

CASE HISTORY IN SUICIDE

PATRICE LUMUMBA, Prime Minister of the Congo, is dead. And nothing that the suddenly pained voices of Western capitals may say is likely to persuade Africa that the West was not ultimately responsible.

Elisabethville is as independent as Brussels permits it to be. If Tshombe governs at all, he does so because there are enough Belgian soldiers to promote his authority and enough Belgian technicians to sustain his administration. Either service could be suspended by a brisk order from Brussels, recalling all soldiers and threatening technicians who serve the still illegal Katanga government with loss of Belgian citizenship if they continue. A freezing of all tax revenue by the Belgian mining companies would soon enough make recruiting in other countries unrewarding.

It is conceivable that the Belgian government was not a covert accomplice to the killing of Lumumba. That it connived at the killing cannot, however, seriously be doubted. It must have known that the killing of Lumumba was a manifest possibility. The proper instruction to the Tshombe regime, had it been parcelled up in the proper threats, would have prevented even an accident. Instead, the Belgian government has shown itself blatant as well as vicious. It did not care if Lumumba was killed and it did not care who knew this. It is true that the vicious often get away with a great deal in the blinding blizzards of the Cold War. Those who are blatant as well shut off their own passages of escape.

Certainly if Belgium must bear much of the responsibility for Lumumba's murder, the whole West is bound to share in the retribution. There are few in Lagos or Dar es Salaam, let alone Casablanca or Conakry, who will not believe that the West—and the United States in particular—could have compelled Belgium to ensure the release of Lumumba or at least the protection of his life. Washington has used the whip before; and then even Britain and France were forced to retreat. Nor is the killing of Lumumba likely to be seen in Africa as an isolated act, but as the culminating crime in a campaign of colonial banditry that began with the nominal independence of the Congo on July 1, 1960. The tragedy is that when, from some plateau of the future, the campaign is surveyed, not the least significant of the casualties will be the United Nations Organisation itself.

From the time, less than two weeks after independence, that the Belgian government dispatched troops to the Congo—with the stated objective of protecting the lives of Belgian settlers—and the provincial administration of Katanga announced its secession from the republic, the independence and integrity of the Congo became an international responsibility. At the request of the Congo's central government, headed by Kasavubu as President and Lumumba as Prime Minister, the Security Council demanded the withdrawal of Belgian troops as speedily as possible and placed a United Nations force at the disposal of the central government to assist it in maintaining law and order.

It should have been clear to the Security Council then, and to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, that the Congo could enjoy neither law and order nor the thinnest semblance of self-determination while the richest of its six provinces was being ruled as a separate state by the Belgian mining houses with the assistance of Belgian troops.

It was from the abject failure of the United Nations to compel the withdrawal of all Belgian forces from Katanga and so clear the Congo of open colonial intervention that the subsequent crisis inevitably spouted. What law and order was the United Nations Command called in to help the central government maintain, if it was not the law and order of the central government? And how could such law and order be acquired, let alone preserved, while foreign intervention continued unrestrained?

Lumumba threatened to invite the assistance of the Soviet Union if the United Nations did not expel the Belgian presence from the Congo. When he at last requested the United Nations Command to withdraw, since it was clearly unwilling or unable to perform the function for which it had been invited to enter the Congo in the first place, and he turned to the Soviet Union instead, he was denounced throughout the West as a Communist and a paranoiac. Kasavubu dismissed him from office—illegally, since the dismissal was invalidated by the Congo Parliament—and finally succeeded in placing him under arrest, to surrender him to captivity and killing in Katanga.

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On September 28, 1958, the 'overseas territories' of France were permitted to vote in a special referendum between limited autonomy within the French Community and complete independence. Guinea, alone of all the French African territories,

chose independence; and Guinea found itself at once under political and economic siege. By the first week in November only 12 remained of the 4,000 French technicians, doctors, judges, teachers and administrators who had been in the territory five weeks before. Even those who wished to stay were forced to leave under threat from the French government that they would lose their pension provisions. France cancelled all aid, halted all trade between the two countries, and even withdrew capital equipment from the territory. Guinea faced complete economic and political collapse.

Rebuffed by the United States, which fought shy of offending France, Sékou Touré was given loans by Ghana and the Soviet Union, while the first six countries to sign trade agreements with the new state were—in that order—East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Soviet Union, Hungary and Bulgaria. Czechoslovakia sent arms, medical and agricultural equipment to replace what France had removed, and together with Hungary and Poland signed agreements to construct factories and mills on long-term credit. It did not take long before Guinea was widely regarded throughout the West—despite Sékou Touré's long record of intellectual independence—as a Communist satellite. It is still being attacked as a mere manipulation of Moscow, though its government has shown itself to be resolutely neutralist, opposed to the colonialism of East and West alike. Significantly, it was Sékou Touré, alone of the African leaders advising Lumumba, who from the outset supported Lumumba in his appeal to the Soviet Union.

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Perhaps Lumumba was not the best Prime Minister the Congo could have had, though those who maintain this are slow to propose a better alternative. Whether he was or not, however, is supremely irrelevant. He was the legally elected Prime Minister of the Congo and leader of the country's democratically chosen strongest parliamentary party. Until the Parliament of the Congo displaced him—and this it unequivocally refused to do—he was the only figure in the Congo whom the United Nations had the right to regard as representing the majority will of the Congolese people. He was, after all, the authority for a United Nations presence in the Congo at all. Is it so reprehensible that, as Prime Minister, he wanted to govern a truly independent country? Is it conceivable that he was right in believing it the

duty of the United Nations to assist him in accomplishing this end? If he did not choose the wisest way of attempting to gain true independence for his country, can the West reasonably claim that it left him with any other choice?

There can be little satisfaction for those faithful to the principle and practice of democracy in attacking the United Nations for its conduct in the Congo. Yet it would surely be perverse for those who value the future of international democracy to do anything else. On February 15, 1961, the Prime Minister of India, addressing the Parliament at Delhi, announced that India would send combat troops to the Congo in response to a United Nations request "*only when it is convinced that they would be rightly employed for the freedom of the people and not in support of the gangster regime now ruling there*". A more corrosive commentary on the record of the United Nations Command in the Congo could hardly be implied.

The United Nations had no right to enter the Congo at the invitation of the central government in order to ensure the complete withdrawal of Belgian forces, and then stay without performing the function for which it was invited. It had no right to pay the troops of the central government directly instead of providing the central government with the funds to pay its own troops itself. It had no right whatsoever to close down the airport and radio station at Leopoldville to the Prime Minister and the President of the Congo, especially since it was aware—as how could it not be?—that the President had unrestricted access to the airport and radio station at Brazzaville, a short stretch of river away. It had no right to intervene at all in the struggle for power taking place within the central government between President and Prime Minister, backing Kasavubu with funds and then with the recognition of a seat for his delegation in the General Assembly while Lumumba was under arrest and members of the Congolese Parliament forcibly prevented from meeting by Kasavubu-controlled troops. It had no right to provide Mobutu with assistance of any sort, since he had no legal authority whatsoever. If the United Nations ceased to recognise the authority of the central government in the persons of its Prime Minister and Parliament, it ceased to recognise simultaneously the authority for its own presence in the Congo. The Secretary-General sponsored the resolution for the recalling of the Congo Parliament, by force if necessary. Had he done so before, might not Lumumba still be alive, and much of the Congo agony have been avoided?

The West will pay dearly for the way in which, with its 'automatic majority', it compelled the United Nations to a course of action increasingly partisan. Nor is there any repair in attempting to silence criticism by denouncing the Soviet Union for its repression of the Hungarian rebellion and the killing of Imre Nagy. The kettle is nonetheless black because it is the pot that calls it so. Can there be any real comfort in such a comparison?

For the West the killing of Lumumba is likely to turn out to be an unmitigated disaster. Already Tshombe's forces are being swollen by assistance from white South Africa and the Rhodesias, allying Belgium—and, for Africa, the whole West—with the most hated manifestations of racial rule.

The Security Council has ordered—it must unhesitatingly ensure—the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from the Congo, 'volunteers' from France, the Rhodesias and South Africa as well as Belgian forces. If the present Congo Parliament no longer reflects popular will since the killing of Lumumba and his two colleagues and the 'disappearance' of so many of its members, new elections must be held throughout the Congo—including Katanga—under the supervision of a committee drawn up from representatives of the Afro-Asian states. A new central government must be democratically chosen, and to that government, whatever its political complexion, the United Nations must pledge its support in the provision of economic, technical and military assistance.

Such patching is not, however, likely to cover all the holes that so much stupidity has stripped to sight. If the West could have afforded to contain a Verwoerd and Salazar before, it clearly cannot do so any longer. Only an energetic and imaginative initiative, leading to the elimination of 'white supremacy' and Portuguese colonialism throughout Africa, will restore some belief in the integrity of the declared democracies and the value of the United Nations.

Above all the West must learn—and show beyond doubt it has learnt—that Africa will not be dragged into the blizzards of the Cold War. A free Africa is an Africa free to choose its alliances or reject all power bloc entanglements. The West would do well to recognise the genuine force of African neutralism. If it does not do so soon, it will succeed only in providing a case history in political suicide.