

A Fine Line: Use of Force, the Cold War, and Canada's Air Support for the UN Organization in the Congo*

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The Congo Crisis of 1960, erupting as it did mere days after that nation's independence and at a time of heightened Cold War tensions, seemed to utterly threaten not only the stability of the new state but also the delicate balance of the East/West rivalry in Africa. For certain, both the West and the Communist bloc were already actively jockeying to garner new friends amongst the decolonized and decolonizing of the continent, but there was considerable fear in the international community that quiet, behind-the-scenes, diplomatic and even covert activity could erupt into open conflict, with the two sides of the ideological divide supporting opposing Congolese political factions. That fear, not at all unreasonable, prompted the international community to respond to the crisis with a UN peacekeeping force – the United Nations Organization in the Congo, but known typically by its French name, the Opération des Nations Unies au Congo (ONUC) – in an attempt both to assist the Congolese government to restore law and order and to insulate the country against outside, direct interference. Assessments of ONUC's success are mixed, but one finding can be made with certainty: the mission severely tested the peacekeeping and financial capacity of the United Nations, especially as it began to exercise an increasing degree of force to carry out its mandate.¹ And, with the Cold War as an ominous backdrop, the implications of a more forceful ONUC were never far from the minds of those engaged in decisions related to the operation.

The use of aircraft in support of UN operations was not new when peacekeepers were deployed to the Congo, but the large scale and the diversity of aircraft used was certainly impressive for the time. In Chapter 2 in this volume, A. Walter Dorn has thoroughly addressed many operational and international aspects of air support in ONUC, while in Chapter 1, William K. Carr provides a detailed review of the mission from his personal experiences in establishing UN air operations. This chapter, by comparison, is focused much more directly on the Canadian political and policy dimensions of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) contributions to ONUC. Canadian foreign policy in the Congo Crisis proved very complex; at various times between 1960 and 1964, the governments of John Diefenbaker and then Lester Pearson were forced to weigh dozens of factors when formulating responses to what proved to be a very fluid and volatile international situation. Still, two significant themes already identified were

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consistently evident and shaped policy options and decisions throughout the period: the underlying impact of the Cold War and the increased level of force exercised by ONUC to fulfill its evolving mandate. To see how these two themes were relevant to the RCAF and ONUC, this chapter examines the political considerations that influenced decisions on the Canadian contribution of North Star aircraft for airlift to the Congo, a Canadian attempt to provide Caribou aircraft to ONUC, and the provision of command personnel for ONUC's air operations. It also reviews Canadian responses to UN requests that arrived at times when conditions in the Congo were particularly troubled or as ONUC contemplated exercising a greater degree of force to address secession in the Congolese province of Katanga.

The North Star Airlift

When the Congo Crisis erupted in July 1960, the international community responded with a surprising degree of alacrity – not at all typical of the diplomatic dithering so often seen in other situations. In Canada, National Defence and External Affairs were equally quick to recognize the United Nations might approach Canada for assistance. Immediately, concern arose over what shape such assistance might take. The existence of a standby battalion, previously earmarked for UN service, raised expectations in the press and parliament that Canadian soldiers might be dispatched. However, the Diefenbaker government recognized the inherent dangers of sending white, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-aligned, combat-ready troops into a Congolese imbroglio that threatened to become a Cold War proxy conflict. At the United Nations, Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld shared these concerns; after a conversation with Hammarskjöld, Canadian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Charles Ritchie advised Ottawa that there was no question of sending a Canadian contingent and certainly not the standby battalion. Instead, External Affairs recommended that Cabinet consider providing food and supplies, and the necessary air transportation, to get these provisions to the Congo. The UN had already informally requested the use of two Canadian aircraft serving in the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), for the purpose of ferrying supplies and personnel to the Congo. The RCAF saw no objection to such service and so it was suggested Canada provide the aircraft if the United Nations formally requested their use.² Subsequently, in the House of Commons, Prime Minister Diefenbaker announced that Canada would respond favourably to UN requests for technical advisors, food, or transportation. These were recognized as “the most useful contribution” Canada could make.³

By 21 July, the Canadian Cabinet had agreed to provide the United Nations with North Stars⁴ and crew to airlift supplies from Pisa, Italy, to the Congo. Pisa had been designated a staging area for the gathering of material in support of ONUC and the four Canadian aircraft were already in the area, having just delivered Canada's gift of food to the Congo. The United Nations proposed the airlift be shared between Italy and Canada, in a 30-day arrangement that would see costs of the operation reimbursed by the United Nations. The Canadian Assistant

Trade Commissioner in Leopoldville also wired Ottawa, requesting the government consider authorizing the aircraft to land at points within the Congo, in addition to Leopoldville.⁵

The North Stars quickly became the object of controversy, related directly to the government's concern that Canada's ONUC contribution be perceived entirely as non-combat and neutral. Cabinet understood the planes would be used only to transport supplies and equipment, to and within the Congo. Then Hammarskjöld approached Ritchie with a request to use the planes to transport troops from the capital, Leopoldville, to secessionist Katanga, in advance of a planned withdrawal of Belgian armed forces. Keen to maintain the appearance of neutrality, or at least objectivity, the government was not eager to facilitate a plan that directly involved its NATO ally, particularly if this involved shifting troops to Katanga. Prime Minister Diefenbaker turned down the request. Secretary of State for External Affairs Howard Green was notified and Ritchie in New York was told to make this policy clear to the UN Secretariat.⁶

There was considerable concern in Ottawa when it was learned the planes had already been used to transport forces to numerous locations within the Congo, facilitating the withdrawal of Belgian paratroopers. UN officials had urged the senior RCAF officer in the Congo to contact Air Transport Command Headquarters in Trenton to obtain permission to use the Canadian aircraft to deploy Moroccan and Tunisian troops.⁷ In New York, Hammarskjöld's Executive Assistant assured Ritchie the whole incident had been a "crash operation". Nevertheless, the Canadian Representative asked that the planes be used only for purposes explicitly identified by Ottawa and insisted that all future requests of a *political* nature be forwarded through the Permanent Mission.⁸ This position was reinforced after ministerial consultations between Howard Green and George Pearkes at National Defence. External Affairs and Department of National Defence (DND) officials were told to restrict use of the aircraft to the transport of supplies and equipment from Pisa to Leopoldville; more to the point, they were advised, "The use of these aircraft for the transportation of troops is not authorized by Cabinet and is to cease forthwith". Pearkes exactly interpreted these instructions, suggesting they even prohibited the return transportation of anything from Leopoldville back to Pisa. Noting the United Nations was to reimburse Canada for the airlift costs, officials at External Affairs were concerned the instructions were too restrictive and, after other nations came forward to provide internal airlift, lobbied to ease conditions. The entire episode demonstrated the government's determination to participate in ONUC only in a non-combat capacity; any use of the North Stars that even appeared to compromise this principle was quickly curtailed.⁹

The aircraft had first arrived in Leopoldville with their cargo of food aid on 21 July, and within three days, more than 60 crewmembers had arrived, filling every bed in the official residence of the Canadian Trade Commissioner and of a local company's guesthouse. Once the Diefenbaker government committed to send personnel from the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals to provide communications for ONUC – another significant Canadian contribution that lasted throughout the peacekeeping mission – the North Stars were reassigned to transport the men and equipment. From Trenton, they embarked on a 40-hr, 6,320-mi trip to the Congo, with stops in Gander, Lajes, Dakar, and Accra.¹⁰ They were assisted by the United States Air Force (USAF) which used C-124 Globemasters to transport vehicles and equipment too heavy for RCAF aircraft; in addition, the USAF flew 117 peacekeepers to the Congo. As historian J.L.

Granatstein has observed, the Canadian military's reliance on US planes, in this instance, serves as a stark reminder that peacekeeping was not as "independent" as it was often assumed to be.¹¹

The RCAF initially envisaged their contribution to ONUC as an Air Transport Unit (ATU) consisting of two key elements:

four Caribou aircraft to be employed in support of Canadian forces, and the routine North Star airlift between Pisa and Leopoldville. The latter was considered a temporary commitment, initially undertaken for 30 days, while the Caribou were seen as the key long-term commitment. Ironically, as we will see, the Caribou portion of the ATU never materialized for political reasons; on the other hand, the arrangements governing the "temporary" North Star airlift were repeatedly renewed every 90 days in the months and years ahead.¹²

Decisions to renew the Pisa–Leopoldville airlift, however, were by no means automatic. As early as October 1960, Douglas Harkness – who had replaced Pearkes as Minister of National Defence – was already keen to review the RCAF commitment. Following the initial deployment, Ottawa had agreed to the first UN request for a 90-day extension of RCAF participation in the airlift. Flights in support of the Canadian contingent had simply been integrated into this airlift. The agreement with the United Nations was scheduled to expire on 9 December. While Green at External considered the airlift a means to assist the United Nations without further "commitment of Canadian personnel and equipment in the Congo itself", Harkness at Defence was not entirely convinced. The Chief of the Air Staff inquired at the United Nations whether it was possible to reduce the airlift by transporting more supplies by sea. The Secretariat quickly responded with an urgent request to continue the existing airlift, with an assurance that a "constant check" would be maintained to determine if or when it would be possible to reduce or discontinue flights. Given the limited transportation infrastructure throughout the Congo, air support was considered especially critical. In late November Green reminded Harkness that a decision was required and the airlift agreement was extended for another 90 days.¹³

For the next two years, extensions of the airlift became routine, with mutual agreement from both External Affairs and National Defence, partly because the government was reluctant to curtail an essential form of logistical support for the peacekeeping mission. Indeed, it feared ending the airlift might suggest a "declining interest" in ONUC or intent to "scale down Canadian participation in the Force" at a time when Congolese political conditions were still unsettled.¹⁴

Then, in July 1962, there was a significant about-face. Just the month before, the government had agreed to yet another 90-day extension. Now, National Defence told External Affairs the agreement would not be renewed again in September. The Diefenbaker government was confronting serious economic difficulties that had already led to the devaluation of the Canadian dollar in May; after a subsequent currency exchange crisis in June, Cabinet approved emergency measures, including significant reductions in government spending. National Defence justified its decision to end the airlift on the grounds that the government's austerity measures required the review of "all extraneous commitments in order to effect every economy possible". The airlift was to be replaced with bimonthly, non-stop Yukon flights in direct

support of Canadian peacekeepers in the Congo. An important Canadian contribution to the UN operation was about to come to an end.¹⁵

The political implications of this decision were immediately apparent to External Affairs, where officials acted quickly to get the decision reversed. They questioned National Defence's argument that canceling the airlift would result in financial savings for the government as a whole, given most of the expenses involved were recoverable from the United Nations. Officials further argued that:

[t]he announcement that Canada is curtailing its assistance to ONUC at such a critical juncture in the Congo would throw unfavourable light on the Canadian attitude toward the UN without bringing us any substantial advantage in terms of the austerity programme.¹⁶

Howard Green instructed his Under-Secretary, Norman Robertson, to discuss the matter with the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff, Air Marshal Frank R. Miller.

At National Defence, they believed ending the airlift was an administrative decision, so there was utter dismay when External expressed its intention to raise the matter in Cabinet, if Defence proceeded with its plans. Air Marshal Miller wrote to the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshall Hugh Campbell, noting, "It is apparent that if we are to get approval on this we will be up against [External] Affairs in Cabinet". He asked, "Have we got enough ammunition to win?" National Defence persevered, maneuvering to resolve the matter at the administrative level. In mid-August, Air Commodore (A/C) Leonard Birchall simply told the Defence Liaison Division at External that 426 Transport Squadron had been disbanded as part of the government's austerity program; the RCAF just did not have the aircraft to continue the Congo airlift. With a looming September deadline approaching, Birchall advised notifying the United Nations so it could make alternate arrangements because there was no longer enough time to arrange for the flights to be resumed, even if Cabinet did consider the issue. The Chairman, Chiefs of Staff, later suggested there might be some flexibility with the September date but reaffirmed it was best to "notify the UN as requested and reconsider the matter when the inevitable 'protest' follows". At this point, Howard Green actually appealed to the Prime Minister to see if Diefenbaker would ask Harkness to reconsider. Diefenbaker said he would not object if Green asked Harkness to review the decision, but he would not direct the Minister of National Defence to alter it. Ultimately, Green chose not to make any further representations to Harkness.¹⁷ The recurring North Star airlift commitment did indeed come to an end in the fall of 1962.

Caribou Aircraft

In the early days of the crisis, as Canada considered and dispatched assistance to ONUC, the Diefenbaker government found itself in a difficult position because of its commitment to send four Caribou aircraft to support Canadian peacekeepers serving in the Congo. On 1 August 1960 the government announced in the House of Commons its intention to purchase these planes from the de Havilland Aircraft Company. Because of their ability to take off and land within short distances, they were considered ideally suited to conditions in the Congo. Arrangements to purchase the aircraft were quickly completed, with delivery of the first operational aircraft by 15 August. Air and ground crews would be trained by the time the aircraft arrived.

Once all the Canadian forces, mostly signallers, were airlifted to the Congo and the North Stars had returned to duties on the Pisa–Leopoldville external airlift, the new Caribou were expected to provide internal air support for the Canadian forces. After the needs of Canadian forces were met, the planes would be made available for other UN duties. Officials at External, however, expected it to be difficult to persuade the United Nations to accept the Caribous if they were to be used in direct support of Canadian peacekeepers but not placed under the operational control of ONUC's Commander. Such an interpretation of the Caribous' role would have required the Canadian government to negotiate a direct bilateral agreement with the Congo government, something considered politically impractical. Minister Pearkes believed a compromise was possible: the RCAF Caribou unit could be placed under the operational control of the UN Commander, with priority given to Canadian force requirements.¹⁸

By mid-September, the Caribou problem was still not resolved; it actually became more complicated. When Canadian officials offered the Caribou to the United Nations, the Secretary-General was neither in New York nor Leopoldville. His official representative in the Congo, Ralph Bunche, initially reacted favourably, given the UN's very real need for air transport. Subsequently, Hammarskjöld made it clear that he considered it politically inadvisable to increase the number of Canadians serving in ONUC. In Leopoldville, Bunche was contacted by the Secretariat to clarify this difference in opinion. He confirmed the practical advantages of the Canadian offer but added that ONUC's Supreme Commander, General Carl von Horn, rejected the Canadian proposal that the Caribou be used primarily to support the Canadian Signals Unit or that priority should be given to their requirements. Von Horn wanted the Caribou assigned to the ONUC Air Transport Unit, under his command. In the end, Bunche said he "understood" Hammarskjöld's view of the political implications of accepting the Caribou. In effect, the United Nations had decided not to accept Canada's offer and the Permanent Mission concluded only a direct approach to the Secretary-General might reverse this position. Stories of a "mixup" began to appear in the Canadian press. One report, while noting that no one was willing to make an official comment on the situation, surmised that the government had ordered the aircraft before finding out if the United Nations wanted them. Moreover, it correctly traced the root of the problem to the government's decision to limit the use of the aircraft to supplying only Canadian forces.¹⁹

Even though the confusion over the Caribou had the potential to become a public embarrassment, External Affairs decided not to press the Canadian position in New York after it learned that Hammarskjöld “responded negatively in very firm terms” to the compromise proposal suggested by the government. The Secretary-General had recently become the target of a virulent and nasty Soviet campaign of criticism. They had been especially critical of his decision to include Canadian signallers in ONUC, and he believed a proposal to send a Canadian air unit would leave him in an “untenable position”. Hammarskjöld suggested that the Caribou might still be used if Canada was prepared to make them available on a “lend-lease” basis, so that aircrews from other UN units could staff them. When a Canadian officer, Colonel Albert Mendelsohn, returned to Canada from the Congo in September 1960 to give a preliminary report, he argued that, in spite of the Secretary General’s concerns, there was an urgent need for the Caribou and that this need was fully recognized by von Horn. The only thing standing in the way was Hammarskjöld’s desire not “to upset the Russians”.²⁰ The political realities of Canada’s position in the Cold War had a real impact on the nature and composition of Canada’s contribution to ONUC’s air operations.

Command Personnel

Canadians served within most branches of ONUC Headquarters, for example as Chief Operations Officer, Chief Signals Officer, and Chief Air Officer (see Chapter 1 in this volume). In fact, for the duration of ONUC there were almost always more Canadians serving as officers at headquarters than was the case for any other nationality. At least one scholar has attributed this disproportionate presence to “their language capability, peacekeeping experience, generally good political acceptability, professionalism, and familiarity with both Commonwealth and U.S. military procedures”.²¹

The RCAF provided valuable assistance in the early days of ONUC and the United Nations had been especially impressed with the services of A/C F.S. Carpenter, present in the Congo when the first peacekeepers arrived. After Carpenter’s return to Canada, the Secretary-General asked if he could be sent back to Leopoldville, accompanied by five RCAF staff officers, to form an air staff at von Horn’s headquarters. Group Captain W.K. Carr was dispatched in Carpenter’s place, along with 10 other personnel to serve at Force Headquarters and as RCAF communications technicians and operators (see Chapter 1 in this volume). As von Horn prepared his proposed establishment of the United Nations Air Transport Force, he had specifically requested a Canadian to fill the position of air commander, or at the very least senior air staff officer. Indeed, he also wanted Canadians as the chief operations officer, engineering officer, and supply officer. It is significant that von Horn anticipated Hammarskjöld would think he was relying too heavily on Canadians – recall the Secretary-General’s political difficulties in New York over Canada’s participation; ONUC’s commander actually couched his request with a plan to reduce the number of Canadians at UN Air Transport Headquarters by one-third, over

a period of three months (and overall RCAF strength did fall from 58 personnel in August to 15 by December).²²

In July 1961, A/C H.A. Morrison, considered one of the air force's "most experienced officers in the air transport field", had been chosen as the latest ONUC Air Commander.²³ Later that year, however, the Chief of the Air Staff issued instructions to develop a case to get the RCAF out of providing an officer to serve in this position. The timing of this decision, coinciding as it did with the addition of jet fighters and light bombers to ONUC's air services, suggests National Defence was uncomfortable having a Canadian oversee operations that went beyond transportation of supplies and personnel. In the midst of the second round of serious fighting in Katanga, Harkness wrote to Green to say once A/C Morrison completed his tour in the Congo he would not be replaced, justifying his decision largely on the grounds that ONUC's military action in Katanga, including both offensive and defensive operations, would require an enlarged staff drawn from countries other than Canada. The country supplying the largest elements of the force, Harkness argued, should also provide the commander.²⁴

The UN Division at External Affairs expressed considerable concern at this decision. General E.L.M. Burns' command of the UNEF was used by External as a ready example of how the United Nations did not consistently follow the principle of appointing commanders from the largest troop-contributing states. Various other arguments were rallied to the cause, but above all, the political implications of not replacing Morrison were noted:

We should not wish to expose ourselves to a charge of backing away from the United Nations operation at a time when our support was needed most. There is no doubt in my mind that if we do not replace Morrison the news about our refusal will spread.²⁵

When Green wrote Harkness to ask for the decision to be reconsidered, the Minister of Defence was unmoved. Green was told to "inform the UN authorities promptly of our desire to withdraw Air Commodore Morrison by the end of this year". Harkness was not entirely uncompromising: he was willing to give the United Nations an additional two weeks of service in order to find a replacement. Green decided not to press National Defence any further and issued instructions to inform New York. The Secretariat was disinclined to accept "no" for an answer, however. They contacted External Affairs and pleaded that the UN command "had become accustomed to dealing with RCAF officers on air matters and that the smoothest cooperation had been possible because the RCAF officers 'understood the United Nations'". They were so disturbed in New York that U Thant, the UN's Acting Secretary-General, directly appealed to Diefenbaker to replace Morrison. This resulted in further consultations between External Affairs and National Defence; Morrison's term was extended by an additional three months, after which time it was made clear National Defence would neither renew Morrison's term again nor provide a substitute.²⁶ Notably, after all the serious hostilities had been brought to an end and as ONUC entered its final months, National Defence responded favourably to a renewed UN effort to once again appoint a Canadian to this position, with the promotion of

someone serving in the Congo to the rank of Group Captain in order to serve as both Air Commander and Coordinator Air Transport Operations.²⁷

Muscular Peacekeeping and Canadian Concerns

The debate over the replacement of A/C Morrison was indicative of the official Canadian attitude towards ONUC's use of force, as the peacekeeping mission laboured to achieve its mandate. Canadian authorities were never entirely comfortable with the form of muscular peacekeeping that ultimately evolved in the Congo, though by the time hostilities came to a head in ending the Katanga secession in early 1963, they were reluctantly resigned to the idea that some degree of force would be necessary to resolve the crisis and to secure conditions that would permit ONUC's eventual withdrawal. But even as this premise was accepted, Ottawa maintained a cautious and quite hesitant view towards permitting Canadians to serve in ONUC in periods of heightened tension and in capacities that directly contributed to the peacekeeping operation's ability to exercise greater force. This was equally true with respect to Canadians serving as signallers, in ONUC headquarters, and as part of the RCAF contribution.

An early indication of this cautious attitude can be seen in January 1961, when Canada turned down a UN request for 27 RCAF technical personnel, some three months after the UN had initially asked. This was the first significant ONUC request the government chose to decline. Initially, details from the United Nations were unclear and when DND prompted External Affairs for clarification of the UN's precise needs, the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff, advised the Under-Secretary:

The organization of the RCAF is such that they are much more able to contribute a complete unit such as a squadron, rather than to weaken several units by supplying a piecemeal group as requested by the United Nations.²⁸

By mid-November, details had been obtained, planning was undertaken, and the RCAF approved a plan to provide the necessary personnel to operate a telecommunications network for ONUC's three main air transport bases in Leopoldville, Stanleyville, and Kamina. The Chief of the Air Staff abandoned his earlier reservations because Canada had since been asked to fill the position of Air Commander in ONUC, and he did not want either the flexibility or safety of the air operations to be compromised because of inadequate communications. Cabinet, however, postponed a decision on the request because of the "disturbed" political situation in the Congo. Following discussions with Group Captain Carr, the Chief of the Air Staff asked Harkness to raise the matter in Cabinet again. The Minister suggested a further delay of two weeks. When that interval passed and political conditions in the Congo had still not improved, DND finally asked External Affairs to advise the Secretary-General that it would not be possible to meet his request.²⁹ Precarious political conditions in the Congo could clearly be a decisive and significant factor when assessing UN requests.

At times, relations between the United Nations and the Congolese authorities became terribly strained. In such moments, Canada also proved reluctant to assist ONUC if the result could be increased tension or even violence between ONUC and the Congolese armed forces. For instance, in April 1961 the United Nations approached Canada for assistance in airlifting Indian troops from Dar es Salaam to Kamina. The United States had transported 2,300 Indian peacekeepers by sea to Tanganyika but backed out of an earlier commitment to airlift half these troops onwards to Katanga. The Secretary General's Military Adviser, Major General Indarjit Rikhye, then turned to Canada with an *informal* enquiry for assistance, not wanting to put the Canadian government in the awkward position of having to turn down an official request. External Affairs, after recognizing political difficulties with the UN's appeal for help, was lukewarm towards it and simply asked that DND just give it sympathetic consideration. In Leopoldville, Consul General Michel Gauvin urged Ottawa to decline the request in light of Congolese opposition to the arrival of additional Indian peacekeepers. The US, he noted, was criticized for airlifting the first 1,000 Indians. He advised:

If without letting down UN too badly and if it is possible to discourage their request I would think it wise to do so especially since nature of [Canadian] contribution to ONUC has been such up to now that we have been able to avoid being involved in controversial issues between [the] Congolese and ONUC.³⁰

United Nations made other arrangements to transport the troops before a final decision could be reached, and the enquiry was suspended.³¹

When serious fighting broke out between ONUC and armed elements in Katanga in the fall of 1961, in operations Rumpunch and Morthor, Canada was again compelled to consider UN requests for additional assistance at a moment when peacekeepers were engaged in open hostilities. The Canadian government was clearly ill at ease with developments in Katanga and was hardly enthusiastic when new UN appeals for help arrived. On 20 September, the Secretariat urgently requested transport aircraft, aircrews, maintenance personnel, and spare parts for airlifts within the Congo for three to five weeks. ONUC relied, to a considerable extent, on charter airlines for internal transport of supplies and personnel. During Operation Morthor, Katangese jet fighters damaged or destroyed a number of these charter planes, so most airlines withdrew their services, reducing available charter aircraft from thirty to three. The aircraft requested were to resupply forces stationed throughout the Congo; Sweden and Ethiopia had already offered jet fighters to escort the transport aircraft. By the end of five weeks, ONUC expected the threat from the Katangese jets to be resolved and planned to revert to chartered transport. Officials warned Howard Green that there could be "armed resistance and renewed hostilities" if the United Nations moved to arrest mercenaries in Katanga. Cabinet considered the request and Green acknowledged that the "decision was a difficult one". Although the aircraft would be at risk of attack, especially if an existing ceasefire ended, Cabinet agreed on 23 September to send two C-119s for one month, together with the necessary crews to permit their operation 24 hours a day; the planes and personnel left the next day.³² In acceding to the request, Cabinet identified

a number of important factors: the need to support Canadian and other peacekeepers deployed throughout the Congo, the significance of UN success in Katanga for the organization's future effectiveness, and public opinion.

Two weeks later, a second request arrived from the Secretariat. ONUC now required eight control tower officers and two maintenance ground communication technicians to aid in the operation of the Swedish and Ethiopian jet fighters and Indian light bombers recently attached to ONUC. Because of the policy implications of this request, further information was sought from New York. Ottawa learned that ONUC intended to use the fighters and bombers if hostilities resumed, both to defend its transport aircraft and to "render unuseable" the runways available to Katanga's jets. Should the ceasefire be breached, ONUC's Commander, General Sean MacEoin, planned to move all jets to Kamina to operate from within Katanga. External Affairs was very concerned about the implications of Canadian involvement in this aspect of ONUC's operations. Robertson wrote:

There is, of course, a possibility that if we agree to the present UN request, we could be placed later on in an awkward position if the UN engages in warlike operations in the Congo, and particularly in Katanga.³³

The Under-Secretary was especially worried that such action might be taken in circumstances that would prove troubling to Canada, but Howard Green did ultimately ask the Minister of National Defence, Douglas Harkness, to give "sympathetic consideration" to the request. The personnel involved, it was argued, would still be considered non-combatant and the aircraft would provide protection for members of both the RCAF and 57th Signals Unit stationed in the Congo. Harkness advised Green on 25 October that there was "an acute shortage" of suitable personnel required to meet the UN's request, so it could be met only by sacrificing the operational efficiency of RCAF units in Canada. He asked External Affairs to inform the Secretariat "Canada would prefer not to accept this commitment".³⁴

Disappointed and deeply concerned by the negative reply, UN Under-Secretary Bunche personally approached Canadian Ambassador Ritchie and asked if Canada would reconsider its decision. The American and Ethiopian missions also expressed concern. The United States went so far as to threaten not to provide the necessary communications equipment unless Canadians agreed to operate it, even as the need for this equipment became acute when Katangese planes carried out bombing raids in Kasai. In a meeting of the Secretary-General's Advisory Committee, Bunche revealed that ONUC had warned the Katangese authorities that any further offensive action would be countered, with the destruction of "all planes involved either in air or on ground". But, the United Nations would not be able to carry out this threat without the American equipment and Canadian personnel. Green wrote Harkness asking him to reconsider his decision. The Minister observed:

[I]t would appear that Canada would be the object of widespread criticisms by Afro-Asian countries, particularly those who are members of the Congo Advisory Committee, if it is felt during the forthcoming developments that the capacity of the UN to resist aggression is seriously impaired because of our inability to provide the communications personnel needed for the servicing of the UN aircraft.³⁵

Before Harkness received Green's appeal, the Minister of Defence raised the matter in Cabinet on his own initiative, and the earlier decision was reversed. Cabinet also granted a 30-day extension on the loan of the two C-119s but cautioned, "there was no intention of continuing this arrangement indefinitely".³⁶ In the end, Canada may have provided critical assistance for an important episode with ONUC, but the deliberations related to these decisions demonstrated considerable concern, angst, and serious reservations.

While Ottawa hardly needed a demonstration of just how dangerous and unpredictable the situation in the Congo could be, the legitimacy of the Canadian government's concerns was made all too apparent when Congolese forces seized a Yukon turboprop when it landed in Leopoldville on 20 November 1961. The plane was released only after A/C Morrison appealed directly to Congolese Prime Minister Cyrille Adoula and Joseph Mobutu, the chief of staff of the Congolese armed forces at that time. Worried that additional aircraft might be detained, National Defence suspended all Yukon flights to the Congo, a decision subsequently endorsed by Cabinet. It was late December before the matter was reviewed. At that time, the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff, asked Robertson to seek assurances from the United Nations that any RCAF aircraft flying within or into the Congo in support of ONUC would not "be subject to seizure or impoundment". External Affairs learned from Leopoldville and New York that the Yukon incident was an isolated case of mistaken identity. The Congolese were confused by the unfamiliar design of the plane and because it bore only RCAF insignia, not UN markings. To reassure Ottawa, the United Nations enacted measures to ensure Congolese authorities were given adequate notice prior to the arrival of each flight.³⁷ On the page opposite, [Figure 3.1](#) shows the Yukon aircraft.

It has been suggested that incidents such as that with the Yukon, happened "frequently enough" to cause Ottawa to become less "eager" to provide ONUC with assistance generally and to meet a particular request in November 1961 for help in establishing a security service. While the threat of violence towards Canadian peacekeepers was always a concern and a factor weighed by the Government when it assessed UN requests, political and even administrative concerns were often the more significant factors when it was decided to turn down requests or scale back Canadian involvement in ONUC. By early 1963, UN requests for various additional personnel for ONUC itself were increasingly scrutinized, especially by National Defence. The Secretariat asked Canada to provide four training and administrative officers for service with two Congolese National Army (ANC) battalions, helicopter pilots, ground crew and movement control personnel. Following consultation with the naval and air forces, the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff, turned down the request for helicopter personnel because it would seriously prejudice other commitments. External Affairs was not surprised by this and decided it was best not to pressure National Defence in order to preserve intradepartmental goodwill for future and more important

UN appeals for assistance. The Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant-General Geoffrey Walsh, was clearly frustrated by “piecemeal” requests which were said to be making it “almost impossible to do any career planning for the officers concerned” and because they were having “an adverse effect on the proper general administration of the Army”.³⁸



Figure 3.1 A Canadian Yukon aircraft at Leopoldville airport being inspected by Congolese and UN military officers.

To conclude, the RCAF made significant contributions to ONUC throughout its operations in the Congo. Particularly important were the services provided by officers in the command and coordination of UN air operations and the essential airlift from Pisa to Leopoldville. It is important to recognize, however, the historical contexts and political circumstances that often dictated and shaped the nature of Canada’s peacekeeping contribution. In the earliest days of the crisis, the government embraced the opportunity to provide air transport as a means to play down expectations Canada would send combat forces – something seen as politically inadvisable by both the Diefenbaker government and the United Nations. The politics of the Cold War were an ever-present determinant of policy in these years. They were evident most notably in the UN’s decision to decline Canada’s offer of Caribou aircraft and crews, but they were also at play when decisions were made regarding staffing at ONUC Headquarters. The increasingly offensive or muscular nature of ONUC’s activities were not especially welcomed in Canada and they served as a backdrop for increasing reticence to maintain or bolster Canada’s contributions to air operations in the Congo. The decision to end A/C Morrison’s appointment in April 1962 came at a critical juncture in this respect and External Affairs was especially disturbed by how his departure would likely be perceived.

A fine line connects the practical decisions related to the precise contributions a country is prepared to make to international peacekeeping with the domestic and international political considerations and contexts that shape those decisions. In the case of ONUC, Canada provided essential support to various elements of the UN's air operations in the Congo, but the willingness behind, capacity to provide and political suitability for this effort appeared tenuous at times. The influence of the Cold War, given Canada's position as a Western-aligned nation, and specific concerns about ONUC's use of force also represented "a fine line" of sorts – a line Canada crossed with difficulty with respect to the Cold War and a line to be crossed only with extreme caution and care with respect to muscular peacekeeping.

Endnotes

¹ Carole J.L. Collins provides a particularly critical perspective, even suggesting ONUC "served as an unconscious midwife to the arrival of the Cold War in Africa". See Collins, C. "The Cold War Comes to Africa: Cordier and the 1960 Congo Crisis", *Journal of International Affairs* 47(1) (1993), 244–5.

² Robertson to Green, 13 July 1960; G.S. Murray, 13 July 1960; Telegram 911 PERMISNY to External: Disorders in Congo, 13 July 1960, RG25, 5208, File 6386-40 part 6, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

³ Canada, House of Commons Debates, 14 July 1960, 6273-4.

⁴ *Editor's note*: The North Star is the Canadian version of the four-engined DC-4 transport aircraft.

⁵ Cabinet Conclusions, 19 July 1960, RG2, 2747, LAC; Cabinet Documents 228/60, 236/60, 238/60, RG2, 5937, LAC; Cabinet Conclusions, 21 July 1960, RG2, 2747.

⁶ Memo UN Div to DL (1): Congo: Development of UN Force, 22 July 1960, RG25, 5208, File 6386-40 part 7, LAC.

⁷ Fred Gaffen suggests that it was Lieutenant-Colonel J.A. Berthiaume who had "managed with the connivance of some members of the RCAF to circumvent this restriction and airlift the Tunisian contingent to Kasai province and its capital Luluabourg". Gaffen, F. *In the Eye of the Storm: A History of Canadian Peacekeeping* (Toronto: Deneau and Wayne, 1987), 233–4.

⁸ Memo for Minister: Congo: use of RCAF aircraft, 21 July 1960; Memo for Minister: Congo: Use of RCAF aircraft, 23 July 1960, 5219, File 6386-C-40 part 1, LAC. Telegram PERMISNY to External: Congo: Use of RCAF Aircraft, 23 July 1960, RG25, 5209, File 6386-40 part 8, LAC.

⁹ Memo SSEA [Secretary of State for External Affairs] to USSEA [Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs]: Congo – modification of the use of the RCAF North Stars, 23 July

1960; Letter Pearkes to Green, 25 July 1960; Letter Green to Pearkes, 27 July 1960; Memo for Minister: Congo: Use of RCAF Aircraft, 30 July 1960, RG25, 5219, File 6386-C-40 part 1, LAC. Memo UN Div to USSEA: Use of RCAF Aircraft on Pisa-Leopoldville Airlift, 27 July 1960, RG25, 5209, File 6386-40 part 8, LAC. Letter Green to Pearkes, 4 August 1960, RG25, 5219, File 6386-C-40 part 2, LAC.

¹⁰ War Diaries CDN HQ UNEF in Congo and No. 57 Canadian Signal Squadron, August 1960, RG24, 18482, LAC; “UN Force Receives Side Arms”, *Montreal Gazette*, 5 August 1960, 1.

¹¹ March notes that ONUC “involved almost every long-range transport aircraft that the RCAF had available at the time. Only essential transport runs were maintained throughout North America and Europe”. March, W. “The Royal Canadian Air Force and Peacekeeping”, in *Peacekeeping 1815 to Today*, ed. Serge Bernier (Ottawa: International Commission of Military History, 1995), 471. See also Wainhouse, D. *International Peacekeeping at the Crossroads: National Support – Experience and Prospects* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 284; Granatstein, J. “Canada and Peacekeeping: Image and Reality”, *The Canadian Forum* 54(263) (1974), 16.

¹² Organisation Order 8.13, 2 August 1960, RG24, 3022, file 895-8/115, LAC.

¹³ Memo for the Minister: Congo – Use of RCAF North Star Aircraft, 24 October 1960; Letter Green to Harkness, 24 October 1960; Letter Harkness to Green, 27 October 1960, RG25, 5220, File 6386-C-40 part 5, LAC. Letter Vaughan (UN) to Speedie, 10 November 1960; Telegram PERMISNY to External: Congo: Use of RCAF North Star Aircraft, 7 November 1960; Memo for Minister: Congo – Use of RCAF North Star Aircraft, 16 November 1960, RG25, 5220, File 6386-C-40 part 6, LAC. Letter Green to Harkness, 21 November 1960, RG25, 5221, File 6386-C-40 part 7, LAC.

¹⁴ Despatch SSEA to PERMISNY: UN Airlift– Replacement of North Star Aircraft, 23 February 1961; Memo for Minister: Congo – Use of RCAF North Star Aircraft, 20 February 1961; Letter Harkness to Green, 24 February 1961, RG25, 5222, File 6386-C-40 part 11, LAC.

¹⁵ Telegram External to PERMISNY: Congo – Extension of RCAF airlift, 4 June 1962, RG24, 7169, File 2-5081-6 part 16, LAC. Letter CCOS to USSEA, 13 July 1962, RG25, 5224, File 6386-C-40 part 20, LAC. The monetary exchange crises Diefenbaker faced are addressed by Smith, D. *Rogue Tory: The Life and Legend of John G. Diefenbaker* (Toronto: Macfarlane, Walter and Ross, 1995), 437–9, 442–5.

¹⁶ Memo for Minister: Canadian Airlift to the Congo, 17 July 1962, RG25, 5224, File 6386-C-40 part 20, LAC.

¹⁷ Note CCOS to CAS, July 1962; Letter USSEA to CCOS, 20 July 1962, File 73/1223, part 463, Directorate of History and Heritage National Defence [DHH]. Memo DL (1) to Ross Campbell: Provision of RCAF Air Transport for UN Operations, 15 August 1962; Memo for Prime Minister: Canadian Airlift to Congo, 16 August 1962; Outgoing Message External to PERMISNY: Congo – RCAF Airlift, 17 August 1962; Memo SSEA to Ross Campbell: Canadian Airlift to the Congo, 1 September 1962, RG25, 5224, File 6386-C-40 part 20, LAC.

¹⁸ Memo: Congo Operations – RCAF Participation [Chief of Air Staff to MND], 9 August 1960; Memo: Canadian Contribution to UN Forces in the Congo Republic, Synopsis No. 13, 12 August 1960, RG24, 21484, File 2137.3 part 1, LAC. Robertson to Green, 9 August 1960; Pearkes to Green, 11 August 1960, RG25, 5219, File 6386-C-40 part 2, LAC.

¹⁹ Telegram PERMISNY to External: Congo – UN Use of Caribou Aircraft, 18 August 1960, RG24, 21484, File 2137.3 part 1, LAC. “Mix up Stalls RCAF Craft For Congo”, *Montreal Gazette*, 9 September 1960, 1. The Canadian government was guilty of “placing the diplomatic cart before the horse”. Precedent established that no nation had the right to insist on the inclusion of its forces in a peacekeeping mission. While the Canadian government did not quite go this far, it was certainly premature to announce the acquisition of the Caribou for service in ONUC prior to consultations with the UN Secretariat on the appropriateness and suitability of such a contribution. On the development of this precedent, see David Wainhouse, *International Peacekeeping at the Crossroads*, 558.

²⁰ Defence Liaison to Cadieux, 30 August 1960; Murray to Robertson, 14 September 1960, RG25, 5219, File 6386-C40 part 4, LAC. Telegram PERMISNY to External: Congo Caribou Aircraft, 2 September 1960, RG24, 21485, File 2137.3 part 2, LAC. Aide Memoire: Notes on Congo, Meeting with Col. Mendelsohn, 12 September 1960, File 112.1.009 (D21) 4, DHH. Note for File by Labouisse, 29 August 1960, File S-0209-0003-16, United Nations Operations in the Congo (ONUC) – Records on Foreign Countries, Canada volume 1 – ONUC military assistance, United Nations Archives [UNA]. Telegram Cordier to SG and von Horn, dated 14 August 1960, File S-0791-0045-10, UN Operation in the Congo, Force Commander, 3310/2/Ops – Canadian Troops – Personnel, UNA.

²¹ Beauregard, J.P.R.E. “UN Operations in the Congo, 1960–1964”, *Canadian Defence Quarterly* (August 1989): 27; Wainhouse, *International Peacekeeping at the Crossroads*, 308; Memo: Canadian Contribution to UN Forces in the Congo Republic, Synopsis No. 13, 12 August 1960, RG24, 21484, File 2137.3 part 1, LAC.

²² Spooner, K. *Canada, the Congo Crisis, and UN Peacekeeping, 1960–64* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009), 87.

²³ Letter CCOS to USSEA: UN Request for Assistance – Congo and attached biography of H.A. Morrison, 30 May 1961, RG25, 5223, File 6386-C-40 part 14, LAC.

²⁴ Memo Chief of Air Staff to Vice Chief of Air Staff, 24 October 1961, RG24, 3022, File 895-8/115, LAC. Letter Harkness to Green, 7 December 1961, RG25, 5223, File 6386C-40 part 17, LAC.

²⁵ Memo UN Div to USSEA: Congo Replacement for A/C Morrison, 13 December 1961, RG25, 5223, File 6386-C40 part 17, LAC.

²⁶ Letter Green to Harkness, 18 December 1961; Letter Harkness to Green, 20 December 1961, RG25, 5223, File 6386-C-40 part 17, LAC. Memo UN Div to USSEA: Canadian Military Assistance to the UN in the Congo, 3 January 1962, RG25, 5214, File 6386-40 part 29, LAC. Memo SSEA to Ignatieff, Campbell DL (1), Euro Div and attached telegram, 5 January 1962; Memo Robinson to USSEA: Replacement for A/C Morrison, 11 January 1962; Memo for Prime Minister: Congo – Replacement for A/C Morrison as UN Air Commander, 8

January 1962; Memo from Prime Minister to Robinson, 10 January 1962, RG25, 5224, File 6386-C-40 part 18, LAC.

²⁷ Telegram PERMISNY to External: ONUC – Request for Assistance Air Commander, 6 November 1963; Letter CCOS to USSEA: ONUC – Air Commander, 6 December 1963, RG25, 10648, File 21-14-6-ONUC-5 part 1, LAC.

²⁸ Letter CCOS to USSEA: RCAF Personnel for the Congo, 14 October 1960, RG25, 5220, File 6386-C-40 part 5, LAC.

²⁹ Memo for Minister (DND): United Nations Request for Assistance in the Congo, 18 November 1960, RG25, 5220, File 6386-C-40 part 6, LAC. Cabinet Conclusions, 25 November 1960, RG2, 2747, LAC; Spooner, *Canada, the Congo Crisis, and UN Peacekeeping, 1960–64*, 127–8.

³⁰ Telegram Leopoldville to External: UN Request for RCAF Planes, 13 April 1961, RG25, 5222, File 6386-C-40 part 13, LAC.

³¹ Memo for Minister: United Nations Request for Air Lift Assistance, 11 April 1961; Letter Green to Harkness, 11 April 1961; Telegram PERMISNY to External: Congo: Enquiry re RCAF assistance in airlift Indian troops from Dar to Kamina, 14 April 1961; Spooner, *Canada, the Congo Crisis, and UN Peacekeeping, 1960–64*, 154–5.

³² Memo to Minister: Congo: UN Request for Assistance, 22 September 1961; Memo for Minister: Congo – UN Request for Canadian Transport Planes and Crews, 22 September 1961, RG25, 5223, File 6386-C-40 part 16, LAC. Cabinet Conclusions, 23 September 1961, RG2, 6177, LAC. Memo Chief of Air Staff to Minister National Defence, 25 September 1961, RG24, 21485, File 2137.3 part 5, LAC.

³³ Memo for Minister: Congo: UN Request for Assistance, 17 October 1961, RG25, 5223, File 6386-C-40 part 16, LAC.

³⁴ Memo for Minister: UN Operations in Katanga, 18 October 1961; Letter Green to Harkness, 17 October 1961; Letter Harkness to Green, 25 October 1961, RG25, 5223, File 6386-C-40 part 16, LAC.

³⁵ Letter Green to Harkness, 2 November 1961, RG25, 5223, File 6386-C-40 part 16, LAC.

³⁶ Memo Ross Campbell to DL (1): Congo: UN Request for Assistance, 3 November 1961; Letter Harkness to Green, 6 November 1961, RG25, 5223, File 6386-C-40 part 16, LAC. Cabinet Conclusions, 23 October 1961, RG2, 6177. Doc. 117, Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the Congo; Doc. 120, National Security Action Memorandum No. 97, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, XX. Memo Bowitz to Bunche, 30 October 1961, United Nations Archives (UNA), S-0209-0003-13, United Nations Operations in the Congo (ONUC) – records on foreign countries, Canada – correspondence, cables, etc.

³⁷ Memo for Minister: Incidents Involving Canadians in the Congo, 28 November 1961; Letter CCOS to USSEA, 18 December 1961, RG25, 5223, File 6386-C-40 part 17, LAC. Cabinet Conclusions, 20 November 1961, RG2, 6177, LAC. Telegram PERMISNY to External: Congo: RCAF Airlift, 24 January 1962; Numbered Letter Leopoldville to USSEA: Congo: RCAF Airlift, 18 January 1962, RG25, 5224, File 6386-C-40 part 18, LAC.

³⁸ Granatstein, J. and Bercuson, D. *War and Peacekeeping* (Toronto: Key Porter, 1991), 221. Letter USSEA to CCOS: UN Request for Assistance, 18 January 1963; Memo DL(1) Div to Ross Campbell: Congo: UN Request for Assistance, 6 February 1963; Letter CCOS to USSEA: Congo – UN Request for Assistance, 12 February 1963; Telegram PERMISNY to External: Congo: UN Request for Assistance, 27 February 1963, RG 25, 5224, File 6386-C40. part 21, LAC. Letter CCOS to USSEA: UN Request for Assistance – Congo Helicopter Pilots and Ground Crew, 7 March 1963; Outgoing Message External to PERMISNY: Congo Ops, 23 March 1963, RG25, 5224, File 6386-C-40 part 22, LAC. Letter CCOS to USSEA: UN Request for Assistance – Congo, 22 March 1963, RG24, 21487, File 2137.3 part 10, LAC; Spooner, *Canada, the Congo Crisis, and UN Peacekeeping, 1960–64*, 206.