

The Congo Independence and its Post-Mayhem (1960-1963)

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Abstract:

The independence of the Belgian Congo in 1960 marked the beginning of a new period of hope that was quickly hampered by a series of events. These events were known as the Public Army Mutiny, the Katanga and Kasai Secessions and the Kasavubu-Lumumba political rivalry and dispute in 1960 and the Patrice Lumumba assassination in 1961. The objective of this paper is to discuss the context and process of these events in the light of the conclusions that some historians in this field have reached. The main outcome of this paper is that the Congo Kinshasa independence and unity were difficult to maintain owing to the separatist intentions of a number of the Congolese independence leaders, and the political and economic interests of foreign countries, mainly Belgium, the United States of America and the Soviet Union in the Congo Kinshasa.

Key words: *The Congo Kinshasa; Mutiny; Secession; Assassination; Separatism; Foreign Intervention*

استقلال الكونغو وما بعد الفوضى (1960-1963)

ملخص

يمثل استقلال الكونغو البلجيكية عام 1960 بداية فترة أمل جديدة أعاقها بسرعة سلسلة من الأحداث. تضمنت هذه الأحداث تمرد الجيش العام ، وانفصال كاتانغا وكاساي والصراع السياسي لكاسافوبوو لومومبا في عام 1960 ، واغتيال باتريس لومومبا في عام 1961. والهدف من هذه الورقة هو مناقشة سياق وعملية هذه الأحداث على ضوء الاستنتاجات التي توصل إليها بعض المؤرخين في هذا المجال. والنتيجة الرئيسية لهذه الورقة هي أنه كان من الصعب الحفاظ على استقلال ووحدة الكونغو كينشاسا بسبب النوايا الانفصالية لعدد من قادة الاستقلال الكونغوليين والمصالح السياسية والاقتصادية لدول أجنبية خاصتا بلجيكا والولايات المتحدة الأمريكية والاتحاد السوفيتي في الكونغو كينشاسا. الكلمات المفتاحية: الكونغو كينشاسا; التمرد; الانفصال; الاغتيال; الانفصال; التدخل الأجنبي

Introduction:

The independence of the Congo Kinshasa was achieved in 1960 after decades of Belgian colonial paternalistic policy. Immediately after, the independent Congo had to face a number of internal conflicts such as the Mutiny of the Public Army, the Secessions of Katanga and Kasai, the Kasavubu-Lumumba dispute and Patrice Lumumba's assassination. These events had tremendous repercussions on the fate of the country at that time. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to understand the context in which these events took place, and the impact they had on the Congo. To this end,

the following questions are raised: what were the reasons behind the outbreak of these problems? How did they happen and what impact did they have on the country?

1.The Reasons for the Outbreak of Internal Conflicts in Independent Congo:

Up to the independence of the Congo, the policy of the Belgians vis-à-vis the Congolese had been paternalistic and under the concerted aegis of three main bodies: The Colonial Administration, the European Companies and the Christian Missionaries. They notably sought to control and develop the political, the economic and the social life of the Congolese people from their employment and salaries to their education and religion. However, this development was slow and did not help them reach their life expectations, mainly to live decently like the Europeans did (Valahu: 1964: 15-29).

This paternalistic policy had negative repercussions on the future of the Congo. Actually, up to 1959, Belgium had never planned to give the Congo its independence. Nevertheless, after being confronted to the pressing demand from the part of the Congolese, and the Socialist Belgians in the metropolis, the United States of America (USA) and the Soviet Union (USSR) and the newly independent African colonies, it found itself compelled to negotiate and to prepare for independence in a short span of time. During the negotiations of the Round Table Conference in January 1960, both the Belgians and the Congolese signed the Treaty of Friendship, Assistance and Technical Aid. It stipulated that the Belgians would not intervene militarily unless they were asked to do it in support to the Congolese government. This whole context shows how unready and inexperienced the political

Congolese elite was, in particular on the eve of the proclamation of independence in July 1960 (Valahu: 1964: 28-29).

The Congolese inexperience gave the Belgians a justification for their presence in the Congo, even after the proclamation of independence, which took place on 1 July 1960. At the same time, the Belgians had political and economic interests they could not abandon there. For these reasons, they decided to help the Congolese during their early years of independence. (Fage: 1978: 481) In this sense, the historian Basil Davidson states that the decision to give the Congolese their independence was sudden and on purpose since the Congolese were not ready to govern their country, which could justify their continuing presence in the Congo (Davidson: 1966: 307-8). Unfortunately, this whole situation culminated into the disastrous events that the independent Congo was going to experience, notably the Mutiny of the Public Army and the Secessions of Katanga and Kasai, the Kasavubu-Lumumba-Mobutu Conflict and Patrice Lumumba's Assassination.

2.The Mutiny of the Public Army and its Implications:

The disastrous consequences of the Congolese inexperience and the continuous presence of the Belgians began with the outbreak of the mutiny of 23.000 Congolese of the Public Army on 4 July 1960 (Davidson: 1966: 308). As it has been mentioned above, though the Congo obtained its independence, its army remained under the command of the Belgian, General Emile Janssens. The Congolese soldiers hoped they would be promoted to higher ranks, notably from sergeants to officers, and hence, they could have their salaries

increased, but General Emile Janssens refused. On 5 July 1960, during a speech, he explained his decision by exposing the true nature of the independence of the Congolese. He notably declared:

“As I have always told you order and discipline will be maintained as they have always been. Independence brings changes to politicians and to civilians. But for you, nothing will be changed...None of our new masters can change the structures of an army which, throughout its history, has been the most organised, the most victorious in Africa. The politicians have lied to you.” (Zeilig: 2008: 70)

Thereafter, he wrote on the blackboard of the place where the speech was given, "Before independence = after independence" (Zeilig: 2008: 70).

Naturally, such a statement did not please the Congolese soldiers who asked for the dismissal of the Belgian General, and then, continued their riots during the same day. Mugur Valahu described their actions in terms of pillage, rape and assassinations (Valahu: 1964: 86). The reaction of the General was to take the decision to bring Belgian soldiers back to the Congo from the Belgian military bases in the Congo, notably, Thysville, Kamina, Kitona and also, from Ruanda-Urundi to protect the Belgian civilians. For Jeanne M. Haskin, this Belgian decision was done "reflexively, without asking for

the permission of the new government". Naturally, it represented a Belgian break to the Treaty of Friendship, Assistance and Technical Aid, which worsened the new Belgian-Congolese relations (Haskin: 2005: 23).

Indeed, Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba opposed this attempt, and took a number of decisions that were to affect the future of the new independent Congo. On 8 July 1960, he replaced the Belgian name of the Congo Army "Public Force" by the "Congolese National Army" (CNA). He also dismissed the Belgian General Emile Janssens and appointed Victor Lundula as commander in chief, Joseph Desire Mobutu as his chief of staff and the Belgian Colonel Henniquian as the adviser of the CNA. Thereafter, he promoted the Congolese soldiers to the rank of officers. (Kibasomba: 2005: 3). However, these actions did not appease the anger of the Congolese soldiers since the following day, the mutiny spread all over the country, in areas such as Matadi, Kasai, Kabalo, Kivu and Katanga, and caused physical and material damage to the Europeans (Kibasomba: 2005: 86-7).

For the Historian Leo Zeilig, Lumumba had a different vision and understanding of the events at that time as he saw them as a strike to the social problems they were confronted to (Zeilig: 2008: 70). Mugur Valahu, in his turn, viewed the reaction of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba as weak since it favoured the Congolese soldiers and their mutiny, and therefore put an end to the riots (Valahu: 1964: 86). Considering Prof. Roger Kibasomba's view, Lumumba's decision worsened the prevailing context since he claimed that there was no appropriate transition from Belgian to Congolese army control, and that the colonial military model was still

prevailing with the top Congolese military leaders seeking their own interests and the soldiers using their authority over the people (Kibasomba: 2005: 3). As far as the reaction of the Belgians was concerned, Leo Zeilig refers to their fear and regrets concerning certain terms of the independence negotiations, in particular those related to the Public Force Army (Zeilig: 1964: 70).

The mutiny had the indirect effects of Africanising the Army and gave Prime Minister a motive to ask for the departure of the Europeans, but at the same time, it pushed Belgian civilians and soldiers to take part in the conflict, which deteriorated the situation. For instance, Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba asked the Europeans to leave Matadi, but only women and children left since European men stayed and shot Congolese with their arms which led to the death of 19 Congolese and the injury of others (Zeilig: 2008: 70-1). In Kabalo, a group of civilian Congolese prevented Europeans from taking the train to evacuate the place, which culminated in the Belgian military intervention (Zeilig: 2008: 71; Ndikumana and Emizet: 2005: 66). On 9 July 1960, the Belgian Paratroopers were sent to Kabalo in order to save the lives of those Europeans who were leaving the Congo. Notwithstanding, for Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, it was seen as a "sabotage" against his government. He notably declared: "We have just learnt that the Belgian Government has sent troops to the Congo and that they have intervened...We appeal to all Congolese to defend our Republic against all those who menace it"(Zeilig: 2008: 71). Again, this intervention can be seen as a violation of the above

mentioned Treaty of Friendship, Assistance and Technical Aid.

Noticing that the situation was deteriorating, Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba asked UN forces for help. These forces were made of soldiers from Ghana, Guinea and Morocco, and operated in Leopoldville to bring law and order in the marasmus that was prevailing at that time. For the historian Muger Valahu, these countries were pro-soviet and anti-European, which invited the presence of the Communists in the Congo, with the discreet appreciation of the Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba (Valahu: 1964: 88) During the same year, Moise Tshombe in Katanga and Albert Kalonji in Kasai saw these events as an opportunity to organise their secessionist movements, which represented another blow for Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba and his newly fragile government.

The Secessions of Katanga, the Kasai Secession and the Kasavubu-Lumumba-Mobutu Conflict: their Implications and Impact:

Moise Tshombe organised the secession of his province Katanga on 11 July 1960. He had historical motivations given the fact that he had different ethnic origins from the ruling class, had always been a fervent separatist and an advocate of the idea that part of the wealth of Katanga had always profited to the capital Leopoldville rather than Katanga, since 40 percent of it had gone there (Valahu: 1964: 89). Naturally, Moise Tshombe justified his action by the spread of the chaotic national context in the country to Katanga and the necessity to secure the area (Ndikumana and Emizet: 2005: 67). However, he was successful in crashing down the rebellion,

and was capable of restoring law and order in the region. For the historian Mugar Valahu, this justification was unfounded because Katanga was 1,400 miles away from the capital of the Congo Leopoldville, and the level of threat was not high (Valahu: 1964: 89).

Belgium worked for the maintenance of the Katanga secession and its foundation as a separate state. It notably provided it with weapons and soldiers; they included 100 tons of arms and ammunition such as mortars, sub-machine guns, and FN-38 automatic rifles, 25 Belgian air Force planes, and 29 Belgian officers and 326 Belgian NCOs technicians. In the meantime, it used its diplomatic ties to influence allies' decisions when it came to discuss the issue in the UN (Haskin: 2005: 28)

This was followed by the Kasai Secession which the separatist Albert Kalonji organised on 8/9 August 1960. This secession took place in the context of a political conflict opposing President Kasavubu and Prime Minister Lumumba, which will be discussed later. It had also the support of Belgium and was financed thanks to the diamonds that this province possessed. At the beginning, it was an anti-government secession with the sole objective to establish a free state out of the central government of the Congo.

On the whole, these secessions aroused the discontent of President, Joseph Kasavubu and Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba. Hence, Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba called for the departure of the Belgian soldiers and the diplomats, but they refused. Hence, he demanded the United Nations (UN) for intervention through technical aid to oust the Belgians and to stop the mutiny and the secessions of Katanga and Kasai.

The UN Secretary Dag Hammarskjold accepted to intervene in the conflict, but its contribution did not restore law and order. Indeed, the UN recognised the authority of the Central Congolese government, succeeded in crashing down the Mutiny of the Public Army and in ousting the Belgians from most of the Congolese territories. But it was unsuccessful in compelling the Belgians to leave Katanga and Kasai, and to stop their secessions. The UN resolutions which were passed allowed UN soldiers to go inside the provinces, but did not permit them to use force. For Leo Zeilig, it was "peculiar" for the UN to recognise the authority of the Central government over Katanga, and to shun to use force to support this recognition (Zeilig: 2008: 75).

M. Haskin also referred to this peculiar attitude and explained it by the fact that the Westerners supported their ally Belgium by refusing to pass resolutions that would threaten its interests, but at the same time did not recognise Katanga's Secession as an independence event, even when Belgium threatened to leave NATO (Haskin: 2005: 28). Such an attitude can also be explained by the international attempt to maintain a balance between the opposing dual forces of the Cold War and also to avoid the risk of destabilizing the unity of the newly independent African states, and therefore, the interests of their ex-colonies (Haskin: 2005: 24).

Noticing that no progress was taking place, Lumumba called the USSR for support. In agreement with President Kasavubu, he obtained that the Soviet Union would follow the situation hourly. But he felt impatient about the whole situation, and asked for the direct intervention of the USSR in the conflict. He notably asked for Soviet planes, trucks and

weapons to stop the secessions. In this sense, the CIA Station Chief in the Congo, Larry Devlin tells the following:

“I had a little Congolese sitting at the airport counting any white man who came off a Soviet aircraft in batches of five. Roughly 1,000 came in during a period of six weeks. They were there as *conseillers techniques* [technical advisers] and they were posted to all the ministeries. To my mind it was clearly an effort to take over. It made good sense when you stopped to think about it. All nine countries surrounding the Congo had their problems. If the Soviets could have gotten control of the Congo, they could have used it as a base, bringing in Africans, training them in sabotage and military skills and sending them home to do their duty.” (Zeilig: 2008: 75)

Thus, President Kasavubu, who was a pro-western, and was already in a political conflict with Lumumba, refused to cooperate with the Russian military officials, and broke with him. He notably dismissed him and all the members of his government. Lumumba, in his turn, did not recognise Kasavubu's decision, and dismissed President Kasavubu,

which paralyzed all the political institutions of the Congolese government.

Seizing this opportunity, Mobuto, who was also a pro-western, supported by the USA, decided to take the interim on 14 September 1960 by removing President Kasavubu and Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba from power, and asked the Soviet to leave in a period of 48 hours. He justified such an undertaking by claiming that it was a momentary solution since both Kasavubu and Lumumba were not in good terms. This disguised coup d'état accelerated the pace towards Lumumba's later arrest on 1 December 1960 and assassination on 17 January 1961 (Zeilig: 2008: 75-81; Haskin: 2005: 27). In Léonce Ndikumana and Kisangani F. Emizet's view point, Lumumba's death accelerated the UN action since his death appeased the existing tensions and paved the way for a general consensus to favour national unity to local separatism, which eased the work of the UN. (Ndikumana and Emizet: 2005: 67).

After almost two years, the Kasai and Katanga Secessions were finally stopped by the UN Forces in October, 1962 and January, 1963 respectively, and their leaders, Kalonji and Tshombe were arrested. As far as Moise Tshombe and Albert Kalonji were concerned, they turned out from allies to support to enemies to fight because they no longer served the interests and the objectives of the Westerners, at their top Belgium. All these events show that the foreign interests, either Belgian, Soviet or American prevailed over the nationalist Congolese ones, and to achieve them, they placed their Congolese puppets in power no matter the impact it could have on the future of the Congo and the Congolese.

Conclusion:

To conclude, one can say that the disastrous events that took place after the independence in the Congo were the results of the inexperience of the Congolese political elite, and their diverging views about what an independent Congo meant, also the greedy political and economic interests of the ex-Congo colonizer, Belgium, and the international context dominated by the Cold War. They all culminated in the disunity of the Congo, and the establishment of a chaotic situation, which prevented it from building a strong political, economic and social basis for its future. It notably destabilized the country, weakened its institutions, and paved the way for the dominance of the Western interests over the Congolese ones.

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