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Committee: HUNSC

Agenda Item: The Congo Crisis (1961)

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Introduction

The Congo Crisis can be defined as the time of political instability and violence that broke out in the newly independent country of the Democratic Republic of Congo shortly after it attained independence from Belgium in 1960. A sudden political change from a colonial system meant that a newly independent country lacked political structures and administrative capacity to govern itself. Politically instability and violence such as military coups and secessionist uprisings broke out in the newly independent state.

What had started as an internal post-independence crisis soon turned into a problem of international concern. External interference and ideological contestation, within the Cold War context, further exacerbated it, with global powers intent on gaining a foothold in the Congo, a strategically important place. In turn, this became one of the most obvious examples of how Cold War tensions linked to decolonization became the point of interest for the United Nations during a formative period of its peacekeeping role.

During the crisis, the breakdown in ordered rule severely affected civilians, with violence, displacement, and humanitarian hardship becoming widespread, amidst struggles by state institutions to maintain security and basic services. The scale of instability underlined challenges faced by newly independent states and raised urgent questions about international responsibility and intervention.

The Congolese Crisis was a complex, multi-dimensional crisis based on post-colonial instability, internal fragmentation, and external involvement. The Historical United Nations Security Council needs to understand the early developments of the crisis when making an evaluation of the decisions taken at the time, with a view to how international action could address immediate instability and the long-term prospects for peace and governance.

Definition of Significant Terms

Cold war:

Era of political and ideological rivalry between the United States of America and the Soviet Union after the Second World War. The rivalry intensified international concern over the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo up until 1961 because the two superpowers wanted to make sure that the Congo Republic did not fall into the political polarity of the rival ideology.

ONUC: ONUC was established in 1960 by the United Nations following Congo's independence from Belgium, in response to a general situation of instability, army mutinies, and foreign military intervention. Its mandate was essentially aimed at assisting the government of the Congo in maintaining law and order, withdrawing Belgian forces, and preventing the crisis situation from developing into a broader Cold War confrontation. By 1961, ONUC had become one of the United Nations' largest and most complex peacekeeping operations up until that time.

Peacekeeping mission: A United Nations operation deployed to help maintain or restore peace and security in conflict-affected areas. Peacekeeping was used not only to separate armed groups but also to preserve territorial integrity and limit superpower confrontation.

Mutiny: A rebellion against authority, especially by soldiers or members of the armed forces. Army mutinies were among the first triggers of instability during the Congo Crisis.

Decolonization: “Decolonization can be defined as the process whereby a colony, that is a country under foreign administrative control, achieves political independence, while ‘decolonization’ is a process involving the elimination of colonies.”

Decolonization took place with a speed that left little preparation before independence, which directly led to instability, power struggles, and, in effect, the Congo Crisis.

Katanga: Katanga is one of the mineral-rich provinces located in the southern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which enjoyed unilateral secession in the year 1960, under the control of Moïse Tshombe. The region of Katanga was vastly rich in natural resources, thus luring foreign interest, primarily from the government of Belgium. The secession of Katanga was a grave threat to the territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, thus a major concern for the United Nations.

Secession:

The act of formally withdrawing from a state in order to form a separate political entity. Secessionist movements, particularly in Katanga, posed a serious threat to the territorial integrity of the Congo and raised urgent concerns within the United Nations regarding how national unity might be preserved.

Post-Colonial State:

A newly independent country facing political, economic, and institutional challenges following colonial rule.

Foreign Intervention:

Foreign intervention is defined as an involvement by external states into the internal affairs of another country. Foreign involvement was a key preoccupation, especially with the continued presence of Belgian forces and growing diplomatic interest of major powers amidst Cold War rivalries. These international pressures made the way towards finding stability even more complicated and signaled the Congo's strategic place within the international system.

Detailed Background of the Issue

Before 1960:

The roots of this issue go back to the late 19th century. With the willingness of King Leopold II of Belgium to reinforce their international power and prestige, Congo Free State - the Congo Basin had been decided to be the world's sole private colony in The Berlin Conference - became the property of Leopold II in 1908.

Another reason why the Belgium King became the state owner was to act as a buffer between other states which were already being mandated by rival colonial states. The Berlin Conference held from 1884 to 1885, contained 14 states including Germany, Austria-Hungary, France, United States, Ottoman Empire, Russia, United Kingdom and the state of Congo under the name "International Congo Society". Several Western Countries saw the Belgian involvement as an opportunity to suppress the possible tensions that may break out within the region among colonialists.

Social Facet of the Belgian Rule

Belgium was following a direct rule policy in Congo by creating organised administrative subdivisions and arranging regular migration. The consequences of such acts were seen as the racial segregation, since most immigrants who moved to Congo were white-colored. They have been treated as privileged, prioritized and superior compared to black people.

Establishment of Movements and Radicalisation

During the 1950s, multiple Congolese nationalist groups and movements were formed in order to gain independence. The "Mouvement National Congolais"(MNC - *National Congolese Movement in English*) had become the largest united front signed and created primarily by Patrice Lumumba, Cyrille Adoula, Joseph Iléo and more. Lumumba was the leading figure of an immense population, claimed to be over 50.000 members before 1960. There were other organizations created within the region, primarily Alliance des Bakongo(ABAKO) which is considered to be the main rival of MNC. Calling for immediate independence in contrast to MNC's seek for independence within a "plausible" time and promoting the regional identity and sovereignty of Congo, ABAKO carried a more radical ideology in comparison to MNC. Some ethnic groups and populations were supporting other organizations such as ABAKO or factions of MNC such as MNC-Kalonji, which led to the rise of internal tensions in the future.

Gaining Independence

On 4 January 1959, a large-scale riot broke out in Léopoldville, the capital of Congo, possibly resulting in a number of total casualties up to 500. This riot influenced the local black people outside the capital, who commenced refusing to pay taxes and to obey the colonial power. Nevertheless, not only the majority of the ABAKO leaders but Lumumba was also arrested. This caught the attention of the Belgian parliamentary, arranging constant meetings upon the future of Congo and the matter of internal autonomy. Therefore, the Minister of Colonies decided to arrange the Belgo-Congolese Round Table Conference in Brussels between the Belgian government and the leaders of

all regional major parties. However, delegates failed to reach an agreement. Though, Lumumba was released to participate in the conference as the MNC-L delegate.

After huge Belgian campaigns against Lumumba, Belgium organised the Congolese elections in May 1960, which resulted in MNC being the new ruler. The new official name of Belgian Congo was proclaimed as the Republic of Congo. The Republic of Congo followed a dual executive system, meaning that there would be a prime minister alongside the president (also known as *Loi Fondamentale*). Kasa-Vubu became the president and Lumumba was the prime minister.

Outbreak of the Crisis:

Although the independence of Congo was proclaimed, the colonial social order was not intended to be ended that quickly. Institutions such as *Force Publique*, were still being beneficial to the Republic of Congo daily. Thus, a non-negligible number of white people retained their position due to their technical expertise, ongoing social presence and effectiveness. Belgium believed that the independence of Congo wouldn't be a remarkable change and that their control over the region would stay the same. Emile Janssens' (the commander of Force Publique) previous speeches and the messages she spread were highly provocative, which caused a mutiny within the organisation against the white officers. In contrast to what Janssens had thought, Lumumba ensured the resignation of *Force Publique* and reestablished it as the Armée Nationale Congolaise(ANC). Victor Lundula, was promoted from sergeant-major to major-general, which made him the commander of ANC, replacing the former commander of *Force Publique*, Emile Janssens and an ex-sergeant-major called Joseph-Désiré Mobutu became the deputy commander as the army chief of staff. However, this reorganization wasn't sufficient to terminate the mutiny. It expanded to almost the whole country even more intensely. Whites were attacked, robbed, their properties were either looted or seized and white women were raped. White civilians began to flee the country and migrated to neighboring countries as refugees. This was particularly concerning for Belgium since their only chance to sustain their mandate was to keep the white population within.

The Congo Crisis (Until 1961):

Belgian Military Intervention

On 9 July 1960, Belgium deployed its first troops, without the consent of the Republic of Congo, in order to protect fleeing white civilians. This act separated Kasa-Vubu, who accepted Belgian intervention, from Lumumba. Time newspapers have reported that the Belgian troops were attacking any African they encountered, disarming and arresting Congolese troops. They even opened fire on Congolese citizens. On 11 July, the Belgium Navy also began attacking multiple cities and Belgian forces began fighting with Congolese troops, even in the capital. Meanwhile, Belgian civilians were evacuating the country and returning to their homeland via Belgian ships. This resulted in disfunctionality of many ministries, and disorder in the country.

Further Disruption and UN Involvement

On 11 July, the leader of CONAKAT - one of the main political parties in Congo - declared the independence of the province of Katanga, as State of Katanga. Katanga was rich in minerals and economically important for Congo. Therefore, CONAKAT decided to separate the region from chaos and the Belgian mandate. Katanga was never officially recognised by any other country, however the secession showed the lack of crisis management and political planning of the



Republic of Congo. Shortly after, Kasai also declared its independence, which was also a mining region. These losses of land made Congo lose approximately 40 percent of its revenues.

The United Nations began taking action in the region after being called multiple times within conferences. On 14 July, the Security Council(UNSC) decided and called for the immediate Belgian withdrawal and their replacement with a UN-powered force named United Nations Operation in the Congo(ONUC). (Resolution 143) However, UN policy didn't cover the Katanga&Kasai secessions and they were seen as internal political issues of Congo, unlike what Lumumba had wished. Lumumba also called upon the US for help, which was refused not to provide any military support. On the other hand, the Soviet Union agreed to help and provided military and material support. The Soviet intervention wasn't welcomed by Kasa-Vubu, nor by the US and the implications of it were concerning for him. ANC - with Soviet aid - managed to take Kasai, however caused a huge massacre of Luba civilians and other ethnic groups. Stating the massacre as the main reason, Kasa-Vubu announced the dismissal of Lumumba on 5 September 1960, which was rejected and not supported by the Parliament. Lumumba also attempted to dismiss Kasa-Vubu and thus, the semi-presidential constitution in Congo collapsed.

Mobutu Coup d'Etat

Mobutu's coup changed the course of events significantly during the crisis. To avoid further discomfort, Mobutu launched a coup, took over the government and replaced Kasa-Vubu and Lumumba with the College of Commissioners-General, which was a body formed by a set of university graduates. Soviet ties were severed.

Mobutu agreed on Kasa-Vubu's policy against Lumumba who was placed under house arrest. Once again, Kasa-Vubu became the president with Mobutu's permission in

1961. The Soviet Union demanded from the UN, the immediate release of Lumumba as the Prime Minister of Congo and the disarmament of Mobutu. However, this demand failed and was rejected. Lumumba was then transported to Katanga, where he was executed by Katangese forces.

Consequences and Aftermath:

After the killing of Lumumba, tensions in both Congo and international media rose and ONUC became more active and present in the region. In September 1961, ONUC attempted to detain Katangese soldiers in a bloodless way. However, the operation went wrong, turned into an armed battle and Irish UN troops were captured by Katangese forces who were released later in October due to a ceasefire. In exchange, ONUC troops retreated from Katanga. This made ONUC troops redirect to Kasai in which they managed a successful operation, ending the South Kasai secession. To prevent the outbreak of a country-wide civil war and because of Katanga's provocations, ONUC seized strategic positions in Elizabethville and forced Tshombe, the ruler of the State of Katanga, to sign the Kitona Declaration which terminated the autonomous presence of Katanga. Nonetheless, Katangese forces continued to fight UN troops. After several operations and clashes, ONUC terminated the de facto existence of the State of Katanga.

On 25 November 1965, Mobutu launched a second coup, supported by the US and some other states, in order to restore democracy and ensure political stability. He held the power and control over the country for over 20 years. Throughout this period, he strengthened his power by removing the semi-presidential system, then dissolving the Parliament. In 1971, the country was renamed as the Republic of Zaire because of Mobutu's Africanization policy. He removed almost every opposition figure who might have overthrown him, including Tshombe who was exiled and accused of treason. These radical actions caused many conflicts in the future.

The Congo Crisis had a huge impact on other African colonial wars and also had severe indirect consequences for the DRC such as the First and the Second Congo War. With multiple political deadlocks, military coups, massacres, secessions, mutinies and foreign interventions, this issue caused harm to many civilians from various ethnic groups while additionally noting that 100.000 lives were taken throughout this period.

Timeline of Key Events

| Date | Description of Event |
|----------------|---|
| 1908 | King Leopold II becomes the state owner of Congo and Belgian Congo is formed |
| 4 January 1959 | A riot breaks out and spreads across the country, causing discussion in the Belgian Parliament about the matter of independence |

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| 30 June 1960 | MNC gains independence and the DRC is formed |
| 11 July 1960 | Belgian paratroops and Navy intervenes DRC without consent and the Katanga province declares its independence |
| 8 August 1960 | Kasai secedes from DRC, following Katanga. |
| September 1960 | Mobutu mounts the first coup d'état, Lumumba is arrested |
| 17 January 1961 | Lumumba is killed by Katangese forces |
| 25 November 1965 | Mobutu launches the second coup d'état, taking absolute power |
| 1971 | Mobutu renames the country as the Republic of Zaire |
| 24 October 1996 | First Congo War starts |
| May 1997 | Mobutu is overthrown |
| July 2003 | Second Congo War ends |

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC):

The DRC was the main land where the crisis happened. First becoming Congo Free State, it was later named as the Belgian Congo after King Leopold II's ownership. After gaining its independence, DRC struggled to sustain political stability. It has been ruled by many people, intervened by several nations and the UN, and fragmented into multiple autonomous regions.

Belgium:

Belgium was one of the main countries involved in the issue. As the former colonial ruler of Congo, Belgium maintained its control indirectly for a while even after DRC became independent. The attacks and harassment targeting the white population caused Belgium to deploy its troops in the region, in order to ensure the safety of the white civilians. Being one of the main opposing sides against DRC, Belgium was later accused of neocolonialism due to a second military intervention with the US in 1964 to suppress the Kwilu&Simba rebellions.

The Soviet Union (USSR):

The USSR played withal a crucial role in this particular issue. By giving military, logistical and material supplies to DRC under Lumumba's authorizations, USSR's intentions and impartiality were questioned by international media and other states. They have also supported the Simba rebellions alongside with China, helped the foundation of a new state influenced by communism later in 1964.

The United States (US):

Although the US had claimed at first to seek for diplomatic solutions and resolve the crisis with the United Nations, the Soviet involvement disturbed the US government and the "reports from Lawrence Devlin, the CIA Chief of Station in Leopoldville (Kinshasa), described the situation in the Congo as a classic Communist takeover." (cited from [history.state.gov](https://www.history.state.gov)). Therefore, Lumumba's rule was concerning for the US and they were in support of the dismissal of Lumumba. USA states that even plans of assassination were made in case of necessity.

The United Nations (UN):

The UNSC had many resolutions and many meetings throughout the crisis and UN's efforts were really appreciated by the media and countries. *Opération de Nations Unies au Congo* (ONUC) was formed as a sub-body to end and prevent further unrest in the region. ONUC has successfully had multiple operations in South Kasai, Katanga, and in the central government which helped the resolution of the conflict.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Immediately after the independence of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 30 June 1960, the internal instability, such as the army mutiny, political fragmentation, as well as the retention of the Belgian military, created an immediate focal point of concern within the international community. The fear of the situation potentially developing beyond Congo's borders, especially with the rise in Cold War tensions, contributed to the United Nations, via the Security Council, acquiring a significant focus on the crisis. The major focus of the international intervention at this juncture was offering assistance to regaining internal stability, ensuring the territorial integrity of the Congo, as well as ensuring minimal foreign intervention in the internal affairs of the Congo.

The first major international intervention was through the United Nations Security Council Resolution 143 of 1960, which was passed in July 1960 and mandated the Secretary General to provide the Congolese government with military assistance through the formation of the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC). This resolution mandated the withdrawal of the Belgian military forces from the territory of the Congo and the protection of the sovereignty and independence of the country while charging ONUC with the responsibility of helping towards the restoration of law and order. ONUC had a limited mandate during this early period and included non-intervention and non-alignment within Congolese domestic politics and thus couldn't do much towards the secessionist movements that had continued to prevail in the country.

As instability continued, in July, the Security Council adopted Resolution 145 (1960), which called for the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the Congo and called upon all states to refrain from any action which might break down national unity. This position was further enhanced by Resolution 146 (1960), adopted in August 1960, which repeated the support given to the central Congolese authorities and continued confidence in the way the Secretary-General conducted ONUC, with an emphasis on the need for the mission's presence to be maintained despite its operational limits.

By early 1961, the situation had further worsened, since political control remained extensively divisible, and two governments kept claiming legitimacy. Moreover, the secession of the mineral-rich province of Katanga remained an ever-present potential destabilizer to national unity. Such events, along with increased tensions in the International arena because of the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, led to fresh debates in the Security Council. As such, in February 1961, Resolution 161 (1961) was passed in the Security Council. This resolution resulted in an important shift in United Nations Peacekeeping policy because it enabled ONUC to employ force, when other options fail, to avoid war and to ensure that all foreign military personnel and mercenaries, not operating under United Nations command, withdrew from the region.

Alternative Solutions

One of the measures that the delegates may consider is to examine the possibility of establishing a decentralized or federal political system in the Congo. This strategy may be useful in coming up with ways to address the complaints raised by the regions without undermining the unity of the state. This strategy involves the presence of an authorized central government and reduced administrative control over the provinces. This may help in finding ways to reduce any discrepancies arising from the existence of a central government and regions experiencing tension arising from secessionism, especially when economic regions are at stake. The strategy may also undermine the central government, especially when it fails to be well controlled, an action which may contribute to increased instability.

Another possible measure might be to enhance the strength and legitimacy of an overall central government via political inclusivity. Increasing political participation via the incorporation of delegates from different regions and political affiliations into national structures might be well worth considering. There may be benefits to arrangements involving the transfer of power and

transitional coalition governments, which could help prevent political exclusion and lower the prospects of further military engagement in politics. Challenges posed by deep-seated political animosities, unproven administrative capacity, and weak institutions are, however, considerable.

Another possible way out of this problematic scenario is the further involvement of the United Nations. A strengthened peacekeeping mission from the United Nations could ensure a stabilization of violence and possibly avoid foreign intervention. Aside from this, a strengthening of political engagement and mediator missions could ensure a better handling of political conflicts for Congolese factions. The success of such scenarios would, admittedly, rely heavily on cooperation from Congolese parties and backing from global authorities.

Delegates may also examine economic and resource-related measures as part of a broader stabilization strategy. Given the central role of natural resources in fueling political tensions, discussions could focus on mechanisms for managing economic assets in a manner that benefits the state as a whole while addressing regional concerns. Proposals for increased transparency and centralized oversight of resource revenues may reduce incentives for secession and limit external economic influence. At the same time, such measures would be challenging to implement due to limited administrative capacity and ongoing insecurity.

Finally, negotiated political dialogue represents a crucial element of any possible solution. The establishment of a platform, through which the central government, the provinces, and the relevant international actors proceed with dialogue, may assist in the identification of a mutually acceptable solution in relation to governance, security, as well as economic management. International intervention and assurances may assist in the maintenance of the above dialogue and prevent any escalation of the crisis. The establishment of a negotiation process, although not a panacea in relation to the crisis, represents a crucial element in the reduction of tensions in order to gain stability as was determined by the Security Council in the year 1961.

Useful Links

www.britannica.com/

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