

Congo-Katanga Crisis

The United Nations' role in the Congo crisis between 1960 and 1964 saw its largest deployment of men and some of its most controversial actions. Until 1960, the Congo had been a colony of Belgium but **in 1960, Belgian announced that it was giving the Congo its independence.** Belgium gave the Congo just **five months to get itself ready** for independence despite the fact that it was **clearly unprepared** for such a task.

The independent **Congo Republic was declared on June 30th, 1960.** Its **Prime Minister was Patrice Lumumba** and its **president was Joseph Kasavubu.** In the first week of July, the army mutinied against the remaining white officers that lead the Congolese army and numerous attacks took place against Europeans in general.

The mutiny immediately took away any authority the civilian government had. It also created a state of near **panic** within the Congo as 100,000 Belgians lived there primarily in or near the capital Leopoldville. In response to the crisis, the **Belgian government sent Belgian paratroopers** to protect Belgian citizens in the Congo. This was **an illegal act** as the Congo was an independent nation and free from Belgian rule. The government of the Congo had not invited the troops in.

Such **problems were made worse when the mineral-rich area of Katanga in southern Congo was declared independent by Moise Tshombe** who lead the people in Katanga.

Katanga produced copper, 60% of the world's uranium and 80% of the world's industrial diamonds. Tshombe was backed by the European companies that worked in Katanga as they hoped to take a cut from the **considerable profits that could be made from mining such resources.** **Katanga had the potential to make Congo one of the more wealthy African states. Without it, the new nation would remain poor.**

With such chaos ensuing, Lumumba appealed to the United Nations for help. The Security Council created an army to restore law and order to the Congo. It numbered nearly 10,000 troops. It was given four tasks:

- Restore law and order and maintain it.
- Stop other nations from getting involved with the crisis.
- Assist in building the nation's economy
- Restore political stability.

The United Nations force was only allowed to use force as a means of self-defence and it was not allowed to take sides between the government in Leopoldville and the government of Tshombe in Elizabethville.

Almost immediately, things went wrong for the United Nations force. Lumumba asked the United Nations to use the military force to crash the power of Tshombe in Katanga. Dag Hammarskjöld, Secretary-General of

the United Nations, refused permission for this. Lumumba immediately accused the United Nations of siding with Tshombe because of Katanga's rich mineral reserves. He also accused the United Nations of siding with the rich European companies that mined the region.

Lumumba's anger at the United Nations failure to act against Katanga, lead to him asking the USSR for help. The Russians provided Lumumba's government with military equipment that gave him the opportunity to launch an **attack on Katanga. This attack failed and President Kasavubu dismissed Lumumba and appointed the chief of the Congo's army – Colonel Mobutu – as the new Prime Minister.**

Lumumba set up a rival government in Stanleyville in the east of the country. However, his murder by mercenaries removed him from the problem. Through all of this the United Nations could do nothing as it had agreed not to take sides and only to fire in self-defence.

For the first six months of 1961, there were four groups that claimed to lead the Congo:

- 1) Mobutu's government based in Leopoldville
- 2) Lumumba's supporters based in Stanleyville
- 3) Tshombe's 'government' in Elizabethville, Katanga and
- 4) A breakaway 'government' in Kasai province lead by King Albert Kalonji – though it was a self-appointed title!

Lumumba and Kalonji's groups both had weapons off of the Russians and the country by the summer of 1961 seemed to be on the verge of implosion. A vicious civil war seemed a real possibility.

The United Nations up to this point had **not done a great deal to bring stability to the new nation.** In response to the crisis, the Security Council gave permission for the United Nations army based there to use force to prevent a civil war occurring. This was not needed as in August 1961, three of the four parts met to form a new parliament in Leopoldville that was to be lead by Cyrille Adoula. The only group that was not part of this was Tshombe's Katanga.

Adoula asked the United Nations to provide military support for an attack on Katanga as he made it his first task to remove Tshombe, as he believed that while Tshombe was effectively in charge of Katanga, the Congo would never have peace. In August 1961, 5,000 United Nations troops launched an attack on Katanga. Though they captured key points in the province, they did not get Tshombe as he had fled to Rhodesia.

The United Nations itself was thrown into some chaos when Dag Hammarskjöld flew to Rhodesia to see Tshombe. However, the United

Nations Secretary-General was killed during this trip when his plane crashed. He was replaced by U Thant who agreed to another attack by United Nations troops on Katanga in December 1961. As a result, Tshombe agreed to meet Adoula to discuss issues. The talks lasted for nearly a year and achieved very little. In late 1962, the United Nations force in the Congo attacked Katanga again. This led to Tshombe fleeing the Congo and **In January 1963, Katanga was re-united with the rest of the Congo.**

Was the work of the United Nations in this crisis a success?

Many believed that it had fulfilled its four objectives. The country had not descended into civil war; Russia had been kept out of a sensitive area in Africa; the Congo was kept as a whole by the end of 1963 and political stability had been achieved. Also the United Nations had taken responsibility for the humanitarian programme needed in the Congo. Famine and epidemics had been avoided by the use of United Nations sponsored food and medical programmes.

However, not every nation was pleased by what the United Nations had done. Russia, France and Belgium refused to pay their part of the \$400 million that was needed to pay for the cost of the Congo operation. This nearly pushed the United Nations to bankruptcy.

Those nations that had supported the United Nations were also critical of some parts of what the United Nations did. The role of Dag Hammarskjöld was criticised as it was felt that he had over-reached his authority regarding what the United Nations could do and what it could not. Supporters were also wary of the fact that the United Nations had taken sides in an effort to bring peace to the Congo.

Key personalities

Patrice Lumumba, the son of a farmer, was born in Katako Kombe in the central Congo on 2nd July, 1925. After leaving school he worked as a nurse's assistant and a postal clerk. An active trade unionist he founded the Post Office Employees Club. He also served as secretary of the Association for African Government Employees.

In October, 1958, Lumumba founded the National Congolese Movement (MNC). He became president of the organization and the following year led a series of demonstrations and strikes against the Belgian colonial government. Lumumba called for the Congo to be granted its immediate independence from Belgium. Lumumba was arrested but after sustained demonstrations the authorities were forced to release him.

After parliamentary elections in May 1960 the MNC became the country's strongest party. Lumumba became the new prime minister and immediately talked about the need for social and economic changes in the country. His decision to adopt a non-aligned foreign policy resulted in the CIA becoming interested in the developments in the Congo.

The country was governed from Leopoldville (Kinshasa). In Kantanga, a rich mining province, was very much under the control of Moise Tshombe. In July 1960, Tshombe, with the support of Belgian troops and white mercenaries, proclaimed an independent republic. Lumumba appealed to the United Nations for help and Dag Hammarskjold agreed to send in a peace-keeping force to restore order.

Lumumba was arrested by Mobutu's soldiers and transferred to Elizabethville, Katanga, where he was murdered on 17th January, 1961.

The UN Security Council passed a resolution demanding an inquiry into the circumstances of his death. This was rejected by Moise Tshombe but evidence emerged later that the Belgian government was behind the events in Katanga.

Moise Tshombe, the son of a wealthy businessman, was born in Musumba, Congo, in 1919. Tshombe was educated at an American Methodist mission. He trained as an accountant and in 1951 took over a chain of stores in Katanga.

Tshombe became involved in politics and founded the Conakat political party which advocated an independent but federal Congo. He was especially keen for his power base of Kantanga, a rich mining province, should remain under his control.

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The following month Colonel Sese Seko Mobutu, with the support of the United States and Belgium, led a military coup and ousted Patrice Lumumba from power. Lumumba was arrested by Mobutu's soldiers and transferred to Elizabethville, Katanga, where he was murdered on 17th January, 1961.

In September 1961 fighting erupted between Katanga troops and the noncombatant forces of the UN. In an effort to secure a cease-fire he arranged to meet President Tshombe. On 17th September 1961 Dag Hammarskjöld was killed when his plane crashed close to Ndola airport.

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The fighting continued and independent regimes were established at different times in Katanga, Stanleyville and Kasai. For a while Tshombe lived in Europe but returned to become prime minister of the Congo Republic in July 1964. After holding corrupt elections he was forced to flee and went to live in Spain.

General Sese Seko Mobutu staged another military coup in November 1965. He placed Tshombe on trial for treason in his absence and was condemned to death.

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Sese Seko Mobutu was born in Lisala, Congo, in 1930. Educated at a Catholic mission school he served in the Belgian colonial army. By 1960 he had reached the rank of colonel and was chief of staff to the Congolese Army.

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Mobutu decided on a policy of Africanization and in October 1971 he changed the name of the country back to Zaire (the name of the country in the 14th century). Three months later a Nationality Law decreed the abolition of all European names for persons and places. Despite this action Mobutu continued to arrange trading agreements with foreign companies engaged in exploiting the country's valuable copper deposits. He also received support from the United States who helped him develop a one party, anti-Communist, dictatorship.

Two further revolts took place in 1977 and 1978 and was only put down with the help of the French Army. Zaire continued to suffer from economic problems and in May 1997 rebel forces led by Laurent Kabila forced him to flee the country.

Sese Seko Mobutu died in Morocco in 1997.