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CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY SUMMARY



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SPECIAL ARTICLES

THE USSR'S ROLE IN THE CONGO

A year ago, Moscow thought it saw an excellent opportunity to influence the Congo's political and economic development-- and to advance Soviet goals for Africa as a whole--by establishing a firm advisory position within the central government at Leopoldville. For a time, the USSR's objective of unifying the country under Patrice Lumumba coincided with the aim of independent African states. Soviet leaders, however, underestimating the extent of Afro-Asian support for the United Nations, overplayed their hand, and bloc aims in Africa suffered a severe setback.

Although its opportunities to influence the situation have diminished, the USSR does not consider the Congo a lost cause. An eight-man Soviet diplomatic mission arrived unannounced in the Gizenga stronghold of Stanleyville early last month, presumably anticipating the reconvening of the Congolese parliament. Two members of the Soviet Foreign Ministry told an American official on 27 July that the USSR expected the formation of a Congolese government representing all factions in parliament. Moscow has begun to lay the groundwork for cultivating Congolese extremists and those elements sympathetic to the Communist bloc.

Early Soviet Attitude

Soviet actions in the months before the Congo received independence gave no evidence that the Kremlin leaders anticipated the later developments there. Prior to 1960 the bloc maintained limited contacts with Congolese political figures through the Czech Consulate in Leopoldville. The Communists began systematic cultivation of leading

Congolese during the pre-independence Round Table Conference in Brussels early that year.

Principal responsibility apparently was assigned to the Belgian Communist party (PCB) and, within the party, to central committee member Albert Deconinck. Trips to East Germany, Prague, and Moscow were offered to the delegates, and some--including Gizenga--visited the bloc during and immediately after the conference.

The Economic Round Table in late April and early May of 1960 gave the PCB and bloc representatives in Brussels further occasion for contacts with the Congolese.

After the Belgian Government ended its administration of the Congo on 30 June 1960, Khrushchev sent a personal message recognizing the regime and requesting diplomatic relations. The Soviet delegates attending the independence ceremonies remained more than a week in Leopoldville, and at their departure an agreement to exchange ambassadors was announced.

The mutiny which broke out a week after independence--among Congolese troops near Leopoldville who demanded increased pay and the removal of Belgian officers--initially was not politically inspired or primarily anti-European in character. It received impetus, however, from inflammatory anti-Belgian speeches by Lumumba, who had come out ahead of his rivals in elections a few weeks earlier and

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headed a "national coalition" government representing 26 different factions and parties. His accession to the soldiers' demands led to the army indiscipline and rioting throughout most of the provinces and prompted a request from him and President Kasavubu for UN assistance in controlling the outbreak.

Influencing Factors

The rapidly deteriorating political and economic situation which followed gave Soviet leaders an opportunity to establish a strong bloc presence deep in Black Africa and at the same time to further the USSR's pose as champion of anticolonialism, benefactor of newly independent African states, and defender of African and Asian nationalism. In addition, it offered the possibility of opening to Communist penetration key areas adjacent to the still dependent territories of British East Africa, the Portuguese colonies, and, within the French Community, the new Central African Republic and Congo Republic (Brazzaville).

The collapse of the Paris "summit" meeting two months earlier had ended Moscow's pro-summit attitude of conciliation toward the West, and Soviet leaders had adopted an increasingly belligerent posture. Moreover, the Congo situation followed in the wake of the conference of Communist leaders at Bucharest in late June, at which the Chinese openly accused Khrushchev of softness toward the West. A specific point at issue was the degree and character of support the bloc should give nationalist movements in the underdeveloped areas.

Soviet leaders apparently felt that developments in the Congo could be fully exploited without undue risk, and Moscow mounted an extensive campaign of official statements, diplomatic activity, and propaganda as part of its strong anti-US line.

Bloc Tactics

Belgium's airlift of reinforcements to the Congo to assist its troops who remained there by treaty was immediately denounced by Khrushchev in a special press conference at the Kremlin as an attempt to suppress the Congo's attainment of independence. This was followed by a Soviet Government statement accusing the Western powers of seeking to "liquidate" the new state through direct military action.

The USSR initially supported UN action to deal with the situation in an effort to prevent unilateral Western intervention, force the withdrawal of Belgian troops and civilian advisers, and strengthen the central government. Premier Lumumba's extreme anticolonial nationalism supported the bloc's objective of removing European influences from Africa.

The independent African states favored UN intervention as a means of easing tension, restoring the authority of the Leopoldville regime, and avoiding extension of the cold war into Africa. Ghana and Guinea, already aiding Lumumba financially as part of their effort to promote claims to African leadership, were particularly eager to cooperate with the UN. In addition, they saw an opportunity to enhance their role within the international organization, to insulate the Congo from unwelcome foreign intervention, and--by acting as mediator between the Congolese premier and the UN--to set a precedent for future situations elsewhere in Africa.

At the Security Council session convened to discuss the situation, the Soviet delegate demanded a resolution condemning Belgium's "armed aggression," accusing the US of collaboration, and calling for the withdrawal of Belgian forces.

In the early days of the crisis, Soviet leaders sought to create the impression that

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the USSR might intervene. In reply to Lumumba's and Kasavubu's request on 14 July to "watch developments closely" since the Congo might "find it necessary" to ask for Soviet help, Khrushchev promised "resolute measures" and the "required help" if further "imperialist aggression" made such action necessary. Responding to Lumumba's reiterated threat a few days later to request Soviet troops, First Deputy Foreign Minister Kuznetsov told the Security Council that the USSR would "answer all requests" of peoples struggling for liberation. These carefully non-committal pledges, by appearing responsive to the Congo Government's concern, were also intended to bolster Lumumba's tenuous hold over the governmental machinery.

Meanwhile, the USSR began rallying neutralist support for its campaign to brand the Western countries aggressors. First Deputy Premier Mikoyan and Foreign Minister Gromyko expounded Soviet views on the Congo situation to diplomats at a reception on 13 July and called on the Afro-Asian countries to join the USSR in denouncing the West's intervention.

However, Soviet leaders were careful to avoid becoming isolated from the Afro-Asian position. In the Security Council, Kuznetsov withdrew his resolution calling for evacuation of Belgian forces within three days and accepted a mod-

erate one for "speedy" withdrawal sponsored by Tunisia and Ceylon.

Bloc Intervention

While Soviet diplomats were taking the lead in urging UN assistance to the Congolese Government, Moscow was obtaining maximum propaganda advantage by circumventing the UN facilities and delivering aid directly to the Congolese. The first Soviet planeload of food supplies arrived in Leopoldville on 20 July; from then until mid-September, when bloc personnel were expelled from the Congo, the Soviet bloc provided Lumumba's extremist faction with 17 aircraft (including a personal plane for Lumumba), 100 trucks, and unknown quantities of small arms, money, food, and medicines. The bloc sent 350 to 400 technicians and several high-level political and economic advisers, and Soviet IL-18s ferried Ghanaian and Guinean troops to the Congo in support of Lumumba.

The aid and support of bloc and radical African states encouraged Lumumba to take a hard line with his opponents and to defy the UN in order to achieve his goal of unifying the Congo under his personal rule. He boasted of bloc support and of the Soviet troops which would be sent if he requested them.

Soviet leaders apparently became concerned over the exaggerated Congolese expectations

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of bloc support. A party of Soviet representatives headed by Foreign Ministry official Fomin--later appointed Soviet chargé d'affaires--arrived in Leopoldville in late July aboard a Soviet food plane to coordinate future moves with the Lumumba government and channel first-hand information to Moscow.

During Lumumba's visit to New York at the end of July, the USSR sought to moderate Congolese demands. Two Soviet Government statements issued between 31 July and 5 August reaffirmed the USSR's readiness to "take resolute measures to rebuff the aggressors," but they carefully avoided committing Moscow to unilateral action.

An official statement on 20 August contained the first reference to "volunteers," a flood of which could come from among "loyal friends" in Africa and other continents if additional NATO units were sent to the Congo. The Congo three days later rejected Soviet military help, however, stating that it did not need foreign volunteers. Soviet propaganda began to claim that Moscow's action had prevented the US from intervening in the situation.

Attitude Toward the UN

Soviet leaders from the outset regarded the UN operation in the Congo as no more than a temporary expedient for eliminating Belgian influence and creating conditions favorable to advancing bloc aims in Africa. The African states expected that the UN would act in support of Lumumba and use

force against opposition elements --particularly secessionist Katanga Province--to unify the country under Leopoldville. They feared that political fragmentation into autonomous provincial governments would encourage continued economic dependence on Brussels and that national allegiance would be subordinated to tribal and sectional loyalties.

Secretary General Hammarskjöld, however, ruled that the UN resolutions did not authorize UN troops to use force on behalf of the central government. His failure to move against Tshombé's Belgian-backed regime in Katanga drew strong Afro-Asian and bloc criticism. Moscow accused Hammarskjöld and Under Secretary Bunche of connivance with the Western powers to perpetuate colonial control under cover of the UN.

When Mobutu overthrew Lumumba on 14 September and subsequently expelled all bloc representatives, Soviet tactics entered a new phase. The USSR launched an all-out campaign to wreck the UN's Congo operation. Moscow, for the first time, broke with the Afro-Asians by vetoing in the Security Council a moderate resolution sponsored by Tunisia and Ceylon designed to confirm Hammarskjöld's stand against unilateral military support to the Congo. General Assembly approval of the resolution on 15 September provoked the first Soviet propaganda criticism of the Afro-Asian position. In his shoe-pounding address before the General Assembly a week later, Khrushchev reaffirmed the USSR's support for Lumumba and made his "troika" proposal for replacing the UN secretary general.

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Soviet Influence Wanes

The bloc's direct involvement in the Congo virtually ceased with the closure of the Soviet and Czech embassies at Leopoldville on 17 September, and the USSR sought to channel assistance to pro-Lumumba forces through Guinea, Ghana, and the UAR. UN control of the major airfields prevented any substantial amount of aid from reaching the rebels.

In the UN, Moscow refused to pay its share of the Congo operation expenses and demanded that Hammarskjold submit proposals for withdrawing UN military forces.

The USSR responded to Lumumba's arrest in early December with a government statement scathingly attacking Hammarskjold and the UN command and laying the blame entirely on what it alleged was US interference. The statement again voiced displeasure with those African and Asian states which "have not preserved the requisite unity" on the Congo issue.

Soviet leaders took a cautious attitude toward the rump government proclaimed in Stanleyville by Lumumba's pro-Communist deputy Antoine Gizenga in mid-December, presumably to maintain flexibility with regard to events in Leopoldville. Gromyko stated publicly that the USSR recognized Gizenga as acting premier, but Moscow did not extend formal recognition to his regime. After a delay of ten days, Khrushchev replied to an appeal for material assistance from Gizenga by reiterating general promises of Soviet support and sympathy.

The UAR, however, threw its entire support to Gizenga. A "diplomatic" mission was established for him in Cairo, and UAR officers in Stanleyville provided military advice and technical assistance. Nasir

withdrew the UAR unit from the UN command and urged Ghana and Morocco to do the same.

Moscow apparently regarded UAR support for Gizenga as strengthening the position of the extremists and thus facilitating Lumumba's eventual restoration. It sought to coordinate bloc aid efforts with the UAR and made available to Gizenga's mission in Cairo a substantial sum of money and a small quantity of arms. Bloc states joined the UAR, Ghana, and Guinea in urging Sudanese officials to permit UAR overflights en route to Stanleyville. With Khartoum's refusal to grant this permission, bloc and radical African support for the pro-Lumumba group was restricted to demands for Lumumba's release and reinstatement and for the disarming of Mobutu and Tshombó forces.

The Soviet leaders saw in Lumumba's death—announced in mid-February—an excellent opportunity to carry forward their campaign against colonialism and again identify the USSR with anti-Western elements in Africa and Asia. They hoped it would lead to the withdrawal of the remaining Afro-Asian contingents in the Congo, and block any effective Western-backed UN action to deal with the situation.

Moscow also seized on the issue as a pretext for renewing Soviet attacks on Hammarskjold and for pressing Khrushchev's plan to reorganize the UN in the hope of garnering Afro-Asian support. In letters in late February to Nehru and other heads of government in Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America, Khrushchev sought to establish the point that Lumumba's death justified the Soviet proposal and Moscow's attack last fall on Hammarskjold. He proposed that all "foreign troops" be withdrawn from the Congo and replaced with a commission of African states.

As a gesture of restraint toward the new administration

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in Washington, Khrushchev did not directly implicate the US in Lumumba's death, but he obliquely warned against any unilateral intervention in the Congo.

Shortly thereafter, Communist China and the bloc satellites formally recognized Gizenga's regime and agreed to exchange ambassadors.

Present Soviet Attitude

Moscow's bitter denunciation of Hammarskjold reflected the frustration the Soviet leaders had felt since Lumumba was overthrown and bloc missions expelled from the Congo. In attacking the UN organization, however, the USSR lost support among the African and Asian countries. While the Asian-African states disagreed with some of Hammarskjold's policies, they were unanimous in upholding the institutional authority of the secretary general, and they considered the United Nations the only alternative to involvement in East-West power struggles.

Soviet hopes in the Congo were further frustrated by an apparent conflict of interest between Moscow and Cairo. As early as January there were signs that the Soviet Union was becoming concerned over the UAR's influence with Gizenga and the possibility of unilateral UAR aid.

The Soviets were also said to feel that Nasir was paying "lip service" to African nationalism while resting on the "laurels" of

his success in influencing Afro-Asian opinion.

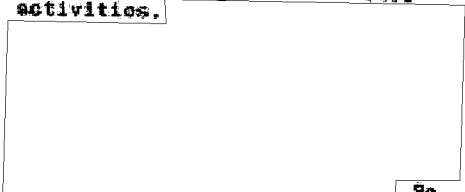
In late February, following the adoption by the UN General Assembly of a moderate resolution sponsored by the UAR, Liberia, and Ceylon upholding Hammarskjold's authority in the Congo, a top Soviet official reportedly characterized the UAR's African policy as "equivocal" and said Nasir's real aim was to isolate the "socialist camp" from Africa.

The failure of renewed Soviet efforts to provide aid to Gizenga and to install him as Lumumba's legitimate successor closed out this phase of Moscow's attempts to influence events in the Congo.



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Nevertheless, with political forces and structures still in flux, the Congo remains a potentially fertile ground for bloc activities.



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Soviet Foreign Ministry official Semenov warned Ambassador Thompson in mid-May that the Soviets had been restrained with respect to the Congo, but that if the situation should deteriorate, they would act "very forcefully." Should the current unstable relationships among Congolese factions break down, Moscow could be expected to move quickly in an attempt to influence subsequent alignments and regain its former position.

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