



**SECURITY COUNCIL
1961: THE SITUATION IN THE REPUBLIC
OF THE CONGO
TOPIC GUIDE**

MID-AMERICAN HISTORICAL SECURITY COUNCILS
APRIL 20-21, 2024

PRESENTED BY



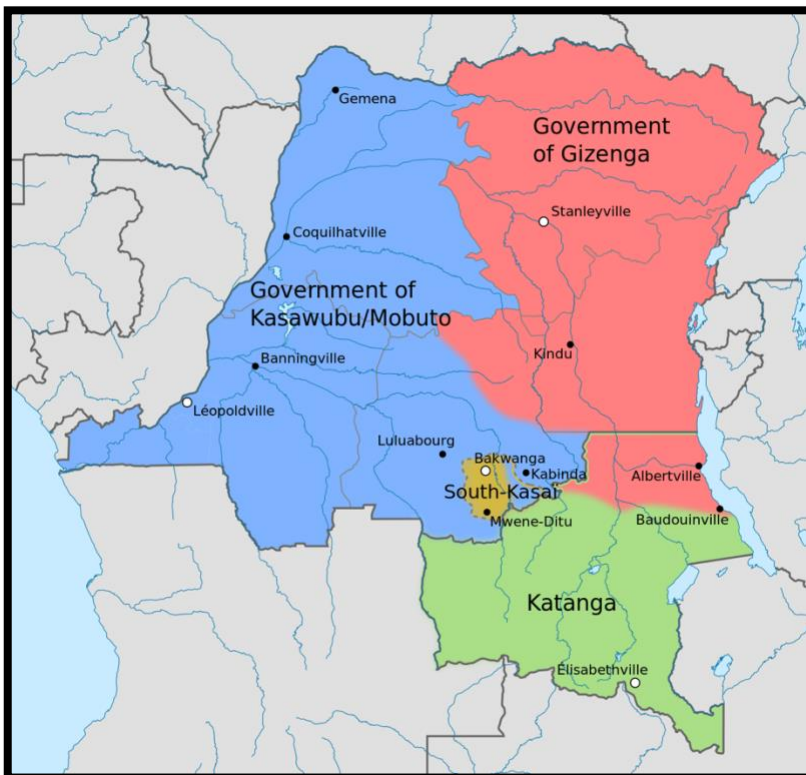
SECURITY COUNCIL

1961: The Situation in the Republic of the Congo

THE DATE IS 18 September 1961

The plane carrying United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld has reportedly crashed in darkness, shortly before landing in a forest near Ndola, Northern Rhodesia. Initial reports from Northern Rhodesia suggest it is unlikely that any individual could have survived the crash. At the time this paper went to print, there was no answer as to why the plane had crashed, though British authorities in Rhodesia are questioning whether the plane could have been targeted to avoid a peaceful negotiation process.

Early reports from this tragic situation indicate that Secretary-General Hammarskjöld was headed to negotiate a ceasefire in Katanga, the mineral-rich breakaway province of the Congo. In recent years, the Congo has been subject to considerable turmoil. Tensions have mounted since June 1960, when the Congo officially gained independence from Belgium. With the newly formed country's election ending in a tie, a compromise was made between the winning political parties. Joseph Kasavubu, backed by the Alliance of Bakongo (ABAKO), would be president and Patrice Lumumba, backed by the Mouvement National Congolais (MNC), would be prime minister. The tension between the Congolese and the formerly colonizing Belgians only continued to grow. Just a week after declaring independence, Congolese soldiers staged a mutiny against their white Belgian commanders at the Thysville military base.⁷



Amid the unrest, the province of Katanga succeeded from the Congo. The Katanga secessionist movement was supported by the formerly ruling Belgians, who wanted influence in Katanga's copper belt and mining operations. The Belgians sent troops to the Congo to restore order without seeking permission from either President Kasavubu or Prime Minister Lumumba.⁸

In July 1960, Prime Minister Lumumba requested that the UN step in and help remove Belgian soldiers and foreign mercenaries from the Congo's borders. The UN Security Council called upon Belgium to withdraw its troops and sent peacekeeping forces to the Congo, establishing the United Nations Operation in the Congo

⁷ <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/congo-decolonization>

⁸ <https://worldhistoryedu.com/congo-crisis-of-1960-1965-history-causes-effects/>

(ONUC).⁹ But the UN was reluctant to interfere with the Congolese government's fight with the Katanga secessionist movement, seeing it as an internal issue. Prime Minister Lumumba sought assistance from the Soviet Union, who provided weapons, technical advisors, and material support. This created tension between Prime Minister Lumumba and the rest of his government, especially President Kasavubu, who feared the implications of Soviet intervention. Further, this created fear in the United States that a Soviet-aligned Congo would lead to the spread of communism in Africa.

In September 1960, Prime Minister Lumumba was removed from power and arrested in a coup d'état led by Col. Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, who was supported by both Belgium and the United States. In January 1961, Prime Minister Lumumba was shot by a firing squad with reported assistance from Belgian officials and an attempt to discard the body was made to cover-up the assassination. The killing of Prime Minister Lumumba only created more tension in the Congo. With no clear leadership in the Congo, the Congolese and the colonial-Belgians both continue to seek to install a head of government.

Since July of last year, the UN has actively negotiated and drafted resolutions to help prevent the conflict in the Congo from worsening. Though the UN had finally arranged for both Belgian and Congolese officials to meet the Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld in Zambia for peace talks about the conflict in the Congo, the news of Secretary Hammarskjöld's presumed death has resulted in an immediate void of authority in both the UN organization and within this conflict. The UN Security Council finds itself in a position to immediately appoint a successor to lead the UN organization while two of its members, the United States and the Soviet Union, engaged in a proxy-conflict in the Congo. While no cause has yet been identified for the crash of Hammarskjöld's DC-6 aircraft, British authorities in Northern Rhodesia are questioning whether this crash was purposeful and have suggested that the incident was the result of actions taken by the Congolese, and likely were buttressed by the Soviet Union, to prevent the Secretary General from successfully negotiating peace in the region. The Security Council has been convened for an emergency session today, 18 September 1961, to determine an international course of action for this war.

Non-Permanent membership: Ecuador, Chile, Ceylon, Turkey, U.A.E, Liberia, Belgium, Katanga, South Kasai, Republic of the Congo

Permanent Membership: Republic of China, France, USSR, U.S., UK

⁹ <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/past/onucB.htm>