

**“Flee! The White Giants Are Coming!”:  
The United States, the Mercenaries, and  
the Congo, 1964–65**

PIERO GLEIJESES\*

On 14 August 1964, Carl Rowan, the prominent black journalist who was then the director of the United States Information Agency, wrote President Lyndon B. Johnson that he sensed “a real danger that in saving the present situation in the Congo we . . . could lose the longer range struggle for all of Africa. I am particularly concerned about the damaging implications of possible press reports that United States’ planes are hauling in Belgian guns to be used by South African and Southern Rhodesian mercenaries to kill Africans and to protect ‘Tshombe and European financial interests.’”<sup>1</sup> Rowan was writing in the midst of a crisis: on 5 August 1964, Stanleyville, the Congo’s third largest city, had fallen to the rebels, while in Washington a National Intelligence Estimate on the Congo had predicted “a total breakdown in governmental authority.”<sup>2</sup>

How had the “real danger” that worried Rowan arisen? Why had the Johnson administration decided to rely on mercenaries to “save” the Congo, and what were the repercussions of this decision in Africa and at home? Mercenaries had been active in Africa before, but this was the first time they had been used as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy. An analysis based on documents from the Johnson Library, the Mennen Williams Papers, and the Freedom of Information Act, and supported by a survey of the press and interviews with several protagonists, reveals that the costs of the policy were lower than Rowan had feared. This was due not to the genius of the public

---

\*The author would like to thank the Lyndon B. Johnson Library for helping to support this research.

<sup>1</sup>Rowan memorandum for the president, 14 August 1964, Confidential File, Country 29, box 7, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas. Throughout this essay “Congo” refers to the former Belgian Congo, now known as Zaire; “Leopoldville” is now Kinshasa; “Stanleyville” is now Kisangani.

<sup>2</sup>Director Central Intelligence (hereafter DCI), Special National Intelligence Estimate (hereafter NIE), “Short-Term Prospects for the Tshombe Government,” 5 August 1964, National Security File (hereafter NSF), NIE, box 8, Johnson Library.

relations men but to the rapid and overwhelming success of the mercenaries, the inattentiveness of the U.S. press, and the weakness of the African states.<sup>3</sup>

Until the late 1950s, Africa had barely surfaced in U.S. foreign policy. It had been ruled by clients and friends of the United States, and decolonization had appeared a distant prospect. When independence came, it took Washington by surprise. "The withdrawal of Western political controls has produced potentially unstable situations in the emergent states," noted a National Intelligence Estimate in 1961, adding that the new countries' immaturity, and the resentment many of their leaders bore toward the West, offered unexpected opportunities to Moscow and Beijing. "Communist Bloc influence has grown from negligible levels in 1958-1959 to substantial proportions today," warned the same report. "The Communists probably will enjoy a number of advantages in the competition with the West."<sup>4</sup>

Though of unequal intensity, U.S. fears about Africa and Latin America were born roughly at the same time, as the 1950s gave way to the next decade, and they subsided at roughly the same time, in the late 1960s. In Latin America, the failure of guerrilla effort after guerrilla effort had convinced the United States that there would be no second Cuba. In Africa, the signposts of success were the overthrow of the "radical" leaders, communism's Trojan horses (Algeria's Ahmed Ben Bella, Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, and Mali's Modibo Keita), and the failure of the guerrillas in Angola, Mozambique, and Rhodesia.<sup>5</sup> In October 1967 the CIA observed that the Soviet Union had been

<sup>3</sup>There are several good studies of Congolese domestic politics in 1964-65: two volumes by the Centre de Recherche et d'Information Socio-Politiques (CRISP) of Brussels, *Congo 1964* (1966) and *Congo 1965* (1967); Benoit Verhaegen, *Rébellions au Congo* [Rebellion in the Congo], 2 vols. (Brussels, 1966 and 1969); Renée Fox et al., "La deuxième indépendance. Etude d'un cas: La rébellion au Kwilu" [The second independence. A case study: The Kwilu rebellion], *Études Congolaises* (January/February 1965): 1-35; and M. Crawford Young, "Rebellion and the Congo," in *Protest and Power in Black Africa*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg and Ali A. Mazrui (New York, 1970), 969-1011.

U.S. policy toward the Congo in 1964-65, however, has received remarkably short shrift. Stephen R. Weissman's pioneering *American Foreign Policy in the Congo, 1960-1964* (Ithaca, 1974), includes an insightful discussion of U.S. policy in the early months of the crisis, despite the unavailability of documents. William Minter, "The Limits of Liberal Africa Policy: Lessons from the Congo Crisis," *Transafrica Forum* 2 (Fall 1984): 27-47, touches only briefly on the 1964-65 period, and points to the importance of further research in the Johnson Library. David N. Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention: Mines, Money, and U.S. Policy in the Congo Crisis* (Chicago, 1991), 146-64, is particularly strong on Belgian business interests in the Congo. There is an excellent study of the U.S.-Belgian raid on Stanleyville in November 1964: Fred E. Wagoner, *Dragon Rouge: The Rescue of Hostages in the Congo* (Washington, 1980). This should be complemented with the following documents that have been declassified since its publication: National Security File Country File: Congo, boxes 82-84, Johnson Library (hereafter NSF, followed by country); and the Papers of George Ball, boxes 2-3, Johnson Library. Also useful is Thomas P. Odom, *Dragon Operations: Hostage Rescues in the Congo, 1964-1965* (Fort Leavenworth, 1988).

Memoirs by protagonists in the crisis are not very helpful. The best are those by mercenaries who served in the Congo (see n.55 below). Accounts by U.S. and foreign officials are shallow (the one exception is Frédéric Vandewalle, *L'Ommegang: Odyssée et Reconquête de Stanleyville 1964* [L'Ommegang: The Odyssey and Reconquest of Stanleyville 1964] [Brussels, 1970]), as are those of journalists who covered the story. (The best are David E. Reed, *111 Days in Stanleyville* [New York, 1965]; Jean Kestergat, *Congo Congo* [Paris, 1965]; and Jacques Le Bailly, *Une poignée de mercenaires* [A handful of mercenaries] [Paris, 1967].)

<sup>4</sup>DCI, NIE, "The Probable Interrelationships of the Independent African States," 31 August 1961, NSF, NIE, box 8, Johnson Library.

<sup>5</sup>What is most striking about the reams of documents on Angola and Mozambique in the Kennedy and Johnson presidential libraries is the change they show in the U.S. assessment of

"burned by several misadventures" in Africa and that the Chinese had suffered "humiliating setbacks" there.<sup>6</sup>

Of all the signposts of victory, none seemed more important than the Congo because of its size, its central location, its mineral riches, and the apparent gravity of the challenge it had posed. "For [the] last five years [the] Congo has been [the] principal insurgent theater in Africa, and second only to Vietnam," the U.S. ambassador in Leopoldville, G. McMurtrie Godley, stated in late 1965.<sup>7</sup>

The Congo had become independent on 30 June 1960. Unprepared for self-government, it had fallen into anarchy a few days later and been sucked into the whirlwind of the Cold War.<sup>8</sup> Over the next two years the Communist bloc sent money and weapons to the Congo, but its interference there was very limited compared to that of the United States. In the summer of 1960 the Eisenhower administration had concluded that Patrice Lumumba, the country's first prime minister, was an African Castro, a Soviet instrument. (Scholars now agree that he was in fact "a genuine nationalist, fanatical in his opposition to foreign control of the Congo."<sup>9</sup>) For the Americans, he was an enemy of the most dangerous type—charismatic and popular. It would not be enough to bring him down: he would have to be eliminated. But the CIA was beaten to the gate. On 17 January 1961 Lumumba was killed by his Congolese enemies.

---

Portugal's ability to maintain control over its colonies. In the early 1960s, U.S. officials did not think that Lisbon would be able to "bear the long and bloody struggle" much longer; they feared that the United States, hamstrung by its alliance with Portugal, would watch passively while the Soviet Union and China strengthened their ties with the rebels. In the end, pro-Communist regimes would emerge in the liberated colonies. By 1966, however, the assessment had changed: The Portuguese would be able to retain control for the foreseeable future, just as the whites would hold sway in Rhodesia. "No liberation movement is likely to expand its operations sufficiently to raise the costs of white resistance to an intolerable level." (Quotations from NIE, "Probable Developments in Colonial Africa," 11 April 1961 and NIE, "The Liberation Movements of Southern Africa," 24 November 1967, both NSF, NIE, box 8, Johnson Library.) See also Sakwa, "U.S. Policy Towards Portugal," 17 January 1962, NSF, box 154, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts; "The White Redoubt," 28 June 1962, enclosed in Owen to McGhee, Johnson, Nitze, et al., 6 July 1962, NSF, box 2, Kennedy Library; Hughes to secretary of state, "Prospects for Angolan Nationalist Movement," 5 November 1963, NSF, box 5, Kennedy Library; and CIA, "The Current Political Situation and Prospects in Tropical Africa," 20 May 1966, NSFCF: Africa, box 76.)

<sup>6</sup>CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, "Some Aspects of Subversion in Africa," 19 October 1967, NSFCF: South Africa, box 78.

<sup>7</sup>Godley to secretary of state, 30 October 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

<sup>8</sup>On U.S. policy toward the Congo in 1960–1963 see Richard D. Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa* (New York, 1983), 34–156; Madeleine G. Kalb, *The Congo Cables: The Cold War in Africa from Eisenhower to Kennedy* (New York, 1982); Gibbs, *Political Economy*, 77–144; and Weissman, *American Foreign Policy*. For the domestic situation in the Congo in the same period see CRISP: *Congo 1960*, 3 vols. (Brussels, 1961); *Congo 1961* (Brussels, 1962); *Congo 1962* (Brussels, 1963); and *Congo 1963* (Brussels, 1964).

<sup>9</sup>Mahoney, *JFK*, 43. See also Weissman, *American Foreign Policy*, 257–72. Lawrence Devlin, the CIA station chief in Leopoldville who had been ordered to arrange Lumumba's assassination, commented that "Lumumba was not a communist. I think he thought he could use the Soviets; he thought that he was much more clever than the Soviets and that once he had used them he could expel them. I don't think he understood their objectives. In a sense he was the Tom Paine of the Congo: he was the man to lead a revolution, but not to lead the government that would follow." (Interview with Lawrence Devlin, Washington, DC, 18 June 1992. Devlin was CIA station chief in Leopoldville, 1960–1963 and 1965–1967; in 1964 he was working in the region.)

President John F. Kennedy inherited a raging crisis as Lumumba's followers prepared to wage war to avenge their leader's death. Kennedy said that he wanted the Congolese to chart their own course and, moving beyond Eisenhower's narrow intransigence, expressed his preference for a coalition government that would include even Lumumbists. But when the Congolese parliament seemed ready to elect a Lumumbist as premier, Kennedy's response was not very different from what Eisenhower's would have been: U.S. officials bribed the parliamentarians, plotted a military coup, and succeeded in having their candidate, the lackluster Cyril Adoula, elected premier in a contest that would otherwise have been won by the Lumumbist. In time, Washington would forget this and would come to consider Adoula the true and legal expression of the parliament's will.

Adoula's election did not resolve the Congo crisis. A few days after independence had been declared, the dynamic, brave, and corrupt Moïse Tshombe had led the country's richest province, Katanga, into a war of secession. As the Congo's self-proclaimed arch anti-Communist, Tshombe enjoyed the sympathy of many Americans, including members of Congress. The Kennedy administration, however, thought that Katangan independence would lead to the fragmentation of the Congo and offer opportunities to the Soviet bloc. Therefore, Washington supported sending a UN peacekeeping force to the Congo. That force finally quashed the Katangan rebellion in January 1963.

With the defeat of Lumumba's followers and the reintegration of Katanga, the Congo settled into corrupt, oppressive, pro-American stability that rested on two pillars: the UN troops, numbering in the thousands, and the Congolese Army (ANC), led by General Joseph Mobutu. Therefore, in early 1964 when the UN troops prepared to leave, rebellion flared up again. Leading the revolt were the fractious followers of Lumumba, whose vague ideology was couched in Marxist jargon. "It's definitely an African and a Congolese movement but all very confused," explained the U.S. consul in Stanleyville, who had had frequent contacts with rebel leaders. Ethnic rivalries, old feuds, and the fear of witchcraft added to the brew that bubbled up through the thin crust of the Pax Americana.<sup>10</sup>

The revolt spread with a rapidity that took the Johnson administration by surprise. In mid-June 1964, Ambassador Godley had assured Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Mennen Williams that "all of us here share your optimism that the economic and political progress that has been made in the Congo during the past four years will . . . continue and that the pace will accelerate."<sup>11</sup> But a few weeks later the Congolese army had virtually collapsed. The rebels, who had practically no weapons, were considered invincible because they were protected by witchcraft. As one scholar put it, "The mere announcement of their arrival terrorized the soldiers of the

---

<sup>10</sup>Quotation from *Washington Post*, 25 November 1964. (The consul had been held prisoner by the rebels for almost four months.) On the rebels see above, n.3.

<sup>11</sup>Godley to Williams, 16 June 1964, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, Mennen Williams Papers, Country File, box 29, National Archives, Washington, DC (hereafter RG 59, Williams Papers, with filing information). See also Williams to secretary of state, 21 May 1964, RG 59, Williams Papers, Chronological File, box 4.

Congolese army, convinced as they were that their bullets would turn into water or fly back to strike them."<sup>12</sup> More than magic, however, explained the rebels' successes, as the U.S. consul in Elisabethville, the capital of Katanga, made clear:

There is in this and contiguous areas [a] strong, nearly universal feeling of dissatisfaction at [the] present GOC [Government of Congo]. . . . All levels [of] population [in] this area are thoroughly disgusted with [the] first four years of Congolese independence, whose corruption, inefficiency, public violence and economic decline are in crass contrast with their original exaggerated expectations. . . . These disaffected views [are] shared also by ANC troops here. The main reason for their failure to fight is not so much lack of military capacity and superstitious fear of rebels, which of course are important factors, but that they do not want to fight.<sup>13</sup>

Not only were the troops unwilling to fight, they also contributed to the rebel cause by their "acts of brutality and pillage." The U.S. embassy noted that "indiscriminate killing, looting and raping" were "normal pursuits" for the ANC, and it lamented that the population usually welcomed the rebels, "who treat them better than [the] ANC in most cases."<sup>14</sup>

On 26 June, four days before the last UN troops left the country, the erstwhile leader of Katanga, Moïse Tshombe, returned to the Congo from self-imposed exile in Spain. "Tshombe has successfully jumped on and is now leading a bandwagon built of despair, disillusionment, friction and opportunism," the U.S. embassy reported.<sup>15</sup> Frightened by the rebel blows, the country's leaders turned to their former enemy, who towered over them in vigor, courage, and charisma. ("Lumumba was probably the only Congolese who exceeded Tshombe in what is known as the charismatic quality of

---

<sup>12</sup>Benoit Verhaegen, "La Première République (1960-1965)" [The First Republic (1960-1965)], in *Du Congo au Zaïre, 1960-1980* [From the Congo to Zaïre, 1960-1980], ed. Jacques Vanderlinden (Brussels, 1984), 126. In the words of one eyewitness, an African journalist, "This superstition has had a powerful effect on Congolese National Army troops. In many places they lay down their arms and run when the rebels advance" (*Daily Nation* [Nairobi], 30 July 1964).

<sup>13</sup>Dean to American embassy, Leopoldville, 2 July 1964, FOIA, Department of State, microfiche 8503217.

<sup>14</sup>Quotations from: DCI, Special NIE, "Short-Term Prospects for the Tshombe Government," 5 August 1964, NSF, NIE, box 8, Johnson Library; American embassy, Leopoldville, to Department of State, Joint Weeka no. 10, 20 September 1964, FOIA, Department of State, microfiche 8503217; Godley to secretary of state, 5 August 1965, NSF, Congo, box 81. On the attitude of the population see also CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Situation in the Congo," 26 August 1965, NSF, Congo, box 85; Godley to secretary of state, 4 December 1964, NSF, Congo, box 85; CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, "The Congo: Assessment and Prospects," 31 December 1964, NSF, Congo, box 87; CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, weekly report, "The Situation in the Congo," 10 March 1965, NSF, Congo, box 87; CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, "The Situation in the Congo," 24 February 1966, NSF, Congo, box 85; and Blake to Department of State, "The Congolese Rebellion: Current Status and Outlook," 3 March 1966, FOIA, Department of State, microfiche 8705067/1.

<sup>15</sup>American embassy, Leopoldville, to Department of State, Joint Weeka no. 1, 2 July 1964, FOIA, Department of State, microfiche 8503217.

leadership," noted a U.S. intelligence report.<sup>16</sup> "We are all for giving Tshombe [an] important post in g[o]v[ernmen]t," cabled Godley.<sup>17</sup>

But neither he nor any other U.S. official expected what happened next: On 6 August, in a move that testified "to the extent of the desperation felt by President [Joseph] Kasavubu and General Mobutu," Tshombe was appointed prime minister.<sup>18</sup> "It all happened so fast," observed the embassy's deputy chief of mission. "Before we knew it the decision had been made. It was very much a Congolese decision."<sup>19</sup> Reserved at first, the U.S. reaction soon turned into warm endorsement. "Prime Minister Tshombe has brought zest and dynamism to his job," said Assistant Secretary Williams.<sup>20</sup>

African leaders were less enthusiastic about Tshombe. Despised by many of them as "a walking museum of colonialism"<sup>21</sup> because of his ties with South Africans, Portuguese, and Belgians and his attempt to divide the Congo, Tshombe was also known to have been the moving force behind Lumumba's murder. "How could anyone imagine," the king of Morocco asked in a broadcast to his nation, "that I, the representative of my country's national conscience, could sit at a conference table or at a banquet with the man who personifies secession? How could anyone even begin to imagine that I, Hassan II . . . could observe a minute of silence in memory of our African heroes when one of their murderers is seated among us?"<sup>22</sup>

In the weeks that followed the appointment of Tshombe as prime minister, the United States increased its military aid to the Congo. But neither increased aid nor Tshombe's leadership could stem the revolt. By late July frantic cables were reaching Washington from Leopoldville: The rebels were winning, the army was collapsing, outside assistance—soldiers, not just matériel—was necessary.

Washington turned to Europe. Just as U.S. officials had urged the British to send in troops to "frustrate [a] Communist takeover" in Zanzibar a few months earlier,<sup>23</sup> so now they turned to the Belgians. The most effective

<sup>16</sup>Hoffacker, "What Should Be U.S. Policy vis-a-vis Tshombe in Future Contingencies?" n.d., enclosed in McElhiney to Palmer, 3 December 1964, FOIA, Department of State, microfiche 8503217.

<sup>17</sup>Godley to secretary of state, 1 July 1964, FOIA, Department of State, microfiche 8503217.

<sup>18</sup>DCI, Special NIE, "Short-Term Prospects for the Tshombe Government," 5 August 1964, NSF, NIE, box 8, Johnson Library.

<sup>19</sup>Interview with DCM Robert Blake (Washington, DC, 21 May 1992). U.S. documents of the time support his recollection. (See NSFCF: Congo, box 81; FOIA, Department of State, microfiche 8503217; and RG 59, Williams Papers, Signature and Clearance File, box 12.) These same sources, including Blake, suggest that the Belgians were not privy to the decision.

<sup>20</sup>Williams to Harrison, 24 July 1964, RG 59, Williams Papers, Signature and Clearance File, box 12.

<sup>21</sup>Ahmed Ben Bella, quoted in *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 March 1965.

<sup>22</sup>Broadcast of 14 July 1964, quoted in CRISP, *Congo 1964*, 456. At least three of the eight white mercenaries involved in the execution of Lumumba—on Tshombe's orders—returned to the Congo to resume their calling once Tshombe became prime minister. ("Un crime payant?" [A crime that paid off?] *Jeune Afrique*, 13 June 1965, 7–14).

<sup>23</sup>Johnson to British prime minister, enclosed in Rusk to American embassy, London, 5 February 1964, NSFCF: Zanzibar, box 103. To the Americans' dismay the British refused to intervene. "We are extremely concerned over what appears as UKG [United Kingdom Government] complacency with [the] Zanzibar situation," lamented Rusk. Rusk to American embassy, London, 29 March 1964, NSFCF: Zanzibar, box 103. The crisis, which Washington had exaggerated, was resolved peacefully: Zanzibar entered into a federation with Tanganyika. See

measure, Ambassador Godley informed Washington, would be the "use of Belgian paratroop battalions to come in rapidly, clean up [the] situation and then withdraw as soon as possible."<sup>24</sup>

Godley's view was shared by his superiors, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Undersecretaries W. Averell Harriman and George Ball.<sup>25</sup> On 4 August, Harriman cabled the U.S. ambassador in Brussels, Douglas MacArthur, to ask: "Under what conditions would [the] GOB [Government of Belgium] be willing to provide troops?" On 6 August, Rusk cabled the Belgian foreign minister, Paul-Henri Spaak, that "events in the Congo have reached so critical a point that you and we and all our European friends must move immediately and vigorously to prevent total collapse. . . . We must concert urgently on tangible, specific measures to save the Congo."<sup>26</sup>

The next day Harriman arrived in Brussels "for a final effort" to convince the Belgians to take "primary responsibility."<sup>27</sup> The United States would provide the hardware; Belgium, the men. "I will tell you, but you must keep it to yourself," Spaak later confided to an aide. "They [the Americans] asked me if Belgium was willing to send in troops. And when Mr. Harriman came, that is what we talked about." The Belgians balked: They agreed to increase the number of their military advisers in the Congo, but "no Belgian would be authorized to engage directly or indirectly in combat."<sup>28</sup>

The Americans were also rebuffed on a second proposal: that Belgium "take the lead in the organization . . . [of] a joint military force of the Six, or some of its member nations." Washington even sought West German troops. "He [Spaak] did not want to mislead us," MacArthur had cabled as Harriman prepared to fly to Brussels, "and among other things he did not r[e]p[re]s[e]nt not see the slightest chance of getting any of the 'Six' to intervene militarily in [the] Congo. Luxembourg had no military forces and he was certain France, Germany and [the] Netherlands would refuse [to] participate in any military

Ball to American embassy, London, 29 January 1964, NSFCF: Zanzibar, box 103; Rusk to American embassy, London, 1 February 1964, NSFCF: Zanzibar, box 103; Williams to Harriman, 1 February 1964, RG 59, Williams Papers, Signature and Clearance File, box 12; Rusk to American embassy, London, 27 March 1964, NSF, Memos to the President, box 1, Johnson Library; Rusk to American embassy, London, 1 February 1964, NSFCF: Zanzibar, box 103; Bruce to secretary of state, 31 March 1964, NSFCF: Zanzibar, box 103; and Hughes to acting secretary, "Growing Communist Influence in Zanzibar," 15 April 1964, NSFCF: Zanzibar, box 103.

<sup>24</sup>Godley to secretary of state, 2 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81.

<sup>25</sup>Initially Harriman was the administration's point man on the Congo, but he was eventually edged out by Ball, who recalled: "Rusk left it to me, but there was considerable interference from Harriman." Ball warned McGeorge Bundy that Harriman considered himself the "Prince of Africa." (Quotations from telephone interview with George Ball, 18 May 1992 and from telephone conversation, Bundy and Ball, 26 August 1964, 3:55 P.M., Ball Papers, boxes 2-3, Johnson Library. See also telephone conversation, Bundy and Ball, 20 November 1964, 12:30 P.M., Ball Papers, boxes 2-3, Johnson Library; and Rudy Abramson, *Spanning the Century: The Life of W. Averell Harriman, 1891-1986* [New York, 1992], 633-35.) Except for the Stanleyville raid (see below, n. 164), there were no differences of opinion on Congo policy between Ball and Harriman.

<sup>26</sup>Harriman to American embassy, Brussels, 4 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81; Rusk to American embassy, Brussels, 6 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81.

<sup>27</sup>Brubeck memorandum for the president, 6 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81; Rusk to American embassy, Brussels, 31 July 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81.

<sup>28</sup>Quotations from Vandewalle, *L'Ommegang*, 145, n.42; and *New York Times*, 8 August 1964.

intervention." Further attempts in the next few days proved futile.<sup>29</sup> The Europeans "had no stomach for it," observed Undersecretary Ball.<sup>30</sup>

Not only did the "gutless Belgians" fail to respond with the proper zest but they also seemed ready to collude with the enemy. Washington worried about the "apparent Belgian preference to try to do business with the rebels, even if Communist, rather than facing up to putting down the rebellion."<sup>31</sup> In fact, the Belgians were simply being practical. They had no intention of sending in troops, they did not believe that anyone else would, and they had no confidence in the Congolese army's ability to do the job. Moreover, they did not consider the rebels to be Communists and thought they could achieve a *modus vivendi* with them should they win. The day before Harriman arrived, Spaak told Ambassador MacArthur that "top Belgian industrialists having [the] most extensive interests in [the] Congo . . . agreed that they could do business with . . . [the] rebel leaders since [the] latter realized Belgian economic and technical presence and assistance was essential to [the] economic life of [the] Congo."<sup>32</sup>

Washington was not interested in a *modus vivendi* with the rebels. Failure to act would mean, a 6 August memorandum warned Johnson, "let[ting] chaos run its course, hoping the Congolese will work out an adjustment without serious Communist intrusion; and rely[ing] on [the] Congo's need for our aid and support for influence with the eventual government. This would be hard to explain politically in [the] US, but it is essentially what [the] Belgians and Europeans are doing."<sup>33</sup>

U.S. officials knew that the rebels were receiving very little outside assistance,<sup>34</sup> and there was no indication that they were Communist. An intelligence appraisal noted:

---

<sup>29</sup>Rusk to American embassy, Brussels, 6 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81; MacArthur to secretary of state, 6 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81. See also American embassy, Paris, to secretary of state, 7 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81; MacArthur to secretary of state, 7 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81; Harriman to Bundy, 11 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81; American embassy, Paris, to secretary of state, 26 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 82; and *Washington Post*, 21 and 22 August and 13 September 1964.

<sup>30</sup>Interview with Ball.

<sup>31</sup>Quotations from interview with Blake and from Williams to Rusk, 7 August 1964, RG 59, Williams Papers, Signature and Clearance File, box 12.

<sup>32</sup>MacArthur to secretary of state, 6 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81. See also MacArthur to secretary of state, 8 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81; and Dean to secretary of state, 16 July 1964, FOIA, Department of State, microfiche 8503217. U.S. officials also worried about France. "The French always have three positions: the official position, the one that is almost the opposite, and the fall back—way back—position. We were picking up things about the French preparing to switch sides." Interview with Blake; see also American embassy, Paris, to secretary of state, 26 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 82; and the comments of Jacques Kosiuzsko-Morizet, the French ambassador in Leopoldville, in *La politique africaine du Général de Gaulle* [The African policy of General de Gaulle], ed. D. G. Lavroff (Paris, 1980), 359–62.

<sup>33</sup>Brubeck memorandum for the president, 6 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81.

<sup>34</sup>"While the Chicoms may have contributed an element of sophistication to insurgent activity, the eastern Congo fundamentally collapsed from within. In comparison with indigenous causes of dissidence, the Chicom contribution to the collapse of central government authority probably has nowhere been more than marginal." Denney to Harriman, INR, "Chinese Communist Involvement in Congolese Insurrections," 11 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81. U.S. intelligence did not believe that the USSR or any other Communist country besides China was involved. See also below, n.67.



While at this point it is impossible to make firm judgments about the orientation of a rebel government, it would certainly seek close links with the East and there is a good chance that it would make the position of the West in the Congo increasingly difficult. (On the other hand, given the enormous reliance of the Congo on the West and the inability of the East to duplicate Western assistance, we do not believe the position of the West would become untenable—at least not in the short run.)<sup>35</sup>

A rebel victory would have ended the pro-American stance of the Congo that had taken four years and two U.S. administrations to establish. As the 1964 presidential campaign gathered momentum in the United States, the loss of the Congo (“the richest country and the richest prize in Africa”) could have become a major political issue.<sup>36</sup>

On 11 August, Johnson and his key advisers met in a hastily called session of the National Security Council (NSC). This was the first NSC meeting about the revolt. The mood was somber. Director of Central Intelligence John McCone stated that “Western troops would be necessary.” Harriman concurred. “The Congolese army in most cases has proven useless. . . . The people in government are demoralized and Leopoldville [is] in danger.”<sup>37</sup>

No one challenged the basic premise: The rebels had to be defeated, and the Congolese army could not do it. Because direct U.S. military involvement was considered only as “an extreme last resort,” African and European troops had to be found.<sup>38</sup> “The job . . . should be put squarely to the Europeans as their responsibility,” Rusk asserted. “We should urge them immediately to put troops into Leopoldville, using Presidential pressure if necessary.” Lyndon Johnson agreed. “Time is running out and the Congo must be saved.”<sup>39</sup>

The discussion had an air of unreality. No European or African government was willing to send its troops, and Washington knew it. In addition to the Europeans, the administration had already approached Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Senegal and had been rebuffed.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, had African troops landed in the Congo, they would not have been welcomed: Mobutu and Tshombe trusted neither black soldiers nor their governments.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup>Denney to Harriman, INR, “Congo Contingency: Possible Alternatives Ahead,” 15 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 82.

<sup>36</sup>*Washington Post* editorial, 25 September 1964.

<sup>37</sup>“NSC Meeting on the Congo—12:30 pm Aug. 11, 1964,” NSF, NSC Meetings File, box 1, Johnson Library. An earlier NSC meeting had dealt only peripherally with the Congo. See “Summary Record on National Security Meeting No. 536 July 28, 1964,” NSF, NSC Meetings File, box 1, Johnson Library.

<sup>38</sup>Treasury Secretary Dillon, “NSC Meeting on the Congo—12:30 pm Aug. 11, 1964,” NSF, NSC Meetings File, box 1, Johnson Library. This was also “the long held view of the JCS.” General Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, “NSC Meeting on the Congo—12:30 pm Aug. 11, 1964,” NSF, NSC Meetings File, box 1, Johnson Library.

<sup>39</sup>“NSC Meeting on the Congo—12:30 pm Aug. 11, 1964,” NSF, NSC Meetings File, box 1, Johnson Library.

<sup>40</sup>Brubeck memorandum for the president, 6 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81; Harriman to Bundy, 11 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81; Rusk to American embassy, Leopoldville, 13 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81.

<sup>41</sup>“Despite our efforts, the Congolese Government has not so far asked any other African country for military forces save South Africa which fortunately refused.” Author’s name deleted, memorandum for Bundy, 14 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81. See also Harriman to Bundy, 4 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81; American embassy, Leopoldville, to secretary of state,

The option that was not discussed at the 11 August NSC meeting was the use of mercenaries. The word was not mentioned. And yet the idea of using "special volunteers" (the "new euphemism for mercenaries," Godley noted)<sup>42</sup> had by then become the most compelling solution to the Congo problem.

It represented no sudden shift. It was part of a two-track approach that had been under consideration from the outset. The United States preferred a "clean solution" (European or African troops), but it would fall back on mercenaries if necessary. A cable from Godley on 5 August had posed the problem crisply. "There are only three places," he wrote, where the Congolese government could turn:

a) GOC [Government of Congo] can seek direct Belgian military intervention; b) it can attempt to recruit [a] white mercenary brigade; c) it can ask for US troops. . . . If [the] Belgian Government refuses to accept [the] risks of intervention . . . [a] mercenary brigade is [the] second best alternative. . . . From US standpoint [the] employment of mercenaries would carry [the] advantage of being done on GOC responsibility and would reduce overt western (i.e. Belgian or US) involvement. . . . It would place [the] burden of responsibility on [the] GOC and not on ourselves or [the] Belgians.<sup>43</sup>

Washington concurred. "Tshombe and [the] GOC should proceed soonest to establish [an] effective gendarmerie-mercenary unit," Rusk had cabled Leopoldville on 6 August, as Harriman was about to leave for Brussels. "[The] U[nited] S[tates] is prepared to assist with transport, communications and other reasonable requirements."<sup>44</sup> Tshombe was an old hand at the mercenary game: They had helped him when he had been the leader of secessionist Katanga. He was happy to use them again.

In Brussels, on 7 August, Spaak told Harriman unequivocally that neither Belgium nor any other European country would send troops. That same day Rusk approved a proposal by Mennen Williams for an "immediate effort . . . to concert with [the] Belgians to help Tshombe to raise [a] mercenary force," and he cabled Harriman urging "Belgian help on [the] mercenary problem including recruitment of Belgians."<sup>45</sup> Washington and Brussels would supply the money to pay the mercenaries and the weapons to arm them; Washington alone would supply the planes to fly them. Bowing to U.S. pressure, the Belgians jettisoned the idea of letting events in the Congo follow their own course and embraced the mercenary option. "In fact, mercenaries were the only possible solution," writes Colonel Frédéric Vandewalle, who would head the Belgian military mission in the Congo and who was briefed by Spaak on the talks with Harriman. "In private, both Washington and Brussels admitted it."<sup>46</sup> And so the United States embarked on a dual policy in the Congo. It

---

15 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81; and Godley to secretary of state, 24 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 82.

<sup>42</sup>Godley to secretary of state, 15 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81.

<sup>43</sup>Godley to secretary of state, 5 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81.

<sup>44</sup>Rusk to American embassy, Leopoldville, 6 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81.

<sup>45</sup>Williams to secretary of state, 7 August 1964, RG 59, Williams Papers, Signature and Clearance File, box 12; Rusk to Harriman, 7 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81.

<sup>46</sup>Vandewalle, *L'Ommegang*, 201.

openly provided military aid to Tshombe<sup>47</sup> while it covertly financed, armed, and oversaw the mercenaries.

The mercenaries flowed into the Congo. Within a few days, well over a hundred had arrived from South Africa and Rhodesia.<sup>48</sup> "At Johannesburg," wrote the weekly *Jeune Afrique*, "they are lining up in front of the recruitment center. All you need to be is white, able to shoot, and ready to help Mr. Tshombe, 'the good friend of Whites and foe of the Red Chinese' . . . *Air Congo* planes fly the South African mercenaries to Leopoldville. There, they are met by instructors who hand them machine guns (American), and then they are flown in planes (American) toward Stanleyville or Bukavu to crush the rebels."<sup>49</sup> By October their number would reach "over a thousand."<sup>50</sup>

The U.S. embassy kept the mercenaries at arm's length—in public. Close contact was maintained through the CIA, the military attachés, and the military mission. The army attaché, Colonel Knut Raudstein, was quite an admirer of the mercenary leader, Mike Hoare. "Tshombe's supporters [are] most fortunate in having [a] man of Hoare's temperament, character and capability in his position," Raudstein cabled. "He . . . conducts [him]self as [a] typical upper class Briton proud of [his] Irish extraction. Avows disagreement with some SA [South African] political concepts calling himself a moderate."<sup>51</sup>

Hoare's "moderate" views on race were reflected in his comment to a fellow mercenary: "I believe . . . we have a great mission here. The Africans have gotten used to the idea that they can do what they like to us whites, that they can trample on us and spit on us."<sup>52</sup> And they were reflected in his response to a South African black who wanted to enlist: "We only engage white mercenaries."<sup>53</sup>

<sup>47</sup>See Godley to Department of State, "Belgian Presence and Belgian Policies in the Congo," 2 December 1965, FOIA, Department of State, microfiche 8503217; CRISP, *Congo 1964*, 357–59, 363–64; CRISP, *Congo 1965*, 300–301; Jules Gérard-Libois, "L'aide extérieure à la République du Congo (II)" [Foreign aid for the Republic of the Congo], *Etudes Congolaises* (July/August 1966): 1–4.

<sup>48</sup>Godley to secretary of state, 24 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 82; Pearson to secretary of state, 24 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 82; Godley to secretary of state, 26 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 82.

<sup>49</sup>"Intervention," *Jeune Afrique*, 7 September 1964, 7. See also Vandewalle, *L'Ommegang* 201; Mike Hoare, *Congo Mercenary* (London, 1967), 33–34; "Congo: Sign Up Here," *Newsweek*, 7 September 1964, 38; "The Congo: Help Wanted," *Time*, 4 September 1964, 36; *Le Peuple* (Algiers), 24 and 25 August 1964; *Egyptian Gazette* (Cairo), 24, 25, 26, and 31 August 1964; *Daily Nation*, 25 and 26 August 1964; and *Tanganyika Standard* (Dar es Salaam), 2 September 1964. In November 1964, the *Tanganyika Standard* became *The Standard*. Throughout this essay the newspaper is cited by its old name.

General Mobutu denied both the mercenaries' presence in the Congo and the existence of recruitment centers abroad, "most especially in South Africa." *Le Progrès* (Leopoldville), 28 August 1964.

<sup>50</sup>NSF, NSC History, Congo C-130 Crisis, July 1967, box 15, Tab 1, "Background," Johnson Library.

<sup>51</sup>USARMA Leopoldville to RUEPDA/DA, December 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 85. The feelings were mutual. See Hoare, *Congo Mercenary*, 36, 126.

<sup>52</sup>Hans Germani, *Weisse Söldner im schwarzen Land* [White Mercenaries in a Black Land] (Frankfurt/M, 1966), 103.

<sup>53</sup>The letter and the reply are printed in Anthony Mockler, *The Mercenaries* (New York, 1969), 244. It was not U.S. policy to exclude blacks: Their inclusion was repugnant to the white mercenaries, particularly the dominant South African and Rhodesian element.

Why did men volunteer? "For money, first of all," five freshly arrived French mercenaries told a journalist over drinks in Leopoldville. But there were other, loftier reasons: "Because we're ashamed of France. . . . We've lost Indochina; *le grand Charles* has tossed Algeria aside. The *fellouzes* will not get the Congo."<sup>54</sup>

The year 1963, mused a philosophical mercenary, "was the heyday of African Unity, of the dream of African grandeur and of the expulsion of the white man from the continent." The year 1964 would be the year of the White Giants—"tall, vigorous Boers from South Africa; long-legged, slim and muscular Englishmen from Rhodesia"—who would come to the Congo and restore the white man to his proper place. "How often was I to hear the muffled drumming in the night, through forests and savannahs, 'Flee! The White Giants are coming!'"<sup>55</sup>

Whatever their motives, the mercenaries were, in the words of the U.S. ambassador, "an uncontrolled lot of toughs . . . who consider looting or safe-cracking fully within their prerogatives." Their "serious excesses," the CIA reported, included "robbery, rape, murder and beatings."<sup>56</sup>

They were also boastful and naive. Once in the Congo, they tended to trust every white face, even that of a journalist. "These mercenaries are everywhere evident, talk frequently to the press and anybody who will listen to them," complained Godley.<sup>57</sup> They talked openly, for instance, to an Italian journalist, who subsequently described their entry into the town of Boende, in late October 1964. "Occupying the town," he wrote, "meant blowing out the doors with rounds of bazooka fire, going into the shops and taking anything they wanted that was movable. . . . After the looting came the killing. The shooting lasted for three days. Three days of executions, of lynchings, of tortures, of screams, and of terror."<sup>58</sup>

Just as tourists send postcards home, so the mercenaries sent photos depicting their exploits. Several found their way to the British weekly, the *Observer*. The first photograph showed two almost naked black men, their hands tied behind their backs, ropes around their necks, being led by a white mercenary to their hanging. In the second, "smiling mercenaries" argued for the privilege of doing the "stringing up." A photograph of the swinging corpses was described but not printed. "The pictures," the *Observer* noted, "show how mercenaries not only shoot and hang their prisoners after torturing them, but use them for target practice and gamble over the number of shots needed to kill them."<sup>59</sup>

<sup>54</sup>"Escale a Léo" [A Visit to Leo], *Jeune Afrique*, 8 August 1965, 19.

<sup>55</sup>Germani, *Weisse Söldner*, 8, 60. *Weisse Söldner* and Hoare's *Congo Mercenary* are interesting, if not reliable. Two other memoirs by mercenaries (Jean Schramme, *Le Bataillon Léopard* [The Leopard Battalion] [Paris, 1969], 129–232; and Siegfried Müller, *Les nouveaux mercenaires* [The new mercenaries] [Paris, 1965]) are self-serving tales of very little value.

<sup>56</sup>Quotations from Godley to secretary of state, 13 December 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 85 and from CIA, Intelligence Information Cable, "Situation Report of Stanleyville, 11–14 January 1965," NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

<sup>57</sup>Godley to secretary of state, 26 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 82.

<sup>58</sup>Carlo Gregoretti, "Una guerra privata in cinemascopo" [A private war in Cinemascope], *L'Espresso*, 20 December 1964, 7.

<sup>59</sup>*Observer*, 29 August 1965, 2. The *Observer* explained that the photographs, which had been taken as souvenirs "for the men to send home to their families," had been provided by a

The mercenaries were thugs, and they were effective. They advanced along the paths of the Congo in mobile columns—"lightly armored Belgian jeeps mounting some automatic weapons and, for heavier work, British Ferrets have been [the] backbone of counterinsurgency military effort," reported Godley.<sup>60</sup> Four U.S. C-130s with American crews transported the mercenaries and their equipment across the Congo's immense expanses. "It was the C-130 that flew all the logistics," said the *New York Times* journalist who covered the campaign. "Nothing went by road, rail or boat—all was supplied by the C-130s."<sup>61</sup>

When they met resistance, the mercenaries called on the Congolese air force, which included not one Congolese.<sup>62</sup> It consisted of the "21st Squadron" (seven T-6s from Italy piloted by South African and European mercenaries)<sup>63</sup> and the T-28s and B-26s supplied by the United States. The State Department's official line ("only if asked") was that the T-28s and B-26s were "provided to the Congolese government and will be flown by contract personnel engaged by that government." No U.S. citizens would be "called upon by the Congo government to engage in operational missions in the police action" under way in the country, and none therefore would fly the planes.<sup>64</sup> The pilots and crews of the T-28s and B-26s were Cuban exiles. (It was "target practice" for Fidel Castro, one of them explained.) "Guiding them into action," the *New York Times* reported, "were American 'diplomats' and other officials in apparently civilian positions. The sponsor, paymaster and director of all of them, however, was the Central Intelligence Agency. . . . Its rapid and effective provision of an 'instant air force' in the Congo was the climax of the agency's deep involvement there."<sup>65</sup> It was an impressive air force, particularly against an enemy without planes or antiaircraft guns. "The pattern," noted a careful study, "was always the same: Cuban-piloted T-28s and B-26s bombing and strafing in front of ground columns; Simbas [rebels]

---

mercenary who had become "so disgusted at the atrocities that he now wants to do all he can to expose them." Ibid. See also *Observer*, 5 September 1965, 31.

<sup>60</sup>Godley to secretary of state, 30 October 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85. The best sources on the campaign are the weekly reports on "The Situation in the Congo" by the CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, NSFCF: Congo, box 87. By far the most useful memoir by a participant is Vandewalle, *L'Ommegang*. Good secondary accounts are CRISP, *Congo 1964*, 349–411, 535–36; CRISP, *Congo 1965*, 43–58, 89–160; and Wagoner, *Dragon Rouge*.

<sup>61</sup>Telephone interview with Lloyd Garrison (8 May 1992), who was the *New York Times* correspondent in the Congo in 1964–65.

<sup>62</sup>For a rousing account of the Congolese air force see *Le Progrès*, 21 March and 19 July 1965.

<sup>63</sup>For the origins of the "21st Squadron" see CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, weekly report, "The Situation in the Congo," 27 October 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 87. See also *Daily Nation*, 19 August 1964.

<sup>64</sup>Rusk to American embassy, Leopoldville, 15 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81.

<sup>65</sup>Quotations from *Egyptian Gazette*, 2 February 1965; and *New York Times*, 26 April 1966. See also Vandewalle, *L'Ommegang*, 63–64; Wagoner, *Dragon Rouge*, 33–34, 76, 90; and René García, "Operación Kamina" [Operation Kamina], *Punto de Mira* (Miami), August 1989, 34–38. "While the agency was not completely happy with this publicity [from the *Times*'s article], many operators were pleased with the newspaper's recognition of the CIA's skill in putting the operation together on comparatively short notice." Victor Marchetti and John Marks, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* (New York, 1974), 117–18.

either scattering in panic or being slaughtered by the more accurate and lethal firepower of the mercenaries."<sup>66</sup>

Throughout the war, U.S. officials railed against the fact that the rebels were receiving outside military assistance. But the rebels got only small amounts of military aid from African countries, the Soviet Union, and China, and the weapons were of little value, for they did not know how to use them.<sup>67</sup> "We're not worried too much about the rebels getting small arms and ammunition," a military attaché in Leopoldville told the *New York Times* in December 1964. "We're not even worried about their getting heavier equipment, like mortars and bazookas, which they don't know how to handle any better than the Congolese army. But if they get some guerrilla veterans from outside, the war could change overnight."<sup>68</sup> The CIA agreed: "The appearance in the Congo of combat 'volunteers' from the radical African states . . . [would create] a new, more ugly and dangerous situation."<sup>69</sup> But no African country sent volunteers. "The African governments that opposed Tshombe were a worthless bunch of people," according to Ambassador Godley. "They did nothing effective, nothing that I'm aware of."<sup>70</sup> (As for the mythical Chinese military advisers in the eastern Congo reported by some newspapers, they turned out to be just that—a myth.<sup>71</sup>)

Only Cuba sent men—under Che Guevara. "For some time there was disbelief that the Cubans were really involved," the CIA station chief recalled. "No one really believed that Che was there. Then a fellow called Tatu ('Three' in Swahili) showed up. We had our own people who were in contact with Tatu. No one could identify him from the photos we had of Che. It was

<sup>66</sup>Wagoner, *Dragon Rouge*, 66. According to *Life*, whose special envoy spent a day or two with the Cubans, a plane was shot down ("Red Arsenals Arm the Simbas," 12 February 1965, 32), but Hoare explains that it actually crashed on takeoff. *Congo Mercenary*, 245. The pilot was the only fatality of the "Congolese" air force. On the pilot see Guadalupe Mendez, "Fausto Gómez: Un hombre leyenda" [Fausto Gómez: A legendary man], *Punto de Mira*, August 1989, 46–47.

<sup>67</sup>See CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Chinese Communist Activities in Africa," 19 June 1964, NSFCF: Africa, box 76; Rusk to American embassy, Brussels, 15 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81; CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Brazzaville's Move to the Left," 30 October 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 83; CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Situation in the Congo," 30 December 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, "The Congo: Assessment and Prospects," 31 December 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Situation in the Congo," 19 January 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Tanzanian Support for the Congo Rebels," 7 April 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; CIA, Office of National Estimates, "Prospects in Brazzaville," 17 May 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85; CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Tanzania Taking the Left Turn," 21 May 1965, NSFCF: Tanzania, box 100; CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, "The Southern Sudan Problem and Its Relationship to the Congo," 28 May 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; CIA, Office of National Estimates, "A Reassessment of Julius Nyerere," 10 June 1965, NSFCF: Tanzania, box 100; CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Consequences of Algerian Coup," 19 June 1965, NSFCF: Algeria, box 79; CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Situation in the Congo," 1 July 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85; CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "The Congo since the Mobutu Coup," 11 February 1966, NSFCF: Congo, box 85; CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, "The Situation in the Congo," 24 February 1966, NSFCF: Congo, box 85. The CIA weekly reports on the Congo (see above, n.60), which always include a 2–3 page section on "The Rebels and Their Sympathizers," provide a convenient guidepost.

<sup>68</sup>*New York Times*, 13 December 1964.

<sup>69</sup>CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, "The Congo: Assessment and Prospects," 31 December 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 87.

<sup>70</sup>Telephone interview with Ambassador G. McMurtrie Godley, 27 October 1992.

<sup>71</sup>For overblown statements see *Le Progrès*, 5 August 1964; *Newsweek*, 22 February 1965, 42, 45; *New York Times*, 9 December 1966; Müller, *Les nouveaux mercenaires*, 102, 247–48, 252.

confusing: we made different pictures of Che, with a beard, without a beard, with a moustache and so on. I decided that Che was Tatu, but no one really believed it in Washington. They thought I was smoking the wrong kind of hemp. Why in hell would Che be fighting in Africa?"<sup>72</sup>

The Cubans arrived in late April 1965 and departed, as quietly as they had come, seven months later.<sup>73</sup> CIA reports occasionally—and always calmly—mentioned them. According to the agency, "over 100 Cuban military advisers trained and assisted—and some actually fought alongside—the Congolese rebels in the 1964–65 Congo rebellion."<sup>74</sup> The Cubans "looked as confused as everybody else," mused DCM Blake. "They made no difference in military terms," Godley concurred.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, one by one, the rebel towns were recaptured, the rebel strongholds in the rural areas dispersed, and the borders across which the rebels might receive help secured until, by late 1965, the revolt had been brought under control. CIA reports, by far the best source on the campaign, are unequivocal: The mercenaries were indispensable, the army's victories were due to them, and the "regular Congo army troops, with a few exceptions, are no better than they ever were."<sup>76</sup>

This was also Godley's conclusion. Following the capture of Stanleyville in November 1964 he reported that the "cardinal resource of [the] GDRC [Government of Congo] is [the] mercenary force. . . [the] only realistic strategy appears [to] be [the] quiet integration of additional numbers of mercenaries into [the] ANC . . . making them as inconspicuous as possible."<sup>77</sup> Ten months later Godley had not changed his opinion: The mercenaries were still essential.<sup>78</sup> General Mobutu, proud commander of the Congolese army,

<sup>72</sup>Interview with Devlin. See also CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, "The Fall of Che Guevara and the Changing Face of the Cuban Revolution," 18 October 1965, NSFCF: Cuba, box 18 and Hughes to secretary of state, "Guevara's Death—The Meaning for Latin America," 12 October 1967, NSFCF: Bolivia, box 8.

<sup>73</sup>Interview with a Cuban official who participated in the operation (Havana, 13 December 1991). This official notes that initially both Presidents Julius Nyerere and Gamal Abd al-Nasser urged Castro to send men, but that Nasser soon got cold feet. (This official asked to remain anonymous, as did all of the Cubans I interviewed.) See also Elías Bestard Pavón, "La colaboración de Cuba con los países de Africa Subsahariana (1959–1988)" [Cuba's collaboration with the countries of SubSaharan Africa (1959–1988)], Havana, Instituto Superior de Relaciones Internacionales Raúl Roa, 1989, 26–28; Moore, *Castro*, 209–48; Jesús Barreto, "Camarada Tatu" [Comrade Tatu], *Moncada* (Havana), October 1987, 92–97; Juana Carrasco, "Tatu, un guerrillero africano" [Tatu, an African guerrilla], *Cuba Internacional*, no. 2, 1989, 32–36; and Gianni Miná, *An Encounter with Fidel* (Melbourne, 1991), 223–25.

<sup>74</sup>CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, "Some Aspects of Subversion in Africa," 19 October 1967, NSFCF: South Africa, box 78. "Most of the Cubans stayed in Tanzania" (interview with Devlin). Physical evidence of the Cubans' presence was found on only one occasion: "We have confirmed that at least two Cubans participated in attack near Bendera late June, for bodies and diaries found." Godley to secretary of state, 21 September 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85. Interviews with two Cuban officials (Havana, 7 and 13 December 1991) confirm the CIA's figure and add that the Cubans were involved only in one or two clashes in the Congo.

<sup>75</sup>Interviews with Blake and Godley.

<sup>76</sup>CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Situation in the Congo," 1 July 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85. See also CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, "The Situation in the Congo," 24 February 1966, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

<sup>77</sup>Godley to secretary of state, 4 December 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

<sup>78</sup>Godley to secretary of state, 30 October 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

agreed: "mercenaries indispensable in Congo until rebel pockets eliminated," he told Godley.<sup>79</sup>

No U.S. official questioned the necessity of using the mercenaries; not one expression of dissent emerges from thousands of pages of documents on the Congo. Nor did any official doubt that victory in the Congo would be Pyrrhic if it caused a backlash in Africa or at home. American officials were painfully aware that the United States was vulnerable to African charges of racism despite the sincere efforts of the Johnson administration to strengthen civil rights legislation. "I think you could make a barometric chart of how civil rights were going," Mennen Williams mused, "through the relationships you had with many Africans."<sup>80</sup> In the summer of 1964, as the Congo operation began, intermarriage was a crime in nineteen states, segregation rampant, and violence against blacks apparent to anyone who opened a paper or turned on a television. On 22 July, the second summit meeting of the Organization of African Unity unanimously approved a resolution condemning "continuing manifestations of bigotry and oppression against Negroes in the United States," while race riots in New York reminded Africans that racial hatred was not limited to "the ever-explosive Deep South."<sup>81</sup>

U.S. officials went to work. "I believe that there are some things that we can do to make our actions in the Congo more palatable internationally and to make ourselves less vulnerable to Communist propaganda," USIA director Rowan told Johnson.<sup>82</sup> This meant polishing Tshombe's image. And it meant making the mercenary issue as anodyne as possible, while transforming the United States from the mercenaries' patron into a concerned onlooker. It was a painful exercise, at times successful, usually frustrating.

Through reams of documents, we see senior U.S. officials trying to get Tshombe to utter the right noises and make the right gestures; they worked directly with him, and they worked through his advisers and public relations people.<sup>83</sup> It was a thankless task, Ambassador Godley and his Belgian and British colleagues concluded, as they swapped stories of Tshombe's stubbornness. The man's survival depended on the United States, but he knew that his patrons also needed him. "We all agreed that dire threats should never

<sup>79</sup>Godley to secretary of state, 8 October 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

<sup>80</sup>Mennen Williams, "Oral History Interview," 77, Kennedy Library, 1970. Documents in the Kennedy Library (esp. NSF, boxes 2 and 3) and the Williams Papers (esp. Subject File, box 16) show the concern of both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations about the impact on Africans of the civil rights situation in the United States.

<sup>81</sup>Quotations from *Le Peuple*, 25 July 1964; and *Tanganyika Standard*, 27 July 1964. A systematic reading of the *Tanganyika Standard*, the *Daily Nation*, the *Egyptian Gazette*, and *Le Peuple* reveals their interest in race relations in the United States. In late July 1964, they devoted substantial articles daily to the New York riots. Through the rest of the year they included on average three to four articles a month on racial problems in the United States (most frequent in *Le Peuple*, least in the *Daily Nation*). The coverage became more intense in early 1965, as the situation in Alabama grew increasingly tense. Then, in the month that followed "Bloody Sunday" in Selma on 7 March 1965, every issue of these four dailies included at least one article on racial violence in the United States.

<sup>82</sup>Rowan memorandum for the president, 14 August 1964, Confidential File, Country 29, box 7, Johnson Library. In his autobiography, Rowan overlooks the entire episode. See *Breaking Barriers: A Memoir* (Boston, 1991).

<sup>83</sup>For the Johnson administration's delicate handling of one of these advisers see the "Michel Struelens" folder in NSFCF: Congo, box 87.



be made unless we [are] prepared [to] accept [the] consequences and have [a] tangible alternative in mind," Godley cabled. "For [the] moment, we can see no satisfactory person [to] replace Tshombe."<sup>84</sup>

Mindful of Tshombe's well-deserved reputation as the friend of Portuguese colonialism, U.S. officials sought to drape him in anticolonialist veils. "I indicated [to him that] there are many rumors around Leopoldville that he is giving [rebel leader] Holden Roberto and his Angolans a rough time," Godley cabled in March 1965. "He again referred to [the] fact that from his limited resources he gave Holden \$800. . . . I suggested he let this be known to African leaders and that he not conceal his pro-Holden tendencies."<sup>85</sup> A few days later the U.S. ambassador in Dar es Salaam chimed in: The Congo should make a "special [financial] contribution" to Holden Roberto at the next meeting of the Liberation Committee of the Organization of African Unity. The contribution would be "more symbolic than substantial and explicable [to the] Portuguese in these terms if [the] closed session leaked."<sup>86</sup>

The suggestions fell on deaf ears. "Holden complains bitterly," *Jeune Afrique* reported two months later. "Tshombe is making his life tough."<sup>87</sup> Tshombe, U.S. officials groused, had an "incredibly poor sense of public relations."<sup>88</sup>

The previous August, U.S. efforts at image making had faced a far deadlier threat than Holden Roberto and the Portuguese. Unbeknown to Washington, Tshombe had asked Pretoria for weapons, "white officers and white enlisted men."<sup>89</sup> While sympathetic to Tshombe ("whom they regard as the least of the black evils," explained the CIA<sup>90</sup>), the South Africans were hesitant. They immediately told U.S. officials that they were worried that evidence of their military involvement might be "grist for the mill" of

<sup>84</sup>Godley to secretary of state, 13 December 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

<sup>85</sup>Godley to secretary of state, 24 March 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85. See also Williams memorandum of conversation (Anderson, Williams), 16 January 1965, RG 59, Williams Papers, Chronological File, box 5; Williams to McIlvaine, 8 February 1965, RG 59, Williams Papers, Chronological File, box 5; and Blake to secretary of state, 27 April 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

The Congo's important newspaper, *Le Progrès* (which was pro-Mobutu but not pro-Tshombe), had just published several articles about Holden Roberto's misadventures at Tshombe's hands: "Holden Roberto interdit de quitter le Congo?" [Holden Roberto prohibited from leaving the Congo?], 3 February 1965; "Holden Roberto en danger?" [Holden Roberto in danger?], 16 February 1965; "Le Congo et le combat de libération en Afrique" [The Congo and the struggle for liberation in Africa], 18 February 1965; "Sommes-nous au bord d'un fratricide?" [Are we on the verge of fratricide?], 21 February 1965; "Aurons-nous à pleurer sur nous-mêmes?" [Are we going to weep for ourselves?], 23 February 1965.

<sup>86</sup>Leonhart to secretary of state, 27 March 1965, NSFCF: Tanzania, box 100.

<sup>87</sup>"Escale à Léo," *Jeune Afrique*, 8 August 1965, 19. See also "Où en est le G.R.A.E. de Roberto Holden?" [How is the G.R.A.E. of Roberto Holden?] *Le Courrier d'Afrique* (Leopoldville), 14 and 20 July 1965; and "Roberto Holden Replies," *West Africa*, 3 July 1965, 735.

<sup>88</sup>Komer, "Memorandum for Record," 21 January 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

<sup>89</sup>Department of State memorandum of conversation, "Tshombe Request for South African Assistance," 11 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81.

<sup>90</sup>CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, weekly report, "The Situation in the Congo," 3 February 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87.

Tshombe's enemies and would complicate American efforts to aid the Congo.<sup>91</sup>

Washington agreed heartily: The South African connection would be a "continuing magnet for [the] cold war in [the] form of greater sov[iet] bloc, chi[nese]com[munist], and radical African interest."<sup>92</sup> Pretoria held back. It sent Tshombe a few military supplies—the arrival on 22 August 1964 of a South African C-130 "with what is obviously military equipment" was immediately reported in the press and proved embarrassing.<sup>93</sup> And it sent, according to the CIA, some military personnel under cover: "Many of the mercenaries arriving at [the Congolese base of] Kamina are actually South African Army regulars placed on leave status for six months." There were a few dozen such soldiers, sent to perform specialized tasks and "probably . . . to gather intelligence," observed a CIA official.<sup>94</sup> Fortunately, for Washington, this operation remained a secret.

U.S. officials would have preferred that both the South African government and the South African mercenaries stay out of the Congo, a point that Undersecretary Ball expressed forcefully. "If Senator [Thomas] Dodd could get [the] following points across to Tshombe it would be immensely beneficial," he wrote.<sup>95</sup> The "Congo cannot expect its friends, such as Nigeria, Senegal, the Ivory Coast and others, to be effective in promoting its interests against [the] strong opposition of radical African states if [the] Congo does not take parallel actions which will make it more acceptable to Africa." Among such actions, Ball stressed, was the "replacement of at least the South Africans and Rhodesians among the mercenary contingents in the Congo ASAP."<sup>96</sup> In

<sup>91</sup>Department of State memorandum of conversation, "Tshombe Request for South African Assistance," 11 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81.

<sup>92</sup>Rusk to American embassy, Leopoldville, 13 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81; Godley to secretary of state, 24 August 1964, quoted, NSFCF: Congo, box 82; Godley to secretary of state, 26 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 82.

<sup>93</sup>Godley to secretary of state, 23 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 82. For the landing on 20 August of another South African C-130 that "almost certainly contained military equipment" see CIA, "The Congo Situation," 25 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 87. For press reports see *Egyptian Gazette*, 24 and 28 August 1964; *Daily Nation*, 24 and 25 August 1964; "Congo for OAU," *West Africa*, 29 August 1964, 979.

<sup>94</sup>Quotations from CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, weekly report, "The Situation in the Congo," 3 February 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87 and from interview with Devlin. On South Africa's involvement (and on the Portuguese role, which was minimal) see also CIA, "The Congo Situation," 27 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, weekly report, "The Situation in the Congo," 10 November 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Situation in the Congo," 30 December 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; Godley to secretary of state, 9 February 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85; and Godley to secretary of state, 3 March 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87.

<sup>95</sup>Senator Dodd (D-CT) had been a prominent member of the Katanga lobby when Tshombe's Katanga had sought independence from Leopoldville. See Dodd, "Congo: The Untold Story," *National Review*, 28 August 1962, 136-44. A warm supporter of Tshombe, he pestered the White House on Tshombe's behalf and was in turn courted by U.S. officials who hoped that he might be able to talk some sense into him. See Komer, "Memorandum for Record," 21 January 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85; Bundy, "Memorandum for the President," 25 August 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85; Komer to Bundy, 31 August 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85; Williams and Ball, telephone conversation, 28 January 1965, 6:30 A.M., Ball Papers, boxes 2-3, Johnson Library; Bundy and Ball, telephone conversation, 28 January 1965, 7:30 A.M., Ball Papers, boxes 2-3, Johnson Library.

<sup>96</sup>Ball to American embassy, London, 28 January 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

their stead should be Europeans. "Such a shift," Harriman and Spaak concluded during a three-hour lunch in New York, "would not in itself overcome African opposition to Tshombe but would make it easier for moderate African countries to support [the] GDRC [Government of Congo]." <sup>97</sup>

Although Spaak had refused to let Belgians serve as mercenaries in August, <sup>98</sup> his reservations had soon been overcome. Honored as one of the fathers of European unity, Spaak appears here in less distinguished garb. Under his aegis, "a recruitment center, shielded by diplomatic immunity, operated in rue Marie de Bourgogne [in Brussels]. There, the [Congolese] military attaché, Babia, was assisted by a Belgian adviser. A [Belgian] police doctor examined the candidates. . . . All this was public knowledge," remarks Colonel Vandewalle. <sup>99</sup>

And yet, fewer than two hundred Belgians enlisted and even fewer Frenchmen; the number of Italians and Germans could be counted on the fingers of one hand; forty-six Spaniards (under an active duty officer on unpaid leave from the Spanish army) arrived in late 1965. <sup>100</sup> The Americans were realistic: As long as so few Europeans volunteered, the southern Africans would have to stay. Godley was philosophical: Although a shift to Europeans might "alleviate [the] political unacceptability [of the] mercenaries . . . none of us [the Belgian and British ambassadors and Godley] believe this would appreciably modify [the] situation." <sup>101</sup> Moreover, he added, "the English-speaking mercenaries . . . have proven themselves more able than the Belgian and other heterogeneous French-speaking mercenaries." <sup>102</sup>

Since little could be done to change the mercenaries' mores or nationality, U.S. officials did what they could to package the unsavory product better. Why not call the mercenaries "military technical assistance volunteers," the U.S. ambassador in Belgium asked. <sup>103</sup> (Others preferred "special volunteers." <sup>104</sup>) Well-meaning, repetitive suggestions rained on Godley. Rusk told him to "play down to [whatever] extent possible [the] role [of the]

<sup>97</sup>Harriman to American embassy, Brussels, 14 December 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

<sup>98</sup>See Brubeck memorandum for the president, 6 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81; McSweeney to secretary of state, 13 July 1964, FOIA, Department of State, microfiche 8503217; Williams to Harriman, 24 July 1964, RG 59, Williams Papers, Signature and Clearance File, box 12; McSweeney to secretary of state, 28 July 1964, FOIA, Department of State, microfiche 8503217.

<sup>99</sup>Vandewalle, *L'Ommegang*, 209. See also "Les mercenaires dans l'histoire du Congo (1960-1967)" [Mercenaries in Congo history (1960-1967)], *Courrier Africain*, nos. 74-75 (26 February 1968): 19.

<sup>100</sup>For the duration of the war, South African and Rhodesian mercenaries constituted well over half the total. For the breakdown by nationality see Godley to secretary of state, 28 October 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 83; CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Situation in the Congo," 19 January 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; Godley to secretary of state, 18 November 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85; CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, "The Situation in the Congo," 24 February 1966, NSFCF: Congo, box 85; Blake to Department of State, "The Congolese Rebellion: Current Status and Outlook," 3 March 1966, FOIA, Department of State, microfiche 8705067/1.

<sup>101</sup>Godley to secretary of state, 13 December 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

<sup>102</sup>Godley to Department of State, "Belgian Presence and Belgian Policies in the Congo," 2 December 1965, FOIA, Department of State, microfiche 8503217.

<sup>103</sup>MacArthur to secretary of state, 3 December 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

<sup>104</sup>Godley to secretary of state, 15 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 81.

mercenaries." Rowan urged "more emphasis on [the] Congolese and less on [the] mercenaries," and Ball insisted that Godley take "measures to avoid publicity such as keeping mercenaries out of Leo[poldville and] impressing upon Hoare [the] necessity [of] keep[ing] quiet."<sup>105</sup> Not an easy task: As the *Christian Science Monitor* noted, Hoare had already sold his story "to British and South African newspapers. In the first article he bluntly states that he and his men 'bore the brunt of all the fighting.'" Hoare also told *Le Figaro Littéraire* that "the Congo will need white troops for many years to come. . . . The work we have started has to be completed, and the only way to complete it is to kill all the rebels."<sup>106</sup>

Wary of being associated with the mercenaries, the United States stayed in the background. It built "a few fires under [the] Belgians"; as the former colonizers, they could dirty their hands.<sup>107</sup> "We had to press them, cajole, yell at them," recalled a U.S. official. The Belgians were "small in resources and small in imagination," observed another.<sup>108</sup> The Americans wanted the Belgians to take the lead in the Congo—the lead, that is, in executing Washington's policy. Belgium cooperated: It increased the number of its military advisers in the Congo,<sup>109</sup> and it was these military advisers who openly maintained the daily contact with the mercenaries. "Overtly at least," Godley recommended, "US rep[resentative]s should keep as far away from [the] mercenaries as possible."<sup>110</sup> The United States wanted the mercenaries to be seen as the responsibility of the Congolese government and of Brussels. To make this unequivocally clear, "in accordance with the wishes of the American government," the mercenaries did not accept U.S. citizens.<sup>111</sup>

It is unlikely that U.S. public diplomacy swayed many Africans. The governments of Algeria, Egypt, the Sudan, Guinea, Ghana, Congo Brazzaville,

<sup>105</sup> Rusk to American embassy, Leopoldville, 6 January 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85; Rowan to American embassy, Leopoldville, 29 December 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 85; Ball to American embassy, London, 28 January 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

<sup>106</sup> *Christian Science Monitor*, 21 December 1964; *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 17 December 1964, 9.

<sup>107</sup> Godley to secretary of state, 18 November 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

<sup>108</sup> Quotations from interviews with Robert Komer, the NSC official in charge of Africa (Washington, DC, 26 September 1991) and with Blake.

<sup>109</sup> The Belgian military mission swelled to almost 450 people, and Belgian officers were eventually placed "in de facto command of most major Congo Army detachments." CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, weekly report, "The Situation in the Congo," 27 January 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87. See also Godley to Department of State, "Belgian Presence and Belgian Policies in the Congo," 2 December 1965, FOIA, Department of State, microfiche 8503217; Jules Gérard-Libois, "L'aide extérieure à la République du Congo" [Foreign aid for the Republic of the Congo], I, *Etudes Congolaises* (May/June 1966): 19–25; Benoit Verhaegen, "L'Armée Nationale Congolaise" [The Congolese National Army], *Etudes Congolaises* (September/October 1967): 15; Kestergat, *Congo*, 101–2.

<sup>110</sup> Godley to secretary of state, 26 August 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 82.

<sup>111</sup> Mockler, *Mercenaries*, 247, prints the letter from which the above quotation is taken. See also *ibid.*, 245; Jay Mallin and Robert Brown, *Merc: American Soldier of Fortune* (New York, 1979), 110; and Vandewalle, *L'Ommegang*, 201.

One American, however, was able to slip through: Samuel Shoemsmith who, mercenary commander Hoare recalled, "had emigrated hurriedly from the United States to the Northern Rhodesian copper belt." Shoemsmith was a useful addition: "He was usually the first to be consulted about the validity of bank notes and other negotiable bills of exchange, etc., that the men had liberated from banks and post offices unfortunate enough to lie on our general line of advance." Mike Hoare, "Congo Merc's Masterpiece," *Soldier of Fortune*, June 1989, 71.

and Burundi lambasted U.S. support for Tshombe ("Lumumba's murderer") and the mercenaries, as did the governments of Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, which usually had cordial relations with the United States. Moreover, many of these governments provided money or weapons to the rebels or allowed aid to pass through their territory.<sup>112</sup>

Support for the rebels and anger at the United States were soon tempered, however, by pragmatic considerations. With the exception of Congo Brazzaville, these governments relied on U.S. economic aid (or, in the case of Burundi, Belgian aid)—a fact that U.S. officials did not let them forget.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, from the outset England used its clout with African governments to rally support for U.S. policy in the Congo, and in the spring of 1965 the French somewhat grudgingly joined in.<sup>114</sup> Finally, the mercenaries' victories could not be overlooked. "My personal relations with [President Jomo] Kenyatta healed slowly," writes the U.S. ambassador in Kenya. "But on May 5 [1965] he called me over [to] the State House, held out his hand and said, 'The Congo is finished. Now we can be friends again.'" <sup>115</sup>

The Sudan, which had allowed aid for the rebels to pass through its territory, was subjected to more direct pressure. In April 1965, Hoare's men reached the Sudanese border. On the 28th, the CIA reported that "South African mercenaries sallied across the frontier." Or, as one mercenary recalled

<sup>112</sup>Quotation from "Tchombe: réconciliation ou pacification" [Tshombe: Reconciliation or pacification], *Dipanda* (Brazzaville), 1 August 1964, unpaginated. For a sample of this criticism from mid-1964 through mid-1965 see *Tanganyika Standard*, 3 September, 25, 27, and 28 November, and 4 and 17 December 1964, and 14 and 30 January, 15 and 18 February, and 8 and 19 April 1965; *Daily Nation*, 31 August, 22 and 24 September, 26 and 27 November, and 17 and 18 December 1964, and 13 January, 16 February, 24 and 29 March, and 8 April 1965; *Egyptian Gazette*, 29 August, 8 and 10 October, 25, 26, and 27 November, and 11 and 16 December 1964, and 18 February, 8 March, and 17 May 1965; and *Le Peuple*, 11 July, 8, 12, and 19 August, 23 and 25 September, 12 October, 25, 27, and 30 November, and 11 and 12 December 1964, and 6, 26, 27, and 29 January, 19 and 26 February, 19 and 25 March, 13 April, 11 and 27 May, and 2 June 1965.

See also the following weeklies: *West Africa*, 22 August 1964, 929, 28 November 1964, 1330, 20 February 1965, 193-94, and 1 May 1965, 497; and *Jeune Afrique*, 4 October 1964, 9, 3 January 1965, 8, 11 April 1965, 22-23, 18 April 1965, 16-17. For *Dipanda*, see below, n.117.

For an excellent study of Africa's relations with the Tshombe government see CRISP, *Congo 1964*, 444-510; and CRISP, *Congo 1965*, 264-91.

<sup>113</sup>See CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "US Aid to Countries Aiding Congo Rebels," 15 December 1964, enclosed in McCone to president, 16 December 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; *Egyptian Gazette*, 25 December 1964; "Si vous aidez les insurgés voici ce qui vous attend" [If you help the rebels, here's what you'll get], *Jeune Afrique*, 10 January 1965, 6; *Le Monde*, 9 February 1965; *Washington Post*, 28 February 1965; *Egyptian Gazette*, 2 May 1965. See also Williams to Harriman, 11 December 1964, RG 59, Williams Papers, Signature and Clearance File, box 12; Williams to All AF Office Directors, Mr. Westerfield, Mr. Kling, 12 January 1965, RG 59, Williams Papers, Chronological File, box 5; Williams to Westerfield and Kling, 12 January 1965, RG 59, Williams Papers, Chronological File, box 5; Williams to secretary of state, 18 January 1965, RG 59, Williams Papers, Signature and Clearance File, box 13; Williams to Harriman, 3 February 1965, RG 59, Williams Papers, Signature and Clearance File, box 13; and Williams to secretary of state, 25 March 1965, RG 59, Williams Papers, Signature and Clearance File, box 13.

<sup>114</sup>CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, weekly report, "The Situation in the Congo," 17 February 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; Godley to secretary of state, 31 March 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85. "The British were very supportive from the outset—they were supportive psychologically although not materially." Interview with Godley.

<sup>115</sup>William Attwood, *The Twilight Struggle: Tales of the Cold War* (New York, 1987), 276. The shift was timely: The failure of the rains throughout the country caused a serious food shortage and a pressing demand for U.S. food aid. See *Daily Nation*, 9, 10, 15, 16, 18, and 19 June 1965.

more poetically, "in the heart of Africa, at Aba on the border between the Congo and Sudan, South African soldiers sang the Boers' folksong in the tropical night." It was an ominous humiliation for the Sudanese; they ended their support for the rebels and toned down their criticism of the United States.<sup>116</sup> Congo Brazzaville, also fearful of a "US-backed attack" by Tshombe's mercenaries, did "little to aid the insurgents."<sup>117</sup>

At times, sheer luck helped the Americans. Algeria had been providing some matériel to the rebels ever since Belgian paratroopers, transported in U.S. planes, had raided Stanleyville on 24 November 1964.<sup>118</sup> "We help the

<sup>116</sup>Quotations from CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, weekly report, "The Situation in the Congo," 5 May 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; and Germani, *Weisse Söldner*, 159. See also CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Situation in the Congo," 30 December 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Situation in the Congo," 19 January 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, weekly report, "The Situation in the Congo," 27 January 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, "The Southern Sudan Problem and Its Relationship to the Congo," 28 May 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; Williams to secretary of state, 3 September 1965, RG 59, Williams Papers, Signature and Clearance File, box 14.

For the evolving rhetoric of the Sudanese authorities see *Le Peuple*, 15 December 1964, and 5 and 24 March and 5 April 1965; *Egyptian Gazette*, 22 December 1964; *Daily Nation*, 12 January 1965; *Tanganyika Standard*, 22 July 1965; "Le Soudan regarde vers Stanleyville" [The Sudan looks toward Stanleyville], *Jeune Afrique*, 14 February 1965, 15–16; "Intervention du Camarade Ousman Ba" [The intervention of Comrade Ousman Ba], *Dipanda*, 9 and 24 January 1965, both p. 2.

<sup>117</sup>Quotations from CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Situation in the Congo," 1 July 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85 and CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, weekly report, "The Situation in the Congo," 27 January 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87. See also CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Brazzaville's Move to the Left," 30 October 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 83; CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, weekly report, "The Situation in the Congo," 3 February 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; CIA, Office of National Estimates, "Prospects in Brazzaville," 17 May 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

These CIA documents analyze Congo Brazzaville's actions. For its rhetoric see *Dipanda*: "Tshombe: réconciliation ou pacification" [Tshombe: Reconciliation or pacification], 1 August 1964, unpaginated; "Le chien Tshombe aboie" [The dog Tshombe barks], 22 August 1964, 3; "L'Afrique n'acceptera jamais de compromis avec le traître Tshombe" [Africa will never agree to compromise with the traitor Tshombe], 17 October 1964, 5; "Les dessous de l'intervention américaine au Congo" [The truth behind the American intervention in the Congo], 14 November 1964, 5; "Je reviens de l'enfer Congolais" [Return from Congolese hell], 21 November 1964, 6; "Les impérialistes yankees et leurs laquais ont massacré le peuple congolais" [The Yankee imperialists and their lackeys have massacred the Congolese people], 1 December 1964, 8; "Stanleyville ou une victoire à la Pyrrhus" [Stanleyville or a Pyrrhic victory], 12 December 1964, 3; "Le voleur qui crie au voleur" [The thief who cries "Thief!"], 31 January 1965, 6; "Une île au milieu de l'océan néo-colonialiste" [An island in the middle of the neocolonial ocean], 2 March 1965, 1; "Eh! Tshombe!" [Eh! Tshombe!], 22 May 1965, 1; "Les progrès du peuple Congolais [Léo] en armes" [The progress of the armed Congolese (Leo) people], 3 July 1965, 2; "Mavimbamesso El Doktor Kapinda!" [Mavimbamesso Doctor Kapinda!], 18 September 1965, 1; "L'impérialiste américain ne sortira pas de son Fiasco" [American imperialists won't be able to escape from this Fiasco], 16 October 1965, 4.

<sup>118</sup>This raid and that on nearby Paulis two days later were the only times Belgian troops intervened directly in the war. The raid on Stanleyville succeeded in freeing Belgian and American hostages, whose number had swelled, with the passing of time, to fifteen hundred or even three thousand. See Paul-Henri Spaak, *Combats Inachevés* [Unfinished battles], 2 vols. (Paris, 1969), 2:275; and Thomas Schoenbaum, *Waging Peace and War: Dean Rusk in the Truman, Kennedy and Johnson Years* (New York, 1988), 380. According to Frédéric Vandewalle, "death threats were only made against the citizens of countries that were helping the Leopoldville government. There were about 300 hostages in Stanleyville, not 1,500. It is already a somber account, why blacken it?" Vandewalle, *L'Ommegang*, 417. Militarily, the operation was not necessary: The mercenaries were closing in on Stanleyville and resistance was slight. Whether the raid saved lives—or the opposite—remains an open question. Vandewalle writes that "the analysis of the facts and the examination of the documents justify well-founded doubts." *Ibid.* See also Wagoner, *Dragon Rouge*, 198; and Verhaegen, *Rébellions* 1:323–27, 2:651–54.

rebels. It is our duty," President Ben Bella proclaimed defiantly.<sup>119</sup> U.S. officials strongly objected to Ben Bella's "fanatical emotions" about the Congo and his vehemence "in attacking our support of Tshombe."<sup>120</sup> Relations between Algeria and the United States were strained, and Dean Rusk told the Algerian ambassador that "bilateral relations could not usefully be discussed as long as Algerian policies on Vietnam and the Congo were at such variance with those of the US."<sup>121</sup> It was Ben Bella's overthrow at Houari Boumedienne's hands in June 1965 that broke the impasse. Algeria promised that no further aid would be given to the rebels. Boumedienne, the CIA noted, "has been warm, open, and attentive with US officials."<sup>122</sup>

The storm was subsiding. Ghana's hostility was unchanged, but in material terms "Nkrumah did not play a role in the Congo in 1964-65, or a very limited one at most."<sup>123</sup> Egypt, Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, and Guinea were "adopting a more pro-Western stance."<sup>124</sup> Only one of the Congo's neighbors remained firm in its support for the rebels—Tanzania, defiant in its revulsion for the "traitor" Tshombe and his mercenaries.<sup>125</sup> "The key place for the opposition was Brazzaville for the political meetings, and Tanzania for the action," observed a CIA official.<sup>126</sup>

The military impact of Tanzania's stand was negated, however, by one of the CIA's most successful operations: the establishment, in the spring of 1965, of a naval patrol on Lake Tanganyka, which intercepted boat traffic to the beleaguered rebels.<sup>127</sup> "The trend line

<sup>119</sup> Ben Bella, "Nous aidons les insurgés. C'est notre devoir" [We help the rebels. It is our duty], *Jeune Afrique*, 10 January 1965, 7. See also *Le Peuple*, 8 and 15 December 1964 and 3 March 1965. Cuban sources reveal, however, that Algeria's support of the rebels was almost entirely rhetorical. Interviews with Cuban officials, Havana, 10 and 11 December 1991.

<sup>120</sup> Bundy, "Memorandum to the President," 5 January 1965, NSFCF: Algeria, box 79; Root to secretary of state, 11 November 1964, NSFCF: Algeria, box 79.

<sup>121</sup> Department of State, memorandum of conversation (Rusk, Guellal, Newsom, Stoltzfus), 16 April 1965, NSFCF: Algeria, box 79. See also Porter to secretary of state, 12 May 1965, NSFCF: Algeria, box 79 and Komer, "Memorandum for Record," 19 November 1964, NSF, Name File, box 6, Johnson Library.

<sup>122</sup> CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Consequences of Algerian Coup," 19 June 1965, NSFCF: Algeria, box 79. See also American embassy, Leopoldville, to secretary of state, 29 October 1965, FOIA, Department of State, microfiche 8503217.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Devlin.

<sup>124</sup> Komer, "Memorandum for the President," 16 June 1965, NSFCF: Africa, box 76.

<sup>125</sup> Nyerere, quoted in *Tanganyika Standard*, 21 April 1965. On Tanzania's role see CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Tanzanian Support for the Congo Rebels," 7 April 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, weekly report, "The Situation in the Congo," 14 April 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Tanzania Taking the Left Turn," 21 May 1965, NSFCF: Tanzania, box 100; CIA, Office of National Estimates, "A Reassessment of Julius Nyerere," 10 June 1965, NSFCF: Tanzania, box 100; CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Situation in the Congo," 1 July 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85; and Komer to Bundy, 11 October 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Devlin.

<sup>127</sup> The patrol consisted of eight LCUs (amphibious landing craft) that had been armored and equipped with machine guns and small cannon (each weighed 180 tons), three or four patrol boats, and several Swift boats. "It was a very successful operation against great difficulties," recalled DCM Blake. "It was a big job," a CIA officer who participated in the patrol agreed. "First, the boats were flown in in pieces. We had to put them together in Albertville. Then it was not easy to find people to man the boats; the mercenaries lacked experience; we had to train them. Finally, it was a big problem to maintain the boats." Interviews with Blake and with X, a CIA official who served in the Congo in 1964-65 and has asked not to be identified. See also CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, weekly report, "The Situation in

is going our way," the NSC specialist on Africa observed drily in June 1965.<sup>128</sup>

The trend was going in the right direction at home as well. In August 1964, when the president sent four C-130s with American crews to the Congo and fifty-six U.S. paratroopers to guard them, many Americans were reminded, with deep uneasiness, of Vietnam. "The United States is getting itself militarily involved in still another conflict," warned the *New York Times*. It "is starting with only enough arms, men and matériel to put out a little bonfire. . . . But as Southeast Asia showed, bonfires can grow into great conflagrations."<sup>129</sup> These fears were echoed, in the days that followed, by several members of Congress. "Today we are providing transport service," remarked Senator John Stennis (D-MS). "I cannot but wonder whether the next step will be the function of advising and training the Government forces, in the style followed in South Vietnam, so that ultimately our men will be fighting and dying in combat."<sup>130</sup>

The administration was eager to dispel these fears. The C-130s were "mostly for evacuation purposes," George Ball assured Walter Lippmann. "We have no intention of getting . . . bogged down in the African swamp."<sup>131</sup> And upon learning that the *New York Times* was "thinking of writing some editorial on the Congo situation," Ball called editorial page editor John Ochs and volunteered to send Deputy Assistant Secretary Wayne Fredericks "to N.Y. and have him talk to Ochs and [his] colleagues."<sup>132</sup>

It was not Ball's or Fredericks's eloquence but the mercenaries' successes that quelled the fear that the United States might be "drawn ever deeper into the Congolese jungle."<sup>133</sup> By using the mercenaries, C. L. Sulzberger noted in mid-September, "Tshombe has already made inroads into rebel pockets."<sup>134</sup> Through the months that followed, the U.S. press reported the obvious: "It has been the white mercenary force . . . that has contained and rolled back the insurgents." Led by the "intelligent, poetry-reading Colonel Mike Hoare," the mercenaries squared the circle: The Congo would be saved, and American soldiers would not die.<sup>135</sup>

---

the Congo," 10 March 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Tanzanian Support for the Congo Rebels," 7 April 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, weekly report, "The Situation in the Congo," 14 April 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 87; and CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "The Congo since the Mobutu Coup," 11 February 1966, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

<sup>128</sup> Komer, "Memorandum for the President," 16 June 1965, NSFCF: Africa, box 76.

<sup>129</sup> *New York Times*, editorial, 13 August 1964. See also *Washington Post*, editorial, 16 August 1964; *Christian Science Monitor*, editorial, 20 August 1964; and *Wall Street Journal*, editorial, 25 August 1964.

<sup>130</sup> Stennis, 14 August 1964, *Congressional Record*, 88th Cong., 2d sess., vol. 110, pt.15:19531. See also Michael Mansfield (D-MT), 21 August 1964, *ibid.*, pt.16:20884-87; *Washington Post*, 15 August 1964; and *New York Times*, 15 and 22 August 1964.

<sup>131</sup> Telephone conversation, Lippmann and Ball, 25 August 1964, 10:45 A.M., Ball Papers, boxes 2-3, Johnson Library.

<sup>132</sup> Telephone conversation, Ochs and Ball, 21 August 1964, 3:20 P.M., Ball Papers, boxes 2-3, Johnson Library. While the document identifies Ochs by his old family name, in the *New York Times* he appeared as Oakes.

<sup>133</sup> *New York Times*, editorial, 21 August 1964.

<sup>134</sup> *New York Times*, 26 September 1964.

<sup>135</sup> *Washington Post*, 14 March and 22 April 1965.



Nor were the mercenaries such bad chaps either, according to the U.S. press. "They resemble rough-hewn college boys," one *Life* reporter wrote.<sup>136</sup> The *New York Times*, which provided more intensive coverage of the Congo crisis than any other U.S. newspaper, made only one attempt to show the American people who the mercenaries were.<sup>137</sup> It did so by devoting two articles to Lieutenant Gary Wilson, "a lean, 25-year-old South African" who had enlisted, he confided, "because he believed Premier Moïse Tshombe was sincerely trying to establish a multiracial society in the Congo. 'I thought that if I could help in this creation, the Congo might offer some hope, some symbol in contrast to the segregation in my own country.'"<sup>138</sup> We hear Wilson's distress at what he witnesses in the Congo. "It's a weird war," he muses, "frightening, brutal, sometimes comic, utterly unreal." We hear him talk about performing acts of great bravery. "He recalled the time two weeks ago when he captured [the town of] Lisala with 15 men [white mercenaries] against more than 400. . . . 'The rebs have one thing in common with our own Congolese,' he adds. 'They don't take aim. They think that noise kills.'"<sup>139</sup> We hear his reaction to the cruelty of the Congolese—on both sides. " 'It's mass murder, it's mass murder,' " he mutters. Moreover, we hear that "his words summed up the feelings of most of his compatriots here."<sup>140</sup>

Perhaps Wilson was indeed the sensitive, idealistic man described by the *New York Times*. If so, he was the exception.<sup>141</sup> More typical was Wally Harper, a fellow South African also fighting in the Congo. When asked, "How do you feel when you're out there fighting? How do you feel about killing anyone?" Harper replied, "Well, I've done a lot of cattle farming, you know, and killing a lot of beasts; it's just like, you know, cattle farming, and just seeing dead beasts all over the place. It didn't worry me at all." Harper's

<sup>136</sup>"Red Arsenals Arm the Simbas," *Life*, 12 February 1965, 31.

<sup>137</sup>I have examined the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *Life*, and the African-American newspapers listed in n.160 below. The *New York Times* covered the story almost daily through mid-1965 and less frequently for the remainder of the year. The *Washington Post* was second to the *New York Times* in the thoroughness of its coverage, with about one third as much space devoted to the crisis. At the other end of the spectrum, the *Wall Street Journal* published only occasional articles. Among the magazines, *Time* and *Newsweek* covered the story regularly; *U.S. News & World Report* and *Life* less so.

The only stories about Africa that the U.S. press covered in any detail in the 1960s were, in order of importance: the Congo (1960–63), the Algerian war of independence, and the Congo (1964–65). These were followed, at some distance, by Rhodesia (1965–66), the Nigerian civil war, and South Africa (esp. 1960, 1963, 1966, and 1969).

It is impossible to measure the depth of the concern felt by the American public about the Congo at the time since no public opinion polls were taken on the issue. Judging by the extensive coverage in the U.S. press, however, the story did attract considerable interest.

<sup>138</sup>Lloyd Garrison, "Congo Mercenary Kills Rebel Prisoner to Spare Him Torture," *New York Times*, 25 October 1964.

<sup>139</sup>Lloyd Garrison, "White Mercenary Finds a Weird War in Congo," *New York Times*, 2 October 1964.

<sup>140</sup>Lloyd Garrison, "Congo Mercenary Kills Rebel Prisoner to Spare Him Torture," *New York Times*, 25 October 1964.

<sup>141</sup>*Newsweek's* senior editor, Arnaud de Borchgrave, must have traveled on the same plane: he also penned a sympathetic portrait of Wilson. "The Congo: Lousy Civilian," *Newsweek*, 12 October 1964, 56. This was the only portrait of a mercenary that appeared in *Newsweek*. For a less romantic description of Wilson and of the battle for Lisala by a French journalist who covered the campaign see Le Bailly, *Une poignée de mercenaires*, 235–63.

words appeared in *Africa Today*, a scholarly magazine that very few Americans read, but not in the *New York Times*.<sup>142</sup>

In its eighteen-month coverage of the war the *New York Times* reported the mercenaries' successes time and again; only rarely did it mention—and then ever so briefly—their transgressions. On 2 December 1964, Sulzberger abruptly referred to “atrocities committed by white mercenaries in the Congo,” but he provided no details; three weeks later he called them “unsavory.”<sup>143</sup> On 6 December, the *Times* wrote that the mercenaries “stalked through” the African section of Stanleyville, “looting and shooting. There seemed to be no end to the killing; any African man or woman was considered a rebel and shot on sight.”<sup>144</sup> In January, the *Times* quoted a UN official in the Congo as saying that the mercenaries “loot everywhere they can,” and it noted in passing that “the mercenaries habitually loot the towns they take.”<sup>145</sup> This was the extent of the indictment. No photos like those published in the *Observer* appeared in the *Times*. Its readers learned instead of the mercenaries' efforts to protect the Congolese from both the rebels and the army.

The *Christian Science Monitor* mentioned the mercenaries' crimes once. “The Western world has heard a lot about the vicious tactics of the rebels against their enemies and white captives,” Robert Hallett wrote. “At the same time,” he added with uncommon sensitivity, “the African nations have been similarly appalled by the cruelties of the white mercenaries toward Africans.”<sup>146</sup> *Newsweek* regularly referred to black atrocities and to the mercenaries' revulsion at them. (After witnessing an atrocity by a government soldier, one mercenary, “his face wrinkled in disgust, snapped out: ‘They are all the same. Take the uniform off that one [pointing to the soldier] and put it on that one [pointing to a dead rebel] and what's the difference?’”) Only once did *Newsweek* mention a crime perpetrated by the mercenaries: In Stanleyville they “divided their time between mopping up the remnants of rebel resistance and pillaging.”<sup>147</sup> *Life*, *Time*, and *U.S. News & World Report* constantly assailed the rebels' atrocities and the latter two occasionally mentioned those of the army, but none of them uttered a single word of criticism of the mercenaries. They stressed instead how the mercenaries were saving the Congo from communism. The closest the *Washington Post* came to mentioning mercenaries' crimes was an isolated reference to “the wholesale looting, killing and burning of villages . . . in areas captured by mercenary-led forces in the northwest Congo.” There were no such references in the *Wall Street Journal*.<sup>148</sup>

Looking back three decades later, one wonders why the American press was so silent about the atrocities the mercenaries committed. Perhaps it was because the American journalists who went to the Congo were dependent on

<sup>142</sup> “Conversations with Mercenaries,” *Africa Today*, December 1964, 8.

<sup>143</sup> *New York Times*, 2 and 21 December 1964.

<sup>144</sup> *New York Times*, 6 December 1964.

<sup>145</sup> *New York Times*, 7 and 19 January 1965.

<sup>146</sup> Robert Hallett, “White Fighters: Heroes?” *Christian Science Monitor*, 21 December 1964.

<sup>147</sup> “The Congo: Killing Ground,” 7 December 1964, 48; “The Congo: No End in Sight,” 14 December 1965, 36.

<sup>148</sup> *Washington Post*, 25 April 1965.

the U.S. embassy for information and transportation.<sup>149</sup> Perhaps it was because the mercenaries were doing America's work. Perhaps it was because the mercenaries, like the journalists, were white (*Time* called them "tough white fighters"<sup>150</sup>) and they killed only blacks, while they saved the lives of white hostages (including some Americans). *Le Monde* put it well: "Western public opinion is more sensitive, one must acknowledge, to the death of one European than to the deaths of twenty blacks."<sup>151</sup>

Given the press's selective reporting, it is not surprising that very few white Americans expressed any qualms about the use of the mercenaries. African Americans were less placid. Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad lashed out at President Johnson, at his "hiring Tshombe" and his "hordes of white Nazi-type mercenaries."<sup>152</sup> Pointing to the connection between the United States and the mercenaries, the Black Muslims' paper, *Muhammad Speaks*, asked: "If it is wrong for a rich individual to hire a thug to kill his enemy, does it become right for a rich country to hire killers to slaughter people of another country? . . . Or is it forgiven because the killers we hire are just 'killing niggers'?"<sup>153</sup> Stressing the bonds of race over citizenship, Malcolm X called on African Americans and Africans to join together against their common enemy—in Mississippi and in the Congo alike.<sup>154</sup>

Martin Luther King's wing of the civil rights movement was more cautious. The Call Committee of the American Negro Leadership Conference on Africa repeatedly expressed its unhappiness with U.S. policy in the Congo, called for a withdrawal of "mercenaries and other external forces," and asked that the problem be solved by negotiations.<sup>155</sup> But these leaders and their constituencies were absorbed in the civil rights struggle that was raging in the United States. They had no desire to quarrel with a president whose help they needed. Insofar as they paid attention to foreign policy, they focused on issues that directly affected black Americans—Vietnam, above all, where black soldiers were dying. "To them, Africa was distant, far off," remarked Congressman Charles Diggs (D-MI), one of the founders of the Black

<sup>149</sup> In addition to "mercenaries, ammunition and supplies," the U.S. C-130s carried American journalists on their visits to the front. *New York Times*, 23 January 1965. See also Godley to secretary of state, 17 November 1964, NSFCF: Congo, box 83.

<sup>150</sup> "The Congo Massacre," 4 December 1964, 30.

<sup>151</sup> *Le Monde*, editorial, 28 November 1964. See also François Honti, "Un Vietnam Africain?" [An African Vietnam?] *Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 1964, 1.

<sup>152</sup> *Muhammad Speaks*, 1 January 1965 and 18 December 1964.

<sup>153</sup> *Muhammad Speaks*, 15 January 1965.

<sup>154</sup> See Malcolm X with Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York, 1973), 347–63; John Henrik Clarke, ed., *Malcolm X: The Man and His Times* (Trenton, 1990), 288–301, 335–42; Carlos Moore, *Castro, the Blacks, and Africa* (Los Angeles, 1988), 185–90. Only one of the American newspapers and magazines examined for this article reported Malcolm X's statements on the Congo: *New York Times*, 25 November 1964 and 2 January 1965. But see *Daily Nation*, 11 July 1964; *Egyptian Gazette*, 7, 17, 23, and 25 August 1964; "Dipanda avec Malcolm X" [Dipanda with Malcolm X], *Dipanda*, 12 September 1964, 1; and *Tanganyika Standard*, 13 October 1964.

<sup>155</sup> *Washington Post*, 29 November 1964. *New York Times*, 29 November and 10 and 14 December 1964; *Afro-American*, 12 December 1964; "U.S. Negroes' Goal: To Set Africa Policy," *U.S. News & World Report*, 11 January 1965, 60–61; *New York Times*, 30 January 1965; *Amsterdam News*, 13 February 1965. See also American Negro Leadership Conference on Africa, "Resolutions," 24–27 September 1964, 1–2, 7–10, RG 59, Williams Papers, Subject File, box 16.

Caucus.<sup>156</sup> Their energy for the Congolese drama was limited; their complaints, somewhat perfunctory. Nevertheless, even their mild criticism provoked hostile comment. "Insofar as the civil rights leaders allow their movements to become hostage to the uncertain and confused events in Africa, they can provide heedless comfort to their enemies," lectured the *Washington Post* in an editorial. "There ought to be the utmost caution in statements that can enable bigots to assert that race is a stronger bond than citizenship."<sup>157</sup>

In January 1965, National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy informed Secretary Rusk that Johnson wanted him to meet with the leaders of the American Negro Leadership Conference on Africa. "What the President hopes is that you might find a way of making the point that we do not think it is a good thing at all to encourage a separate Negro view of foreign policy," Bundy explained. "I get loud and clear that the President wants to discourage emergence of any special Negro pressure group (à la the Zionists) which might limit his freedom of maneuver," noted a NSC official.<sup>158</sup> In March 1965, Rusk met with King and other representatives of the Negro Leadership Conference. The meeting "was quiet and friendly. Concerning the Congo, the Secretary and the Negro Leadership group agreed on the necessity . . . for Tshombe to get rid of the white mercenaries. . . . The meeting was given minimal press coverage and is not likely to give rise to any undesirable repercussions."<sup>159</sup>

Even the black press gave the meeting short shrift. With the notable exceptions of *Muhammad Speaks* and the *Afro-American*, it paid very little attention to Africa, and even less to the Congo. During the eighteen months that the crisis raged, the influential *Amsterdam News* published only four articles that mentioned it, and *The Crisis*, the monthly organ of the NAACP, printed not one word on the subject.<sup>160</sup>

Throughout 1965 the political situation in the Congo worsened even as the military situation improved. Relations between President Kasavubu and Prime Minister Tshombe became increasingly strained. "We've turned ourselves inside out to keep Kasavubu from firing Tshombe and to keep Tshombe from trying to take the presidency from Kasavubu," Bundy wrote Johnson in August. Nevertheless, in October, Kasavubu did indeed fire

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Charles Diggs (Prince George's County, Maryland, 18 March 1992). Diggs, an African American, was one of the few congressmen interested in Africa. On the American Negro Leadership Conference on Africa see Robert Browne and John Henrik Clarke, "The American Negro's Impact," *Africa Today*, December 1966, 16-18; and George M. Houser, *No One Can Stop the Rain: Glimpses of Africa's Liberation Struggle* (New York, 1989), 265-67.

<sup>157</sup> *Washington Post*, editorial, 1 December 1964.

<sup>158</sup> Quotations from Bundy, "Memorandum for the Secretary of State," 7 January 1965, NSFCF: Africa, box 76 and from Komer to Bundy, 6 January 1965, NSFCF: Africa, box 76.

<sup>159</sup> Haynes to Bundy, 4 March 1965, NSFCF: Africa, box 76. See also Williams to secretary of state, 2 March 1965, RG 59, Williams Papers, Signature and Clearance File, box 13.

<sup>160</sup> *Amsterdam News*, 8 August, 9 and 19 September, and 3 October 1964. Over this eighteen-month period, the *Chicago Defender* printed twenty-four articles on the Congo. *Freedomways*, a quarterly that was to the left of *The Crisis*, published an article on the April 1965 U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic, which involved thousands of black soldiers and sailors (Jose Malcioln, "Notes on the Dominican Crisis," Fall 1965, 517-24), but nothing on the Congo. I would like to thank Ms. Teresa Persico, who examined the *Afro-American*, *Muhammad Speaks*, the *Amsterdam News*, and the *Chicago Defender* and shared her insights and vast cache of photocopies with me.

Tshombe, and a frustrated White House aide lamented: "So, just when the mercenaries are mopping up the last organized rebel remnants, we have a real political mess on our hands."<sup>161</sup>

Tshombe and Kasavubu "are moving toward a showdown," warned the NSC's Africa expert on 22 November. "If [the] Belgians and we can't help patch up a compromise we face a painful choice."<sup>162</sup> Three days later the United States was spared the pain of making a decision as General Mobutu shoved both Kasavubu and Tshombe aside to take over as the Congo's strongman. Mobutu had worked with the CIA since 1960. The agency agreed with Spaak: Mobutu's coup was "the best thing that could possibly have happened."<sup>163</sup>

The decision to rely on white mercenaries to win the civil war in the Congo did not stem from a belief that the rebels were Communists or that a major Soviet or Chinese offensive was under way in the Congo, but from the fact that the rebels were unfriendly to the United States. At best, their victory would have meant an unpleasant neutralist regime in a country where both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations had labored mightily to impose a pro-American government. It came down, in the end, to a question of costs. If the cost of defeating the rebels could be kept low, then there was no incentive to explore alternative solutions, to run any risks, to accept any compromises. Had the only way to prevent a rebel victory been to dispatch U.S. troops—with its high cost at home and abroad—then U.S. officials might have allowed events in the Congo to run their course. As it was, there was very little debate among U.S. policymakers about the proper course to take, and if the administration's "doves"—Assistant Secretary Williams and his deputy, Wayne Fredericks—were uneasy, they kept their counsel.<sup>164</sup>

"With Cyprus and Viet-Nam bubbling ominously, and the election two months away, the Administration is eager to keep the lid on the Congo pot," the *Washington Post* remarked in September 1964.<sup>165</sup> It succeeded admirably.

<sup>161</sup> Quotations from Bundy, "Memorandum for the President," 25 August 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85 and Saunders to Bundy, 16 October 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85. On relations between Tshombe and Kasavubu see esp. NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

<sup>162</sup> Komer to Bundy, 22 November 1965, NSFCF: Congo, box 85.

<sup>163</sup> CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence, "The Situation in the Congo," 24 February 1966, NSFCF: Congo, box 85. See also CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "The Congo since the Mobutu Coup," 11 February 1966, NSFCF: Congo, box 85. The United States encouraged the coup. See M. Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* (Madison, 1985), 53. On Mobutu's early contacts with the CIA see Mahoney, *JFK*, 46.

<sup>164</sup> There was a debate about whether the United States and Belgium should launch a raid to free the hostages in Stanleyville. This debate, however, concerned neither the overall direction of Congo policy nor the use of mercenaries. It therefore had no effect on the number of mercenaries or on the way they were used. The lack of debate on Congo policy is reflected in the documents available at the Johnson Library and the Mennen Williams Papers, and it was confirmed in interviews with Ball, Komer, Godley, and Blake.

In a letter to the author, however, Fredericks suggested that there were "differences of opinion within the USG on Congo policy" (New York, 28 May 1992). If so, they were so subtle or subterranean that U.S. policymakers were not aware of them. Thus, Ball told Fredericks (who was, apparently, a dissenter) that "he and Fredericks saw eye to eye and he had complete confidence in Fredericks, and his judgment." Telephone conversation, Fredericks and Ball, 11 November 1964, 3:45 P.M., Ball Papers, boxes 2-3, Johnson Library. As for Williams, the written record shows him solidly behind the mercenary policy. The same is true for Rowan.

<sup>165</sup> *Washington Post*, 13 September 1964.

The costs for Washington of using the mercenaries were remarkably low. At home, after some initial hesitation, neither Congress nor the press questioned the administration's policy. Any doubts were dispelled by the mercenaries' victories.

Only two newspapers, both African American, roundly denounced the United States' role "in the raising and paying of white mercenaries." The *Afro-American* wrote: "We hire the hated anti-Castro mercenary pilots. . . . If we must fight the Congolese people, why don't we openly send in our army, our navy and our airforce instead of hiring thugs to do our dirty work for us?"<sup>166</sup>

The white press was more discreet. It mentioned that Cuban exiles were piloting the T-28s and B-26s provided by the United States, but it did not ask how these Miami Cubans had found their way to Leopoldville. In fact, the only references to any connection between the United States and the mercenaries were a phrase in *Life* about "Cuban exiles" having been "recruited by the United States" to fly the planes and three short sentences buried in a full-page article in the *Washington Post*: "The United States is flying mercenaries to the front. Better still, the United States is in effect underwriting the cost of the entire force of 'operational technicians,' as they are known in official circles. The monthly payroll: \$300,000." One might have expected other newspapers to pick up the story, or for *Life* and the *Washington Post* to elaborate on it. In fact, nothing happened.<sup>167</sup> "In those days there was not the adversarial relationship between the press and the government that now exists," explained the CIA station chief in Leopoldville. "Most of them [the U.S. journalists in the Congo] knew very well or guessed if they didn't know; but they didn't want to embarrass the U.S. government the way they would now."<sup>168</sup>

This reticence was not new. It had been present in 1954, at the time of the CIA covert operation in Guatemala, and in 1961, in the weeks before the Bay of Pigs.<sup>169</sup> "If the leaders of the U.S. government decide that all the risks and perils of a major covert operation are required . . . it is not the business of individual newspapermen to put professional gain over that of country," explains Joseph Alsop. This "journalistic discretion"<sup>170</sup> would survive the

<sup>166</sup> *Afro-American*, 11 September 1965 and 5 December 1964. See also *ibid.*, 3 October and 14 November 1964 and 2 and 23 January 1965. The other newspaper was *Muhammad Speaks* (see 18 December 1964 and 15 January and 19 March 1965).

<sup>167</sup> "Red Arsenals Arm the Simbas," *Life*, 12 February 1965, 31; *Washington Post*, 15 November 1964.

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Devlin. Another CIA agent recalled: "I remember one occasion. We were not supposed to have our CIA men on those boats. A machine gun starts firing at the mercenaries while they're in the water and starts killing them. One of our CIA men fires back with a machine gun, and kills the Simbas. There were two American cameramen—they got it on tape. Can you imagine the scandal this would have created! I convinced them to hand the material over to me." Interview with X (see n. 127 above).

<sup>169</sup> See Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944–1954* (Princeton, 1991), 258–62, 367–70; Victor Bernstein and Jesse Gordon, "The Press and the Bay of Pigs," *Columbia University Forum* (Fall 1967): 5–13; James Aronson, *The Press and the Cold War* (New York, 1970), 153–69; and Harrison F. Salisbury, *Without Fear or Favor: The New York Times and Its Times* (New York, 1980), 137–64.

<sup>170</sup> Quotation from Joseph W. Alsop with Adam Platt, "I've Seen the Best of It": *Memoirs* (New York, 1992), 443.

tumult of Vietnam and characterize the press's treatment of the 1975 Angolan civil war. Although aware of the U.S. covert operation there, the press maintained its silence until the failure of U.S. policy became too obvious to ignore.<sup>171</sup> In the Congo, however, the mercenaries were successful, and the press applauded.

The U.S. press did report on the Africans' outrage at the use of the white mercenaries, at times uneasily, at times contentiously. The *Washington Post* adopted a condescending tone: "Dislike of Premier Tshombe has impelled other African leaders to withhold help to his regime—and then to condemn him for accepting aid elsewhere. It might be useful if the new African states reconsidered their own responsibility for the worsening Congolese debacle."<sup>172</sup> According to the press, the mercenaries were decent chaps and, in any case, they were Tshombe's responsibility, not Washington's.

Those African countries that felt humiliated and threatened by U.S. policy in the Congo accepted the inevitable because, as one U.S. official said, "they had their own problems to worry about and because we were successful."<sup>173</sup> The rebels' disarray and lack of charismatic leaders, along with Tshombe's removal and the eventual departure of the white mercenaries, made it easier for the Africans to turn a blind eye to what happened in the Congo. The overthrow of President Ben Bella of Algeria in 1965 and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana a year later removed the two leaders who would have been more troublesome, and in any event Africa would soon face new dramas and new humiliations, new reminders of its weakness and dependence on the Western powers, beginning with Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965.

It was in the Congo, in 1964 and 1965, that the United States used mercenaries in Africa for the first time, and the policy was successful at a very low cost. In late 1975, during the Angolan civil war, the Ford administration found itself in a tight spot, and again the Americans turned to mercenaries.<sup>174</sup> This time, history did not smile on them. This time, thousands of well-trained Cubans greeted the "White Giants." This time, the mercenaries fled. The White Giants—"who had sown death and despair in African countries in return for pay"<sup>175</sup>—were finally defeated.

---

<sup>171</sup> The *New York Times* is a good example. Beginning in September 1975 and through the next three months it occasionally mentioned, in passing, that the United States was involved in a covert operation in Angola (25 September, 16 and 26 October, and 3, 7, 11, and 21 November). Only in mid-December did the *Times* begin to focus on the covert operation and express its doubts about it (13, 14, and 16 December).

<sup>172</sup> *Washington Post*, editorial, 2 December 1964.

<sup>173</sup> Interview with Komer.

<sup>174</sup> The best account is John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story* (New York, 1978), 182–85, 216–26, 244–48. See also Raúl Valdes Vivó, *Angola: fin del mito de los mercenarios* [Angola: The end of the myth of the mercenaries] (Havana, 1978); Wilfred Burchett and Derek Roebuck, *The Whores of War: Mercenaries Today* (New York, 1978); Chris Dempster and Dave Tomkins, *Fire Power* (New York, 1980).

<sup>175</sup> Agostinho Neto, quoted in *New York Times*, 11 July 1976.