IMUN 2026 Research Report

Historical Security Council Issue #2: The situation in the Congo. March 1964.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo was granted independence from Belgium in June 1960. What followed was a systemic collapse of domestic infrastructure, as elections failed to provide a stable government, and power struggles continued. The Congolese military mutiny, which took place one week after independence was granted, prompted Belgium to send unauthorized troops to defend its citizens and to back the secession of the mineral-rich province of Katanga. (Wiese et al.). The central Congolese government appealed to the United Nations (UN), leading the Security Council to adopt Resolution 143 (1960), establishing the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC). The ONUC faced operational and political turbulence throughout its entire mandate. In March 1964, the UN was in the final phase of downscaling and preparing for a complete withdrawal from the Congo (UN General Assembly resolution 1885(XVIII)). Nevertheless, Congo's political crisis was far from over ("Congo Crisis").

Belgium's unexpected and sudden decision to grant independence to the Congo in June 1960 left the new state politically and administratively unprepared as the Congo had been exploited by Belgium for centuries. Furthermore, when compared to other colonial powers, Belgium was much harsher in barring Africans from educational opportunities and, consequently, positions in the government. Congolese people were prohibited from voting or forming political parties. Free speech, assembly, and travel were all restricted until the eve of independence. Moreover, Belgium's uneven regional economic exploitation fostered extremely lopsided development, creating regional antagonisms (Collins). Following elections in May 1960, Patrice Lumumba became prime minister, and Joseph Kasa-Vubu assumed the presidency. However, tensions between Congolese leaders, Belgian authorities, and other political actors

quickly escalated.

According to Collins, three interconnected crises emerged in July 1960. A mutiny by Congolese soldiers against Belgian officers triggered widespread unrest and provided Belgium with a justification for deploying troops. At the same time, the mineral-rich provinces of Katanga and Kasai formally declared secession and were supported by Belgian business interests and regional allies, threatening the country's territorial integrity and financial viability. Lastly, Belgium's military intervention, undertaken without the Congolese government's approval, intensified the crisis by violating independence agreements and reinforcing suspicions that Belgium sought to retain political and economic control.

The situation became even more complicated when President Kasa-Vubu and Prime Minister Lumumba entered a constitutional struggle over political authority, while divisions within the United Nations and among its Member States paralyzed international efforts to resolve the conflict. The growing crises afflicting all involved parties significantly hindered effective mediation. Lumumba increasingly lost confidence in the UN after it refused to use force against the Katangan secessionists, leading him to seek military aid from the Soviet Union, further internationalizing and politicizing the conflict (Collins; Wiese et al.). With Soviet assistance, Congolese forces launched a military campaign against the secessionist region of South Kasai, resulting in widespread civilian casualties and the displacement of thousands of Luba people. For the UN and Western allies, the growing Soviet presence in the Congo heightened fears that communist influence would spread across Africa during the Cold War (Wiese et al.; "Congo, Decolonization").

In 1961, the impasse between Kasa-Vubu (western-inclined) and Lumumba (Soviet-inclined) ended with a CIA and Western powers backed coup d'état led by lieutenant colonel

Mobutu and Lumumba's assassination. Meanwhile, UN attempts at peace talks with the secessionists were not fruitful, and in September 1961, some UN peacekeepers were captured and held prisoner by Katangese forces ("Congo Crisis"; World History Edu). Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld was killed in a plane crash while attempting to solve the situation. After this incident, Hammarskjöld's successor, Secretary-General U Thant, ordered UN troops to increase efforts. Ultimately, the captured peacekeepers were released in October. The UN troops launched an offensive with the Congolese army and occupied parts of the province of Katanga. By January 1963, Moïse Tshombe had surrendered and fled the country. This resulted in the end of the war between the central government and the secessionist movements of Katanga and South Kasai, which were defeated in early 1963. (World History Edu). At this point, the UN began withdrawing from Congo, as the ONUC's mandate would expire in 1963 (UNSC resolution 143). Still, the Congolese government requested a six-month extension extension to help with the stabilization (UNGA 1885 (XVIII)).

The ONUC was comprised of 20,000 officers, soldiers, as well as a Civil component, and was supported by 30 countries at its peak ("Summary of AG-008"; Collins). These crises resulted in approximately 95,000 deaths. In March 1964, a new uprising was forming as ONUC was withdrawing (World History Edu; Wiese et al.).

Debate should focus on formulating a resolution addressing the situation in the Congo that ensures internal political stability and sovereignty, while not overlooking the broader African region and its complex geopolitical implications. Delegates must address the immediate cessation of hostilities and outline steps for securing comprehensive civil peace, transitioning to a stable democratic government, and securing domestic infrastructure. Therefore, the debate should consider the significant human and economic costs of the conflict, as well as the international

tensions and their implications for human rights and international law. Furthermore, despite the prior peacekeeping intervention, measures involving external military intervention must always be carefully considered. Finally, delegates should ensure that their attitudes and the information they rely on reflect what was publicly accessible as of March 31, 1964, maintaining historical accuracy and context in their deliberations.

Relevant resolutions and documents:

UNSC Resolution 143 (1960)

- Calls upon Belgium to withdraw its troops from the Republic of the Congo and authorizes the Secretary-General to provide the Congolese government with military assistance ("Resolution 143 (1960)").

UNSC Resolution 145 (1960)

- Calls upon Belgium to implement the withdrawal of its troops from the Republic of the Congo speedily as required by resolution 143 (1960) and authorizes the Secretary-General to take all necessary action to that effect. Requests all states to refrain from actions that might impede the restoration of law and order or undermine the Congo's territorial integrity and political independence and asks the Secretary-General to report on his actions ("Resolution 145 (1960)").

UNSC Resolution 146 (1960)

- Addresses the entry of United Nations forces into the Congolese province of Katanga, where Belgian troops had prevented their deployment. Adopted on 9 August 1960, it confirms the Secretary-General's authority under previous resolutions, calls for the immediate withdrawal of Belgian troops from Katanga, declares that the UN force will not be a party to internal conflicts, and calls upon Belgium to comply ("Resolution 146 (1960)").

UNSC Resolution 161 (1961)

- Resolution 161 (1961) responds to the killing of Congolese leaders Patrice Lumumba, Maurice Mpolo, and Joseph Okito by urging immediate measures to prevent civil war in the Congo, including the use of force as a last resort. The resolution demands the withdrawal of all Belgian and other foreign military personnel and mercenaries, calls for an impartial investigation into the deaths, and authorizes the reorganization of Congolese armed forces to eliminate interference in the political process ("Resolution 161 (1961)").

UNSC Resolution 169 (1961)

- Authorizes the Secretary-General to use force if necessary to remove foreign military personnel, mercenaries, and political advisers not under UN command, and to prevent civil war. It deplores secessionist activities in the Katanga province, rejects claims of Katangan sovereignty, and demands that all foreign military and paramilitary personnel be withdrawn immediately ("Resolution 169 (1961)").

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