



The Truth about Dag Hammarskjöld's Killers

Khamala CA*

Senior Lecturer, Africa Nazarene University Law School, Africa

*Corresponding author: Charles A Khamala, Senior Lecturer, Africa Nazarene University Law School, Africa, Email: chalekha@yahoo.co.uk

Editorial

Volume 2 Issue 1

Received Date: February 26, 2024

Published Date: March 04, 2024

DOI: [10.23880/oajcij-16000110](https://doi.org/10.23880/oajcij-16000110)

Introduction

From 1953-1961, Dag Hammarskjöld served as United Nations' second Secretary General. He pioneered the Responsibility to protect concept. In 2015, Ban Ki-moon the organization's eighth Secretary-General, instituted Eminent Persons to investigate the circumstances resulting in Hammarskjöld's tragic death with colleagues accompanying him aboard ill-fated flight SE-BDY. Two years later, the General Assembly extended former Tanzanian Chief Justice Mohamed Chande Othman's investigative mandate. On 7 October 2019, their final report calls on Britain, Russia, South Africa and the United States to conduct a dedicated internal review of sensitive records to determine whether relevant information about that incident exists. These four nations may be withholding information that could solve the puzzle. Who benefits from continued secrecy shrouding Hammarskjöld's death and why? Are murderous "acts of state" immune from prosecution?

In 1960, Belgium invaded the Congo. In response, Hammarskjöld's anticipatory and preventative strategy relied on information and political intuition. These charismatic personal mediation qualities first exploded onto the global stage in 1954, releasing US airmen from China. Subsequently, during the 1956 Suez crisis, to end the inaugural UN "Operation Musketeer," Israel and Egypt accepted Hammarskjöld's international peacekeeping force, prompting Britain's and France's withdrawals. Third, in 1958 without a UN resolution, he called for stronger action in the Jordan-Lebanon crisis. Fourth, in 1959 at the invitation of Thailand and Cambodia, he deployed a special envoy to settle a border dispute. These interventionist performances gave rise to the "Leave it to Dag" slogan, expanding the good offices role of international organizations. Yet, proactively

driving the UN's 1960 Decolonization Charter irked Western interests, including the military superpowers.

Killing over the Congo

On 17/18 September 1961, Hammarskjöld died while attempting to prevent mineral-rich Katanga Province seceding from the Congo. His spirituality and quest for negotiated peace empathized reconciliation and meaning. Poignantly, his mission plane crashed at Ndola, Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), en route to meet President Moise Tshombe, killing all 15 passengers. Congo had the world's richest uranium reserves and was receiving the Soviet Union's aid. Externally, the KGB, CIA, MI5 and MI6 all pursued their countries' interests. Internally, Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba felt that since Hammarskjöld requested Africa to contribute to the UN peacekeeping forces, its Secretary General sided with Belgium. Crucially however, the Secretary General kept the major powers out of Congolese territory, ultimately winning Afro-Asian support to stave off Soviet calls for his resignation. Russian premier Nikita Khrushchev then demanded the replacement of the Secretary General's office by a built-in veto, "the troika," comprising the three-man directorate. But both Khrushchev's ouster and restructure motions failed. Hammarskjöld preserved his office's executive role.

Contrasting continuities of violence in the Congo reveal that while Lumumba's interests included economic and social rights, Hammarskjöld defended UN neutrality, protection of civil and political rights and law and order. However, the 1961 Belgian Parliamentary Report into Dag's death implicates the Secretary General, rather than the UN as a whole for instigating Lumumba's assassination. Over 60 years later, UN troops remain in the DRC.

Hammar skjöld's international solidarity credo held a clear view on equality of people. This posthumously earned him the 1961 Nobel Peace Prize. His position made him the object of twin attacks, from the West, and the Soviet bloc. Fatefully, as he was poised to end the Congo conflicts, his Douglas DC-6 aircraft was possibly threatened as it circled Ndola, and forced to descend by a hostile ariel act. For security reasons, the crew filed no flight plan. They incorrectly used altitude data for Ndola, in Congo and at lower altitude. However, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Human Rights Committee in 1998 uncovered letters implicating MI5, MI6, CIA and South African intelligence services in the 1961 plane crash. One letter pointed to a bomb in the aircraft's wheel bay set to detonate when the wheels came down for landing. Evidence of a bomb, surface-to-air missile or hijacking presented in Danish Mads Brügger's 2019 documentary: *Cold Case Hammar skjöld*, claims that Belgian-British mercenary pilot Jan van Risseghem confessed to shooting the UN plane down. Not only did he have extensive UK ties, including a British mother and wife. Risseghem was also RAF-trained and British-decorated for services rendered during World War II. He allegedly falsified his plane's logbook, to suggest that he was not in Katanga at the time.

Concealing Evidence

Upon Hammar skjöld's demise, legitimate concerns about possible foul play arose. Inquiries have explored multiple theories for the crash, ranging from aerial or ground attacks to sabotage, hijacking and even human error. Before the plane began plummeting ground wards, US security officer Harold Julien, the wreckage's sole survivor, heard an explosion. Six days later, he succumbed to his injuries. Within months of the crash, three inquests were held in rapid succession. A contemporaneous UN Commission relying on groundwork by the-then Rhodesian Federation was inconclusive, as was an initial federal civil

aviation report. On one hand, the Commission empaneled by the Federation conveniently dismissed the event as an accident. On the other hand, in March 1962 the UN inquiry returned an open verdict. Confoundingly, it neither ruled out sabotage nor attack. Rather, it noted that the Rhodesian inquiry identified pilot error as the crash's probable cause. Yet, the UN Commission, disagreed with that conclusion. The UN report led to General Assembly resolution 1759 requesting successor Secretary General, U Thant, to alert it of new evidence catching his attention. Third, in 1993 a small-scale inquiry by Sweden's Foreign Affairs Ministry blamed the pilot's judgmental error regarding altitude. However, in 2011, University of London senior historian Susan Williams's book *Who Killed Hammar skjöld? The UN, the Cold War and White Supremacy in Africa*, makes a myriad of novel claims. She reveals that US intelligence services allegedly eavesdropped as an unidentified plane attacked Hammar skjöld's during its landing approach. Williams precipitated a new General Assembly resolution, appointing the Eminent Persons' investigations culminating in Othman's October 2019 report. This latest report confirms the plausibility "that an external attack or threat may have been a cause of the crash." Simultaneously, Othman's Committee criticizes the UK, US, Russia and South Africa for declining to review their intelligence, security and defence archives in compliance with the General Assembly's resolutions requiring declassification of intelligence and military files. In February 2019, Hynrich Wieschhoff questioned whether or not Ban Ki-Moon or his successor António Guterres, are serious about the truth about the crash. Wieschhoff's article "The Elusive Truth about the Death of Dag Hammar skjöld" called for a move beyond the hollow refrain: "the UN was doing all it could do to find answers and member states should comply with the call to declassify relevant records." Governments' continued concealing of evidence fingering the killers' identities benefit from defeating justice. They are enemies of peace diplomacy.

