

**Airpower and UN  
Operations in the  
Congo Crisis,  
1960 - 1964:  
Policy, Strategy, and  
Effectiveness**

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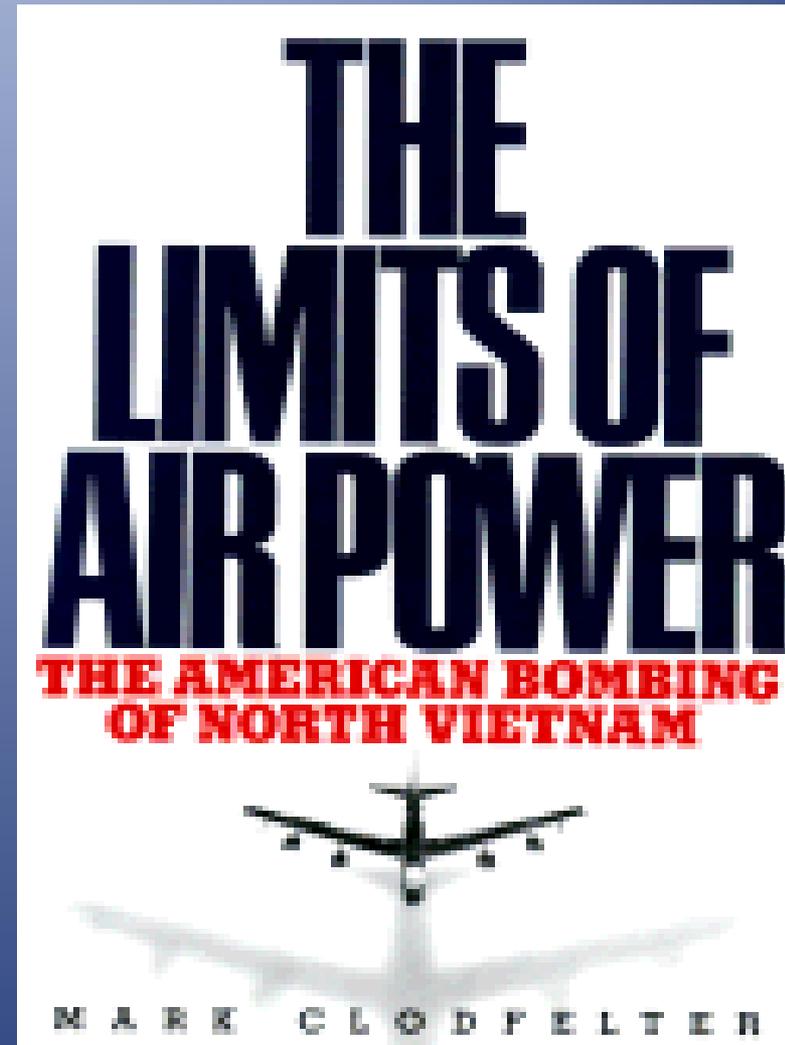
# Overview

- UN and Airpower Capabilities c. 1960
- Airpower in the Congo: Political Contexts
- The ONUC Mandate: Implications for UN Airpower
- The Role of the USAF
- UN Airpower and Combat Operations: Political Constraints
- Conclusion: Policy, Strategy, and UN Airpower

# Airpower as a Political Instrument

- Political contexts determine the strategic and operational dimensions of airpower
- The use of airpower must be subordinate to strategic and policy objectives

*“Clausewitz’s definition of war as a ‘continuation of political activity by other means’ provides the only true measure for evaluating air power’s effectiveness”*



# Airpower, Peacekeeping, and Politics

- Peacekeeping always has a fundamentally political character
- Political considerations are especially predominant in “internal” peacekeeping missions, such as the Congo Crisis
- Political considerations shape the strategic and operational dimensions of airpower in peacekeeping operations



# Organizational Contexts

- UN was not designed to plan and execute large-scale military missions
- No formal provision for “peacekeeping” in the UN Charter
- Office of the Secretary-General lacked a single admin. unit for coordinating all activities related to missions
- Post of military advisor to the Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld established only once the Congo Crisis was underway



# Limited Capabilities

- No long-range air transportation at the UN's immediate disposal
- UN did not maintain emergency stockpiles of pre-positioned materials to support short-term deployments
- UN had neither the personnel nor the facilities to maintain and protect long, ground-based LOCs
- Heavy dependence on U.S. airlift and logistical capabilities

# Limited Precedents

- Few pre-1960 precedents to go by
  - Korea: UN delegated the command and logistical support of UN forces to the U.S. and the Commonwealth
- Closest precedent: United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) in the Middle East



# UNEF as a Precedent?

- 6,000 troops from ten contributing states
- Relatively slow rate of build-up (Nov. 1956 – Feb. 1957)
- Proximity of airbases in Western Europe
- Relatively limited geographical area of operations
- Heavy reliance on sealift (80 – 90%)
- Marginal importance of tactical airlift



# ONUC

- 20,000 troops from 35 states
- 14,000 troops from 24 states in the first month of the operation
  - First troops arrived in the Congo within 48 hours of the Security Council's decision to intervene
- Inadequacies of strategic-level intelligence pertaining to air ops.:
  - Geography
  - Climate

# The Cold War Context

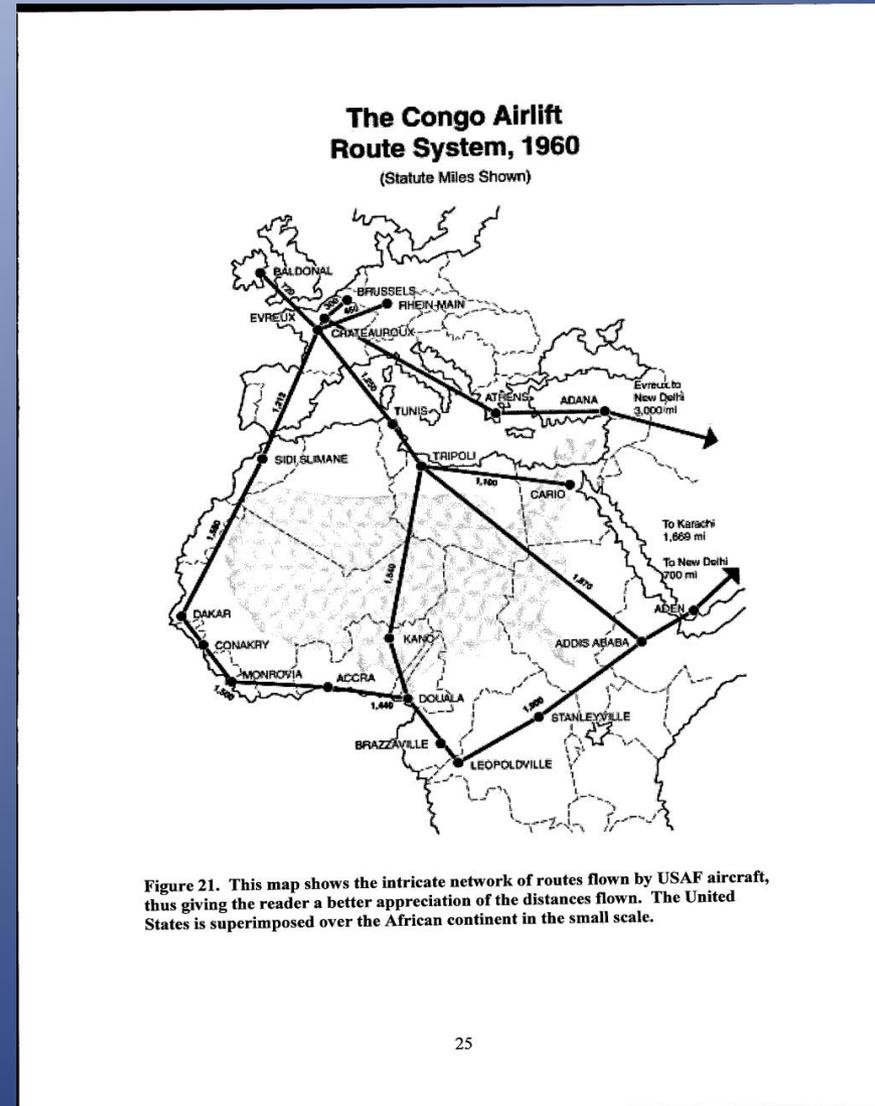
- U. S. political leadership viewed the Congo Crisis through the prism of containment
  - U. S. perceived the UN mission chiefly as a means for blocking Soviet designs on the Congo and Central Africa without actual American military involvement in the region
- Afro-Asian contributor states: wanted to maintain position of non-alignment, and prevent the Congo from becoming an arena of Cold War confrontation

# The Context of Decolonization

- Western European states were unwilling or unable to bear a proportionate share of airpower commitment
- Belgium, France, and Britain were reluctant to lend full support to the Congo mission
  - Western European mining interests in Katanga
  - British memory of the Suez Crisis

# The Context of Decolonization

- Algerian War precluded France from supporting a UN force dedicated to terminating a colonial regime
- France and Portugal banned the use or overflight of their overseas territories by UN aircraft
  - French pressure forced Congo-Brazzaville to do the same





# A Shifting Mandate

- Initial Security Council Resolution (No. 143, July 1960) was vague
- Subsequent resolutions never specified precise UN objectives or the duration of the mission
- UN mandate in the Congo was essentially reactive in response to the events in the host state and the mission's changing significance to its participants and contributors

# A Shifting Mandate

- July 1960 – Sept. 1960: Restoration of Civil Order; Removal of Belgian Military Presence
- Sept. 1960 – Aug. 1961: Restoration of the authority of the central government
- Aug. 1961 – Feb. 1963: Termination of the Katangan Secession
- Feb. 1963 – June 1964: Maintenance of internal stability; termination of the UN mission

# An Ambiguous Mandate: Implications for Airpower

- **Strategy**: Emphasis on maintaining “presence,” combined with limitations of the mandate, underscored the importance of air mobility as the mainstay of air operations in the Congo
- **Operations**: sensitivity to involvement by major powers meant that the contributor nation with the greatest airpower capabilities must limit its role to strategic airlift



# The Role of the USAF

- Crucial in facilitating initial airlift
- Strategic air mobility arm of the UN
- Accounts for approx. 2/3 of the troops airlifted to and from the Congo
- Principle of “non-intervention” restricted USAF to refugee evacuation, disaster relief, and logistical support

# The Role of the USAF

- U. S. policy toward Katanga reinforced reluctance to engage in tactical airlift
- Katangan regime had U. S. and Western backers
- U. S. policymakers saw Tshombe as helpful to U. S. interests and a safeguard against Soviet influence

# Implications for UN Airpower

- JCS limited numbers of U. S. military support personnel deployed to Leopoldville to 25 after Soviet protests and accusations the U. S. intended to support Belgian “neo-colonialism”
- U. S. insistence on the appearance of impartiality limited USAF missions to strategic airlift, and precluded extensive in-theater operations:
  - Basic division of airlift responsibility remains in place for the duration of the mandate:
    - U. S. dominated strategic airlift
    - UN dominated tactical, in-theater airlift

# Implications for UN Airpower

- Security concerns reinforced political imperatives in limiting USAF involvement in tactical airlift
- Principal USAF contribution after summer 1960 consisted of cargo aircraft (esp. C-47s and C-119s transferred to the UN air transport network)
- UN had the responsibility for finding crews for aircraft and establishing and maintaining a tactical airlift structure



# Implications for UN Airpower

- Persistence of the Katanga problem forced a change in U. S. policy
- Fall 1961: Kennedy admin. allowed U. S. airlift assets to support UN operations against Katanga:
  - 63<sup>rd</sup> TCW transported troops, weapons, and armored cars to Elisabethville
  - 1607<sup>th</sup> ATW airlifted Swedish elements of the UN Fighter Wing to the Congo



# Implications for UN Airpower

- The burden of tactical airlift and kinetic ops. was borne by states that did not possess optimal capabilities or resources to support such airpower functions:
- Swedish fighters deployed to satisfy the requirement for an “impartial” contribution to the UN’s kinetic air capabilities:
  - Swedish contribution to the UN Fighter Wing
  - Swedish Air Force not equipped, organized, or trained to conduct long-term expeditionary ops.



# Political Constraints on Combat Operations

- Even at its strongest, the UN mandate only permitted the use of enough force to remove foreign mercenaries from Katanga
- Sensitivity to international criticism compelled UN commanders to exercise force in tentative fashion
- UN command preferred to obtain political settlement rather than decisive military solutions

# Political Constraints on Combat Operations

- UN kinetic air ops. in 1961 were constrained by restrictive ROEs
- Ground and air ops. were halted before the complete elimination of Katangan military capabilities
- Katangan secession did not end until the removal of most of the UN's political restrictions in 1962



# Conclusion:

## Impact of Policy on Airpower

- UN's organizational limitations ensured USAF bore the brunt of the UN airlift
- The underlying context of the Cold War ensured U. S. participation would be confined to strategic air mobility functions, with only minimal participation in tactical, in-theatre airlift
- Political restrictions limited employment of personnel and aircraft from the major powers and had a serious impact on operational aspects of UN airpower

# **Conclusion:**

## **Impact of Policy on Airpower**

- **UN: airpower sustains and supplies the force throughout its mission**
- **U. S.: airpower allows the U. S. to influence the UN mission and attain its policy ends without direct intervention**
- **The Congo does not become a flashpoint of superpower confrontation**