinated by Dextraze, was in the process of planning the mission's withdrawal in early 1964 as the Simba rebellion loomed. Dextraze launched a small-scale operation during Pierre Mulele's Kwilu Province uprising of January 1964 in order to save at least some of the threatened aid workers and missionaries under attack from the jeunesses.

He also led missions to rescue a group of Non-Governmental Organization personnel, who were hostages of Katangan rebels in the Congo. He was awarded the Commander of the Order of the British Empire for his service. He was one of Canada's most distinguished peacekeeping commanders.

In 1967 he was promoted to Major General and Lieutenant-General in 1968. In 1972, he was promoted to the rank of General and became Chief of Defence Staff of the Canadian Forces for an unusual period of five years.



Dag Hammarskjöld, 1905-61, was a Swedish economist and diplomat, and the second Secretary-General of the United Nations, serving from April 1953 until his death in a plane crash in September 1961. He remains the youngest person to have held the post, 47 years old when appointed. He was a son of Hjalmar Hammarskjöld, Prime Minister of Sweden, 1914-17.

Hammarskjöld's tenure was characterized by efforts to strengthen the newly formed UN both internally and externally. He led initiatives to improve morale and organizational efficiency while seeking to make the UN more responsive to global issues. He presided over the creation of the first UN peacekeeping forces in Egypt and the United Nations Operation in the Congo

(ONUC), and personally intervened to defuse diplomatic crises. Hammarskjöld's second term was cut short when he died in a plane crash while en route to cease-fire negotiations during the Congo Crisis.

Hammarskjöld was and remains well regarded internationally as a capable diplomat and administrator, and his efforts to resolve various global crises led to him being the only posthumous recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. He is considered one of the two best UN secretaries-general, along with his successor U Thant, and his appointment has been hailed as one of the most notable successes for the organization. U.S. President John F. Kennedy called Hammarskjöld "the greatest statesman of our century".



Major General Carl von Horn, 1903-89, was a Swedish Army officer known for his service in various UN missions. He was the chief of United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in Palestine, became Supreme Commander of the United Nations Operation in the Congo during the Congo Crisis, and later commander of United Nations Yemen Observation Mission in Yemen.

In 1958, von Horn was appointed chief of the UN Truce Supervision Organization in Palestine by Dag Hammarskjöld and promoted to major general (two stars). At first, he allowed himself "to be optimistic" and he wrote in his memoirs that "instead of fully armed troops, tanks and artillery or even the threat of sanctions, Dag's moral support and my own determination was everything I had." In 1960 he became, with short notice, Supreme Commander of the UN Force in the Congo during the beginning of what was to develop into the Congo Crisis. Other contributing countries, however, refused to accept his authority over their personnel, leading to endless bickering among the peacekeepers, who operated separately much of the time, sometimes with little coordination.

Horn found his task impossible frustrating. His critics thought him an arrogant leader. He sometimes refused to abide by the UN organization's requests for policy adjustments and opposed UN political leaders when they tried to adjust military dispositions, deployment and operations in the field.



Joseph Kasa-Vubu (also Joseph Kasavubu), 1915-1969, was a Congolese politician who served as the first President of the Republic of the Congo, 1960-65, although he had little or no authority outside the national capital city of Leopoldville (today known as Kinshasa).

A member of the Kongo ethnic group, Kasa-Vubu became the leader of the Alliance des

Bakongo (ABAKO) party in the 1950s and soon became a leading proponent of Congo's independence from Belgian colonial rule. He then became the country's first president in a coalition with Patrice Lumumba as prime minister. Less than a week after the country's independence in 1960, their government was confronted by the Congo Crisis, a series of secession movements and rebellions.

Kasa-Vubu, a centrist, clashed with the leftist Lumumba when the latter ordered assistance from the Soviet Union, leading to a political deadlock. Kasa-Vubu then dissolved Lumumba's government, accusing it of having communist sympathies. Following Lumumba's execution in 1961, Kasa-Vubu presided over a series of weak governments while confronting subsequent rebellions by Lumumba's supporters. In 1965, he was overthrown in another coup by Joseph-Désiré Mobutu and died in exile four years later.



Patrice Lumumba, 1925-1961, born Isaïe Tasumbu Tawosa, was a Congolese politician and independence leader who served as the first prime minister of the Republic of the Congo from June until September 1960, following the May 1960 election. He was the leader of the Congolese National Movement (MNC) from 1958 until his execution in January 1961.

Ideologically an African nationalist and pan-Africanist, he played a significant role in the transformation of the Congo from a colony of Belgium into an independent republic. He was the most charismatic figure among early Congolese leaders, although he also was unpredictable and difficult to work with.

Shortly after Congolese independence in June 1960, a mutiny broke out in the army, marking the beginning of the Congo Crisis. Lumumba appealed to the United States and the United Nations for help to suppress the Belgian-supported Katangan secessionists led by Moïse Tshombe. Both refused, as the Belgian government had convinced them that Lumumba was communist, anti-white, and anti-Western. These suspicions deepened when Lumumba turned to the Soviet Union for assistance, which the CIA described as a "classic communist takeover". This led to growing differences with President Joseph Kasa-Vubu and chief-of-staff Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, as well as with the United States and Belgium, who opposed the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

After Mobutu's military coup, Lumumba attempted to escape to Stanleyville to join his supporters who had established a new anti-Mobutu rival state called the Free Republic of the Congo. Lumumba was captured and imprisoned en route by state authorities under Mobutu. He was handed over to Katangan authorities and executed in the presence of Katangan and Belgian officials and military officers. His body was thrown into a shallow grave, but later dug up and destroyed.

Following his execution, he was widely seen as a martyr for the wider pan-African movement. Over the years, inquiries have shed light on the events surrounding Lumumba's death and, in particular, on the roles played by Belgium and the United States. In 2002, Belgium formally apologized for its role in the execution. In 2022, a gold-capped tooth, all that remained of his body, was repatriated to the Democratic Republic of the Congo by Belgium.



Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu wa za Banga, 1930-1997, commonly known as Mobutu Sese Seko or simply just Mobutu, was a Congolese politician and military officer and president of Zaire for thirty-two years, 1965-97. During the Congo Crisis, Mobutu, as Chief of Staff of the Army and supported by Belgium and the United States, deposed the government of left-wing nationalist Patrice Lumumba in 1960. Mobutu installed a government that arranged for Lumumba's execution in 1961, and continued to lead the country's armed forces until he took power directly in a second coup in 1965.

To consolidate his power, he established the Popular Movement of the Revolution as the sole legal political party in 1967, changed the Congo's name to Zaire in 1971, and his own name to Mobutu Sese Seko in 1972. Mobutu claimed that his political ideology was "neither left nor right, nor even centre", though nevertheless he developed a regime that was intensely autocratic even by African standards of his time. He attempted to purge the country of all colonial cultural influence through his

program of "national authenticity". Mobutu was the object of a pervasive cult of personality. During his rule, he amassed a large personal fortune through economic exploitation and corruption, leading some to call his rule a "kleptocracy". He presided over a period of widespread human rights violations. Under his rule, the nation also suffered from uncontrolled inflation, a large debt, and massive currency devaluations.

Mobutu received support from Belgium, France and the United States. He also built close ties with the government of South Africa. From 1972 onward, he was also supported by Mao Zedong of China, mainly due to his anti-Soviet stance but also as part of Mao's attempts to create a bloc of loyal African-Asian nations.



Seán Mac Eoin, 1893-1973, was an Ireland Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1961, he was appointed Force Commander of the United Nations Operation in the Congo, with the rank of Brigadier General (one star) under Swedish Major General van Horn, with operational responsibility for the 20,000 troops of many

different nationalities. Despite the chaos surrounding the complicated, multi-national force, he was held in high regard. This early command was not effective, since other national elements refused to accept his authority, preferring to rely on instructions from their home governments.

Instead, Mac Eoin mostly commanded Ireland's own soldiers during some of the fiercest fighting of the Congo Crisis. U Thant, the United Nations Secretary General said General Mac Eoin had "discharged his duties with eminence", and he was awarded a Distinguished Service Medal. On his return to Ireland, he took over his role as Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces. The emergence of The Troubles in 1969 left the Irish Army somewhat overstretched.



Conor Cruise O'Brien, 1917-2008, nicknamed "The Cruiser", was an Irish diplomat, politician, writer, historian and academic, who served as Ireland's Minister for Posts and Telegraphs from 1973 to 1977, a member of the Irish parliament from 1969 to 1977, and a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) from January 1973 to March 1973.

He came to prominence in 1961, after leaving Ireland's UN delegation to become special representative for Secretary-General Hammarskjöld in the Katanga region of the newly independent Congo. O'Brien accused British, French and white Rhodesian interests of attempting to partition Katanga as a pro-Western client state. He led UN peacekeeping forces to oppose a Western-financed mercenaries and local Katangan forces.



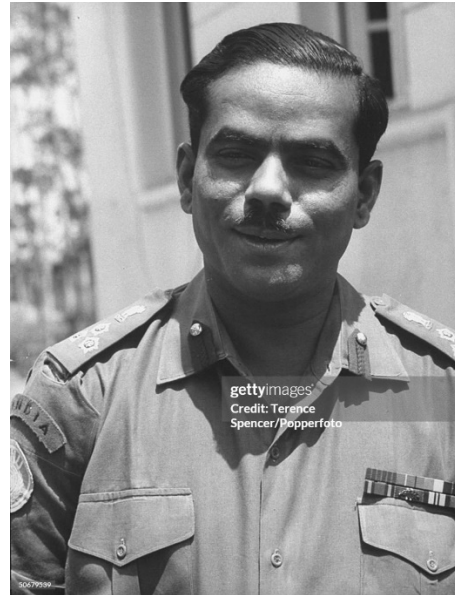
Patrick Quinlan, 1919-97, was an Irish Army officer who commanded the Irish UN force in the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC). He most famous for leading, as a Lt. Colonel, the Irish in the Siege of Jadotville in Katanga in 1961, where he surrendered when they ran out of ammunition and other supplies. Despite the initial lack of recognition for the events leading up to the surrender, in the years following Quinlan's death his reputation in Ireland was restored.

The Siege of Jadotville took place in September 1961, during the UN intervention in the Katanga conflict in Congo-Léopoldville. "A" Company, 35th Battalion (UN service) of the Irish Army

ONUC contingent, commanded by Quinlan, was attacked by Katanga Gendarmerie troops loyal to President Moïse Tshombe and the State of Katanga. Quinlan's lightly armed company was besieged in Jadotville (modern Likasi) and resisted Katangese assaults for six days. A relief force of Irish, Indian and Swedish troops was unsuccessful in their attempts to reach Quinlan's position.

Quinlan's company suffered five wounded in action during the six-day siege. On the other hand, up to 300 Katangese troops were killed, including 30 mercenaries, and an indeterminate number were wounded, with figures ranging from 300 to 1,000. Quinlan, however, had no access to resupply and reinforcements and, with his transport planes destroyed by Katanga's jet fighters, a breakout was virtually impossible. In the end, with his position untenable, without any clear orders or promise of assistance, having run out of ammunition and food and low on water, Quinlan accepted a second offer to surrender to the Katangese.

Although suffering no loss of life, Quinlan's company were held as prisoners of war and hostages for approximately one month. The Katangese bartered the Irish soldiers for prisoners in the custody of the Congolese government. After being released, "A" Company were returned to their base in Elizabethville. Some weeks later, Quinlan found himself involved in active combat again, this time with his company in support of Swedish UN troops. Eventually they were reinforced with fresh troops from Ireland. After weeks of fighting and their six-month tour of duty now complete, "A" Company was rotated home to Ireland that December.



K.A.S. (Kottimukula Alagaraja Singaparaja) Raja, known as K.A.S. Raja, was an Indian military officer with operational command of Indian units in Congo.

In World War Two Raja fought in the Burma campaign and qualified as a paratrooper, choosing to wear a parachutist badge throughout the rest of his career. Following the end of the war, he studied at a military staff college in India. Following India's independence in 1947, he commanded the 1st Battalion of the Madras Regiment with the rank of lieutenant colonel during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1947–1948.

In 1961 Raja was the immediate commander (under Lt. Gen Chand) of the 4,500 strong Indian Independent Brigade Group to the Republic of the Congo, the Indian contribution to the peacekeeping force in the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC). On 5 August 1961 ONUC created an independent Katanga Command under Raja, headquartered in Elizabethville. On 28 August he led ONUC forces in conducting Operation Rum Punch, and action to detain and deport mercenaries and foreign military personnel serving in the Katangese Gendarmerie.



U Thant, 1909-74, was a Burmese diplomat and the third secretary-general of the United Nations from 1961 to 1971, the first non-Scandinavian to hold the position. He held the office for a record 10 years and one month.

Thant was educated at the National High School and at Rangoon University. In the days of political tension in Burma, he held moderate views, positioning himself between nationalists and British loyalists. He was a close friend of Burma's first Prime Minister, U Nu, and served in Nu's cabinet from 1948 to 1961. Thant had a calm and unassuming demeanor that won his colleagues' respect.

He became UN Secretary-General in 1961, six weeks after the death of Dag Hammarskjöld. In his first term, Thant facilitated negotiations between U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, helping to avert a global catastrophe. Later, in December that year, Thant ordered Operation Grandslam, which ended a secessionist insurgency in Congo. During his second term Thant was well known for publicly criticizing U.S. conduct in the Vietnam War. He oversaw the entry of several newly independent African and Asian states into

the UN. He refused to serve a third term and retired in 1971.



Moïse Kapenda Tshombe, 1919-1969, was a Congolese businessman and politician. He served as the president of the secessionist State of Katanga 1960-63 and as prime minister of the Congo from 1964 to 1965.

A member of the Lunda ethnic group, Tshombe was born near Musumba, Belgian Congo, the son of a successful businessman. The Tshombe family were Lunda royalty and a number of Tshombes had reigned in the past as the Mwaant Yav, the traditional king of the Lunda people. He received his education from an American missionary school and later trained as an accountant. In the 1950s, he took over a chain of stores in Katanga Province, which failed. Tshombe ran a number of businesses, which all failed, requiring his wealthy family to bail him out. Tshombe later became involved in politics.



Brian Urquhart, 1919-2021, was a British international civil servant and World War II veteran, and author. He played a significant role in the founding of the United Nations. For much of his career, he worked under Ralph Bunch to implement UN peacekeeping, making the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC) actually function. Later he served as its Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs, responsible for all peacekeeping operations.

Urquhart was a member of the British diplomatic staff involved in the setting-up of the United Nations in 1945, assisting the Executive Committee of the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations in establishing the

administrative framework under the U.N. Charter. He subsequently became an aide to Trygve Lie, the first Secretary-General of the United Nations. Urquhart helped handle the administrative and logistical challenges involved in getting the U.N. established in New York City. Not particularly well liked by Lie, Urquhart was subsequently moved to a minor U.N. administrative post.

When Dag Hammarskjöld became Secretary-General in 1953, he appointed Urquhart as one of his main advisors. Urquhart loyally served by Hammarskjöld's side until the latter's death in 1961, admiring him greatly in spite of admittedly never getting to know him very well on a personal level.

During the Suez Crisis of 1956 Urquhart played a critical role in creating the first major U.N. peacekeeping operation. As Hammarskjöld's only major adviser with military experience, Urquhart took the lead in organizing the first peacekeeping force. It was Urquhart who created the characteristic blue helmets for peacekeeping soldiers.

In the early 1960s Urquhart served as the main U.N. representative in the Congo, succeeding his friend Ralph Bunche. His efforts to stabilize the war-torn country were hampered by the chaos created by innumerable warring factions. At one point Urquhart was abducted, brutally beaten and threatened with death by undisciplined Katangese troops. He survived by persuading his captors that his death would bring retribution by U.N. Gurkha (Nepalese) troops, whom the Katangans feared.

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