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POLICY RESEARCH STUDY

THE CONGO: A STUDY IN POLITICAL DYNAMICS (Political Dynamics Study No. 3)

by
M. CRAWFORD YOUNG
Harvard University
and
EDWARD J. STREATOR, JR.
Office of Research and Analysis
for Africa
Bureau of Intelligence and Research

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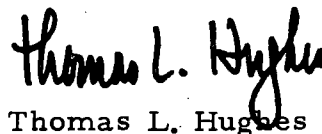
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MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY

After three turbulent years, the Congo is entering a new period of political construction. The eventual departure of UN military forces will terminate on-the-spot responsibility for the maintenance of order. Authority over the entire Congo is now exercised by a government of unquestionable legality. But serious problems remain in the organization of the emerging polity.

To investigate the socio-political hurdles facing the Congo, an INR team, comprising M. Crawford Young, a consultant from Harvard University, and Edward J. Streater, Jr. of INR, visited 14 of the Congo's 21 provincial capitals in June-July 1963. Commenting on this initiative, Ambassador Gullion wrote recently that "...the idea of a Departmental officer working in tandem with an academic area specialist seems to me a good one. This kind of thing has been done by the French very effectively. I judge from the work of the Streater-Young team that it can be equally useful to us."

This Policy Research Study is the product of this collaboration between a Departmental officer and a member of the academic community. An abstract of the study accompanies this memorandum.


Thomas L. Hughes

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ABSTRACT

THE CONGO: A STUDY IN POLITICAL DYNAMICS

1. A modern and virulent form of tribalism will continue to dominate Congolese politics. Tribalism lies squarely athwart every dimension of political behavior. But ethnicity in the Congo is not a phenomenon of the primeval forest. In the cities, tribal origin provided a focus for social organization. The elites of the cities extended this renewed sense of ethnic identity to their tribal homelands, where it served to rally support for emerging political movements. Ethnicity and politics fed upon each other and have been mutually reinforcing in the first years of independence. Ethnic arguments played the paramount role in provincial fragmentation. In 1960 only four political movements of any significance were not primarily ethnic. Since independence all political parties have been subject to serious ethnic tensions.

2. The new constitution now under discussion will perpetuate unwieldy institutions that hamper effective government. A parliamentary commission is considering a draft constitution prepared by UN experts, together with proposals submitted by Katanga and a conference of presidents of provincial assemblies. The UN draft preserves the essential features of the Loi Fondamentale, the Congo's present constitution which ranks with the most unsuitable organic laws in existence. Most other African states which followed classical forms of parliamentary government at independence have abandoned them in favor of presidentialism and single parties, which appear to permit more energetic development policies. The Congo, however, will probably adopt by mid-1964 the UN draft perpetuating a parliamentary framework. The draft makes some concessions to provincial demands for greater autonomy, but does not by any means realistically reflect the present and likely distribution of power between the center and the provinces. It preserves the principle of strong central government but establishes an institutional framework which will obstruct exercise of central power. The result will doubtless be to arouse sharp hostility among local leaders toward a central government which will have serious difficulty in supplying needed national leadership.

3. The new provinces are likely to persist as the basis of internal organization. The creation of 21 new provinces has transformed the character of the Congolese polity. Although

ethnic factors are important, only seven of the new provinces are ethnically homogeneous, and four have one predominant group. In 15 of the 21 provinces there is a single dominant political party, and in many the party has a strong ethnic identity. Traditional tribal structures are significant in 11 provinces.

Secessionism, a spectre haunting many African presidential palaces, is endemic in several regions of the Congo. Although Katanga has been returned to the fold, latent secessionism persists there and in other areas on the country's periphery.

The phenomenon of fragmentation is more recent than the impulse to secessionism, although it derives from common roots. The emergence after independence of three de facto new provinces and the general breakdown of authority reinforced the movement to create new provinces. The paternity of the new provinces usually lay with elites in the urban centers whose aspirations for leadership in their areas of origin were frustrated within the framework of the six provinces inherited from the colonial period. They accordingly invoked ethnic-regionalist arguments to rally popular support for the formation of new provinces. After Parliament established criteria for new provinces in April 1962, a rash of new entities were approved.

4. The new provincial institutions are functioning with varying success. Four can be considered to function very well. Five have reasonably operative governments. Three function very poorly, and seven are unstable. The festering problem of territories disputed between two or more provinces remains to be solved, and several of the provinces show signs of further fragmentation.

The budgetary cost of creating the new provinces has been high. About 150 new ministers and their parasitic entourages are lined up at the pay window each month. And yet, there are reasons to welcome the new provinces. Before emergence of the new units, five of the six former provinces had ceased functioning. The new entities are more representative of local opinion. They frequently have governments of experienced technicians, regional pride to defend, more limited area, and imperfect, yet better, ethnic cohesion. Very real benefits in acquisition of political and administrative skills are accruing in the provinces. In many areas the institutions fun-

tion quite well with virtually no European technical assistance.

5. The Congolese bureaucracy will continue to be handicapped by the lack of experienced and technically qualified personnel; but in the provinces it provides a strong backbone of local administrative continuity. In the colonial period, the bureaucracy, untrammelled in the exercise of power, penetrated and organized Congolese society. Though the present Congolese elite was shaped in the subaltern ranks of the administration, it was excluded from all top echelons of the civil service until 1959. In the context of terror in July 1960, all but a handful of European functionaries departed. Thus, Africa's most radical decolonization was compounded by the revolutionary Africanization of the civil service. The result was administrative chaos. The Lumumba government never really functioned. However, the Congolese clerks promoted to fill the shoes of departed Belgians gradually came to terms with their new responsibilities as administrators both in the central government and in the provinces.

The Congolese civil service today is much better than generally believed--not that its performance is outstanding in any absolute sense, but it probably is not sharply below the norm elsewhere in Africa. The civil servants as a group are far superior to the members of political parties and representative assemblies, though this is faint praise. Many have reasonable norms of rectitude and discipline. The performance of the territorial administrators, the middle echelon of the provincial hierarchy, is superior to that at the provincial and central government levels. Nearly everywhere the territorial administrators are career civil servants who have been the backbone of the Congo's internal administration since independence. In sharp contrast to the breakdown of government at the upper levels during the dark days of 1960-61, the basic administrative units below the territorial administrative level, the circonscriptions indigènes, also have largely remained intact. Their stability has been a significant buffer against widespread chaos in the countryside.

An explanation of the lack of revolutionary social credo accompanying the revolutionary power transfer may lie in the bureaucratic origins of most of the Congolese elite. The administrator is not by nature a radical.

Although the judicial system at the circonscription indigène and territorial levels functions fairly well, the superior courts were stripped of trained legal personnel by the Belgian exodus. The UN provided some judges, but far fewer than needed to assure minimal effectiveness. Some relief will be provided as Congolese law students complete their studies.

A better formula is needed for absorbing

emergent university graduates into the system. Rapidly increasing in number, they are disaffected by their inability to obtain civil service positions commensurate with their competence.

6. The absence of national political parties and the new polarization of power between Leopoldville and the provinces will pose serious problems in elections under consideration for 1964. Political power in the Congo today is divided between Leopoldville and the provinces. Parliament and the central government, like Spanish moss, have their roots in the air, not in the hinterland. Power at the center derives from access to influence, position, and money. The weakening of links between Leopoldville and the provinces since 1960 means that, until elections are held, the exercise of power at the center remains unrelated to the provinces.

Leopoldville's alienation has left the provincial leaders relatively free to consolidate local authority, creating separate power structures collectively capable of challenging Leopoldville leaders in an election.

The new distribution of power has serious implications for the moderates around Prime Minister Adoula who seek to establish a national party. They must deal with provincial leaders who stand astride the lines of political communication with the electorate. Although the central government may apply certain pressures on the provinces to obtain support for a party under Adoula, the provinces retain most of the trump cards. Under these circumstances, an emerging national party would at the summit be, in effect, a loose coalition of Leopoldville and provincial leaders.

It is likely that a moderate national party of this sort would emerge with a narrow majority of seats in Parliament. However, an electoral campaign would run the risk of creating a serious security problem in many areas at a time when tranquility is returning to much of the country. Further, a moderate party of national scope might labor under the onus of identification with the American Embassy. Conceivably, a radical opposition movement might be built around an anti-American theme, offering opportunities for Soviet involvement.

These risks would be much diminished if elections were to be postponed until 1965, thus allowing time for provincial and central government institutions to shake down further, and for the hard political bargaining necessary to launch a moderate national party. If the tide of opinion continues to favor elections in 1964, even a mediocre moderate national party would at least enhance the electoral prospects of moderate candidates.

7. The Congolese National Army (ANC) has developed into a reasonably effective arm of central government authority in many areas of the country. Though the ANC committed bloody

atrocities in the first two years of independence, the growing authority of ANC Commander Mobutu has increased control by the central government over the ANC. Recent incidents involving the ANC do not constitute evidence of generalized indiscipline. Rather, the ANC, except in ex-Kasai and southern Katanga, has proved to be a positive element in the political system. It has developed a nucleus of officers of real ability. It has retained the principle of ethnic scramble, which operates to immunize it against local political influences and to give it a commitment to the nation as a whole. In many areas it is capable of acting as an adequate constabulary. The ANC retraining program now being launched under Western auspices may consolidate recent advances toward providing the central government with a reliable constabulary capable of maintaining domestic order and preserving the supremacy of central power.

8. The Congo will continue to need substan-

tial external technical and economic assistance. The United States, the UN, and other donors, including Belgium, have contributed massive technical and economic support to the Congo since independence. The shortage of Congolese technical personnel and capital resources will persist for the foreseeable future.

For a number of reasons the UN seeks to reduce its role. The United States to date has paid the lion's share, but wants to cut back its contribution. Belgium, the most likely candidate to increase aid to its former colony, is reluctant to shoulder more. Though an informal UN-US-Belgian consortium of assistance appears the most desirable formula for sharing responsibility, the Belgians to date have been reluctant to discuss forthrightly with us the extent of further aid they might provide. The result is a precarious outlook for aid to the Congo at a time when clear definition is needed to permit economic planning.

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