

# The international civil servant

## A beacon of hope

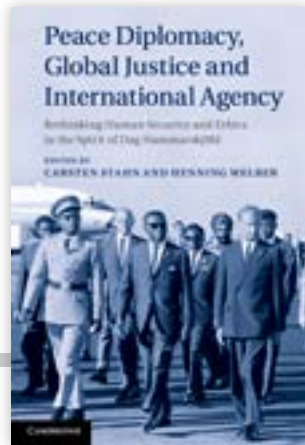
### Peace Diplomacy, Global Justice and International Agency

#### Rethinking Human Security and Ethics in the spirit of Dag Hammarskjöld

Edited by Carsten Stahn and Henning Melber

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This book's many contributors, more than 20 in all, provide a fitting tribute and an objective analysis of Dag Hammarskjöld's achievements as the second UN Secretary-General. This Swedish international civil servant held the post during one of the world's most perilous eras, during the Cold War when there was a constant risk of a global conflagration and the spectre of a nuclear holocaust.

Hammarskjöld is perhaps best known for three aspects of his life: first, his adroit handling of the Suez Crisis that averted a much wider conflict and introduced the concept of peacekeeping to the role of UN's operations. The death of nine UN peacekeepers in Mali early last month (October) is a reminder of the difficulties and dangers blue helmets faced then, and now.

The second aspect is the more controversial Congo crisis, which led to the appalling murder of the newly independent country's prime minister, Patrice Lumumba. Third, it is the Secretary-General's own death, in a mysterious air crash that many believe was no accident, but an assassination

conspiracy. Incidentally, next month, on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> December, the UN General Assembly will be discussing the details of the "investigation into the conditions and circumstances resulting in the tragic death of Dag Hammarskjöld and of the members of the party accompanying him".

Hammarskjöld had many multi-disciplinary strings to his bow – including his work in the field of economics and formulating post-World War II European reconstruction policies.

Indeed, Anne Orford, who contributed the chapter 'Hammarskjöld, Economic thinking and the UN', makes the point that "Hammarskjöld's approach to economic and social policy may have been the reason he was an attractive choice for UN Secretary-General from the America [US] perspective".

Orford's chapter also reveals that Hammarskjöld "had shaped Sweden's post-war economic and financial planning, led trade and financial negotiations with countries including the US and the

UK, was the Swedish delegate to the Paris Conference at which the administration of the Marshall Plan was negotiated, and was a key player in shaping the terms of Sweden's accession to the Bretton Woods institutions.

"Hammarskjöld's liberal economic worldview," she writes, "was the foundation for his principled commitment to decolonisation and to the equality of new states, but was also the foundation for his faith in the free market and in a model of international economic integration."

Hammarskjöld himself, writing in the introduction to the 1960 Annual Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the UN organisation, stated: "The challenges of decolonisation in the context of the Cold War meant that new forms of executive action were necessary to protect the independence of newly decolonised states and to create an international order that ensured 'equal economic opportunities for all individuals and nations.'"

Henning Melber, one of the co-editors of this book (and who was kind enough to ensure a copy of the book was made available to *African Business*), contributes a chapter entitled 'Dag Hammarskjöld and Africa's Decolonisation'.

Melber, a Namibian, is senior advisor to the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, as well as being an extraordinary professor at the Department of Political Studies at the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria, as well as the Centre for Africa Studies, University of Free State, South Africa.

He quotes one of Hammarskjöld's closest advisors at the UN, Brian Urquhart (a former UN under-secretary), who wrote: "[Hammarskjöld] had hoped that the UN, having no past in many African countries, could play a special role in their future."

Melber's chapter focuses on Hammarskjöld's approach to, and role in, the decolonisation of societies on the African continent, with special reference to the Congo as "his most prominent and final engagement".

But he pulls no punches when he notes the 'missions unaccomplished' by Hammarskjöld and the UN, noting: "There is no comment by the UN, as a moral authority, on the British policy in Kenya, where the brutal response to the so-called Mau Mau rebellion could have justified some critical observations. Also, any critical engagement with the French war waged against the Algerian liberation movement was missing."

But the crisis that unfolded after the independence of the Congo was, in Melber's view, Hammarskjöld's greatest challenge, especially in dealing with Western interests vested in the Congo that sought to influence Hammarskjöld's policies.

It is worth revisiting the circumstances that Hammarskjöld encountered with the Congo. Newly independent, the Congo elected Patrice Lumumba as its first prime minister.

But the old colonialist power, Belgium, still retained huge economic interests in the state, principally mining, and they



Left: The Suez Crisis saw the establishment of the United Nations peacekeepers.

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distrusted Lumumba. Relations between Hammarskjöld and Lumumba were not that much better. The two men had different conceptions of the role of the UN intervention in the Congo and after the Katanga Province attempted to break away from the Congo, Lumumba expected UN support and even military assistance to confront this. Nor did it help that Ralph Bunch, Hammarskjöld's Congo adviser, did not get on with Lumumba

Lumumba had delivered a powerful speech, known as his 'tears, fire and blood speech', at the independence ceremony in Leopoldville (now Kinshasa), which created great anger and stiffened opposition to him. Under pressure from Western powers, Congo's President Kasavubu dismissed Lumumba as prime minister.

Lumumba contested the president's move and the Congo's two parliamentary chambers, the parliament itself and the senate, reaffirmed his right to stay in office, but he lacked the support of the army led by General Mobutu.

J. Omasombo Tshonda, in a chapter that explores the relationship between Lumumba and Hammarskjöld, describes the differences "as being the 'truth' (i.e. true independence for the Congolese) and the promotion of 'order' (favoured by UN and Western powers).

Lumumba was placed under house arrest, encircled by UN peacekeepers and Mobutu's soldiers, but made a break for freedom to join with his supporters.

Chased by Mobutu's troops, he was arrested. UN peacekeepers were close by, but remained passive although they must have

known Lumumba was in grave danger. Tshonda writes that shortly after Lumumba's arrest on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1960, "Hammarskjöld visited the Congo but showed no apparent concern for the fate of Lumumba. Lumumba was brutally assassinated on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1961."

### Lessons of history

Hammarskjöld's legacy with regard to the Congo crisis, and for that matter Lumumba's too, is controversial. In a chapter entitled 'Continuities of Violence in the Congo,' Helen Hintjens, a senior lecturer at the Erasmus University in The Hague, writing with Serena Cruz of the Florida International Institute, The Hague, writes that "peace in the Congo today seems as elusive as ever, and the prospects for socio-economic justice are as unlikely today as they were in 1960 when UN forces intervened under Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld ... even with 20,000 UN troops in the country, it remains a challenge to address the underlying injustices of a violent economic and political order for ordinary Congolese".

The two writers continue: "These two great historical figures share a common legacy which has been obscured by their sharp inter-personal and political differences in life".

Expanding on this analysis, Hintjens and Cruz say that the Congo remains, as Lumumba famously said, "an open prison". Their argument is that few Congolese "have benefited from the vision that Lumumba associated with independence, despite an estimated cost of \$8.73bn spent on UN troops stationed in the DR Congo by 2010".

They add: "Hammarskjöld's preoccupations were driven by what we would associate today with the 'liberal peace idea'. [His

social-democratic vision of an ideal political order for the Congo did not necessarily include protection of the elected government [i.e. Lumumba] ... The UN stood by when Lumumba's government was dissolved and when he was illegally arrested, detained, mistreated and eventually murdered."

There are indications that Hammarskjöld only later realised to what extent Belgian mining interests posed a threat to peace and justice in the Congo's independence transition. "Once he started to identify the interests behind violence after independence", Hintjens and Cruz write, "he tried to change tack. Secret cables between the UN headquarters in New York and the UN mission in Congo conveyed [what other writers had said was] the growing frustration of Hammarskjöld and his officials over tactics used by the powerful mining company Union Minière to obstruct and undermine the UN's mission in Congo."

However, on balance, Hammarskjöld's legacy remains that of a peacemaker. Although the Congo crisis remains the most memorable of his undertakings, as Peter Wallensteen of Uppsala University writes in a chapter titled 'Dag Hammarskjöld's Diplomacy', "The 20 crises that saw Hammarskjöld's action, dealt with seven different armed conflicts or wars". The one war in the Congo gave Hammarskjöld six diplomatic and military crises to handle in 14 months, from July 1960 until his death.

Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the UN, is also quoted in this outstanding study and tells us that: "Dag Hammarskjöld is a figure of great importance to me – as he must be for any Secretary-General. His life and death, his words and his action have done more to shape public expectations of the office, and indeed the organisation, than any other man or woman in history."

Stephen Williams