

Southern Rhodesians at the UN, the Congo Crisis and the Case for International Recognition of Zimbabwean Nationalists, 1960-1965

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This paper explores the use of the United Nations by the Government of Southern Rhodesia (GSR) and African nationalist leaders and their supporters during the early 1960s. Both the GSR and African Nationalists attempted to use the UN to make their own specific demands for independence from Britain and majority rule. The events in the Congo immediately after independence in 1960, and the UN's role as peacekeepers in the conflict provided an important backdrop for the GSR and nationalists to make opposing claims for their own recognition by the United Nations. The UN General Assembly's growing criticisms of South Africa's apartheid, along with the Security Council's concerns over the strategic importance of the Katanga region and uranium supplies in the Congo created opportunities for both the GSR and African nationalists to make competing claims at the United Nations during this period. The 'wind of change' speech by British Prime Minister MacMillan in February 1960 served as an important rallying point for Southern African nationalists, particularly in Southern Rhodesia and Southwest Africa, as it did for settler governments in the region. The events of the Congo crisis, particularly the mutiny of the army and the Katanga secession in July 1960, will be explored from the point of view of events in Southern Rhodesia, including important riots and protests in Salisbury and Bulawayo in July and October 1960. The subsequent debates over the role of the UN in assisting African nationalists such as Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe obtain majority rule--and then the internationally divisive issue of Rhodesia's UDI, will be explored against the backdrop of UN involvement in the Congo as well as GSR and South African cooperation in the Katanga war. Primary sources for this paper are from the South African National Archives and the US National Archives.