Kennedy Shows Ability; Steps Into Congo Crisis

By EUGENE KEILIN

The growing crisis in the Congo has forced the first major foreign policy decision upon the new Administration. The problem revolves around the three separate centers of political power in the Congo: western-backed (but pro-unilaterally pro-western) Congolese President Kasavubu and Major General Mobutu, pro-Communist Antoine Gizenga, and enigmatic Katanga Premier Moise Tshombe.

Tshombe is equally critical of the US and Russia; he commands one of Africa’s most prosperous economies and best-trained armies, both advised and staffed by Belgium technicians. Gizenga is not the colorful, commanding figure that Lumumba was; he has been faced with mutiny and unrest among his own followers.

KASAVUBU AND Mobutu are unable—perhaps unwilling—to restore territorial control, to establish a stable, unified government. A proposal for a coalition government died on the drawing board with the death of ex-Premier Lumumba.

Reaction to the announcement of Lumumba’s death was less violent in the Congo than had been predicted, perhaps because such an announcement was expected there. But the news brought to a head the crisis that had been building at the UN.

The necessity for some kind of immediate action destroyed the temporary moratorium President Kennedy had hoped to impose on major foreign policy decisions until he could activate the machinery of “quiet diplomacy.” The President discovered that his ambitions and US actions are bounded by the realities of the decisions and activities of other nations and other men.

ONE OF THE realities he must face is the powerful pressure exerted by African nationalism. Most African politicians flatly refuse even the suggestion of unilateral intervention in African affairs and give only grudging acceptance to UN participation.

The second reality is the recognition that the US must either make events or be swept up in the events made by others. For too long American foreign policy has been a series of reactions to battles lost unforth and counter-attacks against Russian strategic and propaganda strongholds already established.

The new President realized that Soviet Premier Khruschev finds Congolese anarchy and UN embarrassment an enticing prospect. Before the Soviet threat could get off the ground, Kennedy and UN Ambassador Stevenson announced that unilateral intervention in the Congo would meet American resistance.

Thus most of the world’s people were informed that Soviet intervention would mean war. The US affirmed its support of the UN and placed itself in the enviable position of defending the smaller nations eager to preserve their own sovereignty.

THE US CONSIDERS the UN the only effective means of arbitrating the Congolese political disagreements and preventing civil war. By supporting the UN and opposing Soviet interference, Kennedy is making progress in removing the stigma of colonialism attached to the US by her close relations with such colonial powers as Britain, France, and Belgium.

In addition, he shifts this stigma to the countries of the Communist bloc as he spotlights Soviet activities aimed at intervention. The Afro-Asian resolution which this week gave the UN a vote of confidence (along with India’s unexpected support of the UN position) is evidence that the neutral nations are picking up the President’s challenge to see their self-interest in a vigorous UN.

IF ARMED intervention becomes necessary, the strategic advantage lies with the West; Russia would find it far more difficult to supply a Communist army in the Congo than would (Continued on Page 6)
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western powers supporting the government.

Kennedy has thus warned the Soviets in advance of the consequences of their actions, having assured himself of the defensibility of his position. The President’s actions seem to indicate that he realizes “the cold war must be either fought or lost.”