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The United Nations, international peacekeeping and the question of 'impartiality': revisiting the Congo operation of 1960

David N. Gibbs*

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses peacekeeping *impartiality*, i.e. the extent to which peacekeepers act in the interests of international peace and security, rather than the interests of specific states or other external actors. It reevaluates the question of impartiality through an analysis of the Congo operation of July–September 1960. This case study was selected because it was by far the most important instance of peacekeeping during the Cold War. Based upon primary source materials from US, British, and UN archives, as well as memoirs and secondary sources, it finds that the Congo peacekeeping force intervened to a considerable extent in the internal politics of the Congo; in doing so, the peacekeepers collaborated with US policymakers and, to some extent, advanced their strategic objectives. A comparison between the Congo operation and recent cases of peacekeeping in post-Cold War Africa indicates that impartiality is likely to remain an elusive goal.

INTRODUCTION

The African continent has seen a marked increase in political instability during the past decade, owing to unfavourable economic conditions combined with what Basil Davidson (1992) has termed the 'curse of the nation state'. The result has been a rise in the scale and frequency of interstate wars, civil wars and communal violence. In several instances, African state structures have undergone generalised disintegration, resulting in collapsed or failed states. In response to these challenges in Africa (and elsewhere), many have viewed international peacekeeping as a potential source of hope. Over time, the conception of peacekeeping has gradually broadened in scope: in contrast with earlier conceptions

* David N. Gibbs is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Arizona. He would like to thank the following persons for comments: Michael Pugh, Michael Sullivan, Timothy McKeown, Gregory Nowell, Alan James and Harvey Feigenbaum. Financial support was provided by the Udall Center for Public Policy Studies and the University of Arizona Social and Behavioral Sciences Research Institute.

of a lightly armed 'neutral' UN peacekeeper, the new conception is much more activist. Increasingly, peacekeepers are expected to intervene in specific conflicts, with some measure of force when necessary, in order to facilitate conflict resolution. These newer conceptions of peacekeeping – sometimes called 'wider peacekeeping' or 'muscular peacekeeping' (see Crocker in Hirsch & Oakley 1995: x; Ruggie 1996: 11) – have a clearly interventionist quality. At present, international peacekeeping forces under United Nations direction operate in three African countries, with an additional fourteen operations completed during the past decade. It is useful to note that one of the active peacekeeping missions is the MONUC[1] operation, fielded in November 1999 in the Congo, where again civil disorder has led to the deployment of UN forces. Peacekeeping has also been undertaken by regional organisations, such as the ECOWAS force in Liberia. Most of these operations are relatively small in size and limited in scope; however, there have been several recent operations that fall into the category of muscular peacekeeping.

The objective of this study is to explore the question of *impartiality* in peacekeeping. It is widely assumed that peacekeeping forces operate as objective and disinterested parties in specific areas of crisis. Such impartiality is regarded as a desirable objective in its own right; it also provides peacekeepers with a sense of legitimacy, which helps facilitate the success of the operation. For the purposes of this article, we will define peacekeeping impartiality as follows: peacekeepers will be expected to serve universalistic interests (such as attenuation of violent conflict or protection of minorities from persecution) and must not serve the parochial interests of specific foreign powers, which seek to project their influence into the conflicts in question.[2] The foremost theorist of peacekeeping, Dag Hammarskjöld stressed the importance of an impartial and objective UN Secretariat, whose personnel would be able to adopt a truly international perspective (see Hammarskjöld 1975; Zacher, 1970: 13–15, 39–47). However, there are several qualifications: Hammarskjöld never believed that the UN Secretariat could or should be completely autonomous from great power influences (and, indeed such a degree of autonomy would be contrary to the UN Charter). Accordingly, he acknowledged that secretaries-general must 'carry out the policies as adopted by the organs', i.e. the General Assembly and the Security Council. The concept of peacekeeping impartiality is thus rendered problematic at the outset, since even Hammarskjöld recognised that the great powers would play a disproportionate role in framing peacekeeping operations, through

their dominant positions on the Security Council. Nevertheless, he implied that in the specific *implementation* of Security Council resolutions, the Secretariat staff could (and should) be impartial. Accordingly, the staff of the Secretariat was to constitute 'a truly international civil service, free from all national pressures and influences... not only in words but in deeds' (Zacher 1970: 39). Consistent with these objectives, Hammarskjöld gained a personal reputation for independence and political neutrality. Recent discussions of peacekeeping have also stressed the vital importance of impartiality. Alan James, one of the most distinguished authorities on this topic notes: 'It is impartiality which gives peacekeeping its distinctiveness... [Impartiality] is the lifeblood of peacekeeping' (James 1996: 211; also see Diehl 1993: 8–9). The vital importance of peacekeeping impartiality has been emphasised by a wide range of studies (Fetherston, 1994; James 1990: 106; Ramsbotham & Woodhouse 1996: 125; Väyrynen 1996: 35; Berdal 1993: 3; Goulding 1993: 454).

The question to be raised is whether and to what extent peacekeeping forces manage to achieve these standards of impartiality. A fully detailed assessment of this question is not possible for the more recent instances of African peacekeeping (including the new MONUC operation in the Congo), owing to the lack of archival materials pertaining to these operations. It is often forgotten that peacekeeping, like all aspects of international relations, entails a significant degree of official secrecy. Accordingly, we will examine the impartiality thesis through an in-depth case study of the peacekeeping operation that took place in the Congo during 1960–64. The Congo is an excellent case study since it was by far the largest peacekeeping operation of its era. The Congo operation was, in the words of Walter Lippmann (21.7.60: A17), 'the most advanced and the most sophisticated experiment in international cooperation ever attempted'. Given the substantial scale, duration and scope of its activity, the operation was several decades ahead of its time. The factors that triggered the Congo Crisis and led to the UN involvement – state fragility, lack of central government authority, and ethnic and regional fragmentation – bear comparison with recent African crises requiring peacekeeping forces. The Congo operation was the main substantive contribution of Dag Hammarskjöld during his tenure as secretary-general, and it is Hammarskjöld, more than any other single figure who is cited as the principal inspiration to present-day peacekeeping efforts. Finally, the Congo case can be studied in great depth, since substantial archival sources are available from the United Nations archives, as well as the archives of the United

States and Great Britain. The present study will draw on these primary materials. Recent peacekeeping operations, such as the one in Somalia, remain difficult to study since the archives are still closed, but we face no such limitations with regard to the Congo case.

This article evaluates the UN action in the Congo during its first two months of activity, from July to September 1960. The discussion focuses primarily on how the United Nations force affected the politics of the Congolese government; the principal analytical question is whether and to what extent the UN peacekeepers operated with impartiality. The conclusion explores the implications of the Congo case for contemporary peacekeeping operations in Africa.

BACKGROUND TO THE CONGO CASE

The United Nations Organisation in the Congo (Organisation des Nations Unies au Congo, or ONUC, 1960–64) resulted from one of history's least successful cases of decolonisation, which followed the independence of the Congo from Belgium in June 1960. The circumstances of Congolese independence appeared inauspicious from the start: the new country had serious regional and ethnic divisions (with some 200 separate language groups), and the resulting sense of national identity was significantly weaker than in other African countries that were reaching independence at approximately the same time. In addition, there were very few Congolese who had had any meaningful political experience prior to independence and, indeed there were no more than thirty Congolese with university degrees (Bokamba 1986: 193).[3]

Prior to departing, the Belgian administration had prepared a constitution for the new country, which emerged from a hasty series of meetings between Congolese nationalist leaders and Belgian colonial officials early in 1960. This new constitution, *La Loi Fondamentale*, entailed a bicameral parliamentary government, along with a president, whose powers were largely ceremonial, and a prime minister. General elections took place during May 1960, just prior to independence, and a substantial plurality was gained by the Mouvement National Congolais (MNC), led by Patrice Lumumba. A broadly based coalition government was formed, with Lumumba as premier; Joseph Kasavubu, who led the ABAKO party (representing the Bakongo ethnic group) became the president. Though the basic fairness of the election was never seriously questioned, Lumumba's nationalistic credentials and populist appeal made him highly suspect in official Belgian circles.

The Congo officially achieved independence on 30 June 1960, and only five days later, the country underwent a military mutiny and extensive civil unrest, followed by multiple foreign interventions. The circumstances of the disorder were highly complex, and the details lie beyond the scope of this essay. However, it had three decisive features. First, the Congolese army was in a general state of disarray, from which it did not fully recover for many years. Second, this military mutiny led to intervention by Belgian paratroopers. Though the Lumumba government initially countenanced this action, a series of Belgian excesses led to a rapid breach between the objectives of the Belgians on the one hand, and the Lumumba government on the other. Lumumba insisted within days that the Belgians remove their paratroopers; the Belgian government refused to do so, declaring that Belgian citizens were threatened by the disorder, and this response led to a breakdown of communication between the two governments. And third, the province of Katanga, in southeastern Congo, seceded from the country on 11 July 1960, less than two weeks after independence, and formed a separate, *de facto* state under the titular leadership of local politician Moïse Tshombe. The separation of Katanga was a severe blow to Lumumba's government, since the province contained vast mineral wealth and generated approximately half the country's total revenues. In addition, the secession encouraged other provinces to consider secession and, more generally, threatened the very survival of the Congo as an integral state. There was also a clear link between the Belgian intervention and the Katanga secession: Belgian paratroopers operating in Katanga directly supported the secessionist government, and helped to organise the Katangan gendarmerie into a military force.

The Congo Crisis was first brought officially to the attention of the United Nations on 12 July when the Congolese government transmitted a cable, signed by both President Kasavubu and Prime Minister Lumumba, requesting UN military assistance and declaring that Belgium had committed aggression against the Congo. In response, Secretary-General Hammarskjöld called a special meeting of the Security Council to discuss the crisis. The resolution that ultimately passed the Council insisted that Belgium withdraw its troops and authorised the secretary-general:

> to take the necessary steps, in consultation with the Government of the Republic of the Congo, to provide the Government with such military assistance as may be necessary until, through the efforts of the Congolese Government with the technical assistance of the United Nations, the national security forces may be able, in the opinion of the Government, to meet fully their tasks.[4]

The peacekeeping force, implicitly authorised by the reference to 'military assistance' in the Security Council resolution, was quickly organised and deployed. The first United Nations troops, a Tunisian contingent, arrived in the Congo on 15 July and were soon joined by units from Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, India, Ireland, Morocco and Sweden. Major-General Carl Von Horn, a Swedish officer, was selected to command the military forces. During the next four years, soldiers from some thirty countries participated in the ONUC operation which, at maximum strength, comprised almost 20,000 troops. In addition, the United Nations established a Civilian Operations programme, and several hundred UN specialists assisted the Congolese in such diverse sectors as transport, health, education, public works, finance, public administration, natural resources development and emergency food relief (UN 1985: 251–4; UN 1961: 108–18). This multinational team played a major role in administering the country and, overall, the scale of the operation was unprecedented in the history of peacekeeping until that time. Ralph Bunche, a prestigious and internationally known figure, was designated to provide overall supervision for the operation.

It should be noted that, from the outset, the United States was in a strong position to influence the ONUC force. One factor was the preponderance of American personnel in the operation, at least during the first months. Hammarskjöld himself was, of course, a Swede and thus from a neutral country, but this was not true for some of the secretary-general's advisors. The Eastern Bloc countries were largely excluded from the operation, and 'care was taken to see that no member of Secretariat, who was a citizen of a communist state, saw the Congo telegrams' (O'Brien 1966: 56–5).[5] The only communist country that played any significant role in the operation was neutralist Yugoslavia, which later fielded military personnel for ONUC. Americans, in contrast, played a major role in supervising the operation. According to Conor Cruise O'Brien, himself a former Secretariat official, the principal UN personnel who dealt with the Congo operation, consisted 'of an inner core of Americans round Mr Hammarskjöld, with an outer casing of neutrals' (O'Brien 1966: 56). The first field director of ONUC, Bunche, was an American national and a former State Department official. It should be noted, however, that there is no evidence that Bunche collaborated with the United States during his service in the Congo, and he was not always receptive to American entreaties: when the US government urged that the ONUC force disarm Congolese soldiers, to facilitate the restoration of

order, Bunche declined the request, fearing that it would be excessively controversial (Kalb 1982: 23). Nevertheless, Bunche 'worked closely with the US ambassador' to the Congo (Kalb 1982: 20). In addition, it seems likely that the US Embassy saw some of Bunche's cables to UN headquarters in New York since, during his first several days in the Congo, he relied on the Embassy's communication facilities (Urquhart 1993: 312). Bunche's replacement in August 1960 was Andrew Cordier, who was also an American with a State Department background. As we shall see later in this article, Cordier was to collaborate extensively with the United States. Heavy American financial support for the Congo operation also may have been a factor: throughout the four-year existence of ONUC, the United States provided 42 per cent of total ONUC expenses – far more than any other single country – and US support was especially crucial during the first months of the operation (Lefever & Joshua 1966: 154–5). O'Brien makes the following point: 'Washington paid most of the bills, was the heaviest contributor to the organization's general budget, and by far the heaviest contributor to the Congo operation, which would be brought to a standstill by a withdrawal of American support.' Due to this US predominance in financial matters, as well as the considerable US influence in the General Assembly and Security Council at that time, 'it is almost certainly true to say that any secretary-general who lost the confidence of Washington would have to resign' (O'Brien 1966: 56).

Finally, there can be little doubt that the US government attempted to use its power to influence the UN Secretariat with regard to the Congo operation. American officials would later acknowledge the success of their efforts: at one point, State Department official Averell Harriman opined that the Congo operation was beginning 'to appear as a United States venture rather than [US] support for an accepted United Nations plan' (US Department of State 14.12.61). The effects of this American influence will be evaluated shortly.

ONUC AND THE QUESTION OF INTERNAL CONFLICT

Upon the initial deployment of UN troops, the first issue of controversy was whether and in what manner the UN would deal with regional secessions, the most important of which was the province of Katanga. As we have seen, the Katanga secession was heavily influenced by Belgian interests; these interests had reasoned that if the rest of the Congo was in a state of disorder, then at least the province of Katanga

– which was the location of the largest Belgian investments – could be preserved under Belgian tutelage. Indeed, the large European settler community of Katanga continued to function as it had done prior to independence, while the Union Minière company, the overwhelming economic force in the province, carried on its mining activities virtually without interruption (O'Brien 1966: 81–2). Belgian troops strengthened the Katangan military, while Belgian civilian advisors wrote a constitution for the new state and provided technical support (US Department of State, 31.7.64). The Belgians also undertook a large-scale publicity campaign to build up international support for the Katanga secession, and according to a UN report, 'some at least of [the] international press men were given money by Union Minière' (views of UN official Sture Linner, paraphrased in UN 6.8.60a).

Belgian intervention was undoubtedly an important factor (probably the most important factor) sustaining the Tshombe government. By the end of July 1960, after the first two weeks of the UN troop deployment, the Belgian troops had withdrawn from most areas of the Congo and had been replaced by ONUC forces. The only exception was Katanga, where the Belgian forces resisted withdrawal and the UN hesitated to enter. The Katangan government authorities, for their part, declared their intention to 'resist by every means... the dispatch of United Nations forces to Katanga' (Abi-Saab 1978: 29). UN officials who visited Katanga during this period reported intense hostility toward ONUC, emanating from both the Katangan authorities and the Belgian business community (UN 6.8.60b). The problems of entry into Katanga necessitated passage of an additional Security Council resolution, on 8 August 1960, which explicitly granted to the Secretariat the authority to send ONUC forces into Katanga and to remove the remaining Belgian troops from the province. Crucially, this resolution also stated that 'the United Nations force in the Congo will not be a party to or in any way intervene in or be used to influence the outcome of any internal conflict, constitutional or otherwise' (Higgins 1980: 19).

United Nations forces finally began to enter Katanga on 12 August, when Hammarskjöld personally flew to the Congo and escorted several units of Swedish infantry (under UN command) into the secessionist province. Other ONUC forces arrived in Katanga shortly thereafter, and the gradual withdrawal of the Belgian paratroops commenced. To be sure, many of the paratroopers did not really leave the province, as some of them simply discarded their Belgian uniforms and wore the garb of the now defunct colonial military, while official Belgian

government support for the secession continued (although somewhat more discreetly than previously).[6] The Belgian business interests, in close cooperation with the Belgian government, subsidised and supported the secessionist government; mercenaries and 'volunteers' were recruited in Europe (and later in southern Africa) to reinforce the Katangan gendarmerie and to maintain internal security in the province (Gérard-Libois 1966: 103–6, 161, 206; see also UN, 23.10.61).

Hammarskjöld made it clear that the UN forces would only effect removal of the regular Belgian troops. He would make no effort to terminate the Katanga secession and declared: the dispute between:

> the provincial government [of Katanga] and the central government would be one in which the United Nations would in no sense be a party and on which it could in no sense exert any influence... the United Nations force cannot be used on behalf of the Central Government to subdue or to force the provincial government to a specific line of action. (Abi-Saab 1978: 38)

He also asserted that the Belgian involvement in Katanga had essentially terminated or at least, was on the verge of being terminated. In Hammarskjöld's words, 'The difficulty which the [Security] Council faces in the case of Katanga *does not have its roots in the Belgian attitude* [emphasis added]... as stated to me', since the Belgians would comply in good faith with the Council resolutions (Cordier & Foote 1975: 65).

Prime Minister Lumumba reacted very strongly to the decision by the UN regarding the Katanga secession and to Hammarskjöld's explanations. The sense of urgency was intensified when the province of South Kasaï also seceded in August 1960. The South Kasaï government (like its counterpart in Katanga) was nominally run by African officials but, in fact, was heavily influenced by a local Belgian diamond mining company (UN 18.10.60). The new regime in South Kasaï aligned itself with the Tshombe regime in Katanga, against the central government. It should be noted that South Kasaï played only a secondary role in the Congo crisis, since the province was far less economically valuable than Katanga. However, South Kasaï reaffirmed the danger of further secessionist efforts and the very real possibility of national disintegration.

Lumumba wrote a series of sharply worded letters to Hammarskjöld, insisting that he authorise the ONUC force to provide military and transport assistance to the Congolese military and to assist the government in suppressing the secessions (Higgins 1980: 132–3). Hammarskjöld firmly refused this request, and a bitter exchange took place. Lumumba had also sought American assistance to subdue the Katanga secession, but the US government (which was covertly

backing Katanga) also refused.[7] In late August 1960, Lumumba requested and received military assistance from the Soviet Union to suppress the regional rebellions. The Soviets provided planes, trucks and a number of military advisors to assist units of the Congolese National Army. Up to 380 Eastern Bloc personnel arrived in the country (Timberlake 1963: 109). With this Soviet logistical support, Congolese troops were assembled and moved to the southeastern region of the country, in preparation for an offensive against the South Kasaï secession (a separate assault on Katanga was planned to take place subsequently). When the offensive was actually launched, however, the poorly led Congolese forces quickly disintegrated. In retribution, the demoralised troops went on a rampage and committed numerous atrocities against civilians in the region. The combination of Soviet aid, the failed offensive and the atrocities all tarnished Lumumba's international reputation and, as we shall see, invited retribution by the United States.

The secessions of South Kasaï and Katanga would in fact continue for several years, before they were finally terminated in 1962 and 1963, respectively. At this point we will focus on Hammaskjöld's decision to stay out of these conflicts. Hammarskjöld himself justified his actions precisely in terms of non-intervention. He argued that the United Nations could not take any actions to terminate the Katanga secession (or other regional secessions), since this would constitute UN intervention in a purely internal political conflict, something that the UN was barred from undertaking. These points were reiterated by other UN officials. Regarding Katanga, Bunche noted that 'the secretary-general was merely applying the same principles applied ... in previous situations, such as Lebanon and Hungary. The United Nations should not become involved in the internal political affairs of a country ... [The ONUC force] could not become a party to internal political disputes' (paraphrased in UN 12.8.60).

Some of Hammarskjöld's and Bunche's points lack plausibility. The assertion that the Katanga question constituted an internal issue was contradicted by substantial evidence of long-term intervention by both official and private Belgian interests; this intervention was apparent from the very beginning of the secession in July 1960 (Gérard-Libois 1966: 102–9). Later, United Nations documents would emphasise the significance of Belgian involvement. For example, a UN document from October 1960 noted: 'In Katanga, Belgian influence is omnipresent. Virtually all key civilian and security posts are either held directly by officials of Belgian nationality or controlled by advisors to

recently appointed and often inexperienced Congolese officials.'[8] The Belgian interests contributed most of the operating revenues for the Tshombe government, throughout its two and a half year existence; by January 1963, Bunche wrote that the Belgian interests exercised considerable influence in Katanga, and added: 'Tshombe has been receiving approximately $40,000,000 per year from Union Minière, much of which has been expended in the hiring of mercenaries and equipping them' (UN 23.1.63). According to another UN document: 'the idea that Katangan resistance is a native and African affair is a myth put out for foreign consumption and is scoffed at in private by the Europeans here' (UN 23.10.61).

Whether or not Hammarskjöld was fully aware of this information during August 1960, his assertion that the Katanga secession was not influenced 'by the Belgian attitude' seems inconsistent with the historical record. In other respects, however, Hammarskjöld's explanation seems reasonable and well founded. Certainly some of Lumumba's specific requests (e.g. that ONUC place its military resources at the disposal of the Congolese central government) seemed incompatible with the duties of a peacekeeping force. ONUC had been prohibited from intervention by the Security Council's August resolution. One could argue that Hammarskjöld's actions resulted not from political bias, but because a concern with legality prevented the United Nations from taking interventionist actions. However, we shall see that subsequent UN actions – which were strongly interventionist – contradict this interpretation and suggest that Hammarskjöld was perfectly ready to countenance interventionist activities by the ONUC forces. Indeed, ONUC was to intervene in some of the most sensitive political matters in the Congo, and would do so with the approval of the secretary-general.

INTERVENTION BY THE UNITED NATIONS

Lumumba's decision to accept Soviet aid considerably augmented Western antagonism towards his government. The United States became particularly hostile at this point and the Central Intelligence Agency initiated covert operations aimed at destabilising Lumumba (see US Senate 1976: ch. 3). Declassified documents confirm that ONUC personnel, including Hammarskjöld, were drawn into at least some of these anti-Lumumba efforts, and that the secretary-general worked closely with American officials. The US delegate to the United Nations, Henry Cabot Lodge, noted on 8 August that 'Hammarskjöld

had made a very strong statement today' regarding the Congo issue and added: 'frankly... he [Lodge] had assisted Hammarskjöld in writing it' (paraphrased in US Government 8.8.60).

In addition, Hammarskjöld's views of Lumumba were similar to those of Western officials, and Hammarskjöld regularly communicated his opinions to American officials (and also their British allies). A National Security Council document noted, 'Hammarskjöld considers Lumumba an impossible person (quoted in *Foreign Relations of the United States* 1992 [hereafter *FRUS* 1992]: 442). Hammarskjöld indicated that he hoped to see Lumumba replaced and, at one point, he told the US ambassador to the UN that 'Lumumba must be "broken"' (paraphrased in *FRUS* 1992: 444), while Hammarskjöld told British diplomats that he considered it essential 'to "undercut" Lumumba'(cited in UK Foreign Office, 2.8.60).[9] According to a State Department analysis (25.1.61: 29), 'Hammarskjöld was thirsting for a showdown' with Lumumba.[10] On 5 September there was in fact a showdown: President Kasavubu announced that he was dismissing Lumumba as prime minister and appointing Joseph Ileo, a senator and leader of one of the ethnically based parties, to be the new premier.

While the complex internal politics that surrounded the political crisis lies beyond the scope of this article, it is important to emphasise that internal factors alone cannot explain the dismissal of Lumumba. Lumumba's most controversial actions – including the breaking of relations with Belgium and the acceptance of Soviet aid – had all been publicly approved by Kasavubu. President Kasavubu's opposition to Lumumba emerged quite suddenly. It should also be noted that Kasavubu had a reputation as a relatively passive leader, with little individual initiative, and these characteristics were noted by numerous observers (a State Department analysis would later refer to Kasavubu's 'usual somnolence' [US Department of State 28.10.65]).[11] It is unlikely that Kasavubu would have acted on his own, without external encouragement from the ONUC forces.

Key UN officials clearly favored the decision to dismiss Lumumba. Hammarskjöld, as we have seen, privately expressed negative views of Lumumba, and a close aide to Hammarskjöld in the UN Secretariat, Andrew Cordier, shared these views. At one point, on 18 August Cordier wrote to a colleague as follows (Collins 1993: 255):

> The only real solution of the problem is a change of leadership. It will not be easy, however to remove Lumumba from his position. Furthermore there are limits to our own capacity to bring about a change of leadership. We can produce such a situation in the international climate as to affect political

pressures within the country, but we are excluded under the [UN] Charter from direct action of a political character which would affect the political balance of leadership within the country. In various ways the Secretary-General has given encouragement to the moderates and they are also receiving encouragement from other powerful sources.

Though much of this statement is vague, at least several points are clear: Cordier definitely favoured the removal of Lumumba from a position of power in the Congo. He also acknowledged that some form of action was being undertaken by the UN Secretariat ('encouragement to the moderates') to effect this removal, even while Cordier saw a need to keep UN actions within certain parameters. Cordier's statement notes too that Hammarskjöld was involved in the efforts to influence internal events in the Congo. During the period 1–6 September 1960, Cordier served as the director of the ONUC programme (as a temporary replacement for Bunche), and he held this position at the time of the constitutional dispute between Kasavubu and Lumumba.

There is no evidence that Cordier directly orchestrated Kasavubu's decision to dismiss Lumumba, but Cordier and other ONUC officials were aware of Kasavubu's plan several days in advance (Hoskyns 1965: 201). When Kasavubu announced the dismissal, UN personnel expressed satisfaction, as noted in the memoirs of General Von Horn, who commanded the UN force: At ONUC headquarters, 'it was impossible not to detect an atmosphere of relief, almost of satisfaction' (Von Horn 1967: 208). In a public statement, Hammarskjöld supported Kasavubu's actions: 'I do not want to analyze the complicated constitution and the complicated constitutional situation, but let me register as a fact that, according to the [Congolese] constitution, the president [Kasavubu] has the right to revoke the mandate of the prime minister' (Cordier & Foote 1975: 164). This interpretation of the Congolese constitution was questionable: Lumumba still had support in parliament, and it is doubtful that the framers of the Congolese constitution intended that the president should have so much independent power that he could dismiss a premier who had not lost the confidence of parliament.[12] Indeed, a State Department analysis noted that the position of president 'was initially thought to be largely honorific' (US Department of State 25.1.61: 2).

Immediately after the dismissal was announced, Cordier undertook a series of controversial actions that significantly influenced the course of the power struggle. United Nations forces closed the Léopoldville airport and, shortly afterward, the radio station as well. This was

officially considered a disinterested action and, in principle, it affected both Kasavubu and Lumumba equally; in practice these actions clearly benefited Kasavubu and weakened Lumumba. Kasavubu moved his radio broadcasts to Brazzaville in the former French Congo. The conservative government in that country despised Lumumba's purported radicalism and permitted Kasavubu to make radio broadcasts from the radio station in Brazzaville. Since Brazzaville was only a short distance from Léopoldville, Kasavubu's broadcasts easily reached audiences in the capital city. Lumumba, in contrast, had no such means to broadcast. The UN's decision to close the airport also had political consequences: Lumumba could not airlift troops to the capital, which otherwise might have restored Lumumba to power. Declassified documents indicate that the United Nations had actively sided with Kasavubu, against Lumumba and had done so deliberately. In conversations with a British diplomat, Hammarskjöld candidly stated that 'the actions of the United Nations favored *and were designed to favor* Kasavubu' (quoted in James 1996: 71, emphasis added).[13] American officials advocated even more extensive action by the ONUC force, specifically that its troops should have kept pro-Lumumba elements off the streets. UN officials balked at this suggestion, probably because it would have appeared excessively interventionist (*FRUS* 1992: 464). Nevertheless, declassified documents leave no doubt that Hammarskjöld and other UN officials were intervening in the Congo, that they were doing so intentionally, that they were actively collaborating with Western officials in the course of these interventions, and that these actions were salutary for US foreign policy objectives.

Privately, Hammarskjöld stated that he 'would recognize, deal with, and by implication strongly support Kasavubu in his struggle with Lumumba' (paraphrased in *FRUS*, 1992: 466). He also implied that he was willing to intervene in Congolese politics, although Hammarskjöld (like Cordier) wished to keep such intervention within limits: in a conversation with an American official, the secretary-general stated 'that what he was trying to do was to get rid of Lumumba without compromising UN position and himself through extra-constitutional actions'. Hammarskjöld 'compared his activities to "gamesmanship – how to win without actually cheating"' (paraphrased in *FRUS* 1992: 465). Several days later, when it appeared that Lumumba was again gaining the upper hand, a White House document reads: 'Hammarskjöld commented [in discussions with a US official] that he still believes we can break Lumumba' (*FRUS* 1992: 485).

Throughout this period, Hammarskjöld sought to keep his American

colleagues well informed. In addition, the secretary-general went further and actively coached US diplomats on how to conduct policy in the Congo and shared confidential ONUC information with the Americans. A State Department document from September 7 reads as follows (*FRUS* 1992: 458–60):

> SYG [the secretary-general] then produced cable from Cordier stamped 'top secret' (UN usage) and read selected sentences aloud... Main point for US in Cordier's cable was his 'urgent recommendation' that US send someone 'not too high level, not too junior' to Léopoldville to arrive with certain amount of fanfare. He would be able to observe local scene, see what the Soviets are up to, and make first hand report to Washington. Hammarskjöld stressed this was Cordier's recommendation, based on close touch with local scene and he (SYG) passed it along without making any recommendation himself, although he said he felt Cordier had good judgement in matters this kind... Should US decide to act upon Cordier's recommendation, Hammarskjöld expressed strong desire to be in the picture and in effect to be consulted on timing.[14]

Hammarskjöld's statements were carefully worded. He stopped short of explicitly endorsing Cordier's recommendation, but he was quite willing to convey the recommendation and urged that it be given serious consideration. In addition (toward the end of the paragraph), Hammarskjöld solicited US officials to seek his counsel in the future. Overall, there can be little doubt that Hammarskjöld's views during this period paralleled those of US policymakers: at one point, Hammarskjöld stated that 'his primary objective now is to "explode" what Soviets are up to' in the Congo (paraphrased in *FRUS* 1992: 458). And, not surprisingly, US officials encouraged Hammarskjöld's actions. Several days after Lumumba's dismissal, Secretary of State Christian A. Herter 'telephoned Secretary-General Hammarskjöld that we [the US government] were with him 1000% and Hammarskjöld said he was very grateful for this' (paraphrased in *FRUS*: 478).

The UN's effort to remove Lumumba was ultimately unsuccessful. It became evident that Lumumba was a far more capable tactician than his opponents. On 7 September, Lumumba appeared before a joint session of parliament where, using all of his persuasive skills, he presented his case before the deputies. He defended his actions, including the acceptance of Soviet equipment, noting (accurately) that he had 'turned to the Russians for planes only when the Belgians supplied planes to Tshombe and after both the UN and US had abandoned him' (US Department of State 25.1.61: 34). The parliamentarians voted overwhelmingly to reaffirm their confidence in Lumumba as prime minister and to countermand the earlier dismissal.

The reinstatement of Lumumba caused great consternation among Western officials. UN personnel lamented Kasavubu's incompetence, and according to one: 'Kasavubu after making radio address dismissing Lumumba, went home and went to bed and could not be reached... "How can you make a revolution with such material?"' (UN official Heinz Wieschhoff paraphrased in *FRUS* 1992: 464).

After Kasavubu's failure, the Congolese National Army began to move into the limelight. Most of the military remained in disarray during this period and, virtually the only functioning units were under the command of Colonel Joseph-Desiré Mobutu, and the colonel was thus positioned to play a key role in the Congo Crisis. Mobutu had held a secondary post in Lumumba's original government although, after the mutiny against Belgian tutelage, he was dispatched to the military as a commissioned officer. In his new military capacity, Mobutu began to renew his acquaintances among the personnel of the Congolese National Army, and by early September, he had a group of several hundred officers and men who were loyal to him and, loosely, under his command (Young 1965: 447–50). Despite these assets, Mobutu was relatively young and inexperienced. A State Department official described him as 'a childish individual' who had 'no sense of administration and could be, we thought, easily bought' (Christian A. Herter paraphrased in *FRUS*: 528).

On 14 September Colonel Mobutu seized power in a *coup d'état*. He dismissed both Kasavubu and Lumumba and suspended parliament. He established a council of Congolese university students, the *Collège des Commissaires*, to advise him. Essentially, the Congo was to be ruled by a military government, although Mobutu insisted that this rule would be temporary.[15] This coup did not result from purely internal factors. It should be noted that Mobutu was heavily dependent on outside support during this period, since he lacked financial resources to pay his men and to ensure their loyalty, and such support was forthcoming from several sources, including the ONUC military force. Mobutu also received advice from ONUC forces. A detachment of Moroccan soldiers led by Major-General Ben Hammon Kettani was assigned to advise Mobutu's unit and, more generally, to assist in reorganising the Congolese military. These Moroccan officers, especially General Kettani, had considerable influence with Mobutu, who referred to Kettani as 'my military advisor and my best friend' (Weissman 1974: 96). During the turmoil surrounding Lumumba's dismissal, when security was especially questionable, Mobutu moved with his family into a house next to Kettani's own residence (Rikhye 1993: 95).

We will note two key features of the UN military assistance. First, the UN supported Mobutu, and this support was a major factor in advancing him as a political figure. Specifically, Cordier authorised ONUC to disperse $1 million dollars (in local currency) to unpaid Congolese soldiers, and on 10 September the money was dispersed in a public ceremony in Léopoldville. Officially, the payment was intended to propitiate the troops and, hence, to reduce their tendency to loot and foment disorder. However, Mobutu was allowed to have a prominent place in these payment ceremonies, and thus it was Mobutu who received most of the credit. The colonel's prestige and influence within the military ascended accordingly. In the view of Catherine Hoskyns (1965: 213; for similar views, see Weissman 1974: 98; Collins 1992: 18), who interviewed many of the principals, 'It was apparently agreed that Mobutu should be allowed to claim the credit for this payment in the hope that it would help to build up his authority and increase the hold which he had on his men.'

UN officials, notably Kettani, encouraged Mobutu to disregard his previous support for Lumumba and to remain neutral in the dispute between Lumumba and Kasavubu. Mobutu followed this advice and made no effort to support Lumumba against Kasavubu, despite his former loyalty to the prime minister; then, when Kasavubu faltered, Mobutu staged his 14 September takeover (Weissman 1974: 98). There is no definitive proof that the United Nations encouraged Mobutu's coup. However, the conservative Belgian newspaper *La Libre Belgique* alleged 'a "discreet but capital" intervention by Kettani' (paraphrased in Weissman 1974: 98). At the very least, the UN played an indirect role in fomenting the coup. Hoskyns (1965: 216) draws the following conclusion: 'it must be recognized that, whatever the intention, the United Nations action in paying the Léopoldville troops on 10 September went a long way towards strengthening Mobutu's authority and making the coup possible'.[16]

A second point is that United Nations policy, by supporting Colonel Mobutu's rise to power, closely paralleled policies that the US government was pursuing during the same period. The United States had long cultivated Mobutu, beginning in 1959, when CIA officers first made contact with him in Belgium (Kelly 1993: 10). The US connection to Mobutu would remain a feature of Congolese politics for many years afterwards. During the Congo Crisis, the United States supported UN efforts to strengthen the military: before obtaining the money to pay the troops, Cordier telephoned US Ambassador 'Clare Timberlake about funds and Timberlake replied reassuringly that

there would be no difficulty. Then Cordier sent a cable to UN headquarters asking for early remittance of one million dollars' (quoted from Dayal 1976: 34).[17] The United States clearly encouraged the UN's support for Mobutu. In addition, the CIA supplemented UN support and made direct, covert payments to Mobutu, which he presumably used to pay his troops and augment his power (Dayal 1976: 66; Kalb 1982: 96; Weissman 1974: 95). It is not entirely clear when US intelligence first began large-scale financial support for Mobutu, but the funds were definitely flowing shortly after the United Nations paid the Congolese troops on 10 September (Dayal 1976: 66; Kalb 1982: 96). CIA backing for Mobutu during the Congo Crisis has been acknowledged by numerous sources, including the former Director of Central Intelligence William Colby (September 1984: 36). Another former CIA officer, Victor Marchetti, has confirmed that US intelligence operatives encouraged Mobutu to seize power.[18] In short, the United Nations and the United States were both funding the Congolese military and, in doing so, they were increasing Mobutu's political influence. Mobutu's resulting ascendancy was clearly advantageous for the United States: Immediately after his seizure of power, Mobutu expelled all Soviet-bloc personnel.

At this point we will return to the question of peacekeeping impartiality. Feld and Jordan (1989: 123–4) write that 'international civil servants, while in international employment should not receive instructions of any kind from their own governments or attempt to represent the interests of their national governments in any manner', and they add: 'international secretariats [should be] independent of political pressure from any national government or group of member-states'. Such administrative separation may be regarded as a vital feature, in order to insulate the peacekeepers from external pressures. The archival materials on the Congo operation presented above offer little empirical support to the notion of peacekeeping impartiality. It is clear that UN officials – beginning with the secretary-general himself – collaborated closely with their counterparts from the US and British governments.

Such collaboration took place repeatedly and concerned some of the most sensitive political issues: Hammarskjöld and other UN officials shared confidential information with the Western powers and coached them on how to coordinate their policies with those of ONUC; in one instance, Hammarskjöld presented a speech on the Congo that had been written partly by the American delegate to the UN. Communist bloc countries, in contrast, were excluded from significant participation

in the ONUC operation and from the decision-making processes that governed ONUC. Finally, ONUC officials participated in some of the US-led efforts to manipulate events in the Congo, including the intrigues against the Lumumba government and the efforts to establish Mobutu as a power within the military. Such collaboration seems incompatible with the idea of administrative insulation, which is regarded as an essential concomitant of any impartial peacekeeping role.

The findings in this article do not suggest that the UN was *completely* dependent on the United States, or that the UN force possessed no autonomy whatsoever. As we have seen, there were a number of incidents in which the UN defied American pressures. When American officials requested that ONUC disarm the Congolese military and, later, when they urged ONUC to remove Lumumba supporters from the streets of Léopoldville, United Nations personnel politely refused these requests. It should also be noted, more importantly, that the UN presence limited the degree of direct great power influences in the Congo: the Americans never committed regular military forces, the Belgians gradually withdrew their paratroopers, and the Soviets engaged in military intervention only at a very low level and for a brief period of duration. Despite its limited independence, the United Nations probably did, to a small extent, lessen the great powers' intervention in the Congo. And it may well be that the Congo Crisis would have had an even worse outcome, with greater loss of life, had the United Nations not intervened. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to conclude that ONUC's partiality toward American interests was considerable. In 1963, an American diplomat commented 'through most of the three years [of the Congo operation] the UN *acted as an agent* of the U.S' (Jonathan Dean paraphrased in Cox 1963, emphasis added).

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A key question is whether recent, post-Cold War peacekeeping operations have been conducted with higher or lower levels of impartiality than the Congo operation. Unfortunately, a full answer to this question must await the declassification of UN and other documents, and these materials will be unavailable to researchers for an extended period of time. Nevertheless, we will offer some tentative observations: the closest parallel to the ONUC operation during the post-Cold War era was the UNOSOM II mission in Somalia, which began in March 1993.[19] Like the Congo case, this was an operation of

vast size and scope, which sought (unsuccessfully) to reestablish order in the context of generalised insecurity and communal violence. The UNOSOM force, again like ONUC, was truly multinational in its composition and its command structure, with troop contingents from thirty-four countries, under the direct authority of the UN secretariat. However, the evidence suggests that many of the same problems of US domination that circumscribed impartiality in the Congo were also at work in Somalia. The first overall director of UNOSOM was Jonathan Howe, a retired US admiral. The military commander of the operation was Lieutenant-General Cevik Bir, 'a respected Turkish officer well known in NATO circles' (Hirsch & Oakley 1995: 108). Bir's deputy commander, Major-General Thomas Montgomery, was an American. And US troops, especially those in the Quick Reaction Force, provided overall security for the peacekeeping force.

In December 1992, shortly before the initiation of UNOSOM II, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali noted: 'the UN cannot undertake any major military operation unless the US participates actively. But when it does, it [the US] insists on running the whole show.' With regard to Somalia, the secretary-general added that the US wished to use the UN 'simply as a fig leaf' (paraphrased in Cohen 1994: 74). In recently published memoirs, Boutros-Ghali (1999: 198) recounts a conversation he had in 1993 with Madeleine Albright, then UN ambassador, and Secretary of State Warren Christopher. The exchange was revealing, and it began with a plea from Boutros-Ghali:

> 'please allow me from time to time to differ publicly from US policy. This would help the UN reinforce its own personality and maintain its integrity. It would help dispel the image among many member states that the UN is just the tool of the US.' ... I was sure that Christopher and Albright would understand my point of view. I was completely wrong. My words appeared to shock them... It would be some time before I fully realized that the United States sees little need for diplomacy; power is enough. Only the weak rely on diplomacy. This is why the weak are so deeply concerned with the democratic principle of the sovereign equality of states, as a means of providing some small measure of equality for that which is not equal in fact... But the Roman Empire had no need for diplomacy. Nor does the United States.

The above statements must, like all memoir source material, be used with a measure of caution. However, Boutros-Ghali's views if they are confirmed by other sources would suggest that the United States had no intention of accepting UN impartiality in peacekeeping or any other activity; on the contrary the United States would seek to use its now unrivalled power to dominate UN activities wherever possible. The possibility for impartial peacekeeping in the post-Cold War world is accordingly reduced.

Based on Boutros-Ghali's assessment, we have some preliminary evidence that the problems of US domination that were so clear in the Congo case remain problems for contemporary peacekeeping as well. However, the alternatives to US involvement are at least equally problematic. One could rely, perhaps, on unilateral 'peacekeeping' operations by former colonial powers, such as France's 1994 intervention in Rwanda, 'Operation Turquoise'. However, this was widely viewed as an old-fashioned intervention by a power eager to reassert primacy in its francophone sphere of influence (McNulty 1997). The participation by a token number of troops from several of France's African allies, along with UN Security Council approval, did little to alter the fundamentally neocolonial character of Turquoise. Any future operations directed by former colonial powers, whether unilaterally or as head of a multinational force, will suffer from the appearance – and possibly the reality – of neocolonialism.

A final possibility for impartial peacekeeping would be the creation of international forces from African countries. The possibility of African peacekeeping has in fact elicited considerable interest both in Africa, as well as in New York, Washington and European capitals (May & Cleaver 1997). The objective would be to have all-African peacekeeping forces, authorised by the UN in conjunction with the Organization of African Unity. The United States and the European powers would contribute financial and logistical support, as well as transport for the operation. The officer corps of the larger African states, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and possibly South Africa would play leadership roles in such operations. African peacekeeping forces have several advantages: they would at least initially have higher levels of legitimacy, especially in Africa itself, than externally directed forces. African peacekeeping might preclude direct US domination, of the sort that occurred in the Congo and (possibly) Somalia cases, and also avoid the neocolonialism of an Operation Turquoise.

Despite these advantages, it is not clear that African peacekeeping forces would prove any more impartial than those organised by external powers. The experience of the ECOWAS peacekeeping force that operated in Liberia (with UN approval) has been discouraging in this regard. Available evidence suggests that the regional hegemon, Nigeria, dominated the force, in ways reminiscent of US domination of peacekeeping in the Congo (May & Cleaver 1997: 13–15). All-African operations are likely to fall into the category of what Alan James has termed 'back yard' peacekeeping operations, where the peacekeepers and the 'host' state are all from the same general region. Such operations, James (1990: 18) notes, are 'widely regarded and locally

treated as very much within the sway of an adjacent major power, or group of powers. The central fact about a political back yard, therefore, is that it is viewed possessively by the relevant power or powers.'

Such a situation does not seem conducive to impartial peacekeeping. In conclusion, there is no *a priori* reason to assume that contemporary peacekeeping operations have been (or will be) conducted with any more impartiality than existed in the ONUC operation of 1960. This Congo case study should serve as a corrective to the possibly over-optimistic expectations regarding the prospects for peacekeeping in post-Cold War Africa.

NOTES

1. Note that MONUC stands for United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. See list of operations on UN web site, www.un.org/depts/dpko/.

2. Note that the older conception of impartiality, i.e. that peacekeepers must not take sides or intervene in internal conflicts, has been considered impractical and is largely discredited (see Betts 1994).

3. For general background on this period, see Merlier (1962: chs. 4, 5).

4. A second Security Council resolution, which reaffirmed the call for a withdrawal of Belgian troops, was passed on 22.7.1960. For an account of the enabling resolutions, see Higgins (1980: 15, 17).

5. There can be little doubt that such actions were influenced by Hammarskjöld's own anti-Soviet views. A British document noted: 'I had an hour's conversation with the Secretary General this morning... [He viewed] the United Nations operation as a means of preventing Soviet penetration of Africa' (UK Foreign Office 31.8.60).

6. Several dozen Belgian officers remained in Katanga as late as early 1961 (Clark 1994: 101).

7. Regarding US support for Katanga, see Mahoney (1983: 54, 80–1); on Lumumba's request for US aid, see Hoskyns (1965: 158).

8. Report by Rejashwar Dayal, in Higgins (1980: 392). Despite its *de facto* support for the secessionists, the Belgian government officially declined to recognise Katangan independence (Van den Bosch 1986: 72). On Belgian policy, see also Willame (1980: 434–5).

9. Note that the Foreign Office papers contain voluminous documentation of Hammarskjöld's hostility toward Lumumba, as well as his willingness to take action to undermine Lumumba's position (often in coordination with the foreign policies of the United States and Great Britain).

10. This hostility toward Lumumba had been expressed quite early. In early August 1960, 'Hammarskjöld had told Britain's ambassador to the Congo that it was "essential to under-cut Lumumba before he returns" (from a visit to the United States)' (quoted in James 1996: 66).

11. Regarding Kasavubu's extraordinary deference toward UN officials, see UN 19.7.61.

12. The Congolese constitution had been partly based on the constitution of Belgium, which gave the Belgian head of state (the king) the right to appoint and dismiss the prime minister; however, by 1960, it was not considered acceptable that the king could take such actions on his own initiative, without authorisation from parliament (Young 1965: 326, n. 28).

13. Similarly, the British ambassador to the Congo noted that 'Cordier is fully behind Kasavubu' (UK Foreign Office, 5.9.60).

14. Whether or not the US government acted on Hammarskjöld's and Cordier's specific suggestions is not known.

15. It should also be noted that Mobutu stepped down from power in February 1961 and returned to his role in the military, where he and his allies continued to play 'kingmaker' roles in politics. In 1965, he seized power a second time and remained in power until his overthrow in 1997. See analysis in US Department of State (1965).

16. It should be noted for the record, that former UN official Rejashwar Dayal denies (implausibly, in my opinion) that the payment was *intended* to promote Mobutu (see Dayal 1976: 65).

17. Dayal was a UN official and Cordier's successor as director of the ONUC force. Regarding US involvement, it also should be pointed out that Kettani was one of three persons whom Secretary of State Christian Herter had recommended for the UN retraining of the Congolese military (*FRUS* 1992: 293).

18. Interview with Victor Marchetti, former CIA officer. Marchetti also stated that he had mentioned US involvement in the 1960 coup in an earlier book, but this section had been censored by court order prior to publication (Marchetti & Marks 1980).

19. UNOSOM stands for United Nations Operation in Somalia. Note that UNOSOM II was preceded by the UNOSOM I and Unified Task Force (UNITAF) peacekeeping operations.

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