Kinetic Air Power in Robust Peacekeeping: the UN Operation in the Congo 1960-64

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Congo 1960

- Independence from Belgium (June 30)
  - Size of Western Europe
  - Larger decolonization process

- Mutiny (July 5)
  - Belgian (re)deployment

- Secession of Katanga (July 11)

- Superpower proxy battles
  - Lumumba and Tshombe

Image of a map showing key locations: Leopoldville, Kamina, Elizabethville, and Katanga.
UN Intervenes (14 July 1960)

Security Council Resolution 143 (17 July 1960)

Unstated Goals:
- UN in, superpowers out
- boost Central government up, push Katangan secession down
Opération des Nations unies au Congo (ONUC)

• Largest and most complex UN op. in Cold War
  – 20,000 troops
  – 234 fatalities
• Forerunner of multidimensional ops
  – Help restore law & order (nation-building)
  – Secure withdrawal of Belgian forces
  – Prevent secession
• Increasingly robust over time
  – Air power: transport, medical
  – Later: kinetic/combat
US Airlift

50 C-124 transported 9,000 UN troops in two weeks

Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie greets US airmen, 25 July 1960
Staging Area: Pisa, Italy

Canadian "North Star" aircraft in ONUC service
Air Supply

Food packages unloaded, Luluabourg airport, 10 August 1960
Canadian Yukon Aircraft, Leopoldville, 23 July 1962, with Congolese National Army Officers

Replaced Canada’s North Stars on cargo/troop runs from Pisa
Humanitarian/Medical Evacuation
USG Ralph Bunche with Katangan Interior Minister, 5 August 1960
Katangan threat

- Backed by Belgian *Union Minière*
- Congolese government demands force
  - Soviet military aid (Illyshishin-14)
- Lumumba assassinated 17 January 1961
- Res. 161: “all appropriate measures” to prevent civil war, “force, if necessary, in the last resort”
Katangan aircraft (1961)

Fouga Magister

Originally three

• First one captured at Elizabethville airfield
• Second lost due to pilot error
• Third ("lone ranger"): piloted by mercenary Joseph Deulin
  – Attacked UN convoys, troops, transport aircraft & airfields
    (Elisabethville and Kamina), UN headquarters in Katanga
  – Caused havoc
UN Early Offensives

• Operations Rum Punch (Aug 1961)
  – Limited “success”

• Operation Morthor (“Smash”) (Sept 1961)
  – Viewed as “failure”
  – Objection from Hammarskjold

• No kinetic air
• Havoc from Fouga Magister
Dag Hammarskjöld in plane crash

*Plane route*
- Detour
- In range only after dark
- Strict radio silence

17 September 1961
Swedish airmen funeral, Leopoldville (Kinshasa)
Twin-engine transport shot down on 20 September
UN leaders strafed during press conference by Katangan jet

Representative of SG in Katanga, Conor Cruise O'Brien (on ground facing camera in jacket)

September 1961

A C-54 explodes and burns at Elizabethville airport after being attacked by a mercenary of the Katanganese Air Force.
Attacked by a Fouga Magister at Elizabeth airport

Irish UN soldier flees from the exploding ammunition dump, Elizabethville: 1961

http://www.magnumphotos.com/image/LON71515.html
13 Italian airmen seized and murdered in Kivu by ANC-Stanleyville forces
13 Italian Airmen – Memorial Service
Centre: SRSG Sture Linner & President Joseph Kasavubu, flanked by Italian officials.
Creation of a “UN Air Force”

• Hammarskjold’s leadership
  – Armed aircraft: Ethiopia, India, Sweden

• Pres. Kennedy offers eight US jets
  – Joint Chiefs: “seek out and destroy on ground or in the air the Fouga Magister jets”
  – Thant declined
Council debates before passing resolution 169: force authorized to expel mercenaries
Ethiopian Sabre Jets

Leopoldville, 3 October 1961
Swedish Saab J29 Jets

"Flying Barrels “
Wreckage of Saab 29 fighter in the Congo

Svenn Willy Mikaelsen
Indian Canberra Bombers
CANBERRAS IN THE CONGO

Source:
http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/History/Congo.html
(5 photos)
Sqn Ldr PM Wilson in the cockpit of a Canberra
Flying in Formation:

2 IAF B(1) Canberras; 2 Swedish J29s Saabs; 2 Ethiopian F-86 Sabres
Rockets for SAAB jets, Elisabethville airport
Captured "Fouga" fighter in December 1961, Elizabethville airport
Katangan Air Force Expansion (1962)

- Ex-Belgian T-6G
- Harvard IV Fire Assistance Flight
  - Kamina-based

©1997 by Robert Craig Johnson
1962

- Aerial “arms race” with Katanga
  - ONUC’s Military Information Branch (MIB) gathers intelligence
  - South African company offer 40 Harvards
  - Both sides also increase transport aircraft
- UN acquires S-29E photo-recce aircraft
- Camouflage colours applied to S-29 after FAK attacks on airfields
- Britain dithers on providing bombs for Canberras
- Limited operations until December
“We are *not* attempting to destroy any aircraft found in the airfield in the vicinity of that area [Kolwesi airfield] because if we do locate one or two aircraft and destroy them, we feel that FAK will react against Kamina Base and also disperse their aircraft from Kolwezi to other airfields, thereby making our task of locating and destroying these aircraft on the ground very difficult.”

– Force Commander General Kebbede Guebre to Dr. Ralph Bunche, 24 November 1962
ONUC Strategy

• Overwhelming surprise attack
  – Avoid FAK hiding aircraft
  – Avoid retaliation in kind
• Obtain Norwegian anti-aircraft battery
  – 200 strong
• Air surveillance radars
  – Installed Aug 1962 in Elizabethville
• Pres. Kennedy offers fighter jets without US pilots
  – Thant defers
Operation Grand Slam: The Trigger

• Katangan shoot down UN observation helicopter
  • 1 Indian crew member died of bullet wounds

• Continuous firing on UN positions
  • UN escorts Tshombe to site of fighting to show his forces responsible
  • Katangese Gendarmerie Commander ordered bombing of Elizabethville airfield 29 December (radio interception)
  • Gen. Prem Chand convinces Thant for offensive
“Grand Slam” (28 Dec 1962)

• All “bases loaded”
• 0430 hrs J-29s attacked Kolwezi airfield
  – 20 mm canons
  – cloud cover too low for 13.5 mm rockets
  – 3 UN aircraft hit by ground fire: narrowly missing pilot
• Continued for 4-7 days
  – 76 sorties
  – Target aircraft, petrol dumps
  – J29 patrol skies to prevent introduction of new aircraft
  – Thant does not approve use of napalm
Katangan soldiers shooting into the sky, Elizabethville, 1961

http://www.magnumphotos.com/image/LON124394.html
Charanjit Singh’s Canberra IF 898 after local repairs to windscreen day after hit by ground fire; back to flying
Katangan Harvard destroyed on ground by Swedish jets on 30 December 1962
Vampire aircraft destroyed by Swedish fighter jets, Kolwesi airport
KA DFN destroyed by UN jets, Kolwezi, 6 December 1961
http://vayu-sena-aux.tripod.com/pix/ONUC_destroyed_DC-3_Congo_03B_01.jpg
Securing road blocks &
positions around Elisabethville, 3 January 1963
January 1963

• Tshombe agrees to end his secession & give up military means
  – Meets UN demand/ultimatum

• No UN personnel killed in Op Grand Slam
  – 215 killed in ONUC 1960-64
Delay would have been costly

- ONUC intelligence (subsequently): 15 FAK aircraft (Mustangs) hidden in Angolan airfields

- Belgian mercenary interrogated:
  “If you had only given us four more weeks so that we could have got the Mustangs ready, you would have experienced the same disastrous surprise one early morning at your Kamina Base as we experienced at Kengere [Kolwesi] on 29 December.”

- ONUC victory in the nick of time
U Thant with officers from Nigeria, India, Ethiopia (Force Commander Lt. Gen. Kebede Guebre); Thant; India (Maj. Gen. D. Prem Chand, GOC Katanga Area); Sweden; Norway (Gen. C.R. Kaldager, Air Commander); and Commander of the Swedish Air Jet Fighter Unit
Conclusions

• Dispels the myth of peacekeeping as non-combat
  – ONUC Air Force: air combat patrols, air-to-air combat, close air support, strikes against airfields, reconnaissance
  – Established and enforced *de facto* no-fly zone
  – US backing but no US fighter planes
  – Importance of precedents & being aware of them!
  – Defence/offense
    • Secured freedom of movement
    • Responded to attacks
Conclusions

• Showed utility of air intelligence and air combat

• Air Intelligence
  – Utility of aerial recce
    • Limits of aerial recce: Italian airmen case (13 November 1961)
  – Need for gathering intell on air capabilities, incl. in foreign countries

• Air Combat
  – Establish ROEs and Force Directives (see paper)
  – Recognize the dangers of collateral damage
    • Accused of bombing a hospital and hotel
    • Mortar fire on a hospital
ONUC

• Mission challenged and exhausted UN
  – At hq long before DPKO created (1992)
  – Controversial among states and in media
    • Katanga lobby
    • UK, France fears
    • Soviet objections
    • Non-aligned movement
  – Expensive: almost sent UN into bankruptcy
  – Difficulties in field: C2, armaments (bombs), casualties, bad press
  – Messy situation

• No mission in Africa until 1989 (Namibia)
Back to the Congo …

Indian MI-35 attack helicopters:
4 deployed to the Congo in 2004