

A review of: “Ripe for Rebellion. Political and Military Insurgency in the Congo, 1946-1964” by Stephen Rookes¹

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The country in the heart of sub-Saharan Africa has been the scene of constant conflicts. Congo has always been part of political-economic and ethnic struggles. Its territory is populated by nearly 200 different ethnicities, and it has also been affected by the racial and religious tensions of neighbouring states. The Republic of Congo is a former colonial state. It was established as a Belgian colony in 1885 and continued to exist as the Belgian Congo from 1908. After numerous long periods of political battles, the Belgian Congo gained its independence in June 1960. However, the decolonized country proved too weak to establish an efficient democracy. *Ripe for Rebellion. Political and Military Insurgency in the Congo, 1946-1964* is a complex and engaging piece of history of the Congo. The *Ripe for Rebellion's* main objective is to broaden the investigation of events that occurred in the Cold War atmosphere in the years before and right after the independence. The book shows entirely new aspects of progress in a country, which was believed to become the next battleground of the Cold War. *Ripe for Rebellion* is a well-organized and detailed study of a very complicated field of research and the first of two volumes analysing the so-called 'Congo Crisis'.

The first and second chapter introduces Congo's pre-independence era as well as the Congolese political development between 1946-1959.

The third chapter of the book analyses the transition period from independence which soon led to a crisis. The Congolese nationalist movement demanded the end of colonial rule: it led to the country's liberation on 30 June 1960. Minimal preparations were made and many issues, such as federalism, tribal and ethnic nationalism, remained unresolved. In the first week of July, a riot broke out in the army and violence evolved among black and white civilians. Belgium sent troops to protect the fleeing whites. Katanga and South Kasai was separated from Congo with Belgian support. Amid ongoing riots and violence, the UN deployed peacekeepers, however UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld was willing to use these troops to help the central government in Leopoldville to fight with the separatists. Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, the charismatic leader of the largest nationalist faction, responded by asking for help from the Soviet Union, who immediately sent military advisers and other supports. Soviet involvement divided the Congolese government and led to a stalemate

¹ *Ripe for Rebellion. Political and Military Insurgency in the Congo, 1946-1964* by Stephen Rookes, Warwick, England: Helion and Company Limited, 2020. 65pp. ISBN: 978-1-913336-23-3.

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between Lumumba and President Joseph Kasa-Vubu. After Lumumba was removed from power in September 1960 and then assassinated in February 1961, the UN reinforced the peacekeeping mission.

From the fourth to the seventh chapters, Rookes describes the phases and military operations of insurgencies in Stanleyville, Katanga, Kwilu, and Kivu. This volume covers an impressive array of military vehicles, aircrafts, well-illustrated maps, and drawings of army officers, soldiers, UN peacekeepers, and rebels involved in the conflicts.

With the support of UN troops, Leopoldville defeated the secessionist movements in Katanga and South Kasai in early 1963. After Katanga and South Kasai returned to government control and UN troops left Congo, a conciliatory compromise constitution was adopted and the exiled Katangese leader Moïse Tshombe was recalled to head an interim administration.

The final chapter focuses on foreign intervention and the rescue operations during the sustained military conflict. The author uses a substantial number of references from both primary and secondary sources. The precise and detailed introduction of major events and circumstances is very comprehensible for non-specialists too. The author aimed to examine the role of the Congolese and the United States from a military perspective, which he continues to address in the second volume, entitled *For God and the CIA. Cuban Exile Forces in the Congo, 1962-1967*. I recommend the book to anyone interested in the history of Africa, especially the history of the Congo.