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NIE 65-70
22 July 1970

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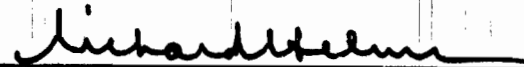
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The Outlook for the Congo

Submitted by



DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

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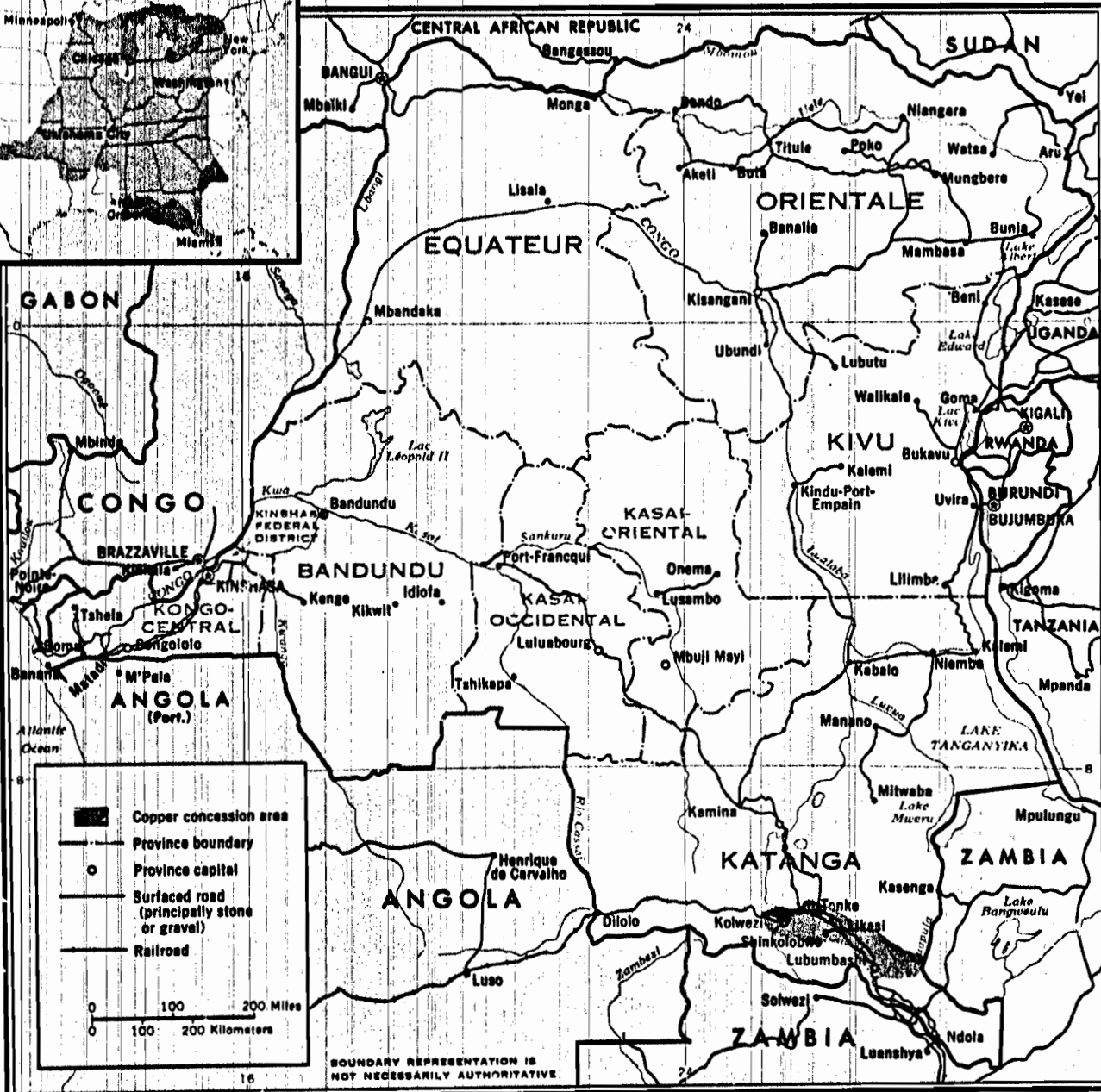
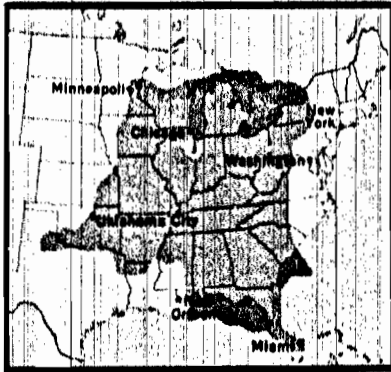
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Democratic Republic of the Congo



Legend

- Copper concession area
- Province boundary
- Province capital
- Surfaced road (principally stone or gravel)
- Railroad

Scale

0 100 200 Miles
 0 100 200 Kilometers

BOUNDARY REPRESENTATION IS NOT NECESSARILY AUTHORITY.

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THE OUTLOOK FOR THE CONGO

NOTE

Congolese internal affairs appear on the surface at least to be tranquil, almost humdrum. This is remarkable, considering the prolonged turmoil and violence of the first half decade of Congolese independence. In those years, the US became deeply involved in preserving central authority against challenges from Communist-armed rebels, unruly mercenaries, Katangan secessionists, and other provincial and tribal factions. US assistance given directly to the Congo or through UN peacekeeping agencies has amounted to over a half billion dollars.

It is the purpose of this estimate to examine anew the political and economic bases of the Congolese state, and to determine how much confidence can be placed in its weak institutions over the next two to three years.

The principal conclusions are in the last three paragraphs.

THE ESTIMATE

I. TRANQUILITY ON THE SURFACE

1. President Mobutu seized power in Congo (Kinshasa) in November 1965, marking the end of the most chaotic phase of that country's troubled history. Ever since independence from Belgium in 1960, a series of army mutinies, secessions, and violent xenophobic outbursts—primarily directed at the Belgians—had kept the Congo in a state of anarchy. Tens of thousands of Belgian functionaries fled the country, leaving the ill-prepared Congolese administration in utter disorder. Some outsiders, including the Soviets and Communist Chinese, provided support to some of the rebellious groups; others, behind the UN, stepped in to provide a semblance of order. In the process, the Congo became an example to the world of everything that could go wrong in a newly independent country.

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2. Much of the credit for the Congo's recovery and relative stability in recent years is due to Mobutu. He has managed to concentrate authority in his own hands and remove from power everyone who could have posed a threat to his control. His main power base, the Congolese National Army (ANC), is apparently loyal to him, and Mobutu has built a personal political party, the Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution (MPR), in an effort to create some semblance of popular support nation-wide. The MPR has failed to arouse much grass-roots enthusiasm for Mobutu, but it does provide a mechanism for patronage and for managing the elections in the fall of 1970. It also helps to occupy otherwise unemployed or dissident politicians and provides some feedback for popular opinion.

3. Presidential and parliamentary elections are scheduled for November and December 1970, respectively. As the sole candidate for president, Mobutu is assured of election. All candidates for parliament are MPR members, and the reconvened parliament will be tightly controlled by the president, through the MPR. Mobutu will continue to monopolize authority, and parliament will be confined to little more than rubber-stamping his decisions. Its election, however, will represent a tentative step towards the development of national political institutions and the provision of an outlet for regional grievances and political energies.

4. The improvement in public order over the last few years has permitted the economy to recover somewhat and encouraged the return of foreigners, mainly Belgians. These outsiders are needed to fill almost all the managerial posts in industry and commerce, advise the government, train the armed forces, and run the Congolese schools. The nationalized copper industry, buoyed by the high world price, is yielding greater revenues than expected. This has improved the Congo's foreign exchange position, added greatly to its fiscal revenues, and enabled the government to spend roughly \$400 million a year.

II. SOME PROBLEM AREAS

5. Beneath the surface, however, many serious problems remain. In the first place, the Congolese Government is basically a one man show. There are functional ministries, a civil service, and an expanding party apparatus. But none of these are efficient, and most are corrupt. In general, the political institutions have shallow roots and currently operate as little more than palace appendages. Mobutu's advisors, including the cabinet, are politically unimportant technocrats who owe their position to the president and are not inclined to make waves. While all this accords with Mobutu's style and ensures a sole source of authority, it is a very vulnerable system in that Mobutu's sudden departure from the national scene would leave a serious political void.

6. Mobutu personally has a lot going for him—political know-how, a talent for balancing tribal interests, considerable practicality, and courage—but he also has some significant weaknesses. He can only focus on one problem at a time, tends to immerse himself in minutiae, and wears himself out periodically.

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His need to be in control coupled with his fear and suspicion of competitors makes him unable to delegate authority, especially under stress. Mobutu has his share of vanity and is fond of spending money on prestige projects—such as costly monuments and palaces—that drain away a good part of the Congo's copper revenue. Moreover, Mobutu personally disposes of perhaps \$50 million a year of unaccountable government funds. Admittedly, as an important chief, Mobutu is expected to dole out large gifts if he is to command respect. Some of this money ends up supplementing military salaries, funding MPR activities, or backing worthwhile projects which would otherwise be buried in the bureaucratic morass. But altogether this spending is on a scale that contributes heavily to the growing inflation and could threaten the Congo's financial stability.

7. The ANC is both the main prop of the regime and the greatest threat to public order. It holds a virtual monopoly of coercive power in the Congo, but, though there has been some improvement in the past few years, it remains poorly trained, relatively undisciplined, and militarily unreliable. Soldiers still occasionally beat and rob the populace; many of the officers line their pockets by organizing rackets. There has been at least one incident when soldiers, angry at delays in being paid, attacked local MPR representatives who seemed to be better cared for by the central government.

8. Despite its deficiencies, the ANC manages to keep the provinces under a rough kind of control and does cope with occasional forays by rebel bands in the eastern Congo. Moreover, the army leadership appears reasonably loyal to Mobutu. The top positions in the ANC are largely filled with his long-time associates, and Mobutu has made some effort to maintain contact with many of the younger officers. There is considerable discontent among junior officers with their relatively uneducated superiors, but little evidence of conspiratorial organization. Mobutu is careful to make sure that military pay scales keep pace with rising prices and is willing to acquiesce in low-level graft. He also manages to provide the ANC with modern equipment and has authorized its expansion from its present 44,000 to a total of 50,000 over the next few years. According to Mobutu, this buildup, which is focused on "elite" paracommando units, is necessary to guard against outside aggression and to discourage opponents of his regime. He probably also believes it will add to the Congo's prestige internationally.

9. While probably helpful in keeping the military busy and contented, this expansion will amount to a further drain on the Congolese budget. The ANC is already the second largest army in black Africa and appears more than adequate in numbers to handle any likely internal and external threats. Instead, its very size may tempt Mobutu or his successor to indulge in moves against obstreperous neighbors. Current plans call for more centralized control and management, but increases in size would be likely to lead to more unwieldiness because of increased logistical problems, poor leadership, lack of expertise in technical and administrative staffs, and inadequate training. In the longer run,

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Mobutu's plan to increase it to about 75,000 in 10 years will only add to difficulties and would heighten the chances of politically oriented cliques forming within the military.

10. The Pax Mobutu has provided at least a minimum of security throughout the Congo and some economic restoration in the capital, in Katanga, and in a few other places. In most of the country, however, particularly in the potentially productive areas of the north and northeast, the destruction and misuse of the economic infrastructure in the early 1960s has left a monumental problem. Throughout much of the Congo, roads are in serious disrepair, rivers are silted, bridges are out, and most river and rail transport has deteriorated through administrative disorder and inadequate or non-existent maintenance. All this has led to agricultural stagnation, high food prices in the larger cities, and a countryside largely out of touch with its regional government, to say nothing of Kinshasa. Yet the political consequences to the Congolese Government in the short-term are probably not great. Most of the rural populace are apathetic and wary of any repetition of the civil strife that plagued the Congo in the immediate post-independence years. There is no political nucleus around which grievances can be crystallized or active opposition to the regime stimulated.

11. A more immediate political problem for the regime is the popular discontent in the cities. Most grievances stem from a generalized feeling that pre-independence expectations have not been achieved. The Congolese tend to accept, in part, stories that foreign machinations were responsible for the unfulfilled promises, but there is also a strong feeling that their own leaders have been indifferent, stupid, and venal. Mobutu is primarily concerned with popular attitudes in Kinshasa and tends to neglect the other cities. At the moment, Kinshasa is a boom town. Jobs in construction are plentiful and food is available, though expensive. Several rounds of wage increases have softened the impact of steadily rising prices. Should economic conditions deteriorate seriously in the capital, however, the political impact on the regime could be damaging.

12. In any foreseeable urban crisis, chronically disaffected university students would probably take the lead. In mid-1969, a group of radical students tried to kindle a general uprising of workers in Kinshasa—but were thwarted by the apathy of the people and the force of the ANC. In the future, more sophisticated leftists might be able to mold urban and student discontent into a serious leftist movement. By themselves, however, radical students will probably not pose a major threat to the government.

13. The main threat to Mobutu's regime, apart from the possibility of assassination, is likely to come from within the ANC—especially as time goes on. Junior officers will almost certainly remain restless and may be further irritated, along with others, if the MPR gains in importance. Mobutu will try to reduce the danger by continuing to give favored treatment to the ANC and by maneuvering to prevent organized opposition within it. Should he be removed from office, the civil service would provide some continuity and might have a bigger role

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in running the country. But the military would have the deciding voice in choosing the next president. There is no obvious choice to replace Mobutu, and his removal would lead to considerable political confusion. If army officers were unable to agree on a successor, it might also lead to armed conflict.

14. For all its weaknesses, the Congo might weather the test of Mobutu's sudden departure. Over the past decade, the Kinshasa Government has acquired its own style—reflecting Congolese rather than Western values—that would help sustain public order and possibly an on-going administration during periods of political uncertainty. These emerging stabilizing factors, however, will not in themselves ensure a successful transition to post-Mobutu politics or freedom from internal upheavals.

III. MOBUTU'S FOREIGN POLICY

15. Despite the serious domestic problems that remain in the Congo, Mobutu is often diverted to involvement in the internal affairs of neighboring countries. His concern stems partly from his belief that Congo (Kinshasa) as the dominant state in Central Africa should have a voice in what goes on in the whole area. More important, Mobutu sees the Congo as virtually surrounded by radical nations, some under Chinese Communist influence. He tends to exaggerate this threat. Doubtless the Chinese and some of Mobutu's neighbors would be happy to see Mobutu replaced by someone not so closely aligned with the West, but there is no evidence of serious outside plotting by Communist China or any other government to overthrow him.

13. Nevertheless, Mobutu—acutely aware of Egyptian, Soviet, and Communist Chinese support of dissident Congolese elements in the past—has asked Uganda, Sudan, and Burundi to repatriate Congolese political refugees. He has had some success in this, as opposed to his inept attempts to unseat the Nguabi regime in Congo (Brazzaville). The cordiality of the recent "summit meeting" of Central African chiefs of state in Kinshasa is not indicative of a major shift in Mobutu's policies. We think he will continue to build up his military and clandestine capability to try to influence his neighbors.

17. At the same time, Mobutu occasionally reveals aspirations to play the role of an African statesman. His prestige, however, derives mainly from being chief of Central Africa's largest and richest country. Somewhat paternally, he even gives aid to a few of the poorer central African countries: military training for the Chadian Army and budgetary supplements for Burundi. The earlier suspicions of some African leaders that Mobutu was too pro-Western and not sufficiently "African" in outlook have been somewhat allayed in recent years. But his own ambitions and the Congo's power—actual and potential—are still alarming to some of his neighbors.

18. Mobutu expects that the US will continue to provide some military vehicles, communications equipment, and transport aircraft for the Congolese

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Armed Forces.¹ He assumes that the US will be responsive to his analysis of the "Communist threat," even though US officials have played it down. He would, therefore, be surprised if the US were to turn down his military requests. Mobutu has always looked upon us as his major foreign backer and often speaks of the special relationship between the US and the Congo. He would undoubtedly turn to alternate sources of supply, most probably France and Italy.

19. Although Mobutu is happy to accept French military equipment, administrative and technical assistance, and guidance for his growing radio and television systems, he will probably remain suspicious of French intentions. He is likely, however, to find ways to take advantage of France's interest in expanding its presence in the Congo. He hopes to diversify foreign investment in the Congo and would be receptive to French commercial overtures. He will probably encourage the French, therefore, despite lingering memory of French involvement in the Katanga secession and subsequent mercenary activities.

20. Relations with Belgium are particularly important for the Congo. Some 40,000 Belgians are now in the Congo as compared to around 90,000 in 1959; they remain indispensable for the continued functioning of key industries, utilities, and educational institutions. Many still have the "colonial mentality" that so frustrates the Congolese, but the Belgians and Congolese remain useful to each other. Most Belgian businessmen are interested primarily in short-term profits, and a number of Belgian middlemen have been caught in shady business practices that tend to confirm Congolese suspicions of foreign trickery in economic activities. Despite the heritage of bitterness and complaint, however, relations with Belgium are fairly good and may improve further.

21. We expect Mobutu to continue to deal pragmatically with the white regimes of southern Africa—despite the objections of Zambia and Tanzania. Commercial relations with South Africa are not deterred by Congolese distaste for apartheid, and the Congolese continue to import Rhodesian coal and food despite UN sanctions. Mobutu opportunistically has developed a fairly close relationship with the Portuguese in Angola. He believes that Angola poses less of a threat to Congolese interests than do his other neighbors and realizes that Katanga Province is dependent on the Benguela railroad for essential imports and an important part of copper exports. Recently the Congolese Government has quietly permitted three Portuguese diplomats to conduct consular activities in Kinshasa and has been less cooperative than it used to be with Holden Roberto's Angolan Revolutionary Government in Exile (GRAE).

22. Mobutu's government has been reserved in its dealings with the Soviets. Four low-level Soviet diplomats were recently expelled as a warning against further meddling in Congolese internal affairs. We believe Mobutu will continue to tolerate a limited Soviet presence in Kinshasa, largely because he wants

¹ Official US military assistance to the Congo amounted to \$3.5 million in fiscal year (FY) 1967. It dropped to \$2.5 million in FY 1969 and \$1.8 million in FY 1970. It is projected at \$0.3 million in 1971. No further military assistance is planned; it is to be replaced by a military sales program covering the same commodities.

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to establish non-aligned credentials. But he will react quickly to any new Russian mischief-making and is not likely to seek warmer relations unless the West is totally unresponsive to his requests.

IV. ECONOMIC PROSPECTS

23. In some ways, the Congo's economic prospects look quite good. Monetary and fiscal reforms promulgated in 1967 established order in foreign trade and government finance. A considerable jump in the price of copper has led to record high levels of government receipts and foreign exchange holdings. Following the enactment of a liberal investment code and generous settlement of the dispute over nationalization of the Belgian-owned copper mines, foreign businessmen flocked to Kinshasa to look into the investment situation. Other than the Japanese, however, whose interest in copper predates the 1967 reforms, few have stayed. Prospective investors from the US and Belgium, deterred by the small domestic markets in the Congo, usually express interest only in export-oriented activities. In addition, they are put off by the unpredictability of the ANC, the deterioration of the infrastructure, the venality of Congolese officials, bureaucratic roadblocks, the lack of skilled Congolese technicians, and Mobutu's erratic decision-making in the investment area.

24. The short term outlook for earnings from copper is uncertain. Prices have remained very high in the past few years, and world demand for copper should continue fairly strong over the longer run. The major copper-consuming industries in the developed countries are expected to be among the fastest growing in the 1970s, and new users for copper are likely to contribute to the demand. Consistently high copper prices would provide the Congo with a windfall of money and time—an opportunity to pay government salaries, to buttress the other sectors of the economy, and to strengthen incentives for renewed investment. Thus prospects for political stability, economic development, and foreign investment would be far better if copper prices hold up than if they were to drop substantially. But even so, much depends on how Mobutu chooses to allocate the copper revenues.

25. Another important factor in the Congo's future is the role of the 65,000 or so non-Africans in the country, a role complicated by xenophobia and the Congolese drive for economic independence. These factors and the actions of the Congolese Government affect different segments of this group in different ways. The Congolese Government is encouraging the Congolization of small scale commerce, and, in the fall of 1969, some Asian middlemen, especially in Kivu Province, were expelled. The important Greek, Portuguese, and Jewish commercial communities have so far been left alone. Mobutu has a plan to prevent foreign businessmen from dealing with the Congolese through intermediaries—mostly Belgians. If the scheme is rigorously carried out, many intermediaries would be tempted to close up shop. We do not, however, expect the Congolese Government to drive out major businesses. Small-scale merchants and traders are likely to continue to be subjected to sudden arbitrary decrees and expulsion.

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26. Most Belgians and Americans will probably be spared this kind of harassment, at least as long as the Congolese Government needs economic and military assistance from Brussels and Washington. The US now provides the Congo around \$30 million a year in overall aid and Belgium provides some \$50 million.² In addition the World Bank, following settlement of the copper nationalization in 1969, seems ready to help rebuild the Congolese economic infrastructure. The Congolese Government has by now come to expect a substantial level of foreign aid and would be quite sensitive to any sizeable cutbacks over the next few years.

V. LONGER RANGE PROSPECTS

27. The strength of the Congo today is also its weakness. It is virtually dependent on one man, Mobutu, and one export commodity, copper. Mobutu seems firmly in control at the moment. He has restored a degree of unity and order and given the Congo status in Africa. Under his rule, the Congo has made some progress towards economic recovery, and central institutions are developing which add a measure of stability. We cannot, however, rule out a coalescence of discontented elements against him (some junior officers, radical students, urban unemployed, and farmers unable to market their goods). Especially as the years go on, there will be a tendency to blame all ills on the ubiquitous president. Moreover, should Mobutu be overthrown or die in office, there may be serious difficulties in finding a successor acceptable to the ANC and to the country as a whole. The problem is complicated by Mobutu's unwillingness to delegate authority and his dismissal of even close political allies when he suspects they may have independent ambitions. Still young enough at 39 to expect to be in office many more years, Mobutu apparently makes no provision for succession.

28. High world copper prices have played a prominent role in the recovery of the Congo's economy. At present, copper provides 60 percent of the country's foreign exchange. The price of copper is known for its fluctuation and unpredictability, however, and there is no assurance that it will remain near the level of \$.60 per pound indefinitely. There is a danger that the government could be so seduced by the high world price that it would tend to forecast essential revenue on current prices. So far the Congolese have resisted this temptation. Were copper prices to fall substantially and remain down for some time, the economic repercussions would be severe. The government would be unable to meet its civilian payroll, and even the military would feel the pinch. It is difficult to predict with certainty the level to which copper prices must fall before the government is in trouble, but the eventual political effects of a sustained significant drop would jeopardize the regime.

² This compares with US economic and military aid of \$50 million in FY 1967, \$112 million in 1963, and \$144 million in 1961. In the early 1960s, Belgium supplied \$75 million a year in aid and an additional \$50 million for debts, pensions, and a military advisory group.

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29. Until such time as the Congo reconstructs its internal transportation network, the hinterland will remain largely cut off from Kinshasa and farmers will continue to have difficulty moving their crops. The Congolese Government, in conjunction with the World Bank and the US, is moving forward to implement plans for correcting this problem. The involvement of the World Bank is a hopeful factor, but the task of maintaining the rebuilt roads, bridges, and river routes would remain with the Congolese. Mobutu's natural preferences are to build up his armed forces, alleviate the capital's pressing needs, and strengthen his political party rather than to focus on what he sees as politically less important projects in the rural areas. The government is generally aware of the basic problem of priorities and indeed is likely to commit additional resources to the countryside. Given the magnitude of funds and effort needed for lasting improvement of the infrastructure, such an achievement is years away. In the meantime, the Congo will probably remain divided between a few enclaves of urban prosperity and a stagnating countryside.

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