

The assassination of patrice lumumba history essay



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Lumumba was known as a charismatic and eloquent man, even when in captivity authorities were concerned that he may be able to talk the guards into letting him go free, such were his linguistic charms. Perhaps it was this inane confidence, and belief that he could talk his way out of any situation that in the end brought about his downfall. Western diplomats and UN officials were certainly not as easily swayed, as were large parts of the Congolese population. In analysing Lumumba's speeches we see a man go through a range of emotions and states, his ideology and passion for a united Congo is clear, but so also is his nativity in dealing with the diplomatic aspect of international relations. His frustration shines through, and towards the end his patience had clearly run thin, this charismatic leader was up against the pride and prestige of the best in the business; the global gamesmanship of the western powers was a step too far even for a man of such high intellect and integrity. He was destined to fail.

Nature of Lumumba

To begin with Lumumba had an idealistic vision of peace and harmony, his vision involved whites and Africans living side by side. Towards independence he lauded praise on the previous colonial masters and looked to embrace their ideologies of progress and modernisation, looking to bring wealth and prosperity to the Congo. Lumumba speaking at the Round Table session for setting the date of independence stated,

“ Belgium has done magnificent work in Africa and we are sincerely proud of being the beneficiaries of that labour ... I cannot let this day go by without first thanking the king, who has endeavoured to carry out and pursue the

work of Leopold II with courage and determination” he looks forward to the “ continued cooperation of the Belgians”.[1]

Although this outward approach taken by Lumumba may have been a façade. In stark contrast, at ceremony for the handover of independence he gave a dramatic, rousing speech, in which he gave a scathing critique of the colonial project; he brought Congolese legislators to their feet cheering, left the King startled and frowning and caught the world’s attention, bringing his name to the forefront of Congolese politics. Lumumba spoke forcefully of the violence and humiliations of colonialism; from the ruthless theft of African land, to the way that French-speaking colonists talked to Africans as adults do to children, using the familiar “ tu” instead of the formal “ vous.”[2]It was this erratic nature and explosive passion would characterise Lumumba’s short reign, perhaps he was a man of conviction and integrity, but he certainly lacked the composure and tact to achieve in the international political sphere.

Katangan Secession

The Katangan secession underlined the fundamental weakness of the Leopoldville government, as a consequence Lumumba looked to the United Nations for support and intervention. The UN rather than back the present government in its attempts at unifying the country, decided to take an altogether more controversial approach, instead acting in an overabundance of self-interest on behalf of the western powers, primarily Belgium and the US. The UN was to become the primary actor in the unfolding drama. The crisis took a further turn for the worse when Albert Kalonji declared the secession of South Kasai.[3]The underlying reasons behind the secessions <https://assignbuster.com/the-assassination-of-patrice-lumumba-history-essay/>

were wealth and power. Lumumba's primary support came for the Oriental region, however, these breakaway regions had the vast majority of the Congo's resources, and Lumumba needed unity if he were to succeed in his ideological pursuit.[4]He expressed understandable frustration at the decision of the UN to stop short of the restoration of the central authority. His contradictory nature and naïve political savvy again can be seen in an analysis of his speeches. He states that he does not " want to subject ourselves to any foreign influences", yet he needed money and support from somewhere to develop the country, in a later speech he states he is willing to welcome aid for " all nations willing to help us ... we will turn no one away" this signalled only one thing, he sought aid from the Soviet Union and in doing so gave justification to the US to promptly remove him from power. Again this lack of guile and impatience has contributed to his downfall and to his eventual assassination.[5]In cohering with the Soviets Lumumba had provided his enemies with the perfect propaganda tool, he was now branded a communist; it was now in the national interest of the Western superpowers to have him disbanded. Lumumba's fall and assassination were the result of a vast conspiracy involving, US, Belgian and UN officials on the one hand, and his Congolese enemies, including Kasa-Vubu, Mobutu and Tshombe on the other.[6]

Even his mentor and supporter Kwame Nkrumah tried to warn tried to give him advice telling him to " face up to reality" engage in " realpolitc" criticising his policy which as aimed at " getting rid of your adversaries here and now". Nkrumah called for calm and patience from his friend he called for " tactical action", not haste, but it never came, Lumumba did not heed the

warning.[7]Nkrumah was a staunch supporter of Lumumba, whom he regarded as the legitimate authority after the breach with Kasavubu. When Katanga seceded, Nkrumah agreed to send Ghanaian troops under UN auspices in the hope that the Belgium meddling would be rebuffed and a splintering of the country avoided. The Casablanca block as a whole demanded that the UN recognise Lumumba, and when it declined to modify its stance the member countries withdrew their peacekeeping troops.[8]On the other hand, the Brazzaville countries backed Kasavubu against Lumumba and failed to take a principled stand against Katangan secession.[9]

Resilience to Arrest

In a last ditch attempt to remain in power Lumumba sent troops to South Kasai, frightened by reports of the boldness of these troops, Tshombe and Kalonji, the secessionist leaders, appealed to Kasavubu, their moderate and federalist ally, to stop Lumumba's anti-secessionist drive. Two critical factors gave Kasavubu the impetuosity he needed to make the move against Lumumba. Firstly, the military action in South Kasai resulted in the massacre of many innocent people, this was cynically exploited by Dag Hammarskjöld who put the blame firmly at the president's door, describing the military action as "genocide" ignoring the fact that the atrocities were in fact carried out by chief of staff Mubutu who had clear self-motivated interests of his own.[10]Secondly, the presence of Andrew Cordier in Kinshasa turned out to be a crucial factor; a Belgian UN representative, who "arranged things in favour of the Kasavubu and the interests of the west." Cold war rivalries had begun to play themselves out, with the Americans urging Kasavubu to break with Lumumba who in taking aid from the Soviets had given the western power

justification to act. Lumumba fell into this trap and reciprocated this by dismissing Kasavubu; the Congo was thrown into a constitutional crisis. This was capitalised on by Colonel Joseph-Desire Mubutu former allies with Lumumba as well as a close friend. Lumumba has lost control of the force republic; Mubutu announced that he was imposing a truce on the warring factions. Lumumba persevered in his cause still insisting that he was the leader, looking for ramification, for the Congo to be united once more, but he now found himself in an ever weakening bargaining position. He lacked the support of the military, he had no political constituency in Leopoldville itself, and to compound the insult, the UN recognised the legality of the Kasavubu putsch. Lumumba now removed from office was reduced to the indignity of house arrest, surrounded by a ring of Ghanaian UN troops protecting him from Congolese soldiers waiting to arrest him.

All the weight and power of the UN and the West was thrown at Kasavubu to dismiss Lumumba; on the 5th September 1960 the dismissal of Lumumba was formally announced. Having failed to bring Lumumba down through the mutiny, his internal and external enemies used the secession of Katanga and South Kasai as obstacle courses through which he could be entrapped. He was charged with the sin of communism in the first instance and accused of the crime of genocide in the second.[11]

Action now turned to diminish his cause and ensure that no return to power was possible. Hammarskjöld played for time, so as “ not to create the impression that he was out to get Lumumba”. [12]The Belgians had no scruples about their intentions, as early as 10th September 1960, Foreign affairs Minister Pierre Wigny wrote to his subordinates in Brazzaville that “
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responsible authorities had the duty to render Lumumba harmless.” In a document signed in October 1960, the then Belgian minister for African affairs, Count Harold d’Aspremont Lynden, stated explicitly that Belgian interests required “ the final elimination of Lumumba”.

On 27th November 1960, Lumumba fled Kinshasa in an attempt to reach his stronghold of Kisangani. Lumumba insisting to stop in every town to preach his cause, defiant until the end; this sense of empowerment eventually led to him being caught, staying strong to his ideals throughout. United States and Belgian intelligence services were quick to offer their assistance to Mobutu and security police Chief Victor Nendka in tracking Lumumba’s movements. Lumumba and his companions were tortured at the Brouwez villa some eight kilometres from downtown; personally assaulted by Munongo, other Katanga leaders and Belgian officers; and shot by an execution squad.

Justice and Clarity

Yet no one has ever been brought to justice over the affair; although several reports and investigations have tried to shed at least a glimmer of light of the subject. In 1975 – 76, Senator Frank Church headed up a Senate Committee to investigate the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the role it played in the Congo crisis. Justice never came to avail the CIA were absolved of any wrong doing as they “ did not actually pull the trigger or carry out the very act of assassination”, clearly whitewashing over the build-up to the deed.[13]However, new revelations put forward by Ludo De Witte forced the Belgium authorities into a fresh inquiry.[14]Ludo De Witte, in *The Assassination of Lumumba*, went as far as to implicate the Belgian

government and King Baudouin himself; the report produced a storm of
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controversy in Belgium. A parliamentary commission was set up in 2000 at belatedly look into the accusations. The report, which was published the following year, was at pains to stress the context in which the events took place. Although it avoided identifying a smoking gun, its middle-of-the-road assessment was nevertheless a step beyond previous denials of Belgian involvement.[15]The report states that,

“ No single document, of which the commission is aware, indicates that the Belgian government or a member of thereof gave the order to physically eliminate Lumumba; The investigation does not show that Belgium authorities premeditated the murder of Lumumba when it attempted to transfer him to Katanga; It is very clear, though, that the physical safety of Lumumba was of no concern to the Belgian government. It deemed the safety of Lumumba less important than other interests.”[16]

De Witte managed to reconstruct the entire episode. It began with enquires from US president Dwight D. Eisenhower to whether “ we can’t get rid of this guy.” A plot was hatched to poison Lumumba, inducing him into a stroke, by planting cobra venom into his food or toothpaste. However, no one in the CIA could get close enough to Lumumba. Instead Lawrence Devil (CIA station chief) insisted that the best course of action was to liaise with Lumumba’s Congolese rivals to defeat him politically and later physically; this plan was put into action in collaboration with Belgium.[17]

The elimination of Lumumba signalled the splitting of the Congo into four different administrations: Leopoldville, Stanleyville, Elizabethville and Bakwanga. The first two remained attached to the idea of a united Congo,

whereas the second two insisted that it was consigned to history; as we have seen due to the self-interest and aspiration of power and wealth of their respected leaders. The reconstitution of the Congo, in relatively short order, has everything to do with the same external forces that had eliminated Lumumba. The Americans and the west favoured the reintegration of the Congo under a western friendly regime and were prepared to apply pressure to get it. The region of South Kasai splintered when its leader Kalonji made a bid for enthronement; which alienated and led to many politicians restoring their links with Leopoldville. However, Katanga was a much more contentious situation. The Belgian military was persuaded to withdraw, but Tshombe was able to recruit innumerable mercenaries due to the fact that vast monetary reserves had been accumulated and deposited in the Katangan national bank during the secession. Tshombe was also backed up diplomatically by Belgian officers and colonial dignitaries, who gave advice and resisted reprisals from the European powers. It took a change of regime in Belgium to swing the pendulum; the incoming administration began to withdraw its support.[18] This crucially allowed the UN to modify its own position; from a peace keeping mission this escalated into one to restore the Congo uniting it under one administration; ironically exactly what Lumumba had intended to do. The instillation of a new government proceeded, amidst various contentions, including Tshombe's call for a confederal Congo whereby substantial powers were devolved to the respective regions. Parliament was reconvened headed by Cyrille Adoula, who was acceptable to most of the major protagonists. With only Katanga yet to re-unite with the rest of the Congo, the UN lost patience. Military force was sanctioned to end the secession, which was precisely what they had failed to do for Lumumba.

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Tshombe was forced to declare an end to the breakaway state; although he went into retirement well compensated from his efforts. The focus returned to the restoration of the Congolese state.[19]

http://www.kingsacademy.com/mhodes/03_The-World-since-1900/10_The-3rd-World/pictures/MER-178g_Lumumba-captured-by-Mobutu's-troops_1960.jpg

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