After a painstaking, twenty-year effort to select and declassify documents on the Congo crisis of the 1960s, historians now have access to the *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXIII, Congo, 1960-1968* (hereafter referred to as *FRUS*, volume XXIII). The history of the *FRUS* volume and how it came to be published is as interesting as the volume itself. The new volume is part of the Johnson presidency 1964-1968, although about one third is devoted to the years 1960 to 1963. The preface points out that this volume should be read as a supplement to the *1958-1960, Volume XIV, Africa* and *1961-1963, Volume XX, Congo Crisis*, which “did not contain documentation of the U.S. covert political action program” (iv) and “no records” on the U.S. planning to assassinate the Congo’s first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba. This latest volume includes previously unpublished documents from the earlier years and offers comprehensive coverage of U.S. policy during the Lyndon Johnson administration. As such, it improves our knowledge of the crisis in the Congo over its five long years.

Historians have long been critical of the biased presentation of the Congo crisis in the *FRUS* series. As early as 1975 the Senate Select Committee on intelligence investigated CIA involvement in plans to assassinate Lumumba. Despite the revelations of an extensive covert program, the 1994 *Volume XX, Congo Crisis* was a major disappointment. In 1996, historian David Gibbs questioned the accuracy of Volume XX which “virtually excludes” any mention of covert operations in the Congo. Stephen Weissman cast further doubt on the integrity of the public record with his article on the CIA’s role in the

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“extraordinary rendition” of Lumumba, turning him over to those known to have wanted him dead.³ To address concerns with the FRUS volumes, the Historical Advisory Committee (HAC) recommended an improved and expedited declassification process to create a more accurate account of Cold-War crises, including that in the Congo.⁴

In the late 1990s, the State Department began plans for a retrospective volume on the Congo, which was stalled from the start; the CIA broke its promise to “more expeditiously” consider requests for access to its material.⁵ In 1998 the Director for Central Intelligence (DCI) George Tenant announced that he did not have the financial resources to proceed with the work on several planned retrospective volumes. Therefore Tenant opted to “hold the reviews of these covert operations in abeyance for the time being.”⁶ Internal personnel problems at the Historian’s Office also hampered progress on declassification.⁷ By 2010 work on the Congo volume finally proceeded with the guidance of Stephen Randolph, the Historian of the U.S. Department of State.⁸ Ironically, the CIA’s own reluctance to release documents has helped concentrate the release of the documents into one volume. The Congo, Volume XXIII debuted in December 2013 with HACs agreement that it was a “reliable guide” and an “exceptionally valuable addition to the historical record” (vii).

The new FRUS volume is timely in light of current events. Disclosures about spying, confessions of CIA involvement in Cold-War assassinations in Iran, Chile, and elsewhere, and recent criticisms of the organization’s effectiveness have dampened confidence that greater transparency might mitigate. The new volume is timely, too, in terms of events in the Congo. Another UN peacekeeping force has operated in the Congo for almost 20 years (first the U.N. Organization Mission in Democratic Republic of the

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Congo, or MONUC and then U.N. Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, known as MONUSCO) with a checkered history and amidst rising tensions. Understanding the legacy of international intervention in the Congo is a starting point for change.

The Congo became independent in June 1960 and immediately fell into crisis amidst a clumsy transfer of power by Belgium. It then saw a massive UN peacekeeping operation, and the escalation of the Cold-War conflict within its own borders. Although the crisis reached some of its most tense moments with the assassination of former Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba in early 1961, Army Chief of Staff Joseph Mobutu did not seize power until November 1965. In 1975 the Senate Select Church Committee concluded ambiguously that although it was reasonable to assume President Dwight Eisenhower had “authorized” plans to assassinate Lumumba, and CIA officers “advised and aided” Congolese intent on the assassination of Lumumba, there was “no evidence of United States involvement” in bringing about the death of Lumumba. Historians have debated these conclusions and the role of the CIA ever since. The debate is not likely to end with the new FRUS Congo volume, which publishes only a few new documents related to the assassination itself, and none that directly links the CIA to the deed. Unlike the case of Iran, where the opening of documents was accompanied by an apology, no such decision was taken in the case of the Congo, where the son of a pro-Lumumba activist is still in power.

Nor does Volume XXIII touch on several other key aspects of the Congo story. The Belgian connection begs attention. References to U.S. contacts with Belgian counterparts are few and far between, despite the active Belgian role in the Congo, as detailed in the report of the Belgian Parliamentary Inquiry into the assassination of Patrice Lumumba. The close presence of Mobutu advisor Louis Marlière and others known to CIA Station Chief Lawrence Devlin, raises questions about intelligence sharing and collaboration. The death of U.N. Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold in a plane crash later that year received virtually no mention at all. A new commission headed by David Lea has cited “probable” existence of “significant new evidence” in radio traffic intercepts that appear to relate to his downed plane and are held by the U.S. National Security Agency, but FOIA requests for this material have been denied. Absent from the volume too is Che Guevara, the Argentinian Marxist who joined the Cuban

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10 Alleged Assassination Plots, 17, 51-52.

11 U.S. Comes Clean about the coup in Iran, (19 April 2000), CNN, retrieved from http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0004/19/i_ins.00.html.


Revolution and later traveled to Africa, although according to author James Bamford, his presence in the Congo was well-known and tracked by signals intelligence of the National Security Agency. Thus, some fifty plus years after the crisis, major questions will remain open.

The retrospective section of the Volume XXIII covers the years 1960-1963 and in this manner is unconventional. The first 100 pages are devoted to the era up to and including Lumumba’s murder. Code words and cryptonyms add drama, so KUBARK refers to the CIA and ODYOKE to the US Government, while ODOACID refers to the U.S. Department of State. The extent of redactions can be perplexing, and are more extensive than any other FRUS publication to date, a model hopefully not repeated. Individuals, Congolese and others, frequently appear as [Identity 1] or [name not declassified] even concerning the smallest details. After the exhausting round of reviews, the redactions add a measure of incompleteness to the volume.

Money ran the game, and even by 1960 standards the CIA had a reputation for spending. Lawrence Devlin himself called the United States “the golden egg laying goose” (doc 107) in the Congo. The preface provides a total figure of $11 million for the cost of the CIA operation in the Congo, but the figures throughout the volume are redacted. Some figures previously published are redacted, such as the mention of $23,000 set aside to support moderate politicians at the time of the Lovanium conference in June 1961. The $11 million dollar price tag for the CIA’s operation in the Congo is in the ballpark of official figures for other operations. By way of comparison, CIA operations in Iran and Guatemala in the 1950s carry official price tags of roughly $1 million and $3 million, while the Bay of Pigs is listed as $13 million. Estimates as to how much the CIA really spent on operations are hard to gauge but are usually much higher. In the case of the Congo, Weissman points out that the official price tag does not include


15 For instance, see Document 55 which includes a statement that the CIA representations were authorized to tell Mobutu and (name not declassified) that they were ready to help with funds if certain conditions were met. Well over 60 years later, and after death of Mobutu and others, it is perplexing how this name could still be vital to security or somehow result in adverse effects for the person’s family.

16 Compare Volume XXIII, document 83, footnote 4 to Volume XX, document 71.

17 Cost is notoriously hard to determine. For cost of Iran, see Tim Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA (New York: Anchor Books, 2007), 95 and for PBSUCCESS, see Kate Doyle and Peter Kornbluh, “CIA and Assassinations: the Guatemala 1954 documents,” at The National Security Archive, retrieved from http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB4/. But the actual figures likely ran much higher, possibly to $75 million to secure the coup and its aftermath, see Ervand Abrahamian, “The 1953 Coup in Iran,” Science & Society, 65:2 (Summer 2001), 211. A price of $46 million for the Bay of Pigs has been suggested as a more complete figure. See NPR Staff, “50 Years later: learning from the Bay of Pigs,” retrieved from http://www.npr.org/2011/04/17/135444882/50-years-later-learning-from-the-bay-of-pigs. The cost of the CIA operation in Indonesia in 1958 has been hard to find. In 1958 US military assistance to the Sukarno government totaled $26 million, see Memorandum from ASSFEA Robertson to USSEA Dillon, 5 March 1959 retrieved from https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v17/d186
spending on the CIA’s air operations or maritime support. A more accurate figure, he suggests, would be at least three times the $11 million and quite possibly more.\(^{18}\)

The volume confirmed the CIA’s almost knee-jerk negative response to Patrice Lumumba even before the Congo was independent. Documents referred to Lumumba as “unscrupulous” but warned against a “stop Lumumba” campaign at this early stage, since it “could backfire” (doc 4). Lumumba’s meteoric rise up the political ladder during the pre-independence election campaign contributed to the CIA’s growing sense of a crisis, or showdown in the Congo. Bronson Tweedy, Head of the CIA’s Africa Division, recommended in April 1960 that “some CS [ie. CIA Chief of Staff] money and influence get in there quick!” (doc 3 fn). CIA Director Allen Dulles ordered his station to “cultivate” the “widest possible spectrum of contracts” among those most influential in the Congo (doc 5, fn 2).

CIA Station Chief Larry Devlin had already been appointed to Congo a full year earlier (August 1959) and now with the Cold War unfolding before his eyes, he rushed to his new post on 10 July 1960. Devlin continued to reinforce his viewpoint, which he had first formed in Brussels, that Lumumba was a “strongman” who was “moving left” and needed to be stopped before he established a regime “under influence if not fully controlled by Commies” (doc 8). Devlin reported watching a “small party” (doc 7) of Soviet personnel arrive on 21 July 1960, and more followed, so that by the end of August there were “several hundred” in the Congo.\(^{19}\) Far from being just another left-leaning nationalist state in Africa, Congo in Devlin’s message might become the first communist-dominated state in Africa, right in the heart of the continent.

The CIA role in the Congo is much more extensive than previous accounts have indicated. Station officers began a covert political-action program soon after its independence. Some of the most fascinating new material in the volume appears here and dispels the view there were two separate crises, a domestic (constitutional) one and an international (colonial) one. The CIA’s political action campaign was officially planned and meticulously carried out from the very first days of the crisis. The result was a five-year-long effort to find a pro-Western government guided from Washington by the NSC’s Special Committee (later the 303 Committee) that had been set up to approve funding for the covert operation. The CIA’s first hope was to secure a vote of no-confidence in the Senate and replace Lumumba’s government with that of Joseph Ileo, with whom the CIA claimed “some influence” (doc 6). Expecting the vote’s failure, Kasavubu suddenly announced the dismissal of Lumumba as Prime Minister on September 5. With the constitutional crisis now in full swing, Devlin reported “going all out” and taking “calculated risks” to “pull hat out of fire” to try to get a new Ileo government installed (doc 17). In fact, two days later the Chamber voted to revoke Kasavubu’s dismissal of Lumumba, deepening the constitutional crisis and U.S. intervention.

The Senate Select (Church) Committee included quotations from documents to demonstrate Eisenhower’s nod toward assassination. The new FRUS volume publishes some of these key documents more fully (but still with redactions). Gordon Gray in the NSC Special Group memorandum of 25

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\(^{19}\) Devlin, *Chief of Station, Congo*, 23.
August 1960 referred to “extremely strong feelings on the necessity for very straightforward action” among top administration officials (doc 12) along with Dulles’s decision to grant the Station “wider authority” to meet “targets of opportunity” (doc 13).20 We already know about the sensational plans to use a virus and poison to inject into Lumumba’s food or toothpaste. Other plans to send a rifle to Congo for the purpose of assassination when “hunting season” (doc 30, 33) opened, are also known, but published here for the record.21 At times it was CIA Headquarters that tempered Station plans, as in late October when a telegram instructed “patience for a few days” but asked for “all info” on activity (doc 36).

The new documents confirm Devlin’s special relationship with Joseph Mobutu, Chief of Staff of the Congolese National Army (Armée Nationale Congolaise, hereafter ANC). During the dramatic events of September 12-15, the CIA cryptically reported it was “continuing press the operation even though it realized that [name not declassified] bungling of the coup...had greatly limited the chances the operation would succeed” (doc 19). Devlin raised further questions of CIA involvement with his mid-September on-the-spot guarantee, far exceeding his authority, that the United States would recognize a “temporary government” installed by a military coup.22 In the end, the CIA assured Mobutu of funds to control the army and convinced him to remain “a ‘strong man’ behind the government” (doc 37). Let others “take [an] open stand” against Lumumba, the CIA advised, so Mobutu could protect his political reputation. For now Kasavubu as President preserved “some form constitutionality” (doc 40), although the CIA kept him at arm’s length. In a rare reference to a Belgian counterpart, an editorial note reported on a meeting in early October between the U.S. ambassador and Kasavubu’s Belgian advisor Georges Denis who admitted that although there once was talk of removing Mobutu or reducing his authority, such an act would now be “dangerous” (doc 31).

At another level, FRUS Volume XXIII reveals the deep conflicts between the CIA’s clandestine activity and the official U.S. support of the UN operation in Congo. In early November Devlin warned Washington that the United States was being outmaneuvered by the United Nations, especially by Hammarskjold’s representative Rajeshwar Dayal who wanted to disarm the ANC. Devlin warned that without Mobutu in charge of the ANC the United States would lose “its primary weapon” against the Lumumbists (doc 40). Mobutu, with help from the CIA and the Belgian Sûreté, had arrested Lumumba on December 1, 1960, and then promised to pay the ANC a bonus (or “special indemnity”, doc 63). Without the bonus Mobutu could not depend on the loyalty of the troops and he constantly asked for money to pay the ANC. Soviet intervention played into his hands, and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev made it known in early January that he was considering greater aid for Lumumbist opposition led by Antoine Gizenga. On December 31 CIA Headquarters authorized the Station to advise the Congolese they were “prepared in principle to support financially” Mobutu and his efforts to “topple [the] Gizenga regime” (doc 53) but asked there be no bloodshed and no links to a U.S. connection. No one in the administration believed the funds would result in a “good solution” but at least they might prevent disaster (doc 55).

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20 Senate Select Committee, Alleged Assassination Plots, 15 quoted the “necessity for very straightforward action,” https://archive.org/stream/allegedassassina00unit/allegedassassina00unit_djvu.txt.

21 Senate Select committee, Alleged Assassination Plots, 32.

They did not. In what seemed an abrupt shift, but maybe a reflection of the new demands from Washington to move against Gizenga, Mobutu publicly promised to raise the pay for the ANC. According to the State Department, Mobutu’s announcement had now “thrown” the matter “in the open” and required a “high policy” review (doc 57). In the meantime, the Africa Division instructed the CIA that under “no circumstances” should they “indicate that assistance might be forthcoming” (doc 58). That very same day Devlin learned of plans to transfer Lumumba to Bakwanga and he did nothing, his silence serving as a sanction of murder as Stephen Weissman has aptly pointed out. Three days later, January 17, Devlin sent a short cable message to Headquarters with news that the transfer had taken place that day, the belated message guaranteeing that no one could stop it (doc 59). Devlin has fiercely defended his actions and claimed not to have known enough of the details to pass along earlier to CIA Headquarters. Yet at least since January 4, according to historian Ludo DeWitte, Mobutu’s Belgian advisor Col. Louis Marlière and an intelligence officer named Andre Lahaye had agreed that Lumumba should be transferred out of Thysville and had opened talks with Katanga leader Moise Tshombe designed to have him agree to accept Lumumba in Katanga. What Devlin knew and when he knew it could very well be tied up in records on U.S.-Belgian relations or even in Belgian archives that await declassification.

After Lumumba’s murder, the CIA quickly convinced President John F. Kennedy to support its political action campaign in the Congo (doc 67, 69). The focus fell on efforts to create a pro-western government and shut out communist influence. In June 1961 Congolese politicians assembled at Lovanium to devise a new constitution and select a new prime minister. Western hopes quickly settled on Cyrille Adoula as the best candidate. Confirmed in Volume XXIII and first discovered by historian Richard Mahoney, the CIA distributed wads of cash to any candidates who would support the interests of the United States (doc 82). Adoula won the top job, allowing CIA to boast of its success, but the Congolese claim a late night deal secured the outcome. More funds were approved in November for covert action to support Adoula (doc 100). Still, the Station downplayed expectations, warning that a year after independence the ANC remained an “armed mob,” that administrative machinery was broken, and that unemployment was “massive” (doc 101) Efforts to reunite Katanga had repeatedly failed. And although specific Soviet aid was not a serious problem, Gizenga still solicited greater Soviet bloc support (doc 113) keeping open the possibility of a renewed Cold War in the Congo.

In the meantime Mobutu kept asking for money. And more money. And the golden goose kept laying its golden eggs. Sometimes the justifications for this cash can only be called foolish. In November 1961 (doc


24 Devlin, Chief of Station, Congo, 128-131.


Mobutu requested money to replace funds given him by Tshombe (which he spent on “smaller” ANC expenses “not approved” in the budget). He did not want to be accused of pocketing the cash, he explained, and so needed to replenish the accounts. Mobutu also complained to Devlin that official U.S. support of ONUC worked against his (and moderate) interests in Congo and insisted that unilateral aid would better help him fight extremists (doc 103). Soon however, he tempered his criticism with a focus on ONUC’s failure to reintegrate Katanga (doc 112).

Throughout 1962 the CIA Station forwarded requests for more money to Headquarters. The “unorthodox funding methods” and “buying votes”, the Station promised, were not a permanent solution, but it was not easy to get things done in Congo (doc 117). Yet the political action program to create a national political party repeatedly produced little-to-no results. Perhaps more to reassure Washington, after almost three years in the Congo, the CIA cited the support of an “unofficial grouping” known as the Customary Tribal Chiefs that brought Adoula “a certain degree of political support” (doc 138). As Adoula’s power continued to teeter on the brink, Devlin pushed for “unilateral U.S. aid to the Congo under a U.N. umbrella” (doc 119). Devlin was at least partially successful and pushed forward CIA air support for the security of the Congolese government. The Special Group approved the training of pilots for 5 or 6 T-6 trainer aircraft but their flights were limited to the Leopoldville area, meaning they could not fly missions into Kasai or other areas of unrest. The documents refer to the pilots as “refugee” pilots, but nowhere mentions Cubans even though the pilots’ origins are a well-known secret (doc 124, 127).

The rest of the FRUS volume takes a more traditional approach to presenting documents on the Johnson administration. By the end of 1963 unrest was again brewing in Kasai and Orientale. The basic problem of how to “re-train” the ANC remained (doc 159). The Station struggled for ways to jump-start Adoula’s party, now renamed RADECO (Rassemblement des Démocrates Congolais). By mid-1964 RADECO “had barely gotten off the ground” (doc 167) and later that year collapsed in a battle over leadership (doc 194). Adoula struggled to keep the group together after Tshombe ousted him to become Prime Minister (doc 240). Concerns were growing, as well, that Belgium gave too much support to the more conservative Jerome Anany, thereby “cancelling” out US efforts (doc 150) to find a more stable solution.

In 1964 insurgency spread throughout eastern Congo. The rebels took aid from China and the Soviet Union and began to “open the way to Communist penetration of Congo” (doc 208). Documents show a renewed sense of danger and crisis brewing. The CIA warned that the central Congolese government was in “continued disintegration,” was “approaching evaporation” and likely to “fall,” while the ANC was “totally ineffective and unreliable” and “without leadership” (doc 219). In August the rebels further pushed their advantage by seizing hostages and hoping to use them as weapons in negotiations. In response, the United States and Belgium planned a joint rescue operation called Dragon Rouge.

Documents detail the decision-making for what was advertised as a humanitarian rescue but had the goal of defeating the rebels once and for all. While most of the planning was left to the Belgians, the two countries agreed to share “equal responsibility” (doc 351). President Lyndon B. Johnson had final say on a launch decision but he and his advisors were agreed that if the Belgians requested a launch, “we should go ahead”. So when the time came on November 23, Johnson really did not have “any choice” (doc 352), as he himself recognized. We learn from the documents that Belgian Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak wanted Dragon Rouge to enter Stanleyville in conjunction with the column of mercenaries led by Belgian Colonel Frédéric Vandewalle, and the CIA for the best “chance of survival” (doc 351) of the hostages.
Johnson reluctantly supported a similar mission to Paulis but declined two others for fear they would get the United States “tied in on” the Congo (doc 359). Mobutu’s mopping-up operations, which are known for their atrocities, swept the area instead.

After Dragon Rouge, the CIA played a key role in balancing the Kasavubu-Tshombe relationship (doc 386, 405). The CIA also continued its air support and in the spring of 1965 added maritime capabilities to help end rebel activity in the area of Lake Tanganyika. Although documents mention Soviet and Chinese support for the rebels and the Cuban guerrilla-training program (doc 431), the volume contains no reference to Che Guevara who arrived in Congo in April 1965 to train revolutionaries, nor does it make any reference to Laurent Kabila, a leading member of the Lumumbist opposition who in 1965 set up a base in Tanzania. It seems when Devlin returned to Congo in July 1965 he gave Mobutu a renewed sense of audacity. With an election pending, Devlin reported that Kasavubu was unlikely to win the vote (doc 451 fn2). As of November 1965 documents trace the growing consensus among top officials that Mobutu could be used to “force a compromise” although this would require more “baksheesh” in the words of NSC member Robert Komer (using a Persian word referring to gratuity, doc 447). An option, the NSC noted, was to back Mobutu in a coup (doc 449). Although again the volume does not include direct links to the coup, it came as no surprise that Mobutu seized power on 25 November 1965.

After Mobutu took control, the CIA continued its support until more formal aid programs were put in place. In fact there was little need for the political action program that had struggled for so long and it was finally ended on 30 June 1966. The combat air support for the Congolese government continued although a phase-out started in 1967 (doc 497). Still, after seven years, Mobutu had clearly become “accustomed” and even “dependent” on informal channels of U.S. aid (doc 498), and, advisors warned, any abrupt shift would be interpreted negatively. Although aid channels would eventually be normalized, not much would change in the overall character of U.S. relations with Mobutu for the next thirty years.

Although the CIA repeatedly claimed success for its covert action in Congo, it was perhaps ironically its failure, and the personal influence of Lawrence Devlin, that best accounts for Mobutu’s rise. While Eisenhower declared to the world that the United States would not intervene in the Congo’s domestic affairs, the CIA did exactly that. U.S. money was blatantly used to buy support and did almost nothing to foster political stability. While Soviet influence was shut out of the Congo, for the next thirty years the United States would find itself trapped in the cycle of bribery and corruption it had started so long ago.


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