

## **Dag Hammarskjöld and the Congo Crisis, 1960-61**

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Fifty years after Dag Hammarskjöld's death, the approach chosen by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to confront the Congo crisis in 1960-61 still bear a great significance. Suffice it to recall that since the very beginning of July 1960, few days after the proclamation of the independence of the Congo (on June 30<sup>th</sup>), the Secretary-General had to find the best way to respond to an appeal from the new independent Congolese government calling for immediate military assistance. This was happening against the background of what, since the start, looked as a major crisis, exceeding the troubled African context to reach the dangerous shores of the cold war.

Although scope, limits and instruments of the United Nations mission to the Congo had been agreed upon by a number of Security Council resolutions, starting from no. 143 of July 14<sup>th</sup> 1960, the issues opened by the UN intervention in the huge African country continued to be debated: how far should the intervention go in helping the Congo to solve its internal problems thus ceding to represent a menace to international peace and security? In the cold war framework prevailing at that time, how could the independence of the UN action be granted, given, for instance, that one of the two superpowers, the United States, provided the bulk of its funding? How the broader picture of the impressive changes taking place in the rest of the African continent could affect the viewpoint of the decision makers within the UN, and among the various governments, African and non-African, that were involved in finding a solution to the crisis?

If we separate those questions from the historical context of the Congo crisis, we realize how some of those issues – degree and freedom of intervention in an internal context by an external force; funding of multilateral military and civilian operations; broader political considerations; promotion of “democratic rules of the game” – still matter for present UN actions and, generally speaking, for today's international interventions in internal crisis and conflicts.

If those premises are true, then it is interesting and useful, even fifty years later, to analyze in details Hammarskjöld's approach to the Congolese crisis, in order to see how he managed to face the constraints of a duty implying risks and difficulties that he understood very clearly and ultimately brought him to death. This is the aim of the present contribution, which, starting from a broad research conducted some years ago with the help of primary sources available in Belgian,

American, French and British archives<sup>1</sup> has been enriched and focused by taking into consideration the specific Dag Hammarskjöld Collection kept at the National Library of Sweden in Stockholm.

Being Hammarskjöld's role in the crisis the core of the analysis, the paper is divided in three sections (the origins of the UN involvement in the crisis; the Katanga issue and the confrontation with Lumumba; the ousting of Lumumba: new counterparts old problems) which basically follow the chronological development of the crisis from the start, in June 1960, until Hammarskjöld's death in September 1961.

It is interesting to remark that the Hammarskjöld Collection, crucial in order to enlighten the decision-making process within the higher ranks of the organization, does not appear among the sources often used by researchers who have devoted their attention to the Congolese crisis, and specifically to the UN role in it. Significantly, even the most recent works dedicated to the topic are based on American and European sources<sup>2</sup>, which of course are essential to grasp important parts of the process but that can be usefully completed by taking into the picture UN documents as well. The perspective of the organization is indeed different from a governmental one – as different are its aims and instruments – and by taking it into account the whole picture is enriched. One can better grasp the issues at stake and the complexity of a political process that, far from regarding just the Congo and Belgium, was perceived by the involved actors – certainly by Dag Hammarskjöld – as a turning point in the relations between new independent countries, former colonial powers and the superpowers.

## **1. The opening of the crisis and the UN involvement**

In the words of the Secretary-General as early as July 19<sup>th</sup> 1960: “Congo operation is likely to go far beyond Suez story in all directions. If we succeed and if Seco [Security Council] accepts lines and philosophy developed in my report of yesterday, it will probably mean the opening of new and decisive chapter in history of under-developed countries and UN. For first time we come to grips with realities of post-colonial era, and I hope that we will not fail.”<sup>3</sup>

Since the start, Hammarskjöld realized that the dimension of the crisis opened by the mutiny of a part of the Congolese army, the secession of the richest province, Katanga, and the military intervention of Belgium exceeded by far the regional context: cold war issues certainly were at stake, both on the field and in New York, where the decisions regarding the UN mission took place.

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<sup>1</sup> See M.S. Rognoni, *Scacchiera congolese. Materie prime, decolonizzazione e guerra fredda nell'Africa dei primi anni Sessanta*, Firenze, Polistampa, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, J. Kent, *America, the UN and Decolonisation*, Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> KB (Kungliga Biblioteket), shelf n. L179: box155 (Congo crisis, code cables, incoming/outgoing 17June-30 September, 1960), OCC (outgoing code cable), from SecGen to de Seynes, 19.7.1960.

Nevertheless, the bipolar confrontation, despite all its implications, was but one of the possible constraints that Hammarskjöld had to take into account, while trying to define a policy for the Congo.

The United States and the Soviet Union, as superpowers, were certainly interested in mastering the African game, trying not to lose ground to the advantage of the rival, but they were by no means the only players on the scene. There was the Congolese political arena, as frail and fragmented as it could be, after a rushed decolonization process: the Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, the president of the Republic, Joseph Kasavubu, and Moïse Tshombe, president of the Katanga province (to quote only the most significant ones), far from sharing a common vision, were clearly not ready to compromise. There was the former colonial power, Belgium, trying to build around the Congolese bet – “le pari congolais” – the credibility it had failed to gain during the decolonization process: the goal in Brussels being to hold political and economic influence in the rich African country while accepting to give away formal power. Holding power and influence as far as possible (and where it was possible) was a goal fully shared by the big corporations (Belgians but also British, French, Americans, Scandinavians etc.) with interests in the Congo and especially in Katanga. For them, as for the majority of Belgian and Western settlers, the preservation of the *status quo* quickly became perceived as a matter of survival.

Meanwhile, as soon as the crisis erupted, the geographic position of the Congo, its economic relevance and its political frailty called for the involvement of a number of significant African governments which perceived the situation in Léopoldville, and in New York, as a risk but also as an opportunity. During the ‘year of Africa’ the international attention was being partly diverted from usually hot areas, such as the Middle and the Far East, to the heart of the continent, opening unexpected room for initiative and, possibly, for asserting new leadership. Finally, there was the Congolese population, 14 million people unevenly distributed over a country as big as the whole Western Europe, that had managed to survive one of the harshest colonial administrations. Very few of them belonged to the privileged class of the so-called “*evolués*” who, thanks to a certain level of education, filled the lower ranks of the colonial administration or enjoyed the status of little entrepreneurs and, thanks to the independence, could aspire to improve their social position. But the great majority of the Congolese people, despite the big expectations linked to independence, did not have much to count on and were far from the richness of their own country.

Against this manifold background the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who was in the third year of his second mandate by the summer of 1960, accepted the stakes involved in the Congo up to the point of turning the crisis into an opportunity, thus opening the way for either a

fundamental and seminal success, or a failure which might bring heavy consequences on the organization<sup>4</sup>.

In any case the bid was perceived to be so high that every decision had to be pondered cautiously under a big pressure and often without the due time. That is why the analysis of the decision-making process at the top of the Secretariat still looks, fifty years later, as an inestimable evidence of the Secretary-General's diplomatic skills. Apart from the judgment over the role he played, one can appreciate his ability to place each choice into a broader picture, in a constant attempt to mediate between constraints and scopes, ultimately keen to work at most of his capabilities for the accomplishment of the organisation's mission that he showed to share all along his mandate<sup>5</sup>.

On the eve of the Congolese independence there was a general fear, shared by the major Western diplomatic missions, that neither the new Congolese political leadership nor the Belgian government were fully aware of the challenges and risks of the transfer of power. Even before the sensational speech delivered by Lumumba<sup>6</sup> at the independence ceremony, which showed that something was not following exactly the pattern the Belgians were trying to set for their former colony, there were rumours about the weaknesses of the new independent country and the risks connected to a possible vacuum created by the transfer of power<sup>7</sup>.

The idea of a UN intervention in the Congo through a technical assistance program therefore started to be discussed before June 30<sup>th</sup>. As early as June 17<sup>th</sup>, from Geneva, Philip de Seynes, UN Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs, reporting talks among Belgian officials, wrote to Hammarskjöld: "Opinion unanimously and emphatically favourable to United Nations intervention and technical assistance in Congo as soon as possible"<sup>8</sup>. In the same cable de Seynes also recounted some impressions on the Congolese Prime Minister: "Lumumba is considered somewhere between Sekou Touré and Nkrumah, but more along Sekou Touré lines, yet more pragmatic and less

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<sup>4</sup> On September 30<sup>th</sup>, in a stressful phase of the crisis, answering to a cable sent by Dayal and comparing the situation in New York to that in Léopoldville, Hammarskjöld wrote: "We also sit on volcano with the pleasant quality that, if it erupts, even the Organisation is likely to disappear underground. This may be meager consolation but it creates the proper kind of philosophical approach". See KB, L179:155, OCC, from SecGen to Dayal, 30.9.60.

<sup>5</sup> The Secretary-General made constant efforts to share thoughts and worries with his closest team. See, for instance, KB, L179: 155, OCC, from SecGen to Dayal, 28.9.1960, n. 2200. "(...) have strongest understanding for the enormous scope of the problem you are facing. We would be happy to be of any assistance but we cannot add anything of value to your own thinking, planning and action. And we are happy to know that the team we have on the spot is one in which we have the fullest confidence. We know that you are doing what is humanly possible with the means at your disposal in the mad situation".

<sup>6</sup> See J.C. Willame, *Patrice Lumumba. La crise congolaise rivisitée*, Paris, Karthala, 1990, p. 112; Thomas Kanza, *The Rise and Fall of Patrice Lumumba. Conflict in the Congo*, Rochester, Schenkman Books, 1972, p. 181

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Archive Diplomatique, Paris (MAEF), Série Amérique- Lévánt (AL) 1960-65, Sous-série Congo ex Belge (SSCeB), Congo Belge (CB) 7, tel.-lett. 135, P. Charpentier a Mae, Léo, 7.7.60.

<sup>8</sup> KB, L179: 155, ICC, from De Seynes to SecGen and Bunche, Paris, 17.6.1960, n. UNPAR 206.

doctrinaire. Considered unpredictable and given to quick decisions”<sup>9</sup>. When Ralph Bunche reached Léopoldville as Special Representative of the Secretary-General to attend the independence ceremony, the request was made explicit by Lumumba himself, who asked for economic and financial experts – “preference for expert from a small neutral country” – to assist the new government in the negotiations with Belgians for infrastructural projects such as the Inga hydroelectric one. The UN Representative, underlining the importance of a quick and positive answer to that request (“it is a striking example of difficulty confronting this government, so uniquely lacking in technicians of every kind”<sup>10</sup>) added a further consideration in his report to the Secretary-General: “We also think it would be tactically advantageous to respond helpfully to this first request”<sup>11</sup>. It is not surprising therefore that as soon as the mutiny of part of the Congolese army started out on July 5<sup>th</sup>, quickly followed by the Belgian military intervention and, few days later, by the declaration of secession of Katanga, both Kasavubu and Lumumba appealed to the UN as the first source of support. At the same time, within few days, similar appeals were launched to the United States<sup>12</sup> and to Ghana<sup>13</sup>, whereas Moscow received a sort of pre-alarm on July 14<sup>th</sup>, stating that the Soviet Union might be called for assistance in case of a refusal by Western powers to stop the act of aggression against the Congo<sup>14</sup>.

Less than a week after independence the situation on the field was becoming more and more worrying. Acts of disobedience among the ranks of the Force Publique, now called Armée Nationale Congolaise (ANC), were spreading. On July 8<sup>th</sup>, trying to meet the requests of the Army, Lumumba and Kasavubu announced a process of africanisation aimed at reducing drastically the Belgian presence among the high ranks of the ANC, but the riots did not stop, while panic started to spread among the white population.

The cables sent by Ralph Bunche to the Secretary-General, from July 7<sup>th</sup> until the final break of diplomatic relations between the Congo and Belgium on July 14<sup>th</sup> and the subsequent Security Council resolution of the same day, give a vivid picture of a tension that nobody seemed to be able to master<sup>15</sup>. “Powder keg here”, wrote Bunche on the 9<sup>th</sup>, “but full explosion may be averted.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> KB, L179:155, ICC, from Bunche to SecGen, Léo., 6.7.60, n. 22.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> In face of the Belgian military intervention in Katanga, Luluabourg and Matadi, on July 12<sup>th</sup>, while Lumumba and Kasavubu were out of the capital, Foreign Minister Justin Bomboko, with the consent of the Vice-Prime Minister Antoine Gizenga, appealed to Washington: see M.S.Rognoni, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>13</sup> This request was made by Antoine Gizenga on July 13<sup>th</sup>, see J. Gérard-Libois and B. Verhaegen, *Congo 1960*, Brussels, CRISP, 1962, 2 vols., p. 546.

<sup>14</sup> The text of the cable sent to Khrushchev signed by Kasavubu and Lumumba is in J. Gérard-Libois and B. Verhaegen, *op. cit.*, p. 555.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, KB, L179: 155, ICC, from Bunche to SecGen, Léo., 7.7.60, n. 24, Bunche reported on the intervention of the Belgian ambassador, Van den Bosch, who avoided a disaster by refusing to follow general Janssens’

Terrific tension among Europeans owing to shock of disillusionment about reliability of corps publique”<sup>16</sup>. The answer Hammarskjöld gave on the same day accounts for his initial view of the crisis but already included some critical points that would last much longer and affect his approach to the whole Congolese operation: “Deeply worried by your evaluation of the situation which indicates that we all deal now not with authorities but with an excitable and demoralized mob”<sup>17</sup>. The lack of a reliable counterpart among the Congolese politicians would remain a constant concern all along the crisis<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, Hammarskjöld added: “What worries me most, apart from considerable risks that maybe run by many, is possibility that situation will develop where European military intervention becomes a psychological necessity with a breakdown for African-Western relations and very serious repercussions for the whole independence development”<sup>19</sup>. The Secretary-General’s words showed his anxiety for the broader and long-run implications of possible mistakes in the Congo: the problem could not be seen only from the Congolese or the Belgian perspective, the stakes were much bigger.

All of a sudden, after almost eighty years of a close and exclusive relation between the Congo and Belgium, the newly-independent African country was being projected on the international stage in the most dramatic and less manageable way. As the Secretary-General quickly realized the forces involved and the challenges to be faced called for an extraordinary effort from the international community and the United Nations in particular<sup>20</sup>. From the field, in face of the developments opened by the secession of Katanga and the continuation of Belgian military intervention despite the protest of the Congolese government, the moderate position taken by Bunche at first turned into an open request for intervention: “In a situation such as this where fear is profound throughout European community and is manifest also among Africans, where excitement holds at fever pitch and tension is unrelaxing, one who is in the midst of it as I am unavoidably questions both his power of observation and analysis” wrote Bunche to Hammarskjöld on July 13<sup>th</sup>, “there has been considerable deterioration (...) this leads now to lean heavily to view that only some manifestation of ‘third presence’ which definitely should be international, military but not indispensably fighting men, can save the situation. (...) But there must be a quick and impressive manifestation of ‘moving

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request for the general intervention of Belgian troops without the necessary previous consent of the Congolese Minister of Defense (Lumumba).

<sup>16</sup> KB, L179: 155, ICC, from Bunche to SecGen, Léo., 9.7.60, n. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., OCC, from SecGen to Bunche, 9.7.60, n. 21, urgent. It’s worth noting that Hammarskjöld’s considerations came before the declaration of secession of Katanga, which worsened the situation further and confirmed his worse fears.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., ICC, from SecGen to Cordier, 4.8.60, n. B-348, top secret. Commenting from Léopoldville, Hammarskjöld wrote: “I feel there is nobody, repeat nobody, on Congolese side combining reason and authority in way which enables me to explore matter before phrasing bid. I must therefore probably again work very much on instinct”.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. OCC, from SecGen to Bunche, 9.7.60, n. 21, urgent.

<sup>20</sup> See *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1958-1960, vol. XIV, doc. 131, tel. from the Mission at the UN to the Department of State, New York, 18.7.60, confidential.

in' by the UNATIONS on the situation here if our effort is to be effective"<sup>21</sup>. Despite this belief and the fact that he followed all the moves made by the Congolese leadership in those dramatic days from very close, Bunche admitted he had been taken by surprise when Kasavubu and Lumumba had formalized the request for a UN military intervention<sup>22</sup>.

The following steps are well known: the Secretary-General, under article 99 of the UN Charter, brought the issue in front of the Security Council<sup>23</sup>. After intense negotiations a Tunisian resolution, asking Belgium to withdraw its troops and authorizing the Secretary-General to provide the needed military assistance, passed with eight votes and the abstention of France, the United Kingdom and China. The miracle of a success at the Security Council could not hide the weaknesses of a text that was agreed upon, despite the cold war constraints of the time, exactly because it left room for at least two different interpretations. According to Western countries and, to a certain extent, to the Secretary-General, the UN operation should assist the Congolese government to maintain the internal order, whereas the Soviet Union, Poland and Tunisia thought it as an instrument to help the Congolese government to face Belgian aggression.

The compromise secured in New York was essential for the establishment of UNOC (as the operation of the United Nations in the Congo was called). At the same time, through it, the long cold war shadows reached the African country and started to count, by no means as the only important factor, but certainly as a crucial one. To what extent was the Secretary-General able to cope with the constraints imposed by the difficulty of the situation on the field and the fragile bases that constituted his mandate?

This question opened a political debate bound to characterize much of the UN intervention in the Congo and to continue for a long time. The end of the cold war partly helped to look back to that period in a different perspective, giving credit to other factors than those inspired exclusively by the bipolar confrontation<sup>24</sup>. To put it in simple terms, the fact that the Congo continued to be the stage of violence and instability after the end of the cold war and the collapse of Mobutu's regime calls for a deeper analysis taking into account long-term trends together with contingent explanations.

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<sup>21</sup> KB, L179:155, ICC, from Bunche to SecGen, 13.7.60, n. 63.

<sup>22</sup> See *ibid.* ICC, from Bunche to SecGen, 13.7.60, unnumbered: "Congo request for UN troops was complete surprise. No prior discussion or indication. Most if anything anticipated as result of activities Belgian troops was protest to UN about violation of treaty. Apparent reason for the extreme request was reports of serious engagements between Congolese and Belgian troops at Matadi on 11<sup>th</sup>. 2. Certain alternative to quick UN action is extension of Belgian troops intervention and probable involvement before long of French forces across river".

<sup>23</sup> See the "Summary diary" written by the Secretary-General on the period 10-17 July: KB, L179: 141 (Congo 1960-61, DH's strictly personal correspondence on the Congo and his personal notes on the Congo operation), Odds, Summary diary of Congo Operation, 19.7.60, secret.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, the interesting contribution by David Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention. Mines, Money, and U.S. Policy in the Congo Crisis*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1991

The same approach could be applied to analyse UNOC and Hammarskjöld's role in it: besides the cold war dimension, he had to consider a series of other factors, first of all the impact of the crisis over the new independent countries which were to form the bulk of UN members in the next future.

The decision to implement the mandate given by the Security Council resolution no. 143 through a regional approach is a good example of this double concern: by asking only African or neutral countries to contribute troops to the UN forces in the Congo, Hammarskjöld managed to keep the big powers<sup>25</sup> out of the Congolese territory while offering an opportunity for assuming responsibility to countries that were looking for international recognition and visibility.

## **2. The Katanga issue and the confrontation with Lumumba**

When UNOC was launched on the basis of the mentioned regional approach, it soon became clear that the obstacles against its implementation were many. Some could be tackled by the intensification of the UN assistance, others appeared to be more risky. The secession of Katanga and the role played by the Belgian government (by certain ministers, in particular<sup>26</sup>) and by Belgian and other Western economic interests became the issue to face. As early as July 14<sup>th</sup>, in a top secret cable to Hammarskjöld, Bunche wrote: "If Government cannot forestall secession of Katanga strongly rumoured here night 11<sup>th</sup>, it could be start of rapid disintegration of this State"<sup>27</sup>.

Meanwhile, the evaluation of the Congolese counterpart, whose collaboration was crucial for the accomplishment of the resolution<sup>28</sup>, was beginning to take shape both in Léopoldville and in New York: "Talked Lumumba two hours and half morning 16<sup>th</sup>", wrote Bunche the same day. "He is fluent but utterly maniacal child. With Leo and entire country on verge of disaster UN troops pouring in etc. his main and excited concern was a UN aircraft fly him to Stanleyville for obvious

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<sup>25</sup> For the Secretary-General's attitude towards France under this respect, see in particular the note he wrote on July 14<sup>th</sup> after a meeting with the French ambassador to the UN, Armand Bérard, in KB, L179: 141, Odd, secret, 14.7.60. "Paris had a feeling that I was in principle excluding French from all possible functions in the UN operation. I said this was complete misunderstanding (...). He should know that the French were excluded in a UN para-military unit in line with principles which were clearly established in UN common law. That meant that there would be no Frenchmen in any function in the UN Force in the Congo, nor would be any US, UK and USSR". Continuing on the same line but with a bit of irony: "Paris further was eager to see true universality in the international Force. I said that true universality would give me an army as the minimum national unit (and in a sense also the maximum) was roughly a battalion. We did not need initially more than some 2000-3000 men and with the Congo approach to Ghana and the Tunis and Morocco approaches to me, in turn leading on to Mali and Guinea I had safely in hand that number already in one integrated corner of Africa".

<sup>26</sup> Harold d'Aspremont Lynden, in particular, see M.S. Rognoni, op. cit., p. 93, 202-203.

<sup>27</sup> KB, L179:155, ICC, from Bunche to SecGen, 14.7.60, n. 45, top secret. See also *ibid.*, from Bunche to SecGen, Léo., 21.7.60, n. B-159 Bunche first impression of Tshombe: "Tshombe is a puppet and nothing more. He represents relatively few people, in fact."

<sup>28</sup> Resolution no. 143 was explicit on this point: "(...) The Security Council (...) decides to authorize the Secretary-General to take the necessary steps, in consultation with the Government of the Republic of the Congo, to provide the Government with such military assistance as may be necessary until, through the efforts of the Congolese Government with the technical assistance of the United Nations, the national security forces may be able, in the opinion of the Government, to meet fully their tasks", in <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/157/32/IMG/NR015732.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed , 29.5.11)



political reasons”<sup>29</sup>. In a subsequent message the Special representative talked in different terms about Thomas Kanza (governmental delegate for the relations with the UN) and Justin Bomboko (Minister of External Affairs), who he described as the only ones to have “education, comprehension but little authority”<sup>30</sup>.

In just few days from July 14<sup>th</sup> onwards, Lumumba became the target of criticism stemming from the Western diplomatic circles – as one could expect – but also from the UN staff. Certainly, his firm and outspoken refusal against any hesitation in accomplishing what he thought it should be the UN mission did not help to forge a good relationship between the Prime Minister and the UN personnel nor the Secretary-General himself<sup>31</sup>.

It was not Lumumba’s supposed communism or radicalism that negatively affected his relationship with the Secretary-General, nor Hammarskjöld’s alleged tendency to lean in favour of Western positions or to be soft with Belgians. In other words, it was not only or mainly a cold war issue that stood into their relation, but the fact that their vision of the role of the UN in the Congo was different and contradictory. In Lumumba’s view, the UN had been called by the Congolese government to help it to regain full control of the internal situation – thus, for instance, it was essential to put an immediate end to Katanga’s secession – and in no way could he conceive a subordinate role of his government to the Organisation. In Hammarskjöld’s belief, ONUC should assist the Congolese government in re-establishing law and order in the country, but this mandate should be accomplished taking into account the safeguard of the impartiality and the universal mission of the Organisation<sup>32</sup>. Whereas Lumumba, since the beginning of the UN operation, contested the lack of action and the slowness on the part of the UN officials as an “imperialist trick”<sup>33</sup>, Hammarskjöld made time-consuming efforts to find out a formula of intervention capable of keeping unanimity, or at least a broad consensus, among UN members. “We cannot permit

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<sup>29</sup> The cable continued stating: “Have disabused him in clearest language that UN not here to assist any political purposes. UN troops will not repeat not fight Belgians or anyone else here, and that they will remain completely and exclusively under UN orders”: KB, L179:155, ICC, from Bunche to SecGen, 16.7.60, n. 80.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., from Bunche to SecGen, 18.7.60, n. 95.

<sup>31</sup> An example was Lumumba’s declaration – received by the Secretary-General on July 18<sup>th</sup> – to appeal to the Soviet Union if the UN troops were not to replace within 24/48 hours all Belgian troops everywhere in the country: *ibid.*, ICC, from Bunche to SecGen, 18.7.60, n. 104; see DH’s answer, in *ibid.*, OCC, from SecGen to Bunche, 18.7.60, most immediate; see also DH’s reflections in KB, L179: 141, Odds, “Summary diary of Congo Operation”, note by DH, 19.7.60, secret.

<sup>32</sup> In order to strengthen his position, the Secretary-General insisted on the importance of understanding the UN Force as a “major manifestation of Africa solidarity”. Against any attempt to introduce the big powers into the picture (as threaten by Lumumba in his controversial ultimatum), he was very straightforward: “This is a question of an either-or: either assistance from African nations within the framework of African solidarity, or assistance from big powers from outside the region”. In this second case, “this would undoubtedly mean a major blow to the peaceful evolution of African independence and might well lay open to a major conflict with possible disastrous consequences for Congo and Africa as a whole”: KB, L179:155, OCC, from SecGen to Bunche, 18.7.60, most immediate.

<sup>33</sup> See *ibid.*, ICC, from Bunche to SecGen, 18.7.60, n. 104.

ourselves to bring havoc in another nation situation”, wrote the Secretary-General to Cordier from Léopoldville, on August 1<sup>st</sup>. “This does not mean playing soft, but it does mean playing reasonably. My main responsibility to the Security Council is for peace, justice and quiet in general, not to anyone specific point at a cost which may be immeasurable in case of rash action”<sup>34</sup>.

On July 22<sup>nd</sup>, a second Security Council resolution called Belgium to “implement speedily” the withdrawal of its troops from the Congo and requested all States to “refrain” from direct or indirect interventions that might worsen the domestic situation and compromise Congolese territorial integrity and political independence<sup>35</sup>. The message should have been clear both to Belgium<sup>36</sup> and to all those, within or outside the country, that might want to manoeuvre against Congo’s “territorial integrity” and “political independence”. As for the Secretary-General, the resolution gave him further credit by strengthening his mandate.

Despite the difficulties encountered in dealing with his counterparts on the field and in New York so far, it was evident that he wanted to master timing and approach for the implementation of his mission. His main concern during the Summer of 1960 focused on finding an equilibrium amidst various and contradicting pressures<sup>37</sup>: the juridical framework of his mandate; the Congolese government’s frailty and fragmentation<sup>38</sup>; the requests coming from the countries that contributed most to UNOC (the United States in terms of money; some African and Asian countries in terms of troops); and the concerns of colonial or former colonial powers<sup>39</sup>. On Katanga – the issue that more than others contributed to exacerbate his divergences with Prime Minister Lumumba – Hammarskjöld position was straightforward: Katanga was a decisive test and the UN should take action there in order not to lose the support of African and anti-colonial powers.<sup>40</sup> Once again, the

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<sup>34</sup> KB, L179: 155, ICC, from SecGen to Cordier, Léo., 1.8.60, B-292 “What must be impressed on people” – wrote Hammarskjöld – “is a. that in this as in other cases, military action is follow up on diplomatic action, and that it is more important here than anywhere else, as we want to preserve the frail basic unity of the Congolese people and their very frail constitution. My view on this point is shared by all Congolese with any political experience and any nation feeling. b. there is a certain rhythm in the deployment of military force over this vast territory. This rhythm is determined by the strength of the force in relation to needs, by the development of logistics support and by transport and similar technicalities (...) Such a potential is not yet reached (...) this is hard fact but it has to be faced also by eager braves”.

<sup>35</sup> <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/157/34/IMG/NR015734.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed 29.05.11)

<sup>36</sup> UN high ranks were very critical on the Belgian attitude towards the Congo. See, for instance: KB, L179: 155, ICC from Bunche to SecGen, Léo., 24.7.60, n. B-190.

<sup>37</sup> The difficulty of the effort appears very well in Hammarskjöld’s words: “I thought I had experienced the maximum of diplomatic and political complications, committed with risks, in UN activities, - but this - !”: KB, L179:155, ICC, from SecGen to Cordier, Léo., 31.7.60, n. B-273, top sec.

<sup>38</sup> See for instance, *ibid.*, ICC, from SecGen to Cordier, Léo., 29.7.60, n. B-244, “I have found Katanga problem deeply intertwined with domestic politics and members of Central Government keen on keeping its political lead in the matter” wrote the Secretary-General after talks with various Congolese leaders.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, OCC, from SecGen to Bunche, 26.7.60, top sec.

<sup>40</sup> Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, du Commerce Extérieur et de la Coopération au Développement, Bruxelles (MAECC), Direction des Archives (DA), Archives Diplomatiques (AD) Afrique, Congo, général (AF I-1), Juillet,

disagreement with Lumumba did not concern the aim – since both of them favoured the end of the secession – but the methods and timing to achieve it.

Of course a delay in ending the secession in Katanga (and the various influences at play on the field) could imply – this was Lumumba's main point – a weakening of the central government in a crucial phase. Hammarskjöld's detractors saw in his attitude an attempt to indirectly influence the internal debate among Congolese political forces<sup>41</sup>, which was particularly harsh in those weeks of late July and August. On the contrary, during his trip to the Congo, Hammarskjöld made up his mind to foster a quick action to avoid extremist drifts: "If we are scared of risks", he wrote to Cordier on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, "the outcome seems too certain: a dictatorial regime with clear orientation seemingly requested by Congolese people itself in frustration with conditions and in reaction against difficulties encountered in first international contacts with one side"<sup>42</sup>. Additional credit to the Secretary-General's approach was given by the Security Council resolution of August 9<sup>th</sup> (approved by 9 votes and one abstention), which reiterated the prohibition for the UN to "be a party" or "in no sense to exert influence" on the question between the provincial government and the central government.<sup>43</sup> The point was further reaffirmed by the Secretary-General's memorandum to the Security Council of August 12<sup>th</sup> which, not surprisingly, provoked the negative reaction of Lumumba. The Prime Minister contested the UN ineffectiveness in ending Katanga's secession, Hammarskjöld's interpretation of his mandate and his decision to start direct negotiations with Tshombe<sup>44</sup>.

This letter, the first out of three sent by Lumumba to the Secretary-General, constitutes the factual demonstration of a confrontation that lasted until late August, when the majority of the Security Council members endorsed Hammarskjöld's interpretation<sup>45</sup>, thus weakening Lumumba's

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memorandum of conversation, (P. Wigny, D. Hammarskjöld, W. Loridan, A. Holvoet, C. Schuurmans *et al.*), Brussels, 27.7.60.

<sup>41</sup> See D.N. Gibbs, "The United Nations, International Peacekeeping and the Question of 'Impartiality': Revisiting the Congo Operation of 1960", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 38, 3, 2000, pp. 359- 382 (pp. 359-377). The contrary was also true. At the beginning of August when Hammarskjöld was visiting the Congo he became convinced of the need for the UN forces to entering into the secessionist province as soon as possible in order to "lifting Katanga question out of fight between extremists and others" in KB, L179:155, ICC, SecGen a Cordier, 3.8.60, n. B-317.

<sup>42</sup> KB, L179: 155, ICC, from SecGen to Cordier, 3.8.60, n. B-318. At the end of the cable the Secretary-General noted: "Afraid I cannot impress on you how things are in this never-never land. For the second time in this crisis we were today on the eve of Korea, and I do not know if countermove led to postponement for more than couple of day. Long-term we are facing a China problem. It is now that action must be taken, inspired in no way by choice of side in cold war, but simply in the interest of peace for people whose innocence no party should be permitted to abuse for its own purposes and with disastrous consequences".

<sup>43</sup> For the text of the Security Council resolution and Secretary-General's memorandum see: <http://daccess-dds-un.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/157/35/IMG/NR015735.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed 29.5.11)

<sup>44</sup> For UN high official comments on Lumumba's reaction to Secretary-General's memorandum see: KB, L179:155, ICC, from Bunche to Cordier, Léo., 12.8.60, n. B433 and L179:141, let. from Bunche to SecGen, 13.8.60.

<sup>45</sup> See [http://www.un.org/en/sc/repertoire/59-63/Chapter%208/59-63\\_08-8-Situation%20in%20the%20Republic%20of%20Congo.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/sc/repertoire/59-63/Chapter%208/59-63_08-8-Situation%20in%20the%20Republic%20of%20Congo.pdf), p. 166 (accessed 29.05.11)

international stand. The deterioration of the relationship with Western countries and the UN increased the political isolation of the Prime Minister, whose domestic consensus was also under strain: rivals of the first hour, people like Jean Bolikango or Albert Kalonji, were gaining support; colleagues like Cyrille Adoula and Joseph Ileo<sup>46</sup> dissociated themselves from what they judged an excessive centralization and a wrong use of power; criticism over the approach and content of Lumumba's leadership was spreading even within his cabinet<sup>47</sup>. Thomas Kanza, one of Lumumba's closest friends, was particularly worried by the possible outcomes of the confrontation with the high ranks of the UN: "Certainly we were all too aware of the harm done when Lumumba effectively broke off all personal relations with Hammarskjöld – in one of the worst diplomatic errors he committed during that August 1960."<sup>48</sup> But it was within the grass-roots of the ABAKO movement that a strong opposition developed against Lumumba's premiership thus creating the premises for his ousting in the first days of September<sup>49</sup>.

Certainly pressures to get rid of the Prime Minister were spreading among Western governments as well, and the CIA was working out a plan for his "removal"<sup>50</sup>. Against this general backdrop Lumumba's decision to fight an open battle with UNOC and the Secretary-General himself proved to be a definite mistake. Probably out of alternatives, the Prime Minister called an All African Independent States Conference in Léopoldville (August 25<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>) hoping to build up African consensus around his struggle. The delegates, coming from various African countries<sup>51</sup>, were impressed by the general climate of tension and, following a position backed by Tunisia<sup>52</sup> and

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<sup>46</sup> In a cable sent to the Secretary-General, Bunche reported: "Morning 25 Ileo told me in confidence that at least 13 ministers were opposed to Lumumba but dared not to speak out. (...) His view is that Lumumba called for UN only when he thought it politically advantageous to do so. Now, finding that UN will not permit him to use it as an instrument on behalf of his political ends, he is against it": KB, L179:155, ICC, from Bunche to SecGen, 25.8.60, n. B-627, top secret.

<sup>47</sup> The Minister of External Affairs, Joseph Bomboko, for instance, did not approve the total break with Belgium and kept informal contacts with Ambassador Van den Bosch: see, J.C. Willame, *Patrice*, p. 373. On Bomboko's attitude see also KB, L179:155, ICC, from Bunche to SecGen, 21.8.60, n. B-580.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Kanza, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

<sup>49</sup> See *Rapport fait au nom de la Commission d'Enquête parlementaire visant à déterminer les circonstances exactes de l'assassinat de Patrice Lumumba et l'implication éventuelle des responsables politiques belges dans celui-ci*, (eds. D. Bacquelaïne; F. Willems; M.T. Coenen), Bruxelles, Chambre des représentants de Belgique, 2001 (RCE), pp. 105-106; J.C. Willame, *op. cit.*, p. 379-381; A. Maurel, *Le Congo de la colonisation belge à l'indépendance*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1992, p. 322. See also M.S. Rognoni, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-139.

<sup>50</sup> FRUS, doc. 189, Editorial Note. See also *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders. An Interim Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities*, United States Senate, Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975, p. 15. For the French position see FRUS *cit.*, doc. 177.

<sup>51</sup> The conference was attended by the Ministers of External Affairs of Tunisia, Sudan, Liberia, Togo, Ethiopia, Morocco, Guinea, Ghana, RAU, Mali, the Provisional Government of Algeria, Congo Brazzaville, and other representatives of non-independent countries. See M.S. Rognoni, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

<sup>52</sup> See KB, L179:155, ICC from Bunche to SecGen, 27.8.60, n. B-668; see also *ibid.*, ICC, from Bunche to SecGen, Léo., 30.8.60, B-694.

contrary to Lumumba's expectations, advocated a more moderate line towards the UN and its Secretary-General in particular: Lumumba's isolation could not be more manifest<sup>53</sup>.

Lumumba's showdown with the Secretary-General (probably stemmed out of his frustration against what he judged as a misuse of the UN force in the Congo) marked a new defeat for the Prime Minister. His subsequent decision to appeal directly to the Soviet Union for help was the last step into his political fall. From the Secretary-General's perspective this new attempt to gain support outside the UN framework through the involvement of a superpower contradicted all the efforts made until then and confirmed the image of Lumumba as the essential obstacle for a positive outcome of UNOC.

Reassessing the UN position in the framework of the late developments on the field after the end of the African conference, Hammarskjöld rather bluntly wrote: "There is one page that has to be turned and that is Lumumba's and Gizenga's and, for example, Gbenye's with their complete misconception of rights in relation to the UN and their role in the world". Concluding with an ironic accent and a good degree of self-confidence, he added: "For the rest: visitors galore, repainted planes, formal protests written in Leo and possibly also civil war trucks speak their eloquent language. But in spite of that and other worries I believe that the risk of another Korean situation is now back of us."<sup>54</sup>

### **3. The ousting of Lumumba: new counterparts, old problems**

When, on September 5<sup>th</sup>, applying a debatable (and discussed) article of the *Loi Fondamentale*, President Kasavubu dismissed Lumumba from his office, the immediate response of the UN was mainly left to the officials on the field. Cordier felt it was necessary to take a prompt action in order to avoid the spread of violence, so he ordered UN forces to keep control of all ports, airports and of the national radio. The decision was eventually endorsed by the Secretary-General, who became the target of strong criticism from the Eastern Bloc and from many African States. They considered the action taken by Cordier as a new, heavy interference and the final evidence of UNOC's biased role<sup>55</sup>.

Although the sources give no clear evidence of a direct involvement of Hammarskjöld or his closest staff in Lumumba's ousting, the general climate of tension and mistrust that prevailed at that time

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<sup>53</sup> Ghana in particular had been very close to Lumumba's position since the beginning of the crisis but followed the Tunisian line. Nkrumah tried hard to induce the Prime Minister to adopt a more moderate course. On this see, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State (GRDS), Central Decimal File (CDF) 1960-63, box 1956, 770G.00, tel. 321, W.C.Flake a Sec. of State, Accra, 6.9.60.

<sup>54</sup> KB, L179:155, OCC, from SecGen to Cordier, n. 1437, 1.9.60.

<sup>55</sup> The sources show no evidence of a direct involvement of the UN in the ousting of the Prime Minister.

between the Prime Minister and the high ranks of the UN Secretariat allows to think that Kasavubu, with or without a precise *placet* from Cordier<sup>56</sup>, did act knowing that his decision might please many, even in the UN. From our purpose it is interesting to remark how Hammarskjöld tried to counter the attacks and criticism by keeping the issue on the field of principles: the UN – this was his line – did act by taking control of the most important communication lines only to avoid a general uprising, thus accomplishing their mandate.

On the other side, and in a perfect timing, the replacement of Cordier by the Indian officer Rajeshwar Dayal, as the Secretary-General Special Representative in the Congo, on September 8<sup>th</sup>, did mark a significant change for the UNOC general approach to the crisis. Dayal did not hide his view of the need for the UN to go back on “the path of legality and even-handed justice”<sup>57</sup>, thus indirectly admitting a diversion from that path in the recent past<sup>58</sup>. This new attitude was an answer (fully endorsed by Hammarskjöld) to the need for the UN to regain the essential support of Asian and African States in a moment when the credibility of the Organisation was losing ground and the very office of the Secretary-General was under attack by the Soviet Union<sup>59</sup>. Consistently, UN forces prevented the arrest of Lumumba ordered by Mobutu on September 12<sup>th</sup> (and again in October)<sup>60</sup>, assured his protection in the following weeks and adopted a strong stand in favour of the definite withdrawal of Belgian personnel “military, para-military and civilians” from the Congo, including Katanga<sup>61</sup>.

In face of the political turmoil produced by the confrontation between the president and the Prime Minister which resulted in Mobutu’s take over<sup>62</sup> on September 19<sup>th</sup> and the following formation of the *College des Commissaires*, later recognised by President Kasavubu, Hammarskjöld and his closest entourage in the Congo managed to keep a neutral position<sup>63</sup>. Significantly, he continued to

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<sup>56</sup> See J.C. Willame, op. cit., pp. 394-395.

<sup>57</sup> See R. Dayal, *Mission for Hammarskjöld. The Congo Crisis*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 47.

<sup>58</sup> Dayal showed also great concern over the desperate conditions of the country: see KB, L179:155, ICC, from Dayal to SecGen, n. B984, 15.9.60: “With complete and utter recklessness, the political struggle – if it can be so called – is going on without logic or sense. Meanwhile the country is hurtling head long on the road to disintegration and chaos”.

<sup>59</sup> Commenting on those attacks Hammarskjöld wrote Dayal: “Round up in a day of cold war.(...) My basic feeling however is that the very venom of certain statements is a recognition of defeat, which again is of interest for it means that it is our duty to continue in the interest of those who wish only the best for the people of the Congo”, in KB, L179:151, OCC, from SecGen to Dayal, 23.9.60, n. 2115.

<sup>60</sup> See for instance, *ibid.*, ICC, from Dayal to SecGen, Léo. 26.9.60, n. B-1058.

<sup>61</sup> MAECC, DA, AD, AF I1, Octobre, ONUC, copie de note, D.H. à W. Loridan, Léo., 8.10.60.

<sup>62</sup> For an assessment of Mobutu’s attitude see KB, L179:155, ICC, from Dayal to SecGen, Léo., 19.9.60, n. B-1021 and *ibid.* B-1052. Rumours of a possible takeover by Mobutu were spreading since September 14<sup>th</sup>: see *ibid.*, ICC, from Dayal to SecGen, 14.9.60, n. B-962, top sec.

<sup>63</sup> “It is charmingly ironical counterpoint daily to be told here how we have disorganised the central government, paralysed administration, put up Mobutu, support Tshombe and act for the Belgians at the same time as your reports and even newspapers in their biased way tell about the attacks on UN from those same quarters. The role of strict impartiality is not one for somebody who ‘wants to be loved’. Aesthetically the balance would be perfect if both sides in

be criticised by both camps. Nevertheless, he succeeded to secure basic consensus among Asian and African countries<sup>64</sup>. Resisting the pressures coming from opposite sides he tried to work for the implementation of his mandate with the priority of preserving the legitimacy and credibility of the Organisation and of his office. In his own words the UN must “keep clean on the record, wherever it may lead”<sup>65</sup>.

We all know where the attempt to find a solution to the crisis brought Hammarskjöld. In the months following the dismissal of Lumumba many were the moments of tension and the difficult choices he had to face. Certainly the most dangerous one was the arrest<sup>66</sup> and the subsequent murder of Lumumba<sup>67</sup> with the consent of President Kasavubu, General Mobutu and the active participation of Katanga’s government officers. Again, from the Organisation’s perspective – in face of a human tragedy that could have been predicted in advance, leaving room for all kinds of different speculations – the death of Patrice Lumumba represented both a failure and a risk. A failure because, despite the direct responsibilities that should be searched elsewhere<sup>68</sup>, the UN were in the Congo to grant law and order, and the death of Lumumba and two of his companions, Joseph Okito and Maurice Mpolo, showed the world how far the UNOC had still to go before accomplishing its mission. A risk because UN credibility received from Lumumba’s murder a terrible blow: its detractors could now shout to the world the Organisation’s fallacies and ask for its definite withdrawal, with all the political implications that might result.

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the cold war used the same degree of publicity in voicing their dissatisfaction”, in KB, L179:156, OCC, from SecGen to Dayal, 23.10.60, n. 2860.

<sup>64</sup> “If the Afro-Asian stick together, or even if only the Africans stick together, they represent new big power to which certain others have to bow” wrote Hammarskjöld in a cable to Dayal after the meeting of the General Assembly that had confirmed its support to the Secretary-General against the expectations of the Soviet Union. “You know”, he continued “this is a theory on which I have worked now for two months. Today it was fully vindicated and I regard the fact that the Afro-Asian group in this way stood up to the test, found its own strength and a new cohesion, is more important than any other result”: KB, L179:155, OCC, from SecGen to Dayal, 20.9.60, n. 1971, immediate.

<sup>65</sup> This comment was made by the Secretary-General during a discussion with the United States Representative at the UN. Hammarskjöld noted in particular the complexity of the legal aspects involved in the confrontation between the president and the Prime Minister and the following role of Ileo’s cabinet. Significant is also the comment reported in the memorandum of conversation which described the US reaction to Hammarskjöld’s stand: “Our strongest impression is that he sees no clear course of action in Léopoldville to deal with the present situation and has fallen back on a completely do nothing ‘impartiality’, although he realizes that this may be working in Lumumba’s favour”: FRUS cit., doc. 249. See also M.S. Rognoni, op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>66</sup> Immediately after Lumumba’s arrest, Hammarskjöld wrote to Dayal: “We are in the middle of an extraordinarily complicated and indeed politically dangerous situation. I believe all we can do is to fall back on our right and duty to stand firmly on Charter principles, as overriding all other considerations, even if this would lay us open to allegations of partisanship – perhaps even from both sides”: KB, L179:156, OCC, from SecGen to Dayal, 2.12.60, n. 3898 and 3899, most urgent.

<sup>67</sup> On Lumumba’s murder see, in particular, RCE. See also C. Braeckman, *Lumumba, un crime d’Etat: une lecture critique de la Commission parlementaire belge*, Bruxelles, Aden 2002; Ludo De Witte, *L’assassinat de Lumumba*, Paris, Khartala, 2000, pp.190-206.

<sup>68</sup> Since January 13<sup>th</sup> the correspondence between the Secretary-General and his team in the Congo shows a strong concern for the fate of Lumumba and his companions and for the consequences of their probable mistreatment, see, for instance, KB, L179:157, ICC, from Dayal to SecGen, Léo., 14.2.61, n. D-409.

Against this difficult backdrop Hammarskjöld kept the line he had pursued since the beginning of the crisis. In New York he looked and worked for a constant and clear support by the Security Council, which was his ultimate point of reference, trying to keep a broad consensus from the Asian and African states around his approach to the crisis<sup>69</sup>. In the Congo, with the help of a staff that he managed to keep very close despite enormous pressures<sup>70</sup>, he pursued a dialogue with all different political parties in order to overcome the stalemate of Summer 1960 and help to create the premises for the formation of a government of national unity<sup>71</sup>.

When the Adoula Cabinet received the approval of the Congolese Parliament on August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1961, and the quick recognition of the majority of the international community, including the Soviet Union, the Secretary-General could look at this development as a personal success<sup>72</sup>. The Katanga secession was not over yet, but the participation of the Lumumbists into the new political framework left room for hope to build the necessary unitary domestic front needed to tackle Tshombe's resistance. It was precisely during a new attempt of negotiating with Katanga that the Secretary-General and 15 more people died in a plane crash, the exact dynamics of which have never been totally cleared<sup>73</sup>.

The climate in the Congo at mid September 1961, after the enthusiasm linked to the formation of the government of national unity in August, was getting tense again. The UN – through their new representative at Elisabethville, the Irish official Connor Cruise O'Brien – were now convinced of the urge to end the secession of Katanga in order to assure the unity of the country and implement the reforms it badly needed<sup>74</sup>. At the end of August, 81 foreign officials had been peacefully

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<sup>69</sup> For a personal interpretation of his role in the Congo and the constraints he had to face see the very interesting letter Hammarskjöld sent to the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, in KB, L179:141, letter from Dag Hammarskjöld to H.E. Mr. Östen Undén, 26.2.61, personal.

<sup>70</sup> Among others the Dayal's case, see M.S. Rognoni, *op. cit.*, p.231-232; J. Kent, *op. cit.*, p. 47. "In this 'Battle of Britain'" wrote Hammarskjöld to Dayal "those who try to be in the deeper sense the friends of all are bound to be treated as the enemies of all. This you know as well as we do, and therefore things I believe somehow will work out right": KB, L179:157, OCC, from SecGen to Dayal, 28.2.61, n. 1414.

<sup>71</sup> See for instance, KB, L179:162, ICC, from Linner to SecGen (only), Léo, 25.5.61, unnumbered.

<sup>72</sup> "My congratulation and gratitude to the UN Congo team" wrote the Secretary-General immediately after the vote of confidence to Adoula's cabinet "and especially to you and your close collaborators, on this encouraging forward step. The way may now be opened to a much more constructive effort on our part": KB, L179:160, OCC, from SecGen to Linner, 2.8.61, n. 5361.

<sup>73</sup> The enquiry commission formed to investigate in the crash worked on three hypotheses: a direct attack; a sabotage and an accident, without reaching straightforward results. The issue opened a vivid debate. In a letter published on *The Guardian*, in September 1992, Conor Cruise O'Brien – UN representative in Katanga at the time of the crash – and his aid George Ivan Smith argued that the crash was the result of a direct attack made by Katanga's mercenaries paid by the Union Minière (see "Letter to the Editor", *The Guardian*, 11.9.1992). This thesis has been contested by Bengt Rösiö in "The Ndola Crash and the Death of Dag Hammarskjöld", in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 1993, 31, 4, pp. 661-671. On the issue see also, D.N. Gibbs, "Dag Hammarskjöld, the United Nations, and the Congo Crises of 1960-61: A Reinterpretation", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 31,1, 1993, (pp. 163-174) pp. 173-174.

<sup>74</sup> See Conor Cruise O'Brien, *To Katanga and Back. A UN Case History*, New York, The Universal Library, 1966.



expelled from the province<sup>75</sup>, the Katangese Minister of the Interior, Godefroid Munongo, had been arrested and the radio station temporarily seized by UN forces to grant the final expulsion of all mercenaries. This move by the UN forces, fully endorsed by the central government in Léopoldville, the Soviets and the majority of Afro-Asian States, met the scepticism (if not the open opposition) of many Western countries<sup>76</sup>, while Tshombe continued to adopt delaying tactics.

In this framework of impasse the Secretary-General hoped to facilitate a solution through his involvement in direct negotiations with Tshombe. Despite the premises the correspondence he exchanged with his closest staff and with Bunche, in particular, until the last hour, shows a confidence in his mission and the absolute belief of the need to make all possible efforts to come out with a positive outcome in the interest of the Organisation and of the Congo as a whole. In one of his last cables from Léopoldville the Secretary-General, upset for the Western lack of comprehension over the difficulties met in Katanga, stated in very clear terms: "It is better for the UN to lose support of the US because it is faithful to law and principles than it survive as an agent whose activities are geared to political purposes never avowed or laid down by the major organs of the UN"<sup>77</sup>.

## Conclusion

The UN played a crucial role during the first Congo crisis. The Secretary-General was convinced, since he endorsed the mandate received by the Security Council on July 14<sup>th</sup> 1960, that the crisis was an immense challenge for the future of the Organisation. In the framework of the great transformations taking place in the international system as a result of the decolonisation process, a success in the Congo would have increased enormously the prestige and the very role of the UN; a defeat would have been a severe blow to its future development.

Thus the Secretary-General, despite the many constraints he had to face – the high level of economic dependence from the United States, by far the largest economic supporter of UNOC; the resistance of Belgium to give up its influence; the discordant views of Congolese political leaders, to mention but few – tried constantly to work out a balanced approach. The post he occupied and his personal experience allowed him to place the Congo crisis in a broader perspective – not always to the advantage of the Congo, one must say. The solution to look for, in fact, had to take into account

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<sup>75</sup> At the beginning of the month there were 500 mercenaries left in the province, by mid September more than 100 were still to be expelled. See C.C. O' Brien, *To Katanga and Back. A UN Case History*, New York, The Universal Library, 1966, p. 123 and M.S. Rognoni, op. cit., p. 409.

<sup>76</sup> See for instance, KB, L179:162, OCC, from Bunche to SecGen, 14.9.61, unnumbered, top secret, immediate, no distribution.

<sup>77</sup> KB, L179:162, from SecGen to Bunche, 15.9.61, unnumbered, top secret.

aspects that exceeded the local framework and called for a difficult balance of different point of views. Certainly Hammarskjöld – as clearly showed by the sources – was aware of the cold war implications of his personal stand and of his place within that confrontation.

The peak of the Congo crisis coincided – and not incidentally, of course – with a harsh Soviet campaign against the functions and powers of the Secretary-General. Paradoxically that campaign, far from producing positive results to the Soviet Union, helped Hammarskjöld to keep a strong consensus not only in personal terms, but also around his conduct on the Congo, even in face of the most controversial events, such as Lumumba's murder.

The analysis of the UN internal papers allows to see, cable by cable, how this effort of mediation had been pursued and to appreciate aspects of the Secretary-General's personality that do not come out from other sources: his irony, his ability to play down difficulties and obstacles in a spirit of understatement that probably helped him to face his duties deeply enjoying his work, despite the frustrations and disenchantment that were part of it.