

Dag Hammarskjöld, the United Nations, and the Congo Crisis of 1960–1: a Reinterpretation

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THE Congo constituted the largest peace-keeping operation in the history of the United Nations, at least until recently, being only exceeded in scale by current actions in Yugoslavia, Cambodia, and Somalia. It included, during 1960–4, not only civilian advisers who helped run the central régime in Léopoldville, but also an army which, at full strength, comprised 19,000 troops.¹ They intervened extensively in the politics of the country,² thereby not conforming to the popular image of a passive ‘peace-keeping’ force.

The complex events of that era continue to become clearer over time. In 1975, for example, U.S. Senate investigators disclosed that the Central Intelligence Agency had, in fact, plotted the death of Patrice Lumumba, the Congo’s first Prime Minister,³ and in 1984 two former C.I.A. officials spoke about their Agency’s involvement with General Mobutu Sese Seko during the crisis.⁴ In 1992, even more surprisingly, two former diplomats employed by the United Nations claimed that Dag Hammarskjöld’s plane had been shot down by mercenaries on 17 September 1961 while the U.N. Secretary-General had been flying to Ndola in Northern Rhodesia, in order to mediate the secession of Katanga province from the Congo.⁵

Specifically, George Ivan Smith and Conor Cruise O’Brien state in a letter published in *The Guardian* (London), 11 September 1992, that

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¹ See, for example, Thomas M. Franck and John Carey, *The Legal Aspects of the United Nations Action in the Congo* (Dobbs Ferry, 1963); Ernest W. Lefever, *Crisis in the Congo: a U.N. force in action* (Washington, DC, 1965); P. H. Gendebien, *L’Intervention des Nations Unies au Congo, 1960–1964* (Paris, 1967); and United Nations, *The Blue Helmets* (New York, 1985), pt. 5.

² Cf. Carole Collins, ‘Fatally Flawed Mediation: Cordier and the Congo crisis of 1960’, in *Africa Today* (Denver), 39, 3, 1992, pp. 5–22.

³ U.S. Senate, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders* (New York, 1975), ch. 3.

⁴ William Colby and John Stockwell, panel discussion, ‘Should the U.S. Fight Secret Wars?’, in *Harper’s* (New York), September 1984.

⁵ George Ivan Smith and Conor Cruise O’Brien, *The Guardian* (London), 11 September 1992, letter to the editor.

Hammarskjöld's death was 'no accident'. They contend that the 'European industrialists who controlled Katanga' arranged for two aircraft (piloted by mercenaries) to intercept the Secretary-General's flight in order 'to prevent Hammarskjöld from meeting Tshombe, their black stooge, before they could tell the UN Secretary-General in person that European interests were paramount and he must not "sell out to the blacks"'. However, the warning shot fired by one pilot 'must have hit a wire and caused the plane to veer out of control' and crash in Northern Rhodesia, not far from the Congolese border. All persons on board, including Dag Hammarskjöld, were killed on impact or died soon afterwards.

During 1961 and 1962, Rhodesian authorities investigated the crash; they downplayed speculation of intrigue and concluded that pilot error was the probable cause of the tragedy.⁶ Most historians have accepted the official verdict, but *The Guardian* letter suggests that Hammarskjöld's death resulted from an attempt to terminate his negotiation efforts in September 1961. At that time, O'Brien (Irish) was the U.N. Representative in Elisabethville, where he was joined at the end of the following month by Smith (Australian), the U.N.'s principal expert in press relations, and O'Brien's 1962 'case history' still remains one of the best and most authoritative accounts of the U.N. operation.⁷ Their 1992 revelations, based on 20 interviews with former mercenaries that were taped by a senior French diplomat in the 1970s, undoubtedly need to be taken seriously.

In this article, I will place this new evidence in historical perspective, and focus on what motivated the action taken against Hammarskjöld that caused his death.

THE ECONOMICS OF THE CONGO CRISIS

The Smith–O'Brien letter emphasises that the mercenaries operated with the assistance and the direction of the 'European industrialists who controlled Katanga'. Indeed, in an accompanying interview, Smith argues that those who shot down Hammarskjöld's plane 'were acting under orders from the mining cabal who wanted to control Katanga's copper, uranium and diamonds', and states that this cabal 'was led by a Belgian mining conglomerate', namely the *Union minière du Haut-Katanga* (U.M.H.K.).⁸ Smith's tone may seem unduly conspiratorial, but he is quite right to claim that the shoot-down could not

⁶ *The New York Times*, 10 February 1962.

⁷ Conor Cruise O'Brien, *To Katanga and Back: a UN case history* (London, 1962).

⁸ 'Mercenaries "killed UN chief in air crash"', in *The Guardian*, 11 September 1992.

have been undertaken by mercenaries acting entirely on their own initiative.

The Belgian Congo was one of the most valuable colonies in Africa, long known to contain considerable reserves of copper, diamonds, gold, uranium, and by 1960, some 60 per cent of the Western world's supplies of cobalt.⁹ It also exported substantial quantities of palm oil. Belgian investments in the Congo produced profit rates that were two or three times higher than those in the metropole,¹⁰ with the largest financial group, the *Société générale de Belgique*, gaining some 40 per cent of its total profits from holdings in the Congo.¹¹ Exports of the colony's raw materials were major factors behind the strength of the Belgian franc during the 1950s.¹²

Belgian investments were especially concentrated in the province of Katanga, whose mineral resources were exploited by the *Union minière*, which was itself controlled by the *Société générale's* financial network. In July 1960, only one week after Congo's independence, Katanga broke away under the leadership of Moïse Tshombe, and functioned as an independent state until reintegrated into the Congo in January 1963. During the two-and-a-half years of its existence, the Katanga secession was the central issue in the Congo crisis.

The *Union minière* propped up Tshombe's régime with political support, arms, and money. Information from declassified U.S. reports, from the United Nations archives in New York, and from other sources confirm that Belgium industrialists did, indeed, control Katanga. The political basis of the secession was the *Confédération des associations tribales du Katanga* (Conakat), which depended on subsidies and 'advice' from white settlers.¹³ A U.N. report noted: 'The idea that Katanga resistance [to the Congolese central government] is a native and African affair is a myth put out for foreign consumption and is scoffed at in private by Europeans here'.¹⁴ According to a U.S. State Department document, 'Volumes could and probably will be written about UMHK's real rôle in the Katanga secession attempt'.¹⁵ Even

⁹ Whatever the merits of the argument that the colonies were more of a liability than an asset in most cases, the Congo had an exceptionally high economic value. For a generally critical view of the thesis of 'economic imperialism', see D. K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire, 1830-1914* (Ithaca, 1973).

¹⁰ O'Brien, op. cit. p. 173.

¹¹ 'Belgian Giant Maps New Areas for Profit', in *Business Week* (New York), 26 May 1962.

¹² 'The Congo is in Business', in *Fortune* (New York), November 1952.

¹³ See statements by a Belgian journalist in O'Brien, op. cit. pp. 84 and 239.

¹⁴ Quoted from U.N. document, 'Report on Mercenaries and Other Forms of Foreign Intervention in Katanga', dated (probably) 23 October 1961; DAG-1/2.2.1, Box 47, United Nations Archives, New York.

¹⁵ Department of State Airgram, A-701, 9 June 1966, Washington, DC, released under the Freedom of Information Act.

admirers of Tshombe acknowledge the all-important rôle of the *Union minière*, which provided about 80 per cent of the revenues for his régime, according to Smith Hempstone.¹⁶ It seems doubtful that Katanga could have survived as an independent state without these subsidies, and they continued until the end of the secession in January 1963.

Belgian interests continued to prosper in Katanga, even as the rest of the Congo was in disarray. Though nominally under African control, the secessionist régime in Elisabethville remained receptive to European influence, and was quite liberal in permitting repatriation of profits from the on-going mining operations. As O'Brien tartly observed in his 1962 memoirs, 'the State apparatus of Katanga was designed mainly for the protection of European lives and property'.¹⁷ And in their recent letter, he and Smith state that 'European industrialists... controlled Katanga'.¹⁸

The Belgians were determined to preserve the compliant Tshombe régime, and to this end they helped to establish an army of some 500 expatriates. This mercenary force, which commanded the Katangese *gendarmérie*, included racists from South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, French officers who had fought in Algeria and participated in the notorious *Organisation de l'armée secrète*, and even several former Italian fascists and German S.S. members. One important figure in the Katanga operation was Roger Trinquier, a famous French army officer with experience in Indochina, who had cleverly directed a campaign against Viet Minh guerrillas through monies raised in the trade of opium.¹⁹ Some of the mercenaries may have come to Katanga for adventure or because of ideology, but the overwhelming reason was money. Of those interrogated after their capture in April 1961, O'Brien's 'own recollection... is that, in about twenty-five of the thirty cases, the motives given ranged from financial reasons to financial reasons'.²⁰ And it was the *Union minière* that provided most of the cash.

The mercenaries were useful in several ways. First, they deterred possible attacks by the *Armée nationale congolaise*, which was commanded (nominally at least) by the central régime in Léopoldville. Second, they helped to contain internal opposition to Tshombe. He even formed his own security force, comprised entirely of white mercenaries, pre-

¹⁶ Smith Hempstone, *Rebels, Mercenaries, and Dividends: the Katanga story* (New York, 1962), p. 46. The author, then a journalist, is currently U.S. ambassador to Kenya.

¹⁷ O'Brien, op. cit. p. 164.

¹⁸ Smith and O'Brien, loc. cit.

¹⁹ Roger Trinquier's activities in both Indochina and Katanga are discussed by Alfred McCoy, Jr., *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* (New York, 1972), ch. 4.

²⁰ O'Brien, op. cit. p. 197.

sumably to act as bodyguards in case of a mutiny in the *gendarmérie*. In creating this special unit, Tshombe noted 'In these matters, I trust only whites'.²¹ Uprisings by the Baluba peoples, especially in northern Katanga, were repeatedly crushed by mercenary-led units; thousands (or, by some estimates, tens of thousands) of Balubas died in these campaigns.

THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE CONGO CRISIS

The mercenaries also helped to defend Katanga from the United Nations which, after some initial hesitation,²² became critical of the secession and its external sponsors. In November 1960, the U.N. 'peace-keeping' force directly criticised European interests, and implied that both the Government in Brussels and private Belgian companies were abetting the Katanga régime and thus contributing to the disorder.²³ Thereafter the U.N. tried increasingly to terminate the secession, beginning with diplomatic means and, ultimately, using its considerable offensive capability against Tshombe and his mercenary-led army.

The U.N. troops in the Congo were subjected to intimidation and harassment by *Union minière* employees and other Belgians almost as soon as they arrived in July 1960. The following month Ralph Bunche, the U.N.'s civilian director in the Congo, complained to the Secretary-General about the 'rather arrogant' attitude of various Belgian representatives who had engaged in what he called 'hysterical outbursts' with 'accusations against me' and the United Nations in general. It was claimed that the latter sought to drive 'away all the Belgians so that they [the U.N.] could take over the business in Katanga in the interest of some other Western powers'. Bunche did note that, in private, some Belgians seemed more conciliatory, but the general attitude was one of deep hostility.²⁴

The conflict intensified during 1961. In February the U.N. Security Council adopted a resolution which implicitly criticised all foreign

²¹ Department of State, 'An Analytical Chronology of the Congo Crisis', 27 January 1961, p. 72; National Security File, Countries Series, Box 86, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas.

²² The U.N. force adopted a 'hands off' attitude with regard to Katanga from July until mid-September 1960, when Rejeshwar Dayal, an Indian national, arrived in the Congo as Hammarskjöld's personal representative. This anti-Katanga stance continued until the termination of the secession in January 1963.

²³ *The New York Times*, 5 November 1960.

²⁴ Memorandum from Ralph Bunche to Secretary-General, 6 August 1960; DAG-13/1.6.1.1, Box 1, U.N. Archives, New York.

support for the Katanga secession. It called for the removal of Belgian military and political advisers from the Congo (excepting those functioning under U.N. authority), and authorised the U.N. troops to use 'force, if necessary, in the last resort'.²⁵ Their determination to remove the mercenaries, to terminate the secession, and to reintegrate Katanga into the Congo was strenuously opposed by Belgian interests.²⁶

The United Nations became progressively more assertive, and on 13 September 1961 an unsuccessful attempt was made to round up mercenaries in an operation code-named 'Morthor', the Hindi word for 'Smash'. But the Katangese were too powerful. They even possessed a small air force, and a mercenary-piloted fighter plane strafed U.N. troops. Moreover, European defenders of Katanga sharply criticised the action and thus weakened the U.N. politically. Although Hammarskjöld quickly suspended 'Morthor',²⁷ U.N. troops stayed in Katanga and remained an ever-present threat to Belgian interests. They responded with a strident propaganda campaign against the United Nations, which gradually gathered force.

Anti-U.N. articles appeared in newspapers in Belgium and, indeed, elsewhere in Europe. In Britain, for example, the U.N. force in the Congo was called 'The Red Army in blue berets'.²⁸ But it was the Belgians, especially those living in Katanga, who were the most acrimonious. O'Brien has described with characteristic wit the hostility that he encountered when visiting Belgian missionaries in Katanga:

What Père Martin enjoyed most, I think, was appearing unexpectedly at the door of some convent in the bush, and introducing – always throwing the line away a little – *M le Représentant de l'ONU*. The effect was somewhat as if one had said casually to Christians of an earlier time, 'May I introduce the Emperor Nero?' I became used to the tiny intake of the breath which announced the following struggle in the mind of a Reverend Mother: 'This man [meaning O'Brien] is working for the Communists, but Père Martin

²⁵ Catherine Hoskyns, *The Congo Since Independence: January 1960–December 1961* (Oxford, 1965), p. 329.

²⁶ Although Brussels gradually distanced itself from Tshombe's régime, according to Jules Gérard-Libois, *Katanga Secession* (Madison, 1966), p. 158, Belgian policy changed especially quickly after a new left-leaning government was elected and assumed office in April 1961. However, Belgian mining interests continued to support Tshombe long after the termination of the Katanga secession. See Gibbs, *op. cit.* chs. 4–6.

The finding that it was the mining companies, not the Belgian Government, which played the dominant rôle in the Katanga secession contradicts the notion of the 'autonomous' state, insulated from business pressures, which has been popularised by, for example, Theda Skocpol, 'Bringing the State Back In: strategies of analysis in current research', in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 3–43.

²⁷ On these events, see Rejeshwar Dayal, *Mission for Hammarskjöld* (Delhi, 1976), ch. 16.

²⁸ According to Geoffrey Wheatcroft, 'The Center Holds I', in *The New Republic* (Washington, DC), 12–19 September 1988.

would not have brought him here if it had not been the Archbishop's wish. It is therefore my duty to overcome my personal revulsion and, yes, to shake his hand.²⁹

Most Belgians refused to co-operate with the U.N., and their antagonism increased over time.

THE RÔLE OF DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD

Much of the Belgians' animus was directed against Hammarskjöld personally. He strongly supported the U.N. policy of pressuring Tshombe, and was of course directing this in his capacity as Secretary-General. Although, according to some accounts, it was actually O'Brien who authorised the 'Morthor' operation in September 1961, critics of the U.N. considered that Hammarskjöld was responsible for the action taken against the Katanga régime.³⁰

But the Belgians distrusted Hammarskjöld for an additional reason as well. Specifically, many suspected that he had a personal interest in ending Tshombe's secession. There were rumours that Hammarskjöld represented a large group of Swedish or (according to some variants) both Swedish and American mining companies in the Congo, and that they were attempting to put the Belgians out of business. Such reports hinted that the U.N. Secretary-General, one of the world's most esteemed personalities, was motivated by considerations of financial gain. These allegations circulated widely, especially in Belgium, having started from the very beginning of the crisis and continuing after Hammarskjöld's plane had crashed.

In December 1961, *La Libre Belgique* (Brussels), a conservative daily, noted reports of 'a Swedish-American concern... set up for the purpose of gaining control over the nonferrous metals in the Congo. A relative of Mr. Hammarskjöld was the kingpin of this trust'.³¹ Similar articles appeared in other Belgian newspapers accusing the late Secretary-General of having had a financial interest in the outcome of the Congo crisis. Some of these polemics assumed an odd quality. *La Libre Belgique* called the U.N. 'the striking force of American imperialism' in the Congo,³² and the U.N. action was termed 'a case of sinister

²⁹ O'Brien, op. cit. p. 158.

³⁰ For competing views of operation 'Morthor', see Dayal, op. cit. pp. 268-9.

³¹ Translated and quoted by Representative Donald Bruce, 'Is Katanga on the Auction Bloc?', in *Congressional Record* (Washington, DC), 12 September 1962, p. 19247.

³² *La Libre Belgique* quoted in *L'Echo de la bourse* (Brussels), 1-2 January 1963, and translated by author.

international capitalism' by a Tory M.P. in Britain.³³ Rhetoric of this type appealed to right-wing activists in Europe, especially in Belgium. Business publications, particularly those with interests in mining, also played up the issue of 'imperialism' in the Congo. The London *Metal Bulletin*, for example, implied that 'The Americans have been using the UN as a tool to oust the Belgians from Katanga and to get a foothold there themselves'.³⁴

But the extent of these rumours should not be exaggerated, because Hammarskjöld's alleged business connections were only emphasised by major newspapers in Belgium. Elsewhere, establishment circles tended to downplay the charges against the Secretary-General, or to disparage them as ridiculous.³⁵ Arthur Gavshon, for example, quickly dismissed them as a 'smear' which had 'no truth'.³⁶ Historians of the Congo crisis have either agreed with his analysis or, more typically, they have ignored the allegations altogether.³⁷

To the best of my knowledge, no one has ever seriously attempted to refute in detail the charges made against Hammarskjöld, probably because they do seem to be sensational and implausible. However, I have examined those made by U.S. Representative Donald Bruce in September 1962, and found them to be well-documented and accurate. His evidence was culled mainly from U.S. Government records, especially reports from the Commerce Department and the Securities and Exchange Commission.³⁸ The Secretary-General certainly did have financial connections, and there is evidence that they were politically significant.

The facts are as follows. The Hammarskjöld family was associated with the Liberian-American Swedish Minerals Company, known by the acronym Lamco. This syndicate of six separate Swedish mining companies was closely connected with Boliden, another Swedish enterprise with interests in copper mining, and with the International

³³ Sir William Teeling, M.P., in *Hansard Parliamentary Debates* (London), 7 February 1963, pp. 706-7.

³⁴ *Metal Bulletin* (London), 12 December 1961.

³⁵ Although *The Washington Post*, 31 December 1991, ran a good article by Russell Warren Howe, entitled 'Union Minière: an enigma of Congo crisis', the allegations against the U.N. were not reported at all by *The New York Times*.

³⁶ Arthur Gavshon, *The Last Days of Dag Hammarskjöld* (London, 1963), p. 125. His assertions were mainly the outcome of interviews with Swedish officials, not necessarily the best or most objective sources of information about the Secretary-General.

³⁷ For example, Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation* (New York, 1967), p. 262, claimed that the charges of financial ties were 'quickly and easily refuted', although offering no specifics. See also, Brian Urquhart, *Hammarskjöld* (New York, 1972), p. 575.

³⁸ Copies of the original documents can be found in the Donald Bruce Papers, Katanga Box, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis.

African American Corporation. Several persons from the syndicate were involved in the U.N. force in the Congo, notably Sture Linner, the first head of civilian operations, who was, at the time of his hiring, a 'managing director' of Lamco. Two other Swedes employed by the U.N. mission as consultants also had connections with Lamco: Sven Schwartz had been a director at a constituent company as well as chairman of the board at Boliden, and Börje Hjortzberg-Nordlund was listed as an 'alternate director' at Lamco. Both assisted the U.N. in evaluating the prospects for economic development, especially in the mining sector, and their interest in the Congo probably alarmed the Belgians, especially those affiliated with the *Union minière*, which regarded the Swedes as interlopers in what had historically been a special 'preserve' for Belgian capital. Such suspicions were increased when it was discovered that Bo Hammarskjöld, the brother of the Secretary-General, was on the board of directors of Grängesberg Oxelösund, the largest of Lamco's constituent companies.³⁹

Events during the Congo crisis must have increased Belgian anxieties still further. In July 1960 an American national, L. Edgar Detwiler, attempted – unsuccessfully as it turned out – to establish large-scale investments in the Congo. Detwiler was a 'voting trustee' and a former president (in 1954) of Lamco's U.S. affiliate, the International African American Corporation.⁴⁰ Two months later, a U.N. report (written by Hjortzberg-Nordlund) suggested that the Congolese Government might consider nationalising the *Union minière*.⁴¹

The obvious question at this point is the following: So what? There is no hard evidence that Swedish business interests actually influenced U.N. policy in the Congo. It may well have been a coincidence that certain Swedish companies had such good connections to the U.N. Secretariat, and that the U.N. actions were not at all affected by commercial factors. But whatever the reality, some Belgian investors undoubtedly viewed certain key U.N. officials as representatives of Lamco, and resented what they considered was an intrusion by a competitor. Whether rightly or wrongly, critics of the U.N. operation in the Congo believed that the Swedes were using their connections to

³⁹ Ibid. Researchers interested in the Secretary-General's collection of personal papers in Stockholm are advised to consult Larry Trachtenberg, 'A Bibliographic Essay on Dag Hammarskjöld', in Robert S. Jordan (ed.), *Dag Hammarskjöld Revisited* (Durham, 1983).

⁴⁰ Dun and Bradstreet report, dated 5 November 1959; Donald Bruce Papers, Katanga Box, Indianapolis. According to *Le Monde* (Paris), 24–25 July 1960, Detwiler was also directly affiliated with the Lamco group itself.

⁴¹ Börje Hjortzberg-Nordlund, 'Mining Situation in the Republic of the Congo', 30 September 1960; DAG-13/1.6.1.o, Box 72, U.N. Archives, New York.

the U.N. force in order to weaken the *Union minière*, and to open investment opportunities for themselves.

Concurrently, American interests in Lamco were being represented by two law firms with influential political connections, namely (i) Sullivan and Cromwell,⁴² whose former partners included Allen Dulles, President Eisenhower's C.I.A. director, and (ii) Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen and Hamilton,⁴³ whose former partners included George Ball, a leading member of the State Department in Kennedy's Administration,⁴⁴ as well as Fowler Hamilton, who appears to have had close links with the C.I.A. before becoming head of the U.S. foreign aid programme.⁴⁵ It is also worth noting that the 1960 annual report of the Lamco-affiliated International African American Corporation listed Hamilton as a member of the board of directors, and that another partner in the Cleary, Gottlieb firm, Melvin Steen, sat on the board of the Canadian-registered Liberian Iron Ore Company, which had an interlocking directorate with both Lamco and the International African American Corporation.⁴⁶

Overall, the U.S.-Swedish connections increased Belgian suspicions still further. America was encouraging Hammarskjöld's anti-Katanga policies – the Kennedy Administration strongly opposed the secession, the bulwark of the Belgian interests – and was providing much of the finances for the U.N.'s Congo operation.⁴⁷ In addition, several enterprises in the United States were seeking investments in the Congo, including the New York diamond trading firm of Leon Tempelman and Son, and a series of interests associated with the Rockefeller family.⁴⁸ Whenever these U.S. and/or Swedish companies sought new investment opportunities in Central Africa, they came into contention with established Belgian interests, and the ensuing commercial rivalries

⁴² Lamco's and Liberian Iron Ore's Securities and Exchange Commission Prospectus, 15 November 1961, p. 45, in Donald Bruce Papers, Katanga Box, Indianapolis. See also, Nancy Lisagor and Frank Lipsius, *A Law Unto Itself: the untold story of the law firm of Sullivan and Cromwell* (New York, 1988).

⁴³ Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation on 'History and Status of Liberian-American Mining Company (LAMCO)', 28 March 1958, released under mandatory review by the Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

⁴⁴ See George Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern* (New York, 1982).

⁴⁵ According to Theodore C. Sorenson, *Kennedy* (New York, 1965), pp. 630–1, Fowler Hamilton 'was nearly nominated' as C.I.A. director, but was then assigned at the last moment to foreign aid.

⁴⁶ I.A.A.C.'s Annual Report, 1960, and Lamco's and Liberian Ore's...Prospectus, 1961; Donald Bruce Papers, Katanga Box, Indianapolis.

⁴⁷ See Stephen R. Weissman, *American Foreign Policy in the Congo, 1960–1964* (Ithaca and London, 1974); Madeleine Kalb, *The Congo Cables* (New York, 1982); Richard D. Mahoney, *JFK: ordeal in Africa* (New York, 1983); and Gibbs, op. cit.

⁴⁸ This assortment of American companies is discussed at length in Gibbs, *ibid.* ch. 4.

undoubtedly contributed to the general climate of paranoia which prevailed in *Union minière* circles during this period.⁴⁹

When Hammarskjöld was killed in September 1961, a Belgian newsletter, closely associated with the *Union minière*, tastelessly repeated the conflict-of-interest allegations, including the financial connections of the Secretary-General's brother.⁵⁰



The new information from O'Brien and Smith provides evidence that Belgian mining interests were responsible for the death of Dag Hammarskjöld. They had sought to retain their lucrative investments in Katanga, and had set up what was essentially a puppet régime, under Moïse Tshombe, which allowed the *Union minière* to retain *de facto* control. However, their domination of Katanga was always tenuous, given the international outcry against such blatant neo-colonialism. The Belgians felt threatened by the U.N. force in the Congo and, especially, by the Secretary-General who directed the operation.

Quite simply, the United Nations sought to terminate Tshombe's régime and made clear in September 1961 that it would use force to achieve this objective. The Congo crisis occurred in the context of intense international commercial rivalry, and the fact that Hammarskjöld was connected with foreign mining companies only increased Belgian anxieties.

CONCLUSION

The recent evidence about the planned interception of Hammarskjöld's plane on 17 September 1961 has important implications for our understanding of the whole Congo crisis. Traditionally, this has been analysed in the context of U.S.-Soviet rivalry, and nearly all existing interpretations have accepted this perspective. Madeleine Kalb, from an establishment viewpoint, basically approves of the strategy adopted by the United States, and accepts that the cold war was, in fact, the main issue in the Congo crisis.⁵¹ At the other end of the ideological spectrum, even critical analysts of U.S. policy, such as Stephen Weissman, seem to agree that the U.S. perception of Soviet involvement

⁴⁹ The U.S. ambassador to Belgium noted 'the emotional (sometimes near hysterical) atmosphere of Brussels' due to international involvement in the Congo crisis. Cable from Douglas MacArthur II to State Department, dated 4 January 1962; National Security File, Countries Series, Box 20/30, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston.

⁵⁰ Gavshon, *op. cit.* p. 126.

⁵¹ Kalb, *op. cit.*

essentially drove the diplomacy of the Congo crisis.⁵² It should also be noted that the familiar neo-realist approach places great emphasis on the cold war as a causal factor in explaining international crises during the post-1945 period.⁵³

However, as we have seen, the death of Hammarskjöld took place in the context of intense competition among Western mining companies for access to Katanga, and had very little to do with the rivalry between East and West.⁵⁴ Commercial conflicts have been substantially underrated factors in studies of the Congo crisis, and deserve greater attention from researchers.⁵⁵ Now that the cold war is over, we can at last dispense with the clichés of that era and explore some new themes in the study of foreign intervention in Africa.

⁵² Weissman, *op. cit.*, which remains, in my opinion, one of the best accounts of the Congo crisis.

⁵³ See, especially, Stephen Krasner, *Defending the National Interest* (Princeton, 1978). The neo-realists emphasise the importance of state interests in international relations, an approach not well supported by the facts of the Congo crisis, since so much of the conflict involved private companies.

⁵⁴ Hammarskjöld's plane was shot down by the U.S.S.R., according to Arkady Shevchenko, *Breaking with Moscow* (New York, 1985), pp. 102–3. However, this Soviet defector's report is of very dubious reliability, as pointed out by Edward J. Epstein, 'The Spy Who Came in to Be Sold', in *The New Republic*, 15–22 July 1985, who found extensive factual errors and other serious flaws in Shevchenko's account.

⁵⁵ The importance of commercial rivalries is the main theme of my recent book on the Congo, Gibbs, *op. cit.*, which appeared in 1991, before the recent revelations about Hammarskjöld's death.