# The Historical Security Council of 1961

**Members of the Historical Security Council of 1961**

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## Historical Security Council of 1961

As 1961 began, Dwight D. Eisenhower prepared to pass the United States of America's Presidency to John F. Kennedy, marking a potential shift in Cold War relations between the United States and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Cold War tensions were extremely high and played out on all levels of foreign policy and diplomacy for both States and their allies. Colonialism was collapsing while changing political and social climates forced governments to make drastic changes to deal with new pressures. Meanwhile, United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld continued his efforts to energetically use the Secretariat to fulfill the roles of the United Nations Charter as he saw fit, pursuing peace actively, sometimes at odds with the Security Council's Member States.

For each topic area, Representatives should consider the following questions. These questions are designed to assist in developing a deeper understanding of the issues at hand, particularly from your country's perspective:

- Should the United Nations be involved in the situation? If yes, what role can the United Nations play in the situation?
- How can regional organizations be utilized?
- Does your government feel that this situation is a threat to international peace and security?
- What are your government's interests in the region?

## The Situation in the Congo

In the early 1950s, Belgium faced increasing pressure to grant independence to its colonial territory of Belgian Congo. On 30 June 1960, the Republic of Congo was granted independence in an effort to avoid years of bloodshed and prolonged insurgency encountered by other colonial powers that sought to maintain their colonial holdings. Despite this intention, granting Congo independence failed to prevent bloodshed or conflict. The severity of the ensuing turmoil drew the attention of United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, who actively campaigned for United Nations involvement in establishing peace in the region.

As the agreed-upon date for independence approached, Congo found itself ill-prepared for self-governance. Its great size, coveted natural resources, fractured political leadership, tribal loyalties and dependence on the 10,000-strong Belgian colonial civil service contributed to an extremely precarious situation. Although a Treaty of Friendship, Assistance, and Cooperation with Belgium was signed by the first government on the eve of independence, it was never ratified and was quickly disregarded.

The first government of the newly independent Congo was a coalition formed between the leaders of two opposing political factions with great tribal support, President Joseph Kasa-Vubu and Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba. The provisional constitution called for a unitary system, joining the Congo's provinces together in one government. However, the President of the Katanga Province, Moise Tshombe, member of a third political faction, believed in a federated system, and his disagreement quickly led to Katanga's secession.

Problems in the Congo became much worse just five days after independence. A series of mutinies swept through the Congolese army, as Congolese troops removed the European officer commanders and installed native Congolese between 5-9 July 1960. Mutineers roamed the capital city of Leopoldville and attacked Europeans. The new, all-Congolese military created a terrifying environment for the Europeans living and working in the Congo, causing thousands of Belgians to flee to Congo (Brazzaville), Rhodesia and Belgium. On 10 July 1960, the Belgian military unilaterally intervened, sending 1,200 troops to aid the force of 2,500 already in Congo under the Treaty of Friendship. On 11 July 1960, Moise Tshombe, backed by Belgian support, declared Katanga independent from Congo. By 12 July 1960, the Belgian troops had reestablished order in Leopoldville as well as other cities.

Ralph Bunche, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, kept Hammarskjöld apprised of the evolving situation. On 10 July 1960, the Congolese Cabinet formally requested United Nations help in the form of "technical assistance in the military field." The Congolese were unfamiliar with the United Nations system, and, while the wording of the request was suggested to them, it became the cause of many of the United Nations' later problems in the region.

On 13 July 1960, Hammarskjöld invoked Article 99 of the Charter, requesting an immediate meeting of the Security Council to discuss the situation. The Security Council passed Resolution 143 (with abstentions by China, France and the United Kingdom) which called for the withdrawal of Belgian troops and the establishment of a United Nations force providing "military assistance as necessary," per the Congolese request. On 18 July, the first 3,500 United Nations troops, composed mainly of African regiments, entered the Congo.

The first months of the Congo crisis saw many difficulties for United Nations forces. Resolution 143 had several problems: (1) it only made clear that the Secretary-General was to do something about the situation, not what specifically; (2) there was no timetable provided; (3) there was no description given of the military assistance; (4) there was no mention of territorial integrity (with regard to the Katanga situation); and (5) United Nations troops were only to use weapons in self-defense and were not to become a party to any internal conflicts.

This period saw intense arguments, within both the Congo and the United Nations, over the entry of United Nations troops into Katanga. These were only resolved by a personal visit from Hammarskjöld to Katanga on 12 August. Further, Prime Minister Lumumba grew extremely critical and distrustful of United Nations aid, issuing several ultimatums for the United Nations to conform to his policies and provide United Nations military force against Tshombe in Katanga or withdraw.

Hammarskjöld was deeply personally involved in the handling of the Congo crisis, repeatedly appearing before the Council seeking endorsement of his actions. On 8 August, the Council passed Resolution 146, backing Hammarskjöld's plan and actions, clarifying the territorial integrity issue by calling upon all States to refrain from any action that might undermine the territorial integrity of the Republic of Congo, and again demanding the departure of Belgian troops. Although the first United Nations troops entered Katanga in mid-August, the Belgians did not fully withdraw until mid-October.

In early September, Kasa-Vubu dismissed Lumumba and declared a new government, with the support of the Army Chief of Staff, Colonel Joseph Mobutu. Lumumba, in turn, announced that President Kasa-Vubu was no longer Head of State and called upon the people, workers and the army to rise. The Council of Ministers published a communiqué depriving Kasa-Vubu of his powers, nullifying his ordinance, revoking the Government and accusing him of high treason. In votes by both houses of the Congolese parliament, Lumumba's claim to legitimacy was supported. With the opening of the General Assembly that fall, both factions vied for the Congo's seat. The Kasa-Vubu delegate was seated after a long, drawn out political battle.

The interplay of Cold War politics was an underlying factor in the Congo crisis. While the West mildly supported Kasa-Vubu and Mobutu, the Soviets and their allies supported the legitimacy of the Lumumba government and the Congolese Parliament by providing military aid to Lumumba and several factions. The Soviets also used the crisis as an opportunity to attack Hammarskjöld's leadership. Khruschev went so far as to attack Hammarskjöld specifically in his address at the opening of the General Assembly in 1960.

The final major group of players in the Congo crisis were the other African States. Seventeen African States were admitted to the United Nations General Assembly in the fall 1960 session, immediately becoming a bloc influencing negotiations and actions. While they joined the West in isolating the Soviet bloc, they were not united, and often disagreed with the West on specifics in the Congo. Three major African groups arose: those which backed Lumumba, those which backed the actions of the United Nations to date, and those which backed Mobutu and Kasa-Vubu.

Near the end of 1960, events again moved toward an imminent crisis. On 28 November, Lumumba was arrested by forces loyal to Mobutu and jailed. He remained a captive at the end of the year. Katanga was still independent, with a strong Belgian infrastructure still in place. Finally, both the Belgians and the Soviets were supplying various factions in bids to establish new independent territories.

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## The Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean

Many Latin American and Caribbean countries were dealing with severe and mounting problems entering the 1960s. The countries in this region faced the incredible tasks of industrializing their economies, enacting land reform and establishing civilian control over the military all at the same time. The end results of the rapidly changing political and economic climate were political and social instability throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. After a short period of military rule, Argentina's newly elected government had to deal with general strikes and massive inflation in 1959. Brazil, which was attempting 50 years of economic improvement in five, was facing an imminent reckoning with foreign creditors and growing unrest in the military. Meanwhile, civil unrest was prevalent in El Salvador, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Guatemala.

The deepening mistrust between the Cuban regime of Fidel Castro, who took power in Cuba on 1 January 1959, and several other Latin American States, most notably the United States, set the stage for heightened Cold War tensions. While Castro had not officially declared himself a Marxist, his populist policies, increasing reliance on the Communist Party for organizational support and crack-down on anti-communist factions were more than enough to convince the United States of Castro's intention to establish a Marxist regime in Cuba. Moves by Cuba and the Soviet Union to form stronger political, economic and military ties raised the possibility of a Communist military presence in the heart of the Americas, which would undermine the entire inter-American system of alliances, treaties, international organization and tacit understandings. Even without the establishment of bases by Communist powers, activities of the Soviet bloc in supplying arms and military advice to a State in Latin America presented problems of hemispheric defense for the United States, and thus international politics. Cuba's growing political, military and economic relationship with the Soviet Union was discouraged by several American states, which called for Cuba to remain in the framework of the inter-American principles.

In turn, Cuba accused the United States of promoting plans for intervention in Cuba, protecting Cuban war criminals, providing training facilities for counter-revolutionary elements and multiple violations of Cuban air space throughout 1960. In July 1960, the Cuban government requested an opportunity to be heard before the Security Council to discuss what it termed "repeated threats, reprisals and aggressive acts" by the United States against Cuba. The Security Council responded with Resolution 144 (19 July 1960), which deferred the issue until a report was received from the Organization of American States, and called on all parties to reduce tensions in the region.

Current issues facing the Council include the possibility of increased tension between Cuba and other States in the region and the likelihood of new political instability caused by political and economic development crises in the region.

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## Security Council / Secretariat Cooperation

During its early years, the United Nations was generally allowed only those duties the great powers were willing to cede to it. In that context, the relationship between the Security Council and the Secretary-General and his Secretariat was rarely acrimonious. Furthermore, the United Nations was rarely an active power broker in a crisis situation. The relative lack of real international responsibility within the Secretariat quickly began to evaporate when Dag Hammarskjöld succeeded Trygvie Lie as Secretary-General in 1953. Hammarskjöld's perception of the ideals of the United Nations may not have been more expansive than those of his predecessor, but he was significantly more willing to take action. As Secretary-General, he greatly extended the influence of the United Nations with his peacekeeping efforts, particularly in the Middle East and Africa.

Hammarskjöld used his good offices in a variety of situations to attempt to prevent war and further the purpose of the United Nations Charter. Though rebuffed, he attempted to intercede during the Suez Crisis, and he was constantly working to engage various players in the Middle East. Hammarskjöld was most active, however, in the many African disputes of the era, especially as decolonization peaked in the late 1950s. Hammarskjöld regularly did more than just offer the good offices of the Secretary-General; he was an active believer in the role of United Nations peacekeeping forces.

Under Hammarskjöld, United Nations peacekeeping forces were deployed to more areas of dispute and in greater numbers than at any time before or since. Hammarskjöld's activist approach to the office of Secretary-General and the Secretariat often led to tensions, both within the United Nations bureaucracy, and between the Secretariat and Member States. Hammarskjöld was willing to take action without having first gained what others considered to be full approval for those actions. The use of peacekeeping forces, without specific Security Council resolutions allowing engagement of those forces, is one such example. Hammarskjöld often defended his actions on the principles of working toward the maintenance of international peace and stability or on expansive views of General Assembly actions and authority.

Regardless of where the authority for his action derived, the activist nature in which the office of Secretary-General was viewed (both by Hammarskjöld and by his Secretariat support staff) led to many disagreements. Several Member States publicly expressed disapproval with what they viewed as the Secretary-General's meddling in what were otherwise sovereign affairs or policies. It was, in fact, just this attitude that led to the Soviet's attempt to have Hammarskjöld removed from the post of Secretary-General.

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## Relations Between the Great Powers

Cold War tensions colored the entire spectrum of international relations throughout the middle of the 20th Century. Most viewed the era as a zero-sum game for virtually every decision made by the United States, Soviet Union and their allies. In 1960, tensions were reaching their highest levels yet. While many minor events occurred during the year, the most significant incident occurred 1 May 1960 when Soviet missiles were able to bring down a United States U-2 spy plane in Soviet airspace. The incident took place just prior to the East-West Summit in Paris, significantly increasing the tense setting for the meeting. The Security Council took up the discussion under the heading "The Question of Relations Between the Great Powers," and discussions were held in several meetings from May through July 1960. A draft resolution concerning the violation of Soviet airspace failed to garner a majority on 26 May; this was followed by a more neutrally phrased resolution on 27 May. This resolution recommended the peaceful resolution of problems between States, appealed to United Nations Members to refrain from the threat or use of force in international relations, called for continued disarmament talks between the major powers, especially on nuclear issues, and urged the Four Powers (France, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and the United States) to continue discussions in order to reduce tensions. The Soviet Union again complained to the Council of continuing aggressive acts by the U.S. Air Force, and was met with repeated denials from the United States. This led to three additional draft resolutions in July, but each failed due to vetoes by Permanent Members of the Council. It is in the context of these relationships that the Security Council must again take up the crises of the 1961 time period. The Council's ability to act, and the efficacy of such action, could be predicated on overall United Nations activity and on the actions of its Member States.

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