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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

THE SITUATION IN THE CONGO

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
24 February 1966

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in the Congo

SUMMARY

Foreign Minister Spaak's comment last November on Mobutu's coup is still applicable: the coup was the "best thing that could possibly have happened; it remains to be seen whether it is also a good thing." President Mobutu and Premier Mulamba are making a far more energetic attack on the Congo's multitudinous problems than any of their predecessors did. They are trying to cut down corruption, to improve the country's foreign exchange position, to reduce unemployment and increase agricultural production, to make the central government's influence more effective in the provinces, and also to keep up the momentum of the fight against the rebels. This would be a tall order even for a government with far greater resources at its disposal than Leopoldville has. Thus, notwithstanding the good intentions and the energy of Mobutu and Mulamba, the outlook for the Congo is about as bleak as ever.

1. Mobutu and Mulamba have put together a cabinet that compares favorably in ability with previous Congolese governments. To the extent that its members' ideology can be determined, it is one of the most solidly Western-oriented since independence.

2. Mobutu is also trying to increase his leverage with the governments in the 21 provinces, which have always compounded the corruption and inefficiency of the central government. To this end

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one provincial governor has already been convicted of misuse of public funds, and others may be arrested soon. Mobutu and Mulamba have also begun to visit the provincial capitals on tours designed to strengthen Leopoldville's standing with both the politicians and the populace at large.

3. The government is also making a more energetic effort than any of its predecessors to cope with some of the country's economic problems. It is encouraging the unemployed Congolese who have swelled the cities' populations since independence to return to their home areas. It is urging everyone to grow more food and is trying to improve the transport network for both cash and subsistence crops. It is working to bring smuggling under control and is otherwise trying to ameliorate the chronic foreign exchange shortage.

4. Leopoldville's presence is gradually being re-established in the regions troubled by rebellion since 1964. The rebellion in Kwilu Province led by Peking-trained Pierre Mulele is confined to a few pockets of resistance in the deep forest. French- and Spanish-speaking mercenaries, helped by troops from Moise Tshombé's old Katanga gendarmerie and occasionally by Congolese Army (ANC) units and by local tribal militia, are slowly regaining control of the major towns and the roads and railroads of the northeast. Near Lake Tanganyika, a South African mercenary - ANC force is having much heavier going. Even here, however, the rebellion seems very gradually to be losing ground.

5. The insurgents' outside supporters, including Communist China and Cuba, have grown disillusioned with the erratic fighting qualities of the rebels and the perennial squabbling among rebel leaders. They have drastically reduced their aid, and Cuba at least has withdrawn most of its advisers. After rebel defeats last October, the Tanzanian Government halted the transport of supplies already made difficult by the increasing effectiveness of the Congolese patrol boats on Lake Tanganyika.

6. The rebellion will continue to be a drain on the country's meager human and financial resources for a long time, however, and the wounds it has caused

will be slow to heal. The Kwilu revolt, small though it may be, is still tying down 1,500 ANC troops who must be paid and provided with logistical support. Economic activity in this area, which used to produce considerable palm oil, remains at a standstill.

7. In the northeast the rebels can still move with relative freedom over wide stretches of country; not much of the area has re-entered the money economy; and much of what little is produced is smuggled out (usually with the connivance of local civil and military officials). Of the government forces in this region, ANC troops are only sporadically helpful, and then only when stiffened by mercenaries or by Belgian regular officers assigned to the ANC. The Katangan troops, which have been in the area for a year and a half, want to go home, and the French-speaking mercenaries get along with neither ANC nor civilian officials. The Spanish-speaking unit of about 40 men has been quite impressive in the two months it has been in the Congo. It has cleared out a fairly large area, working with locally recruited tribal warriors, and it is one of the few government units to give much attention to civic-action programs.

8. In a large area of the eastern Congo extending north and east from Albertville, the rebels can still present an effective challenge to the available government forces. In part the loss of government momentum in this region is due to rapid turnover in the South African mercenary unit, whose new members reportedly will not finish their training until mid-March. In part the government has been slowed by very difficult terrain. In part the rebel skill at mining roads, with deleterious effects both on the ANC's transport and on its always shaky morale, is responsible. At any rate, clearing operations are more than two months behind schedule, with no sign of early improvement.

9. In both the northeast and the east, rebels in the past have often been supported by local populations, many of which have long histories either of opposition to central authority, of feuds between tribes, or of friction within tribes. In some cases rebel excesses have alienated these people, but disaffection from the rebel cause rarely brings the

people over firmly to the government's side. The traditional frictions, which existed long before the rebels arrived to build on them, will remain long after the rebellion per se is snuffed out.

10. The rebels apparently still get a little aid from outside--ANC sources, for instance, state that some Ugandan border garrisons are willing to pass arms. Even if no help at all came in, however, the ANC would be hard pressed to cope with the rebellion, much less to maintain order in nominally pacified areas. Non-Congolese units thus will continue to bear the brunt of the fighting.

11. In civil affairs, Mobutu's programs are still little more than a mixture of decrees and wishful thinking. The tug of war between the provinces and the central government has hardly begun; tours by Leopoldville leaders and arrests of provincial figures are a hopeful sign, but it is still an open question whether Mobutu can make his decisions stick. To do this requires an administrative system to keep up the pressure, and this is almost nonexistent. Since independence, relations between Leopoldville and the provinces have operated through a network of tribal and personal alliances; to replace this with an institutionalized administrative structure would be almost revolutionary. Until such a structure can be set up, however, Mobutu will have to play Congolese politics according to its traditional rules. This means that the central government's authority will be limited essentially to what he and his trusted associates can personally exercise.

12. Given the paucity of civilian talent, Mobutu's chief instrument presumably will be the ANC, which has rarely been tactful in its dealings with the Congolese populace or dedicated in its compliance with orders from Leopoldville. With very rare exceptions, the ANC has shown no ability to fulfil an administrative function effectively: its participation in Mobutu's program of economic mobilization, for instance, has so far been minimal. It seems reasonable to expect that one result--perhaps the main one--of the army's further immersion in the country's internal affairs will be the further politicization of its officers, and that in the future,

rivalries within the army and between military and civilian officials will be added to the endemic civilian political maneuvering.


13. The politicians themselves have only temporarily and incompletely suspended their activity. Despite Mobutu's efforts, some in his own circle are busily feathering their own nests: Finance Minister Litho, for instance, is said to be shocking even the Congolese with the blatancy of his corruption. Litho is Mobutu's cousin and his intermediary on private financial transactions, a fact which does not add to the regime's image of idealism and selflessness. Those politicians on the outs--by far the majority--are beginning to feel around cautiously for alliances which can present a viable challenge to Mobutu. They are incensed at his proclamation of a five-year presidential term for himself and at his reduction of the legislature to a rubber stamp for his decrees; they are also said to be restive at "drawing no more than their legal pay." Parliament is scheduled to reconvene in March, and Mobutu is likely to have trouble controlling the disgruntled politicians when they get together.

14. The principal opposition figure is still former Premier Tshombé, who is now in Europe. He appears to believe that the Mobutu regime will soon be weighted down by the problems confronting it, possibly in the next few months, and that he will be called on to save the situation as he was when the rebellion broke out in 1964. He therefore does not seem to be actively plotting Mobutu's overthrow, Mobutu's fears to the contrary notwithstanding. He is, however, keeping up his contacts with Belgian interests and with his own political associates, and he probably is also seeing to the military defenses of his stronghold in southern Katanga. He has said he will be on hand when Parliament reconvenes.

15. Mobutu is an old hand at Congolese politics, and there seems to be a good chance that, backed by his trusted ANC units in Leopoldville, he can continue to keep the politicians off balance. Making significant progress toward unifying and integrating the Congo is another matter, however. Given the shortage of administrative skills, the lack of money, and the endemic local rivalries, his or any other

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government will have trouble imposing its will throughout the country. Unless a stronger authority begins to emanate from Leopoldville, the Congo's economic, political, and social malaise is certain to continue.



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