

Dag Hammarskjöld's Plane Crash: The Continuing Search for Truth

Next Steps for the UN Commission of Inquiry

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Today's presentations have covered such very different aspects of this extraordinary episode in the history of the United Nations. Shortly, participants at our Round Table will discuss

- a) how we can assist the UN Secretary-General and Justice Othman (leading the investigation) in identifying relevant sources of information; and
- b) how we can influence key Member States to assist the investigation more wholeheartedly.

I will touch on some of the points raised today but first, let's recall what was happening in the geopolitical sphere at the time Dag Hammarskjöld took his bold decision to fly to the Congo, seeking to prevent the crisis there unfolding even further. What else was on his plate? The Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev had proposed a troika of officials to replace Hammarskjöld's own post as Secretary-General. President Kennedy was due to address the General Assembly, tackling the admission of Red China, disarmament, nuclear testing and the status of Berlin as Khrushchev had just proposed that it should replace New York as the UN host city. And the British? Dug in along the Kuwait-Iraq border, protecting the newly independent Sheikdom following threats by Iraqi Premier Kassem who taken captive in Jadotville, Katanga. In Gaza? Yes, there was Gaza too. And still he flew to the Congo. And then this.



But first, to our speakers. Some of us came together about ten years ago, triggered by ‘*Who killed Hammarskjöld?*’ the book written by Susan Williams who has just spoken. Some were already researching Hammarskjöld’s career. Others not content with how the causes of the plane crash have been comfortably assumed, and some with startling new information. This all led to the setting up of the independent Hammarskjöld Commission chaired by Sir Stephen Sedley which published its findings at the Peace Palace at The Hague in 2013. Using this, we lobbied the UN General Assembly (GA) President and the large diplomatic community here in London, pressing them to support the reopening of the 1962 UN inquiry. But it was the incoming government in Sweden that year which gave the boost, capably steering the resolution through at the GA leading to the reopening of the 1962 inquiry. That was on 30 December 2013 with seventy-five nations as cosignatories.

Since then, we have hunted down documents in several countries, traced those still living who could provide contemporary knowledge, analysed images, reviewed theories. We have not hesitated to criticise our own nations when we believe they have blatantly sought to frustrate this legitimate pursuit of the truth undertaken in the name of the United Nations, in the name of We The Peoples.

And, yes, ‘We The Peoples’, not ‘We the Governments’. UK premier Clement Attlee addressed that very point in 1945 when proposing in parliament that the UK should join the new United Nations. “The Charter does not start by saying *We, the Governments*.” he said, “It starts by saying *We, the peoples*. It expresses the fact that it is an endeavour to put into practical form the deep feelings of all the peoples, including the fighting men who have made it possible to have a Charter at all.” And this is reinforced by Secretary-General Guterres whose words we heard this morning. I repeat some of these now.

We have a shared responsibility to pursue the truth – for Dag Hammarskjöld and those who died alongside him, for their loved ones, and for the United Nations and the people we serve.

So why did that plane crash? Besides looking through documents, signals from agents to their governments back home and more, there were practical questions. If there was an attack,

Which aircraft might have been used? Originally considered were the De Havilland Dove and Dornier DO-28 but Dr O’Malley firmly points to the sole Fouga Magister flying in the Katanga Airforce at the time, harassing the UN, straffing the Congolese people.

Flown by whom? The Katangese had a dozen or so mercenaries who were in the frame and for decades, there had been many more unchallenged claims.

Were logbooks faked - or did they even exist? Dr O’Malley and Dr Williams have been pretty explicit in pointing fingers but maybe that is only the tip of an iceberg of claims and counter claims.

From which airfield might the plane have flown? Which were in reach of Ndola, paved or not?

And what were its intentions if not to shoot down Hammarskjöld’s plane?

As we heard, with the bodies of the two French speakers unexpectedly found near the cockpit, did that imply radio contact was made at the time with others, maybe seeking to divert the plane to another airstrip? Behind it all, some claim, was the immense wealth of the Belgian mining empire Union Miniere and its supporters in Europe, certainly in Britain, seeking an advantageous settlement with the UN’s blessing. So, who was pulling whose strings? Might we seek further access to the closed archives of Union Miniere’s successor UNICOR?

And then there was the search and rescue operation. Susan Williams sets out the inconsistencies in both official reports and personal recollections. So, who were those strangely uniformed personnel seen at the crash site many hours before the official confirmation of its discovery and who then disappeared? Listening to the presentation by Maurin Picard speaking from New York, might these have been the French group of mercenaries led by Major Faulques? After all, the border with rebel Katanga was remarkably close to Ndola. We know mercenaries were present even at the airport and acting relaxed. One wonders how that could be possible as also there were Rhodesian federal troops along with about thirty military aircraft, fighters, bombers and air transport. Yes, a very porous border.

Let's summarise: Justice Othman has led his team in the publication of four reports to the Secretary General. The Expert Panel report (2015) and his reports of 2017, 2019 and 2022. The next is due this year. Support in the General Assembly to continue to pursue the inquiry has grown upon publication of each report. From 75 Member States in 2013 to 100, then 130 and now 142. This last, another statistic to which I will return.

As the inquiry progressed, the justice continued to ask for assistance from key Member States, asking them to check their security and intelligence records and archives. The degree of cooperation varied greatly. Some states showed both sincerity and energy. In his 2019 report, the Justice summarised the performances of fourteen member states as would a football writer after the match.

Who were the star players? Canada, Belgium, Zambia, the DRC, Portugal, Germany. I could continue but the ten-point stand-out was surely Zimbabwe. Professional, thorough and committed. And who should have been pulled from the pitch for an early bath?

a) Sweden. Could it have taken a more proactive stance over these more than six decades? The change of its government in 2013 was fortunate and led to the UN resolution to reopen the inquiry. Its recent efforts to assist the inquiry have been commendable. However, as Professor Henning Melber articulated this morning, an MP in the ruling coalition with support from others in the coalition has initiated moves to re-examine Sweden's stance at the time of the crash, hinting at the need to set up a Truth Commission.

b) France I can add nothing to Maurin Picard's devastating overview of the complicated involvement of French nationals at the time and the legacy they have left. The fallout from the struggle for Algerian independence, creating ready recruits for the cadres of soldiers of fortune sought by the Katangese and their rich backers. These add new characters to the story, each another dot to be somehow linked up in our puzzle.

c) South Africa It is remarkable that for a long time, the South African government was judged by many of us as frankly disengaged. At best, supportive documents have been inexplicably mislaid, at worst it seemed for a while that Apartheid era people still ran its secret service. But it is not my voice that should be heard here, rather one from Africa. This is the advice given to President Ramaphosa by Cameron Duodu, the highly respected commentator from Ghana:

“Comrade, it is not just a matter for the continent, but the whole of the UN. please you need to save the honour of South Africa. Please, you do not owe the apartheid regime any protection. If the ANC agreed to keep the apartheid era's murderous secrets under wraps, that agreement was invalid. For it was reached by your negotiators under duress.”

d) The United States

I won't repeat Susan Williams' detailed points, so I summarise as follows:

We encounter:

denial about the supply by the CIA to Katanga of Fouga Magister jets,

denial about the presence of US Dakota planes at Ndola,

obstruction to efforts to confirm the military service of key witnesses,

pages of documents generously provided but practically all fiercely redacted,

Yes, closed doors,

and as Susan observes, also seemingly indifferent to the fate of the four US citizens who died in the plane crash.

e) The United Kingdom

The accident happened in Northern Rhodesia, UK colonial territory. In the field at the time were at least one agent of MI6 and GCHQ was involved in intercepting radio traffic. What records might they have? This sort of question customarily triggers the response of 'neither confirm nor deny', of course, but now let's recall the contribution from Dr Mandy Banton? It's not a mountain of archives that must be viewed, rather a mountain range!

Besides the question on why former colonial documents are withheld, there remains another question. Whose records, are they? Not as newsworthy as the repatriation of the Benin bronzes but surely part of any new independent state's identity.

I stated earlier that as the inquiry progressed, the judge turned to key Member States, asking them to check their records and archives, this time appointing a high ranking and independent person to lead this. How did the UK respond? Susan Williams touched on this but let me share with you the grizzly detail.

Justice Othman wrote to the UK ambassador on 20 March 2019 asking for a report of the requested review by 3 November. There was no reply - from a P5 state! He wrote again on 30 April but again no reply. And again, on 15 June with the same failure to acknowledge. But, three days after the closing date for submission of responses, a UK minister did reply, stating that the UK would not appoint the requested high ranking and independent person. That is downright rude.

So, I initiated a Freedom of Information Request to the UK government asking for access to all correspondence between the UN and the UK government over those few months as there can't be much of it, I presumed. I will not waste your time on the fate of my request.

Fifteen months after the original request from Justice Othman, an official who oversees the reviewing of Foreign Office documents prior to their transfer to the National Archives - by no means, a high ranking and independent person - was tasked to trek across that veritable mountain range of archives, all unknown territory. Mandy Banton tells us that miraculously he completed this in only four weeks. Here, my friends, we have a new Hercules! Why, cleaning the Augean Stables would have been mere foothills for this intrepid mountaineer!

Attempts to find out whether his work extended to the records of MI5, MI6, and GCHQ were evaded so we do not know the answer. However, it is a reasonable hypothesis that they did not extend that far. To do so would have been to breach the UK Government's standard policy that it doesn't comment on security and intelligence matters.

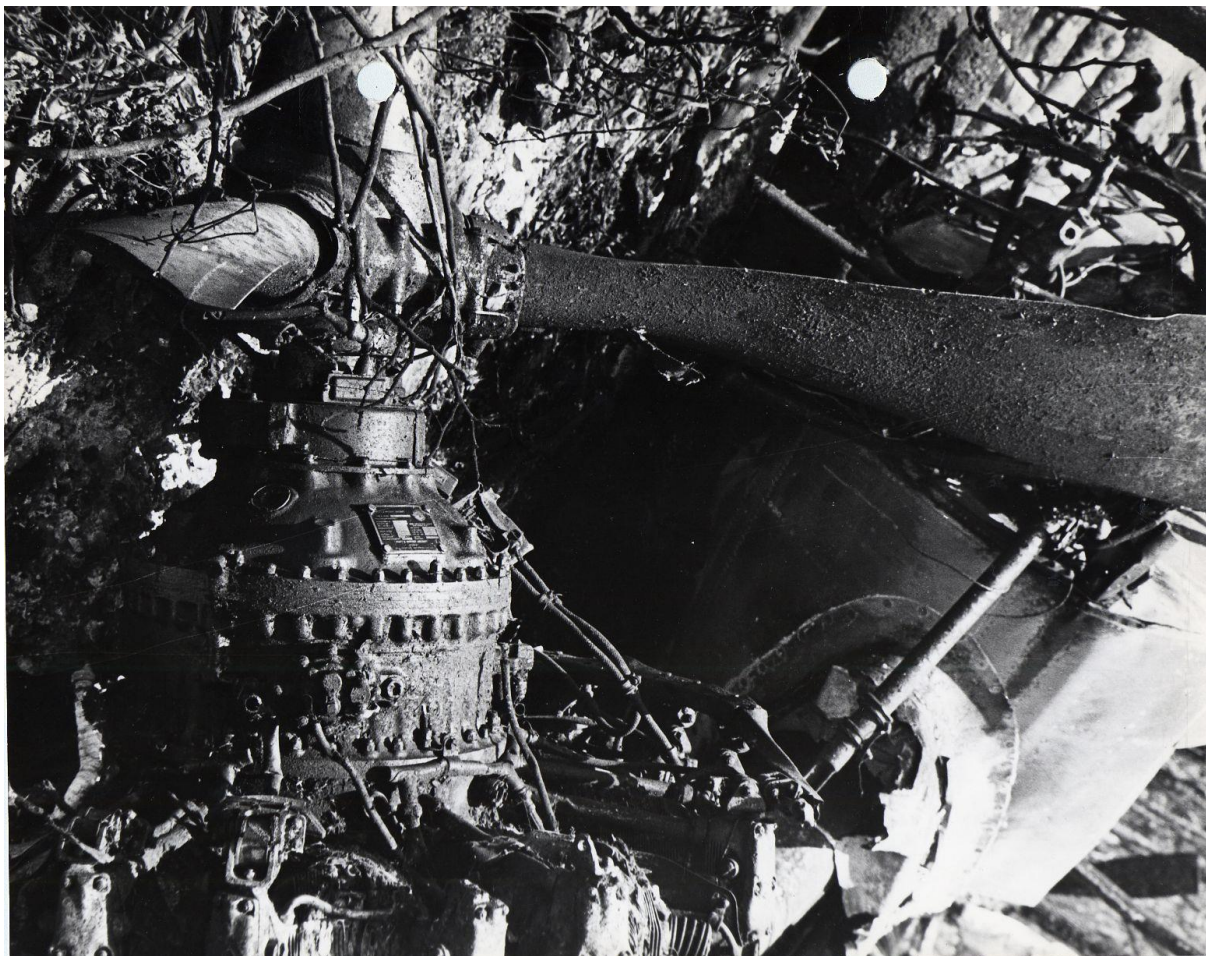
But when might GCHQ ever make a statement? But there's a precedent. In 2019, Donald Trump repeated unproven and unverified accusations from 2017 that British intelligence agencies spied on his election campaign. GCHQ considered itself forced to make a statement "The allegations are nonsense. Utterly ridiculous and should be ignored." This shows the intelligence agency can respond publicly if it feels there's good reason. Is the

sudden death of the UN Secretary General not good enough reason? Anyway, it was for the Justice to assess the UK's degree of cooperation. I quote from his report:

“The 2020 and 2021 responses of the Independent Appointee of the United Kingdom did not address my specific requests for information.”

So that's it. But is it? I have mentioned that the most recent decision by the General Assembly to pursue the investigation was supported by 142 states but not by the UK or the USA. A similar number of countries (141) backed the resolution calling for peace in Ukraine and the withdrawal of Russian troops. But in that Ukraine vote, thirty-five states, many in Africa, chose to abstain, a gesture widely interpreted as a statement by the Global South that the US and UK might now have become seriously out of touch. As much as these two P5 states may complain at that, there's a link there which others can plainly see. Why continue to be on the wrong side of history, we ask? As Hammarskjöld stated at the General Assembly to wide applause - and table-thumping led by Krushchev himself, 'the UN is not for the big powers but for the others.'

I ask the question again. Why did that plane crash? What progress is being made? Now the Justice has indicated that the majority of new information is coming from independent researchers, not from governments, progress is being made. Here's an example: The initial Rhodesian inquiry conducted in 1961 stated that the setting of all propellers at the crash site was found to be in the normal configuration. But were they? Recently, an independent expert has disputed this.



This image shows one of the four engines. Why are the propellers in reverse thrust mode? Why might the pilot have engaged reverse thrust in flight, impossible to activate by mistake? Maybe he was under attack and the earliest and slowest possible landing was considered the preferred option. We understand that further analysis of this hypothesis will soon be underway.

You can follow this argument in detail on our website

www.hammaraskjoldinquiry.info

This website features:

Hammaraskjold Commission report, our own lobbying all those years back

The Panel report and the three reports by the Justice's inquiry

Links to other websites including that of Dr Roger Lipsey, who spoke today,
and the UN Digital Oral Library System

and about one hundred news items on developments dating back to 2014.

It is here you will read what progress those private researchers are making in linking up those dots and maybe reaching a conclusion.

For now, with the encouragement of now more than two thirds of all UN Member States, we will continue to speak truth to power because *We are the peoples*, all of us, the Peoples of the United Nations.