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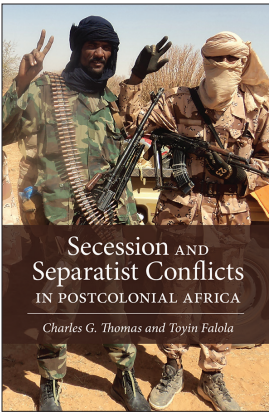
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## SECESSION AND SEPARATIST CONFLICTS IN POSTCOLONIAL AFRICA

By Charles G. Thomas and Toyin Falola

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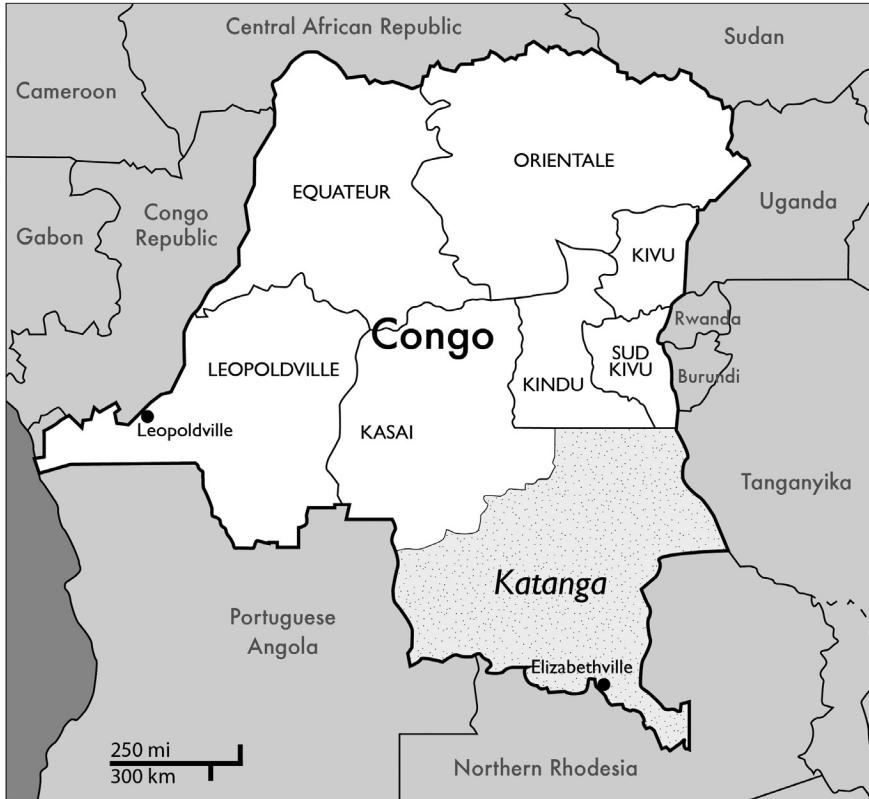
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## Map of Congo and Katanga



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## The Secession of Katanga, 1960–1963

The transition to independence was not easy for the majority of African nations. Army mutinies, ethnic struggles, parliamentary challenges, even brutal liberation struggles marked the birth of the nation-state for most of the former colonial possessions. Even taken in this context, few underwent the trials of the Congo upon its independence from Belgium in 1960. Liberated into the world with little infrastructure and less preparation, the Congo began to fragment almost immediately. This was to be the turbulent period known as the Congo Crisis, which would take centre stage in the debates on decolonization and in the development of the United Nations' responses to global crises. Over the next five years, the central government of the Congo fended off Cold War intrigues, parliamentary strife, ethnic troubles, rebel governments, an army mutiny, a coup, and even the attempted secession of its most resource-rich province, Katanga. The mutiny of the Force Publique (later the *Armée nationale congolaise*, or ANC) was the first army revolt in free Africa. Colonel Mobutu's first coup, launched on 14 September 1960, was designed to place the College of Commissioners in power and was one of the first on the continent. The secession of Katanga was the first secession movement of the independent era. The Congolese government would deal with all of these crises by processes of trial and error. Processes that would be all too common in later times would slowly take shape in the chaotic environs of the splintered Congo.

The secession of Katanga was one of the central issues involved in the Congo Crisis, and its defeat would be a vital step in creating a stable central regime. At the same time, the after-effects of the secession set numerous precedents in international law and helped to show the members of the

African community the steps they would need to take in order to avoid such a problem themselves. The Katangan secessionist movement revealed several patterns that would recur in the future secessions, and also exhibited anomalous characteristics that were not repeated in later separatist conflicts. While the patterns of creating what White would term a “civil nation,”<sup>1</sup> being led by the “New Men” of Africa, establishing a standing and professional military, and waging an essentially conventional war were standard within the wave of secessions immediately following independence, the massive amount of direct external intervention by individual nations and international organizations that was seen in the Congo was never replicated.

## THE ROOTS OF KATANGAN SECESSION

The seeds of Katanga’s secession were actually planted in 1958, with the emergence of the CONAKAT political party. It had become obvious to all onlookers that independence was on the horizon for African nations and national consciousness was beginning to take root within the black populations of the colonies. Despite these dynamics, Belgium did little or nothing to prepare the Congo for independence, instead hoping that its continued underdevelopment might delay any demands for independence or make the Congo completely dependent upon Belgium in the likely event of independence. The Belgians did not offer any advanced schooling to the masses, did not set up a local Africanized administration, and did not attempt to further develop the local economy. The Belgian administration in the Congo held independence back for as long as it could, but even the underdeveloped state of the black bourgeoisie could not prevent the rising tide of nationalism. Various political parties emerged within the provinces of the Congo, with Joseph Kasavubu’s ABAKO party and Patrice Lumumba’s MNC emerging as the two most widespread parties. Smaller parties emerged with support in various regions, and of these perhaps the most influential and powerful was CONAKAT of Katanga Province.<sup>2</sup>

Katanga was already an anomaly among the provinces of the Congo. Nearly 50 percent of the tax revenue of the Congo came from mineral-rich Katanga.<sup>3</sup> The province held large deposits of copper, cobalt, silver, platinum, uranium, and zinc, and had been extensively developed by the Belgians and the *Comité spéciale du Katanga* (or CSK) during their period of

colonial rule. Of all the provinces, it held the closest relationship to the Belgians, and the majority party, CONAKAT, reflected this. CONAKAT (short for the *Confédération des associations tribales du Katanga*) was founded in 1958 in Elisabethville, the capital of the region. Led initially by Godefroid Munongo, in 1959 it absorbed the Union Katangaise, a party composed of the Belgian and other European expatriates who held the majority of wealth and power within the province.<sup>4</sup> The party extolled a vision of a federal Congo, with each province having a great deal of autonomy within its borders and being guided generally by a central government. In addition, at the time of its founding, the party wished for union with Belgium, believing that the central government of the colonizer would give direction to the new state. Finally, the party believed in the idea of an “authentic Katangan,” an individual who, regardless of race, had been “integrated into the province” and who would protect “the legitimate rights of the original residents of this province.”<sup>5</sup> With these goals in mind, CONAKAT may be seen as having been a semi-nationalist organization, with the goal of keeping the running of the Katangan state within its own central control. This was to have dire consequences following independence in 1960.

The elections of 1960, although meant to set the stage for Congolese independence, instead began the process of the splintering of the state. The two largest parties, ABAKO and MNC, both gained significant power within the government but neither could claim sole control of the government. This led to a coalition government, with Kasavubu claiming the presidency while Lumumba was appointed the prime minister. However, despite the forming of a political partnership, the two still had considerable disagreements that would undermine the government of the Congo from day one. In terms of Katangan political aspirations, CONAKAT won eight seats in the lower chamber of the Congolese parliament and seven in the Senate, but it was denied any ministerial appointments within the newly formed government of Kasavubu and Lumumba. This slight was compounded by Lumumba’s electrifying speech at the 30 June Proclamation of Independence, which invoked the images of “magnificent mansions for whites in the cities and ramshackle straw hovels for blacks” and “the cells into which the authorities threw those who no longer were willing to submit to a rule where justice meant oppression and exploitation.”<sup>6</sup> This had a negative effect on the large European population of Katanga, which backed

CONAKAT and its new leader Moïse Tshombe, as well as the watching audiences in key Western nations such as the United States and Belgium. Since the province was already unsteady in its support of a unified Congo state and had only narrowly been talked out of proclaiming secession a few days before independence,<sup>7</sup> it would not take much for the province to go its own way. The tipping point came mere days after independence.

On 5 July, the Force Publique mutinied in Léopoldville and other locations across the country, beginning what over the next five years was called the Congo Crisis.<sup>8</sup> The soldiers of the military had assumed that independence would open new avenues of promotion for them, allowing long-service soldiers to finally rise to commissioned ranks. However, these hopes were quickly dashed by General Émile Janssens, who starkly explained to the soldiers that they would continue to serve Belgian officers, leading to an eruption of violence by the rank and file of the Force Publique.<sup>9</sup> Belgium responded quickly and on 10 July transported an additional 5,600 troops to join the 3,800 who were already in the country, ostensibly to protect its citizens who still resided in the Congo and to restore order. This was not acceptable to the newly independent state, and the situation was made worse by an incident a day later in Matadi where at least a dozen Africans were killed by Belgian troops.<sup>10</sup> In the midst of the chaos, Moïse Tshombe declared independence for Katanga, proclaiming:

This independence is total. However, aware of the imperative necessity for economic cooperation with Belgium, the Katangan government, to which Belgium has just granted the assistance of its own troops to protect human life, calls upon Belgium to join with Katanga in close economic community.

Katanga calls upon Belgium to continue its technical, financial, and military support.

It calls upon her to assist in re-establishing order and public safety. . . .

To all the inhabitants of Katanga, without distinction of Race or Color, we ask that you gather around us to lead our country and all its inhabitants forward to political, social, and economic progress, to the betterment of all.<sup>11</sup>



With this statement, the first secessionist conflict in Africa began. Although the central government opposed the secession, it was powerless to enforce its will while the mutinous army was rampaging throughout the nation. The same day, Kasavubu and Lumumba turned to the United States for aid. This request was promptly rejected by President Eisenhower, who instead suggested they appeal to the United Nations.<sup>12</sup> The requests on 12 and 13 July proved to be the beginning of a grand experiment for the United Nations and its place within international law.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF EXTERNAL INTERVENTION

The United Nations' response to the Congo's requests spurred the body to take direct action to reimpose order and peace within the beleaguered state, with the initial step being the passing of United Nations Security Council Resolution 143. This resolution, passed on 14 July, gave a broad mandate to the United Nations armed forces that were to play such a great part in the secession crisis. It called upon the Belgians to remove their troops from the Congo, while simultaneously providing for "such military assistance as may be necessary until . . . the national security forces may be able . . . to fully meet their task."<sup>13</sup> The next day, troops from various member states began to arrive in the Congo to restore order, and within a week they had deployed to every major centre in the nation. Katanga, however, would not accept the United Nations troops within its borders and refused to expel the Belgian forces. United Nations Resolution 145 was passed on 22 July, reaffirming the legitimacy of the United Nations presence within the borders of Katanga and urging the removal of the Belgian forces. While the situation was deadlocked, a further resolution (Resolution 146) was passed on 9 August, assuring the Katangans of the UN's resolve to enter Katanga but not to interfere in the Katangans' current disagreement with the central government. This was accompanied by a further demand for the withdrawal of the still substantial Belgian forces within the province. Tshombe fired back at the UN force with ten demands, including a demand that none of the troops would be from Communist or communist-oriented nations and a demand for a reaffirmation of the UN's statement that it would not interfere with the internal workings of the state.<sup>14</sup> These demands were accepted, and the UN troops finally entered Katanga. Shortly afterward, a

new constitutional crisis struck the Congo and effectively halted any attempts to reintegrate Katanga until 1961.

It is necessary to provide a brief description of this crisis, because of its effects upon the actual secession conflict itself. Chaos still reigned and the Congolese army was still an unstable element. In the midst of this, the already considerable tensions between President Kasavubu and Prime Minister Lumumba publicly erupted, with each trying to remove the other from power on 5 September. The UN seized the radio station in Léopoldville and forbade all air traffic, effectively neutralizing Lumumba's base of support. At the height of the confusion, Colonel Mobutu of the ANC staged a coup on 14 September, replacing Lumumba and Kasavubu with a committee of young, educated, and nonpolitical Congolese.<sup>15</sup> Both had been rapidly losing their international standing due to their actions, but Lumumba in particular had managed to alienate a great deal of support. He had already been viewed as unstable and a dangerous leftist by the United States, Belgium, and members of the opposition parties, all of whom had been searching for a reason to remove him.<sup>16</sup> This hostility had been exacerbated by Lumumba's response to the attempted secession of South Kasai, a province in the Congo, during the early days of the Congo Crisis. Lumumba had sent in ANC troops, who had responded with widespread and sustained brutality to the local Luba dissenters, further undermining the prime minister's position and helping legitimize many of the efforts to remove him. Meanwhile, Kasavubu was largely seen as blameless and would eventually be invited back into the government.

In the days following Mobutu's coup, Lumumba was confined to his house under the protection of UN troops, but he escaped in December and attempted to reach Stanleyville, the base of his support. He was recaptured and held briefly by the Congolese central government, but was considered too dangerous to the Congo to be held. Already his political followers in the Stanleyville region were arming themselves and could likely threaten the Leopoldville government, particularly while said government was also dealing with the Katangan conflict. To prevent further threats from Lumumba himself, the former prime minister was flown to Katanga with two of his associates. All three were beaten, tortured, and then executed by the Katangan Gendarmerie, with Lumumba's death being reported on 17 January 1961, to be greeted with shock all over the world.

This event must be mentioned because of the immense changes it forced on the dynamics of the conflict. Despite the earlier demands for his removal and the shock at his actions toward South Kasai, following this political murder Lumumba became a martyr, and none were painted more harshly than the Katangans for their slaying of the former prime minister. A new government of Lumumba loyalists set themselves up in Stanleyville and declared themselves the legitimate executive of the nation.<sup>17</sup> These claims were greeted eagerly by those who regretted the death of the fiery nationalist. The United Nations was excoriated for its inaction in the event, with several member nations withdrawing their contingents in protest. In the near future, on 21 February, the UN Security Council would pass a resolution to bring a final end to the Congo tumult.<sup>18</sup> The Council of Commissioners in Léopoldville immediately reached out to try and patch together an alliance between the warring factions and end the strife that was tearing the nation apart.

In his capacity as president of the de facto state of Katanga, Moïse Tshombe attended several of the attempted peacemaking conferences over the next four months. Although Tshombe would miss the first, all four meetings involved one or more of the factions currently dividing the Congo between them. The first took place at Léopoldville beginning on 25 January; the second in Elisabethville in February; the third in Tananarive, Madagascar, in March; and the final conference in Coquilhatville on 24 April. The Léopoldville conference's aim was to constitute a representative government for the Congo, but due to his absence, Tshombe declared it invalid. The Katangan government demanded at least nominal recognition from the Léopoldville government, which was not forthcoming. The conference in Elisabethville was in response to the UN initiatives of late February. These initiatives were the first steps toward authorizing the use of force by the UN troops to prevent the broadening of the conflict. On 28 February, Tshombe entered into a military alliance with the central government and that of the secessionist South Kasai Province. Ostensibly this was aimed at the "Communists" of the Stanleyville government, but in effect it was a preventive measure taken against the increasingly aggressive United Nations. The next meeting, at Tananarive from 8 to 12 March, was an overwhelming success for the Katangan government and Tshombe. They entered the conference with three objectives and achieved them all, partially

due to the continued panic instilled in the factions by the UN resolution of 21 February. All the parties agreed on a denunciation of the UN resolution of 21 February, the idea of a federal government structure with each region having general autonomy, and the concept of each region having its own gendarmerie and police at its disposal.<sup>19</sup> In this way, Katanga had effectively won the beginnings of recognition. This recognition, however, was not to last. The Léopoldville government realized its error and reached out to the UN and the Stanleyville government in an attempt to reclaim the balance of power. By the time of the Coquilhatville conference of 24 April, opinion had hardened against the Katangan initiatives and Tshombe was actually arrested and imprisoned by the Congolese government inside a military villa in Leopoldville.

During Tshombe's imprisonment, new negotiations were undertaken by the other factions, and the parliament began to reassemble to serve as a representative government for the Congo. By June, Tshombe was promising to send a Katanga delegation to join in the process and pledging an end to the separate Katangan state. However, upon his return to Katanga he rejected his earlier statement, and he celebrated the first anniversary of Katangan independence on 11 July 1961. Secessionist Katanga was still a going concern, but events were rapidly catching up with it. Already the UN's Resolution 161 of 21 February had caused a realignment of the Congo that would lead to the downfall of Tshombe's government. Aside from authorizing the UN forces to use force and repeating the demand for the removal of foreign soldiers and technical assistants, the resolution had two major effects on the Congo. First, the resolution increased the military tension between the UN and the various armed forces within the borders of the Congo. The Katangan Gendarmerie clashed with the UN forces on 30 March, beginning a running series of skirmishes that eroded the position of Katanga vis-à-vis the international community.<sup>20</sup> Second, the resolution led to the realignment of the diplomatic stances of the various factions, with Tshombe, Kasavubu, and the separatists of Kasai coming together to form an alliance of sorts for their protection. However, Tshombe overplayed his hand, which led to the rapprochement between Stanleyville and Léopoldville. With three of the four political forces now aligned against Katanga, these factions formed a government during the month of July while Tshombe continued his defiance. By the time the president of

Katanga attempted to intervene, the government had been formed, rendering him impotent. On 2 August, the new coalition government led by Cyrille Adoula took power and pledged to end the secession of Katanga. Belatedly Katanga sent a delegation to take part in the government, but the beginning of the end was upon the breakaway state.

## THE UNITED NATIONS AS PEACEMAKER

Of course, it must be stressed that initially the United Nations was not trying to suppress the Katanga secession. The UN did not have the authority to do this and thus never attempted a forcible disarming of the Katangan government. The UN's mandate, however, included the removal of the foreign elements of the Katangan Gendarmerie and government, and it was under this mandate that the initial exercises of force were carried out. The prologue to the larger operations of the latter half of 1961 was the expulsion of Georges Thyssens. Thyssens was an "ultra," a hard-line advisor to Tshombe and Munongo, who had frustrated all attempts by the United Nations to apply pressure on the state.<sup>21</sup> Under increasing pressure from the UN, the Belgians produced a list of those foreign advisors whose expulsion would be appropriate. Thyssens was one of these. On 7 July, Thyssens was detained by UN peacekeepers, after a brief struggle, and forced onto a plane. His forcible repatriation was an indication of the methods by which Katanga would in future be bent to the will of the United Nations and the central government. The Tshombe government even made nominal efforts to provide names of individuals to be expelled, creating a list of eleven names of people who could be repatriated safely, while declaring that list exhaustive. Again the demand for the replacement of foreign nationals in the Gendarmerie was made, but France and Belgium pleaded their lack of control over the mercenaries. This stated inability worked for the Katangan government, which used these foreign mercenaries as trainers and officers for their locally recruited Gendarmerie. With its central control already shaky and in face of mounting pressure to deal with the Katanga problem, on 24 August 1961, the central government formally requested UN aid in the removal of the foreign personnel. This was the beginning of the actual shooting war between the United Nations and the Katangan Gendarmerie.

However, the first clash between the two was bloodless. The UN forces under the direction of Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien began Operation Rum Punch on 28 August, with the intention of rounding up the foreign soldiers and mercenaries staffing the Katangan Gendarmerie in Elisabethville.<sup>22</sup> The surprise was complete and the majority of the Belgian nationals were rounded up and expelled from the Congo. No casualties were sustained in the course of the operation. Unfortunately, a key component went awry. The Belgian consul had assumed responsibility for ensuring the surrender and expulsion of the foreign nationals, but at the beginning of the operation he revealed he had no authority over any of those who were not Belgian regular officers. This left the UN forces flat-footed, while a large number of foreign mercenaries were left to their own devices. These men blended into the civilian population or disappeared over the Rhodesian border, simply to return after the conclusion of the operation. By 9 September, over a hundred officers were still unaccounted for. Between the hollow statement of Tshombe declaring the termination of the mercenaries' services and the duplicitous actions of the Belgian consul, the operation was hamstrung and achieved only a fraction of its hoped-for success. The United Nations continued to insist on the repatriation of the mercenaries, but this only resulted in a final refusal by Tshombe to aid in their expulsion. This led to Operation Morthor in early September.

In theory, Operation Morthor ("Smash" in Hindi) was intended to expand on the success of Rum Punch. O'Brien had obtained warrants for the arrest of four prominent Katangan ministers and intended to use their detention in combination with the final expulsion of the mercenaries to bring a negotiated end to the state of Katanga. Plans were laid to seal off Tshombe's residence in Elisabethville and seize the town's post office and radio station, thereby stripping the Katangan government of most of its methods of communication. On 13 September, the operation began and almost immediately ran into complications.<sup>23</sup> The post office was heavily guarded by Katangan paracommandos led by mercenary officers. This led to a general firefight for possession of the building, which claimed lives on both sides. Meanwhile the UN forces never managed to seal off Tshombe, who promptly fled across the Rhodesian border and pledged resistance to the utmost. With the element of surprise gone, the operation degenerated into a series of firefights across Elisabethville between ill-equipped UN

forces and the Gendarmerie. While this dragged on into 14 September, an isolated UN garrison of Irish troops was surrounded in the mining town of Jadotville. While offering a heroic defence, the Irish troops were subjected to withering fire and strafing from the lone Fouga Magister jet fighter the Katangan forces had, and the Irishmen finally capitulated on 17 September.<sup>24</sup> These UN soldiers served as hostages in the ceasefire negotiations that were being set up. Unfortunately, the plane carrying UN Secretary-General Hammarskjöld crashed on its way to Ndola for a meeting with Tshombe, killing all aboard.<sup>25</sup> In response to this tragedy, the UN forces patched together a ceasefire on 20 September, bringing the debacle of Operation Morthor to an end. Conditions for a permanent ceasefire began to be suggested, much to the disapproval of the central Congolese government.

As a reflection of this disapproval, in late October the Adoula government attempted an invasion of Katanga which failed, further weakening the government's authority within the nation. This invasion stirred up the Gendarmerie, which repeatedly provoked the UN forces left in Katanga in early November. These actions served to convince the UN under the new leadership of U Thant that the only way that the Congo might find stability was the reintegration of Katanga into the Congo proper. This led to the resolution of 24 November,<sup>26</sup> giving the UN forces a mandate to use force to remove the mercenaries if necessary. Tshombe and Katanga were incensed and called for resistance to the utmost against what they characterized as UN aggression against their sovereign status. Katangan gendarmes constructed roadblocks, despite warnings from the UN forces, and on December 2 began a minor engagement against the UN forces that were attempting to clear one of several blocked roads.<sup>27</sup> By December 5, this skirmish had escalated into a general conflict, called Operation UNOKAT, or Round Two, by the UN forces involved. In contrast to their earlier operations, the UN forces were no longer restricted in their mandate and had built up effective airpower to cover their operations.<sup>28</sup> On December 6, the United Nations bombed multiple Katangan airports and positions and the UN's ground forces continued their strikes into Elisabethville. By the middle of the month, the UN forces held the majority of strategic locations within the province and Tshombe called for negotiations. On December 17, he was told that negotiations would only take place under the framework of the Basic Law concerning the structure of the Congo, which did not recognize

Katanga as a state. While Tshombe agreed to these terms and signed the Kitona accords on December 21, he reneged on this agreement, claiming that he did not have the sole authority to make such a decision. Katanga remained insistent on its independence but continued diplomatic wrangling with the central government for months to come.

Although under considerable pressure, the Katangan government prolonged its negotiations both with the United Nations and the Congolese government. Throughout 1962, various incidents and provocations took place, involving UN authorities and Katangan forces. By 20 August, the United Nations had had enough and released the U Thant Plan for National Reconciliation.<sup>29</sup> It was not open to negotiation and had to be accepted by Katanga within ten days or sanctions would be applied. The Katangans protested against the provisions of the plan, which called for the subordination of Katanga and all its resources to the central Congolese government, but they had little leverage to fight against it. In an untenable situation, the Katangan government accepted it under protest on 2 September. Throughout the next three months, the Katangans dragged their feet over adherence to the plan, while beginning another mercenary recruitment drive. In addition, during this period, Tshombe succeeded in adding nearly twenty military airplanes to his air force, despite warnings that the recruitment drive and the purchase of the planes endangered the successful implementation of the U Thant Plan and that Katanga would pay the penalty for any failure to adhere to its precepts.<sup>30</sup> By December 10, the United Nations had resolved to impose sanctions in response to the provocative actions of Tshombe, which included the blockading of UN supplies and the detention of UN troops in Katanga. Finally, on Christmas Eve, the dam broke and Katangan gendarmes became involved in a five-hour firefight with Ethiopian UN troops at a roadblock. Despite several demands for a ceasefire by the UN forces, the conflict continued, leading again to a general engagement. On December 28, Operation Grand Slam, also known as Round Three, initiated a UN offensive across the breadth of the separatist Katangan state. Multiple air sorties destroyed the interior defensive lines and logistical bases of the Katangan Gendarmerie, and the UN troops, reinforced over the past year, achieved great success on all fronts. By December 30, all meaningful resistance had ended, and by 3 January 1963, Jadotville was captured. Tshombe continued to demand a scorched-earth policy



from his new base in Rhodesia, but he was finally convinced to return to Elisabethville under the terms of an amnesty. By 21 January, the secession of Katanga had ended and the U Thant Plan had been put into effect.

## KATANGA AS ARCHETYPE

The attempted secession of Katanga offers several areas of comparison in terms of the trajectory of African secessionist conflicts. The fact that it was the first of its kind in the post-independence era would have a profound effect on its course and nature and in turn would create several precedents in the international community in terms of that community's opinions about self-determination and in terms of the process of self-determination within the new nations of Africa. Katanga came to be seen as a typical secession of its period due to its formation of a civil (as opposed to an ethnic) state, its leadership by "New Men" of Africa, its formation of a structured standing army, and that army's prosecution of a conventional conflict to try and ensure the independence of its home state. However, it also served to set the most important international precedents in terms of dealing with issues of African sovereignty. It is this set of precedents and the consequent international legal structures set up by both the United Nations and the emerging Organization of African Unity that continue to shape the process of sovereignty, legitimacy, and international relations of all subsequent African separatist movements.

The continuities of the separatist state will be dealt with first, before moving on to the far more lasting and important international ramifications of the Katangan conflict. In looking at the general nature and structure of the fledgling Katangan state, it is easy to see that it was typical of the first wave of secessionist conflicts that aimed at creating a "civil nation." In the immediate postwar period, there had been a subtle redefinition of the idea of the "nation." This transferred the focus of nationhood from an ethnic group effecting its own administration, which had been the common focus of the "nation-state" since the nineteenth century, to the idea of an administration that would oversee multiple ethnic identities and endeavour to foster them all equally. This created the distinction between *ethnic* nations, which as a concept fell out of favour until the 1990s with the end of the Cold War, and *civil* nations, which were seen as the new favoured form

of the state. Katanga was undoubtedly among the ranks of the civil nations, with representatives of numerous races and ethnicities represented within its borders and administrations. CONAKAT, which formed the ruling party throughout the existence of the separate Katanga, was itself a product of the union between the original *Confédération des associations tribales du Katanga* and the *Union Katangaise*, which contained the majority of the wealthy white settlers of the region. CONAKAT expounded among its goals the desire to effect “the Union of all the original residents of the province of Katanga, black and white, without racial discrimination, who show by their behavior that they have been integrated into this province.”<sup>31</sup> In this effort, they were most likely attempting to create a separate and binding Katangan identity above and beyond the pre-existing ethnic identities of the inhabitants of the province. The senior members of the government of the separate state were all from differing ethnic groups, while they were aided by European advisors, which ensured the attempt to represent and foster a unitary identity and agenda. Although there was intergroup strife during the period of the separate state, this was almost entirely aimed at the repression of the Luba, who were seen as non-Katangans living within the borders of the nation and constituting a threat to Katanga itself.

The state of Katanga also had legislative precedent on its side when making its arguments for its separate nature. This continues to be a common argument in favour of international recognition in each movement—the ability to show a historical antecedent to the state being proposed, in order to make the case that the separatist state is justified in its existence. In the case of Katanga, its case rested upon the history of the *Compagnie du Katanga* and the *Comité spéciale du Katanga*. The *Compagnie* was a private concern that was granted several concessions across Katanga by Belgium in 1891, giving the company a free hand to develop its territories as it saw fit to achieve profitability. It worked hand in hand with the Congo Free State, Leopold II’s created personalist colonial state that claimed the entirety of the Congo River Basin, to develop the province and solidify Leopold’s claim on the region. In 1900, the *Compagnie* made a pact with the Free State, setting up the *Comité spéciale du Katanga*, which was granted the undivided management of the region’s assets. Although by 1910 the administrative and political roles were taken away from the *Comité*, it still remained a potent economic force up to and beyond independence.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, from

1910 to 1933, Katanga enjoyed a special administrative status, separate from the rest of the Congo. It is this history as a separate administrative and developmental zone that Katanga proposed as its precedent first for a federal system of governance in the unified Congo and later for Katanga's secession from the central government. This historical sleight of hand has since been put to use in the secessions of Biafra, South Sudan, Somaliland, and Eritrea. Although the strength of each case must be evaluated on its own merits, the Katangan experience was the first in postcolonial Africa to propose the idea of a precedent for separatism.

Also typical of the secession conflicts was the leadership of the New Men of Africa and their top-down leadership and administration of the secession. As the inevitability of independence became increasingly obvious through colonized Africa, there had been in general a push to "Africanize" the administrative services of most colonies. At the time of independence, Belgium was woefully behind in this process in the Congo, with only twenty university graduates within the indigenous population. However, this did not mean that there was no rising African bourgeoisie to take the reins of leadership within the state. Patrice Lumumba and Joseph Kasavubu each rose to prominence within a nascent middle class within the Congo. The same group produced the dissenting leaders of the rebelling states. All the major figures of the CONAKAT regime were what the Belgians referred to as *évolués* (or "civilized"), their term for the members of the newer generation who were integrated into the administrative and economic policies of the Congo. Three key figures in particular represent the New Men in CONAKAT and the independent state of Katanga: Moïse Tshombe, Godefroid Munongo, and Jean-Baptiste Kibwe. CONAKAT in turn provided the intellectual and ideological drive toward the independent Katangan state.

Moïse Tshombe was born in 1919, the son of a wealthy Lunda trader in Katanga. His father had established his business by buying the stock of smaller agriculturalists in the Sandoa district and reselling the products to the workers in the copper belt of Katanga. His firm, Tshombe and Sons, was profitable enough to enable him to educate his sons and send his family members abroad to visit Europe. Moïse himself was taught at a Methodist mission school, completing his primary schooling and earning a teaching certificate. He went on to earn a degree in accounting and establish several business ventures before entering into politics. He rose to the position

of president-general of CONAKAT in the second half of 1959 and headed the party's delegation to the political and economic roundtable discussions leading to the independence of the Congo.<sup>33</sup> While Katanga was still part of the Congo, he was elected as a provincial deputy for the Elisabethville region and after secession became president of the state of Katanga. Coming from one of the wealthiest families of the nation and having a solid education placed Tshombe squarely in the new *évolué* class of the Congo.

Godefroid Munongo was born in 1925. He was a Yeke and a descendant of the legendary nineteenth-century paramount chief Msiri. This immediately gave him high standing in the traditional power structure of the Congo. However, he quickly added to this prestige, spending two years in a seminary before switching to more worldly pursuits and earning his degree from the School for Administrative Sciences. After this, Munongo rose through the Belgian administration, working first as a court clerk and rising to the level of a territorial agent by 1958. It was Munongo who helped found CONAKAT and was in fact its first president.<sup>34</sup> However, there was a conflict of interest between his administrative career and the political party, and for this reason he stepped aside in favour of Tshombe in 1959. In 1960, he was elected to the position of provincial deputy for Elisabethville and upon Katanga's secession became its minister of the interior. Munongo, having risen into the new middle and upper class, was the firmest "ultra" and ideologue of the Katangan secession.

This last of the major figures is Jean-Baptiste Kibwe, a Tabwa who was born in Katanga in 1924. Kibwe completed his primary education and went on to four years of high school, then further studies in law, political science, and sociology. He served with the *Comité spéciale du Katanga* and the Banque du Congo Belge.<sup>35</sup> Already well placed within the administrative organs of colonial rule, Kibwe also served with the territorial administration in the mid-1950s. Kibwe served with Tshombe at the political roundtable in 1960, being CONAKAT vice president that year. Upon the secession of Katanga, Kibwe served as both its vice president and its minister of finance. Kibwe, like Tshombe and Munongo, had firmly entrenched himself within the administration and politics of Katanga before and during independence. By using the rising prominence allowed to the Congolese as independence approached, Kibwe climbed into the class of the *évolués* and became a leader of the Katangans in the new Congo state.

It was these men and their companions who formed the core of CONAKAT, which in turn served as the central party and administrative command structure for the secessionist Katanga state. It was CONAKAT, especially its militant “ultras” from the Union Katangaise, that led Katanga into secession and served as its guiding force in terms of international relations, foreign aid, and legal arguments for the existence of the separatist state. As such, CONAKAT and its leadership served as a central player in the top-down imposition of the secessionist state and its ideological structures as proposed in both CONAKAT’s initial goal for an autonomous Katangan state run by “authentic Katangans”<sup>36</sup> and the *Union Katangaise*’s calls for an “awakening of a Katangan national conscience.”<sup>37</sup>

To defend that national consciousness, Tshombe, Munongo, Kibwe, and others assembled the Katangan Gendarmerie. Constructed out of the remnants of the ANC in the region after the mutiny, it was supplemented by recruitment among the Lunda and the Yeke and staffed initially by Belgian officers seconded to the Katangan state. This force was supplemented by mercenaries hired en masse to bolster the military power of Katanga.<sup>38</sup> It was originally constituted to secure the borders of the Katangan state, to control the uprising of the mutinous ANC, and to police the Luba of northern Katanga, who were separated from the larger population of the Luba by the secession of Kasai and were assumed to be an internal threat. Of course, as continued international pressure was brought to bear on Belgium, it slowly withdrew its officers and replaced them with mercenaries to provide a strong leadership for the fledgling force. It is estimated that the Gendarmerie had approximately 8,000–10,000 troops and was originally led by 114 officers and 117 other ranks of the Belgian army.<sup>39</sup> These were supplemented by approximately 300 Belgian, South African, Rhodesian, and French mercenaries hired to replace the Belgian army officers who were slowly but surely forced to leave.<sup>40</sup> Around 100 of these mercenaries were placed in leadership positions within the Gendarmerie, while the other 200 or so were placed in an all-white “International Company.”<sup>41</sup> The training of the Gendarmerie was generally held to be average in quality, although its paracommandos were noted as being extremely tough and disciplined, having been trained by Commandant Roger Faulques, a French officer discharged from that army after his central involvement in atrocities during the Algerian struggle for independence came to light.<sup>42</sup>

A key factor in the success of the Gendarmerie, in addition to its leadership, was the high standard of its equipment. Above and beyond the small arms with which the men were largely equipped, the troops were well supported by mortars, artillery, and air power. During the siege of Jadotville, all three had a considerable effect and allowed the Gendarmerie to capture the Irish UN force guarding the mining centre. Captain Pat Quinlan, commander of the Irish contingent, repeatedly mentioned the mortar bombardments his men endured, although he also took pains to mention the ineffectiveness of these strikes. In addition, while describing the preparations of the Gendarmerie in encircling Jadotville, Quinlan noted the presence of a heavy gun, assumed to be a French 75 mm artillery piece.<sup>43</sup> Quinlan's accounts also mention numerous jeeps and trucks and most notably the French-made Fouga Magister jet airplane that would wreak such havoc among the reinforcements who attempted to relieve the Irish company. The Fouga had been purchased by the Katangan government through a French firm and gave a decided edge to the Katangan forces, while the UN was bereft of air cover. At the time of the ceasefire that ended the secession, the Indian Brigade confiscated large numbers of weapons, including several dozen machine guns, over a hundred mortars of varying sizes, an armoured car with a 37 mm gun, and several locally manufactured armoured personnel carriers.<sup>44</sup> Overall, the Katangan Gendarmerie was admirably equipped for conventional operations within the Congo and performed reasonably well.

## KATANGA AS ANOMALY

Despite the continuities between the Katangan secession and the rest of the first wave of secessionist conflicts in Africa, there were several unique aspects to the Katangan conflict. The most obvious of these were the open and decisive interventions by both national and international groups. Belgium played a central role in the secession of Katanga, just as its final rejection of Katanga would lead to that state's dissolution, while the United Nations acted first as peacekeeper and then as aggressor in dismantling Katanga. For the first and last time in African separatist conflicts, widespread international intervention played a major part, with the final legal framework set up by the United Nations establishing what continues to serve as the

precedent in terms of African secessions, as well as the framework of the Organization of African Unity, which continues to be a deterrent to the recognition of secessionist movements.

Belgium's interests in the secession of Katanga were all too obvious. The massive mineral wealth of Katanga was the crown jewel in the holdings of the *Société générale du Belgique*. The *Union minière du Haut Katanga* held the vast majority of mineral extraction rights within the state. This represented a large proportion of the \$750 million of the general "Congo Portfolio" held in Belgium.<sup>45</sup> Of course, these mining industries also employed nearly 10,000 Belgian citizens within the province, giving the Belgians another reason to interfere with the inner running of the fledgling state. This intervention took the form of both military and administrative aid to Katanga during its years of secession.

With the mutiny of the ANC on 5 July 1960, the Belgians quickly moved additional troops into the Congo, raising their numbers to 8,600. Although the majority of these began to be removed on the arrival of the UN force, they were not removed from Katanga. Tshombe rejected the imposition of the UN force and instead leaned heavily on the Belgian troops seconded to his forces, while at the same time accepting some seven to nine tons of armaments provided by the Belgians.<sup>46</sup> Although eventually the United Nations was able to negotiate the insertion of forces into Katanga, the Tshombe government refused to abide by UN resolutions 143, 145, and 146, requesting the removal of all foreign troops and personnel. When Resolution 161 was passed on 21 February 1961, it caused a stir, as it empowered the UN to use force to remove the foreign nationals.

This cut to the heart of Belgian interference with UN policy in Katanga, and Belgium refused to remove the Belgian officers of the former Force Publique until suitable replacements were found. The Belgians did remove a minimal number of the Belgian officers seconded to train Congolese forces, but those Belgian troops functioning as mercenaries could only be asked to leave.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, to make good on the losses incurred, the Belgian government worked closely with the Katangan mission to hire mercenaries, offering them the resources of the Sûreté (the military secret police) in vetting prospective soldiers. The advent of the Lefèvre ministry in Belgium changed the outlook somewhat, with negotiations being carried on with a view to replacing the Belgian troops with those of the UN force.

This was known as the Egge plan, but it was unfortunately interrupted by the tribulations of operations Rum Punch and Morthor. While the Spaak government was to remove all regular Belgian forces by November 1961 by withdrawing their passports, Rum Punch had been hamstrung by the inability of the Belgian consul to remove the mercenary soldiers, and thus Belgian mercenaries continued to serve in Katanga.

In addition, Belgium offered significant technical assistance to the Katangan separatists. Although refusing to offer recognition to the breakaway state, the Belgian government did send the Belgian Technical Mission, or Mistebel, which was to provide invaluable support. Over the course of its mission, Mistebel provided the backbone of the administration of Katanga as well as organizing Belgian support for the Gendarmerie, warning the Belgian personnel about UN attacks, attempting to rally the West to support the Tshombe regime, and overall helping guide Tshombe and the Katangan state. Although it was recalled to Belgium in October 1960, it is not too far of a stretch to say that the Technical Mission offered vital support to the secessionists at a critical juncture in the history of Katanga. It was the withdrawal of this support that began to slowly eat away at the Katangan state. Once its military and administrative components were withdrawn from Katanga, all that remained for Belgium were the financial aspects of its interests. Once these were assured, Katanga was on its own.

In fact, Belgian disengagement truly began following the 21 February 1961 resolution, which began the proactive attempts of the United Nations to remove any outside interference from Katanga. While the Belgian government protested against operations Rum Punch and Morthor, the fact remained that by that time the majority of their formal interactions with the Tshombe regime had ended. Despite the Belgians' protests against the United Nations' Round Two, they began to support the UN initiatives to bring the Katangans to heel and even joined in the economic sanctions of 1962. In fact, their help in this case was invaluable, as cutting off the financial payments from the *Union minière du Haut Katanga* resulted in the crippling of the Katangan economy and ensured the dismantling of the separatist state.

Belgium was not the only state whose removal tipped the balance within the Katangan Secession. Following the initial breakaway of the secessionist state, the United States under the Eisenhower administration found itself



wondering what role it might play in the Congo Crisis. While they hoped for a unified and effective Congolese state, the influence that Lumumba had over the nationalist elements of the government and his reputation as a leftist left the United States uncertain of their path forward. In addition, Lumumba's insistence on the removal of all influence by NATO ally Belgium made the United States even more concerned about rising spectre of Communism in the Congo. The emergence of the Western-oriented Katanga offered a chance for a local locus of allied influence, while the increasingly strident Lumumba made demands for US support. Ultimately the Eisenhower administration would find itself in the position of actively trying to undermine Lumumba's position within the Congo while musing about the role the Katangan forces might play in central Africa. This policy found its apex with the US support for Colonel Mobutu's coup and arrest of Lumumba, which led directly to his murder on 17 January 1961.<sup>48</sup>

However, the shocking assassination of the former prime minister happened to occur three days before the accession of the Kennedy Administration, who took office to find the present Katanga policy anathema to their goals in central Africa. Although they were as stridently anti-Communist as the Eisenhower administration, they placed a higher priority on the emergence and development of the decolonizing world as independent allies. While they could support Mobutu as a strongman bulwark against the assumed communist aggression, they could not countenance a fractured Congo. As such, the United States quickly reversed course and played a role in clearing out the remaining Belgian interference while providing considerable supplies and air cover to the central Congolese government. This was done largely in the hopes that a singular, centralized independent Congo would find alignment with the United States agreeable as opposed to retaining ties with the neocolonial powers and possibly leaning closer to the Soviets. While the Kennedy administration ultimately would not play a direct role in the fall of Tshombe's Katanga, the *volte-face* of American foreign policy toward the secessionist state undercut any remaining international support for the breakaway state.

The United Nations also played a central role in the Katangan secession, taking on initially the role of mediator and eventually that of antagonist to Tshombe's state. UN aid was requested by Lumumba and Kasavubu in 1960, in response to the mutiny of the ANC and the reinsertion of Belgian

troops into the Congo. A series of UN resolutions gave the UN force its mandate to keep the peace and request the removal of foreign personnel, beginning with Resolutions 143 and 145. Upon the refusal of Katanga to allow the entrance of UN troops, Resolution 143 was passed, asserting the right of the United Nations force to be present within the boundaries of Katanga. At this point, the UN troops existed solely as peacekeepers and to prevent any aggressive action toward civilians within the Congo. Their mandate was solely self-defence, and they had no right to interfere in the internal difficulties of the Congolese state.

This all changed with the passing of Resolution 161 on 21 February 1961, which emerged as a response to the death of Patrice Lumumba and the apparent chaos descending across the Congo. This resolution empowered the United Nations to “take immediately all appropriate measures to prevent the occurrence of civil war in the Congo.”<sup>49</sup> This included the use of force as a last resort. Although once again not actually allowing any proactive measures to be taken as far as the Katangan situation was concerned, Resolution 161 altered the entire situation within the Congo and caused a rapprochement between the Léopoldville and Stanleyville governments. This in turn isolated the Katangan separatists and left them as the sole targets of the UN peacekeepers. The 21 February resolution also reinforced the demand that all foreign personnel leave the Congo, which was finally acted on with Rum Punch and Morthor several after several months of delay, when the Katangans still had not removed the foreigners. Unfortunately, it was the debacle of Morthor that led to the death of Dag Hammarskjöld and a complete change in the UN’s views on the Katanga situation.

Following Hammarskjöld’s death, U Thant rose to the secretary-generalship and began to take decisive steps to end the secession of Katanga. The 24 November 1961 resolution effectively ended any hopes for a separate state of Katanga by recognizing the central authority of the Léopoldville government and condemning the separatist activities of the Tshombe regime. At this point, the secretary-general was empowered to use force to remove any and all foreign personnel and take any measures necessary to make certain they remained absent. This not only provided a belated approval of the activities of Rum Punch and Morthor but also gave a reason for the offensives of December following the provocations by the Gendarmerie. With Round Two (Operation UNOKAT) and Round Three

(Operation Grand Slam), the United Nations had effectively transformed itself from a passive peacekeeping force into an aggressive power with the mandate to dismantle the Katangan state.

The thought process behind the transformation may be seen in the progress of the resolutions passed over the two-year period of 1961–1962. Initially, the United Nations sustained the hope that the central authority of the Congo would reassert itself after a brief period of chaos. This would hopefully then lead to negotiations between the various factions and a settlement of the crisis. As time passed, it became increasingly obvious that several factors were preventing this from occurring and therefore the mandates were provided to remove these factors. At first the strategic thinking was that the Katangan state would fall into line without foreign intervention. This led to aggressive moves against the foreign elements as opposed to the state itself, as shown in such heralded operations as Rum Punch. However, as the Congo factions realigned themselves and isolated Katanga, it became increasingly obvious to the United Nations that the Katangan state itself was an impediment to the unity of the Congo. This resulted in the 24 November resolution, which announced the recognition of the Léopoldville government and the rejection of Katangan sovereignty. At this point, any and all members of the Katangan state's apparatus became unlawful combatants and could be repressed by the UN force. It was the final alignment of the Léopoldville and Stanleyville governments that gave the United Nations the justification to dismantle the Katangan State.

## KATANGA AS PRECEDENT

This series of actions by the United Nations in 1960–62 created an entirely new precedent with regard to the application of force through that august body. As Trevor Findlay notes in his work on the UN force in the Congo, the mandated force was originally constituted as neither a peacekeeping nor a punitive force, under either chapter VI or chapter VII of the UN charter, respectively.<sup>50</sup> Hammarskjöld had established a force without a necessarily defined purpose within the Congo, instead relying on his own powers, as delineated in article 99 of the UN charter, to “bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.”<sup>51</sup> This was done to avoid

the invocation of articles 41 (sanctions) and 42 (direct force) in chapter VII, which would have required the naming of Belgium as an aggressor in the occupation of Congolese territory. Following the 9 August 1960 and 21 February 1961 resolutions, Hammarskjöld still had not invoked either of the articles involved in the application of direct punitive measures, and yet he had implicitly sanctioned actions normally under the purview of article 42 of the charter. This created a hybrid mandate for the uncertain force, one that Findlay argues was neither a peacekeeping nor a punitive force and instead fell under what he refers to as a peace-enforcement mandate that offered extralegal flexibility to the actions of *Opération des Nations Unies au Congo* (ONUC), a mandate that was finally exploited to its full extent by U Thant in Round Two and Round Three when finally bringing Katanga to heel.<sup>52</sup> This expanded mandate involved actions such as the continued application of force both to prevent civil war and to expel the mercenaries from Katanga, which fell under the quasi-legal stance taken by Hammarskjöld and were later justified under a rapidly expanded mandate for self-defence and freedom of movement within the UN force's area of operations. This expanded conception of freedom of movement and self-defence allowed for the aggressive pursuit of the policies of the UN, which, following the 21 February resolution, was ever more determined to support the territorial integrity of the Congo and was therefore geared toward the eventual downfall of the Katangan state.

The precedent set by the actions of the United Nations was one that would alter international participation in African secessions. As mentioned, the 21 February resolution explicitly set the UN's conception of the maintenance of territorial integrity of the Congo as a precondition for the peaceful resolution of the Congo Crisis. It thus involved an implicit condemnation of secessionist struggles as threatening to both domestic and international peace and security. While this initially might not seem to be such a worrisome development, given the previous necessity for the Security Council to agree to actions under article 42, Hammarskjöld's efforts to create a mandate for his international peacekeeping and peace-enforcement force under articles 39 (determining threats to peace), 40 (provisional measures), and 99, without the direct invocation of 42, meant that now an international force could be created and wielded against secessionist threats with little difficulty, especially under the more aggressive leadership of U

Thant. The precedent of the UN's actions in the Katangan Secession set in place the idea not only that secession movements would be viewed as threats to international peace and order but also that the UN could enforce its mandates against such a threat.

Beyond the central international authority of the United Nations, another transnational organization came into being informed by the experiences of Katanga and the foreign agitation that maintained it. This new international body was the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and its own core values would alter the trajectory of African secession struggles. The initial idea behind the organization was found in the dreams of the early Pan-Africanists, who had hoped that the shared historical experiences of the African people would help them come together and create an international organization that could both defend the sovereignty of the newly decolonized states and help better the lives of all Africans. While there were varying conceptions behind what form this organization would eventually take, with a more radical bloc called the Casablanca group looking for a strongly integrated federation while the more moderate Monrovia Group wanted a looser, more decentralized organization, a compromise was struck throughout the discussions in early 1963, and all thirty-two initial member states combined their efforts to formally create the OAU. The organization's charter, signed on 25 May 1963, promised in article III both "non-interference in the internal affairs of states" and "Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of each State."<sup>53</sup> This effectively recognized the authority of the central government of each member state and pre-emptively established the unlawfulness of any attempt at partition. From the signing of the OAU's charter onward, any overt outside interference in any secession process became a prohibited action under the OAU agreements. This meant that even any separatist group would have to make do with its own limited resources and what little covert aid could be offered to it by sympathetic parties. So, while the processes of leadership, structure, army building, and the prosecution of conflict would repeat themselves and evolve as the circumstances changed, the intervention of outside forces, either for or against the secession of a region, became unheard of.

This combination of the UN's forceful rejection of Katanga's right to self-determination and the OAU's enshrinement of the existing state's sovereignty would set a twin precedent severely hampering any future

attempts to separate from a recognized African sovereign state. Any further attempts would have to do without any significant outside assistance from either a continental or global ally, and even the recognition of any separatist government was cast into doubt as a result of the Congo Crisis. Because of all this, the international legal parameters set during and after the Katangan secession would affect every subsequent secessionist struggle on the continent.

The Congo Crisis, of which the Katangan secession was part, introduced the problems of postcolonial Africa to the world. Between a repressed bourgeoisie, inadequate infrastructure, Cold War manipulation, ethnic violence, and unstable governments, the Congo represented the worst experiences of the emergence of the independent African nations, while at the same time offering a testing ground for the international difficulties that would accompany widespread decolonization. The secession of Katanga offered several unique difficulties for both the African state and the international community. These difficulties would be echoed through the coming decades, and it was the experience of the Congo Crisis that informed the future decisions of the international community. The Katanga secession established the precedents to be used with regard to future separatist movements in Africa and the responses to them. As such, the trial by fire of the Katangan separatists would set patterns of secession that would last until the thawing of the Cold War, the return of the idea of the ethnic nation, and the collapse of both the international order and the stability of the African nations.