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Breakfast with Mobutu: Congo, the United States and the Cold War, 1964-1981

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Abstract

On the 25th November 1965 Colonel Joseph Désiré Mobutu staged a bloodless coup to take charge of the political turmoil in recently independent Congo and establish one of the most brutal and corrupt dictatorships in modern African history. This thesis explores the story of the American hand both in Mobutu's fortuitous rise and its subsequent sustenance of his regime in the name of its geostrategic Cold War agenda. Spanning the administrations of four presidents from Lyndon Johnson to Jimmy Carter, this study considers the effects of the American Mobutu alliance on Congo and how its relationship with the Congolese leader in turn shaped the American approach towards the wider region and, ultimately, defined its Cold War in Africa. The thesis begins with the CIA-organised mercenary suppression of the Simba rebellion from 1964 to 1965, before offering a detailed analysis of the American role in bringing Mobutu to the helm of Congolese politics and ensuring the survival of his initially tenuous grasp on power. Having consolidated his grip on Congo, subsequent chapters investigate the American role in the establishment of the Mobutist 'State Kleptocracy', the part played by the Kinshasa despot in defining the American stand in the Angolan Civil War and, despite the by now obvious shortcomings of its Congo alliance, the Carter administration's continued support for Mobutu when his regime was threatened by violent dissent once more. As such, this thesis aims to give a more comprehensive and detailed picture of the American Cold War alliance with Congo's profligate dictator from 1964 to 1981.

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who was killed in a plane crash as he attempted to mediate the crisis. The conflict also became the site of a dangerous Cold War “proxy” contest between western powers led by the United States and the Soviet Union -led Communist bloc. Kasavubu and Tshombe were exiled as Mobutu set up a one-party dictatorship, controlling the nation until 1997. Nonetheless, for the first time since independence, all of the country was ruled by one government. Share The Congo, Decolonization, and the Cold War, 1960–1965. The decolonization of Sub-Saharan Africa from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s resulted in several proxy Cold War confrontations between the United States and the Soviet Union over the dozens of newly independent, non-aligned nations. The United States also made diplomatic approaches to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to secure support for the Republic of the Congo. By late October, the situation in Stanleyville was dire. Despite periodic uprisings and unrest, Mobutu ruled the Congo (renamed Zaire in 1971) until the mid-1990s. Viewed as mercurial and occasionally irrational, Mobutu nonetheless proved to be a staunch ally against Communist encroachment in Africa. During the Congo Crisis, Mobutu, serving as Chief of Staff of the Army and supported by Belgium and the United States, deposed the democratically elected government of nationalist Patrice Lumumba in 1960. Mobutu installed a government that arranged for Lumumba's execution in 1961, and continued to lead the country's armed forces until he took power directly in a second coup in 1965 to become the country's military dictator. As this was during the Cold War, the US government feared that the Soviet activity was a maneuver to spread communist influence in Central Africa. Kasa-Vubu was encouraged by the US and Belgium to dismiss Lumumba, which he did on 5 September. An outraged Lumumba declared Kasa-Vubu deposed.