

Dag Hammarskjöld

by Peter Wallensteen



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Famous
Swedes

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DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD stepped unexpectedly onto the world stage when he became Secretary-General of the United Nations in April 1953. To the general public, the media and decision makers, he was an unknown Swede. Soon, however, he would become almost legendary. His equally sudden tragic death eight years later reinforced this image. The global shock caused by his death was evidence of how, during his time at the UN, he had carved out a position in world politics subsequently achieved by no other Secretary-General and by no other Swede. Who, then, was Secretary-General Hammarskjöld? What made him so unique? Did he have creative qualities, or was he shaped by the global political conditions that prevailed in his day? The answers to these questions can hardly be found in Dag Hammarskjöld's life before his UN period, which – as it later became apparent – had provided valuable preparation for the post that no one knew would be offered to him.

Nor, in any real sense, are these questions answered by his life outside of his UN post. He was active in the Swedish Touring Club (STF). He was very interested in nature and photography. He devoted himself to reading and translation of literature. He had a lively interest in modern art, particularly through his friendship with the artist and writer Bo Beskow. He appreciated being a member of the Swedish Academy. This provides a different perspective on him than his UN post, but does not explain his way of handling it. His accomplishments at the UN surprised everyone, perhaps even himself.

Dag Hammarskjöld's debut on the world stage is captured by a photo of him that was taken on April 9, 1953. He was descending the stairway from his plane at Idlewild Airport in New York and being greeted by the then-departing UN

professor of law who held political appointments and was active in international legal circles. He served as a delegate to the Hague international law conference in 1907, and this experience undoubtedly colored his own political career and those of his sons. Dag's two oldest brothers, Bo and Åke, were also active in the field of international law, but his third brother, Sten, became a writer. The family's literary interests are attributed to Dag's mother Agnes, née Almquist, a step-niece of the writer Carl Jonas Love Almquist (1793–1866).

In 1914, Hjalmar Hammarskjöld was asked by King Gustav V to serve as prime minister of Sweden after a popularly elected government had been defeated by conservative forces. After that, he served in the indirectly elected First Chamber of Parliament while remaining county governor of Uppsala and accepting international assignments.

In Swedish history books, Hjalmar Hammarskjöld does not enjoy the best reputation. He headed a government that represented royal power in an age of emerging democracy, just before the breakthrough of parliamentary government in Sweden. However, Dag Hammarskjöld later explained that his father considered it a matter of duty to accept the post of prime minister without thereby taking a position on the constitutional issue. He was acting as a civil servant who belonged to no political party. This portrayal may well reflect earlier conversations between father and son, but may also be an expression of how the son wanted to see his father, in light of his own experiences.

During World War I, Prime Minister Hjalmar Hammarskjöld pursued a policy of strict neutrality. Among other things, this meant that Sweden continued trading with Germany, despite criticism from the Western allies. Many people perceived this as a pro-German policy, but Hjalmar Hammarskjöld – and his son Dag – regarded it as an example of firm principles. The father hoped that the sacrifices created by this policy would demonstrate that Sweden was not opportunistic but was carefully fol-

lowing the principles of international law. After the war, this would leave the country in a stronger position. Firm principles were appropriate in a long-term perspective, though in the short term they led both to famine and political instability in Sweden due to the Allied blockade. This policy isolated Hjalmar Hammarskjöld. He was forced to resign. According to Dag, in the end his father's "only firm support was his faith in his own convictions. The advice of others might be welcome and valuable, but did not free him from responsibility." These were themes that Dag Hammarskjöld would return to.

Dag Hammarskjöld thus had the opportunity to see, at an early age and at close quarters, that a principled position could lead to severe sacrifices – especially for the principled person himself. These experiences were undoubtedly useful when he came into direct conflict with several of the world's major powers, for example during the Congo crisis. A sense of duty and self-sacrifice combined in what Dag Hammarskjöld often referred to as "integrity." The guiding principle was faithfulness to "oneself." *Markings*, a book of Hammarskjöld's personal reflections over many years that was published after his death, may be regarded as Hammarskjöld's way of examining his own role and personality. This process led him to ponder eternal issues, but did not necessarily reflect a religious conviction. Where did these principles come from? Why should he defend them when others did not understand them? Would these principles and his actions really benefit everyone in the long term?

Hammarskjöld graduated from upper secondary school in Uppsala, earned a law degree at Uppsala University in 1930 and completed his doctorate in economics at Stockholm College (now University) in 1933. He was appointed to a position at the Ministry of Finance. He worked under the leading theoretician of the Social Democratic Party, Ernst Wigforss, a man whose policies and perspective must have appeared poles apart from those that his father represented. Dag Hammarskjöld was



Dag Hammarskjöld with his three brothers. From the left Bo, Dag, Åke and Sten. Bo also pursued a civil service career, Åke was a high official of the International Court of Justice and Sten was a writer.

Under-Secretary in the Ministry of Finance for ten years and became chairman of the Governors of the Bank of Sweden (*Sveriges Riksbank*). Although international issues were part of his duties, they did not become his main task until 1947, when he moved to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. He served there as Permanent Under-Secretary from 1949 to 1951, then joined the government as a non-political minister without portfolio and dealt with a broad range of international issues under Foreign Minister Östen Undén.

In other words, by the time he was appointed UN Secretary-General, Hammarskjöld had extensive political experience,

despite his civil service orientation and even though he had not actually been a politician in the true sense. He had also participated in international negotiations, for example as Sweden's chief delegate to the new Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) from 1948 to 1953. He had not created his position in Sweden by means of ordinary political activity. He had not campaigned for votes in elections, had no large fortune and was not a media personality. Instead he was a "gray eminence," well respected for his skills. His strengths were high proficiency, mental and physical endurance, the ability to analyze a situation quickly, keep the facts in order and propose courses of action. He had an air of self-assurance and won people's confidence. Hammarskjöld's broad cultural and scholarly interests were a further asset in achieving contacts. The precondition for influence was that he could win the confidence of those who had "real" power. In Hammarskjöld's hands, this could be transformed into strategies of action, which in turn gave "real" power to him.

The civil service tradition that Hammarskjöld represented is typical of Scandinavian public administration and also exists in Great Britain. The civil servant views himself as the bearer of efficiency and incorruptibility. He or she is a barrier to political changes that are irreconcilable with earlier principles. A civil servant is also the guardian of due process of law, a role that may seem conservative but ultimately depends on the policies established by such legitimate organs as the government, Parliament and the courts. This civil service tradition has parallels with the mandarin system in China, where education and loyalty were also elements of paternalistic concern for the country's inhabitants and future prosperity. As a civil servant, Hammarskjöld found it possible to remain loyal to a Social Democratic government because the changes it made were implemented in legally correct form and served all the people of Sweden, not only some of them.

Unexpected Secretary-General

WHEN HAMMARSKJÖLD became UN Secretary-General, he took over as the head of an organization that had been treated roughly despite its relative youth. The United Nations had been created less than eight years earlier. The UN Charter had gone into effect on October 24, 1945. The UN enjoyed a stronger position than its predecessor, the League of Nations. The Security Council with its five permanent members (China, France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States: the five victorious major powers of World War II) had extensive authority, provided that none of the big five blocked a decision by invoking its veto power. The General Assembly, where each member country had one seat and one vote, also played a major role. The Secretary-General had a strong position as the chief administrative officer of the UN. He was entitled to “bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security” (Article 99 of the Charter). The UN thus included three organs that could all take action on matters related to war and peace: the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Office of the Secretary-General (Secretariat).

During its first few months, UN headquarters had been in London. The now familiar UN building in New York was completed in 1952. Trygve Lie, a Norwegian politician and union official, became the first UN Secretary-General in 1946. He devoted much of his time to building up the organization. Meanwhile, the Cold War began. The UN was in the process of becoming one of its first victims. In some respects, the veto power of the big five in the Security Council may have saved the organization, by making it impossible for any one numerically superior great-power bloc to use the UN against other countries. Only in 1950, when the Soviet Union boycotted the Security Council in protest because the Communist regime in Peking

(now called Beijing) was not allowed to take the Chinese seat in the UN, did a situation arise where a majority could make a decision that adversely affected one of the major powers. The UN thus became a belligerent in the Korean War of 1950–53, taking the side of South Korea against North Korea and China. Trygve Lie defended these decisions and gradually lost the confidence of the Soviet Union, China's ally. When he was nominated for a new five-year term of office, the Soviet Union voted against him. The decision was nevertheless pushed through the General Assembly, and Lie was given another three years in his post. After that, Soviet representatives refused to speak to him. Trygve Lie found himself in an intolerable conflict with one of the founders and most influential members of the organization.

This situation worsened when a United States Senator, Joseph McCarthy, labeled the UN a nest of "Communist" spies. The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) started looking into the backgrounds of American employees at the UN. By 1952, the UN was suffering a severe crisis of confidence. Lie finally realized that he had to resign before the end of his term. It came as a great surprise when, after five months of discussions, the five major powers reached agreement on the unknown Dag Hammarskjöld as the new Secretary-General. Hammarskjöld had impressed French and British negotiators in the OEEC. The Soviet Union apparently wanted to end the deadlock at the UN, and a Secretary-General from neutral Sweden was acceptable. The death of Stalin in March 1953 provided an opening to the West and created an interest in reducing tensions. In the United States, too, a new administration took office early in 1953 and listened to its European allies.

It is interesting to note that Sweden did not pursue any campaign to have Hammarskjöld elected. On the contrary, Swedish diplomats and politicians seem to have been just as taken by surprise as Dag Hammarskjöld himself. For example, he refused to believe the telegrams and telephone calls that reached Stock-



Dag Hammarskjöld attached great importance to the oath he swore as an international civil servant before the UN General Assembly in April 1953.

holm. Hammarskjöld was not even asked if he was available for the job. Perhaps the members of the Security Council feared that he would say no. The Security Council voted unanimously for him on March 31. On April 10, 1953 Dag Hammarskjöld swore the oath of office as Secretary-General of the UN.

Hammarskjöld took office at a time of major shifts in the policies of the great powers. There were new regimes both in the United States and the Soviet Union. An armistice was being negotiated in the Korean War. A new attitude was discernible among the Chinese leaders in Peking. There was, however, no lack of potential crises. These soon materialized in the form of

unrest in Berlin and new atomic weapons tests. However, Hammarskjöld began his first five-year term as Secretary-General under conditions that were more promising than they had been for years.

Hammarskjöld's first action was to protect the integrity of his organization against Senator McCarthy's investigative committee and against FBI interference. First he had FBI agents removed from UN premises. Then he found a method for dealing with the Senate committee's accusations against UN employees. According to Article 101 of the UN Charter, all employees of the UN are subordinate to the Secretary-General, not to national agencies. The fundamental principle in the UN Charter was thus to create an international civil service that would be neutral in relation to all member countries. Hammarskjöld's background as a Swedish civil servant undoubtedly influenced his way of handling this crisis. The strength of the UN could not be measured either in arms or money, but only in its impartiality, skill and efficiency. These three qualities had been crucial to Hammarskjöld's own career in Sweden.

By taking a firm stand against the American authorities and initiating appropriate organizational changes, Hammarskjöld improved the working climate at the UN. The position of the Secretary-General as an impartial international civil servant was emphasized. However, the task of giving the organization a prominent new global role remained. Through its actions in the Korean War, the UN was in danger of appearing to be an appendage of Western foreign ministries. Meanwhile, the West in general and the United States in particular did not seem to want to give the UN a more important role. The organization played only a limited part in ending the Indochina War in 1954. Such major European issues as the role of Germany, Berlin and Austria were handled by the victorious powers among themselves. Nuclear arms issues, to the extent they were discussed at all, also lay outside the purview of the UN.

There was an obvious risk that the UN would be reduced to a forum for informal debate and propagandistic manifestations. In June 1954, when Guatemala asked for a meeting of the Security Council to deal with the ongoing invasion from neighboring Honduras, this gave Hammarskjöld an opportunity to draw attention to the relevance of the UN. This attempt failed, however, and Hammarskjöld came into conflict with the United States. The invasion was being led and implemented by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Its purpose was to overthrow the popularly elected government that had been running Guatemala since 1951 and that had begun distributing farmland belonging to American companies to landless citizens. From the standpoint of the American government, this was “Communism” and the offending government should be deposed. The American government was not interested in having the issue brought before the Security Council but could not prevent this from happening. In the Council, the United States proposed that the matter be referred to the Organization of American States (OAS), but this proposal was blocked by a Soviet veto. A vague resolution was adopted, stating that member countries should not contribute to acts that might lead to bloodshed. After that, the U.S. took advantage of its temporary role as chairman of the Security Council to delay the issue. The elected Guatemalan government was driven from office late in June 1954.

For Hammarskjöld, this was a defeat. The UN had not been able to intervene to protect a small country from the manipulations of a large nearby country. He maintained that the UN should play a central role on the Guatemala issue and not be subordinated to the OAS. Perhaps it was both undiplomatic and tactless to pick a fight with the United States, but he was told that other Security Council members shared his view even though they could not openly support it. Seen in a longer perspective, by adopting this stance Hammarskjöld may have strengthened his position.

Independent global actor

THE BIG BREAKTHROUGH for Hammarskjöld and the United Nations came on a more complex issue. During the Korean War a number of American fliers, formally under UN command, had been shot down and imprisoned in China. They included eleven crew members from a B-29 aircraft and four pilots who had been shot down during combat operations. Late in November 1954, Radio Peking announced that the eleven had been sentenced to long prison terms for espionage. The American government reacted strongly. Early in December, President Dwight D. Eisenhower made it clear that the responsibility for the fate of the airmen rested with the UN, since they had been under UN command. Discussions began with Hammarskjöld. On December 10, the General Assembly assigned him the task of working toward the release of all UN personnel.

The complications were numerous. The People's Republic of China was not represented in the UN. China's seat in the Security Council was held by the losers of the civil war, the nationalist Chiang Kai-shek regime that had fled to Formosa (Taiwan). The U.S. had no diplomatic relations with the People's Republic either. By handing the issue over to the UN, the American government was washing its hands of responsibility. Any failures could be blamed on the UN. Furthermore, the UN had been one of the belligerents in the conflict against China during the Korean War and had directed sanctions at China. Hammarskjöld's task as the foremost representative of the UN was to somehow bring about the release of the American airmen. China was hardly likely to accept his authority as Secretary-General of the UN, much less see any reason to obey the recommendations of the General Assembly. Overcoming China's suspicions would require great diplomatic skills. However, Sweden and Great Britain were among the few Western countries that had immediately recognized the new mainland

Chinese regime. The People's Republic had an embassy in Stockholm, which turned out to be useful.

From Hammarskjöld's perspective, his assignment was a gamble. If he succeeded, this would strengthen the position of the UN, both in the United States and in general. A failure would be difficult to repair, especially in the eyes of American public opinion. Hammarskjöld took the most daring possible action by deciding to visit China personally. He sent a telegram to the Chinese prime minister and foreign minister, Chou En-lai, requesting a meeting in Peking. The reply was positive. The practical arrangements were finalized during Hammarskjöld's stay in Stockholm for the annual meeting of the Swedish Academy on December 20, 1954.

His talks with Chou En-lai in Peking took place between January 5 and 10, 1955. A brief communiqué was the only publicly acknowledged result. The talks had proceeded smoothly. Contacts had been established. Hammarskjöld acted according to what became the "Peking formula," which stated that he was in Peking in his role as Secretary-General under the UN Charter, not as a representative of everything the General Assembly had said in its resolution. Chou En-lai accepted this distinction. Hammarskjöld later applied this way of distancing of himself from undiplomatically formulated resolutions in other contexts as well.

The eleven B-29 aviators had already received their espionage sentences in accordance with the valid laws of China, Chou En-lai maintained. The government of China was thus not prepared to view them as prisoners of war, which the UN and Hammarskjöld considered them to be. Changing the verdict was an internal Chinese issue. The four other Americans had not yet been convicted, which provided maneuvering room that Hammarskjöld took advantage of. Chou En-lai's attitude during the talks indicated that China was probably not inflexible or unwilling to contribute to reducing tensions in the region. The concrete steps



The January 1955 talks between Hammar skjöld and Chinese leader Chou En-lai in Peking not only dealt with politics but also touched on cultural and philosophical issues.

they discussed were taking photographs of the prisoners, exchanging information on their state of health and arranging visits by their families.

Hammar skjöld regarded the talks in Peking as the beginning of a new era. “The door that has been opened can be kept open, given restraint on all sides,” he told waiting journalists upon his return to the U.S. China’s offer to allow family members to visit the prisoners was received unfavorably by the U.S. State Department, however. It warned against such visits and refused to issue passports. Hammar skjöld’s impression was that China intended to release the prisoners at the time of these family visits. The United States had now blocked this opportunity. Hammar skjöld

instead worked to have the four still-unconvicted pilots released. He succeeded. They were freed in May 1955. Hammarskjöld believed that the favorable reactions to this step in the United States would pave the way for the release of the remaining eleven. They were to be freed on August 1. According to a message to Hammarskjöld from Chou En-lai, the pilots had behaved in a disciplined way and the Chinese court had thus viewed them with good will. This information reached Hammarskjöld via a small post office in southernmost Sweden. He was spending a few days at a farmhouse in Skåne and was out fishing on his 50th birthday. Chou En-lai wrote that the release of the prisoners was a way of maintaining his personal friendship with Hammarskjöld and sent him a birthday greeting at the same time.

The release of the American aviators was a triumph for Hammarskjöld's diplomatic style. Risk-taking had paid off. The UN had proved its usefulness in a nearly impossible stand-off between two of the world's largest powers. Attitudes toward the UN and Hammarskjöld shifted. To the American public and to the media, Hammarskjöld and the UN seemed like an independent actor on the global political stage.

Innovative peacemaker

IN 1956, Egypt nationalized the company that operated the Suez Canal, which connects the Mediterranean with the Red Sea. This provoked strong reactions from the Western powers, which wanted to keep the canal under international control. Negotiations began, but meanwhile France, Great Britain and Israel concluded a secret alliance that was aimed at ensuring control of the canal, overthrowing Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser and bringing an end to the raids against Israel occurring from Egyptian territory. According to this plan, Israel would first attack Egypt, after which France and Britain would demand

that the belligerents (Egypt and Israel) withdraw from the canal. Then the canal would be placed under French-British control as a buffer between the two belligerents. The effects of these events on Egypt would trigger the fall of Nasser, or at least that is what France was hoping. The French believed that Nasser was behind the uprising against their colonial rule in Algeria.

The plan was set in motion in October 1956 but failed. Complex conspiracies are often difficult to carry out. Israeli troops swept across Egyptian territory. An Anglo-French ultimatum was issued, followed by troops. This ultimatum had no credibility. The United States opposed Israel's action. The Security Council was summoned. The U.S. proposed a resolution demanding an Israeli withdrawal. France and Britain vetoed the American resolution. The Soviet Union presented a modified version of the same resolution and received support from Nationalist China. France and Britain vetoed this resolution as well. The Security Council was paralyzed. Instead, the General Assembly was called into an emergency session and heard demands for an immediate cease-fire, withdrawal of troops from the three countries and the re-opening of the Suez Canal.

In this situation, Canadian representative Lester Pearson raised the idea of organizing a UN peacekeeping force. Hammarskjöld was skeptical at first, but the idea won support from many camps. British and French troops were intended to be part of the UN force, but Hammarskjöld firmly rejected this, since it would be a way of legitimizing the acts of the two countries. The General Assembly authorized Hammarskjöld to organize an emergency force under UN leadership. Meanwhile, he was supposed to persuade the belligerents to sign a cease-fire. The UN force and the mediation assignment were new tasks for the world organization. Hammarskjöld's assignment was threefold: to dispatch a UN military force, work out guidelines for its use and persuade France and Britain to withdraw from Egypt.



Egyptian President Nasser's permission was required before the UN could begin its first peacekeeping operation. Hammarskjöld had intensive, successful negotiations with Nasser late in 1956.

date for UN peacekeeping operations. This type of military mission was destined to become a permanent feature of the UN's arsenal of crisis measures, even though it is not mentioned in the Charter. The first such mission set the pattern. It succeeded because – for various reasons – the mandate was acceptable to all the affected parties. Hammarskjöld's most difficult negotiations were with Egypt, which had to approve of the stationing of foreign troops, albeit under a UN flag, on its national territory. The General Assembly had asked Hammarskjöld to establish the guiding principles of the operation, which meant that he was

expected to resolve these issues. It would create a troublesome precedent if Egypt were allowed to make the ultimate decision. Meanwhile, Egypt's consent was obviously vital. This type of delicate dilemma was Hammarskjöld's specialty. By simultaneously acknowledging Egypt's sovereignty and emphasizing the importance of bringing in the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) as soon as possible, so that French and British troops could be withdrawn, Hammarskjöld managed to obtain permission to send the first UN contingents to Egypt. The sovereignty issue was resolved thanks to a special procedure by which Egypt was entitled to demand the withdrawal of UN forces. This procedure was implemented eleven years later (in 1967) when Egypt asked that the troops be removed.

The Israeli attack had begun on October 29, 1956. The cease-fire went into effect on November 6 and the first UN forces were in place by November 15. Within less than three weeks, the political map of the Middle East had changed, and a new type of UN operation had been born. Hammarskjöld's ability to work quickly, thoughtfully and efficiently had yielded dividends. His reputation rose throughout the world, and his efforts were highly respected.

Meanwhile another crisis was underway, but the UN could do nothing about it. On October 22, there were demonstrations in the Hungarian capital of Budapest against the existing Communist regime. The regime asked for help from Soviet forces. Hostilities began and escalated. The UN Security Council met on October 28, but was unable to reach any decision on this crisis. The Soviet delegate maintained that the events in Hungary were an internal matter. On October 30, Imre Nagy took over as prime minister of Hungary. He demanded the withdrawal of Soviet troops. At first this seemed to be what was happening, but events suddenly took a new turn. Additional Soviet troops were sent to Hungary. On November 4, the Security Council met again and the United States proposed a resolution calling

for the withdrawal of the Soviet troops that were now invading Hungary and surrounding Budapest. The proposal was defeated by a Soviet veto.

In strong terms, the General Assembly demanded Soviet withdrawal from Hungary and asked the Secretary-General to look into the situation more closely. Neither the Soviet Union nor the new Hungarian regime that was soon installed in Budapest gave the Secretary-General any opportunity to study events in Hungary. The Western powers were unable to react to what was happening. The Suez crisis was already complicating relations among leading Western countries and weakening the governments of Britain and France. Giving the Secretary-General the task of dealing with the Hungarian crisis was a way of concealing the inability of the West to act against the Soviet Union within its sphere of military authority.

After his role in resolving the Suez crisis, the UN Secretary-General undertook a whole series of diplomatic and other actions. In September 1957, Hammarskjöld was unanimously re-elected for another five-year term. During subsequent years he was active in crises where the interests of the major powers were less pronounced and where they saw no reason to oppose an independent and resourceful UN Secretariat. These included the Lebanese crisis of 1958 and the Laotian crisis of 1959. It was therefore not surprising that in July 1960 the leadership of the newly independent Congo approached Hammarskjöld and the UN for help, rather than turning to any of the great powers. The UN had developed into a realistic alternative and seemed to be a force nearly independent or beyond the interests of the major powers. Nor was it surprising that Hammarskjöld should reach the conclusion that the UN should intervene in the Congo. However, what began as a limited series of events quickly gained global political dimensions and drew Hammarskjöld into his most severe crisis. When there finally seemed to be a way out, Hammarskjöld too became a victim of these events.

Defender of the Charter

THE BELGIAN CONGO became independent on June 30, 1960 under the name Republic of the Congo (later Zaïre, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo). Very little had been done to prepare for independence. There were few Congolese with administrative, political and military leadership experience. The country faced major development problems. A Belgian administration was holding the country together. Belgian officers commanded the Congolese army. A large Belgian mining company, Union Minière, was working mineral deposits in the southern province of Katanga. The prime minister of the Congo was Patrice Lumumba; the president was his rival Joseph Kasavubu. Tensions between the two added to the complications. Hammar-skjöld and his staff were aware of the Congo's problems. Even before independence, they had begun discussions on development assistance.

Events moved faster than anyone could have imagined. Expectations were high, and dissatisfaction was triggered after only a few days. Soldiers refused to obey their Belgian officers and mutinied in the capital of Léopoldville (now Kinshasa). The Belgian civilian population was seized by panic. Similar revolts occurred throughout the country, and a few Europeans were killed. Belgian troops intervened to protect the white population, without the approval of the Congo central government. On July 11, the leader of resource-rich Katanga, Moïse Tshombe, declared his province independent. He requested and received Belgian troops to maintain order. From the viewpoint of the Congolese government, this was a Belgian intervention in the country's internal affairs. Kasavubu and Lumumba appealed for UN assistance against Belgian aggression. They hinted that they would seek help from other countries if the UN did not intervene. There was an imminent risk that the Congo would be transformed into a battlefield contested by many camps.



Hammarskjöld realized the importance of the media and willingly took part in press conferences. When necessary, his answers could be enigmatic. United Nations.

Hammarskjöld convened the Security Council by invoking Article 99 of the UN Charter. This article had never been used by the Secretary-General before. The Council meeting received huge media coverage. The Congo crisis became a major world event. The Security Council adopted a Tunisian draft resolution asking the Secretary-General to arrange military aid for the Congolese government and its army. This was an attempt to help the central government of the Congo. The Soviet Union

proposed a more radical resolution condemning Belgium's armed aggression. The Western powers assumed a cautious attitude and were unwilling to antagonize their Belgian ally.

The Tunisian resolution was adopted, but there were widely varying interpretations of what it was "actually" supposed to achieve. Hammarskjöld had developed a good feel for diplomatic balancing acts, but this time the difficulties were pronounced from the very beginning. Winning the simultaneous support of the United States, the Soviet Union and the Afro-Asian countries could be considered a good start, but in this case it meant that the same decision had been made for different reasons. East-West tensions were growing. African liberation movements were also making a breakthrough in 1960, and the problems of the Congo were similar to those that other African countries were grappling with. Hammarskjöld understood the significance of this. Although his position on the Congo crisis increasingly resembled the views of the African countries, he had to avoid confrontation with the major powers.

The Security Council made its decision early on July 14. Hammarskjöld immediately began to assemble troops for what was known as *Opération des Nations Unies au Congo* (ONUC). Tunisian troops landed in Léopoldville as early as July 15. Troops from Morocco, Ghana and Ethiopia arrived during the following days. The United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union provided transport aircraft. By July 18, Hammarskjöld could report that 3,500 UN men from four countries were in place in the Congo. Hammarskjöld mainly used African forces, a policy supported by the Afro-Asian countries and the Soviet Union. However, because these troops had no calming effect on the Belgian population, Hammarskjöld also allowed Swedish and Irish soldiers to be part of the operation.

The speed with which the Security Council acted, and the willingness of UN member countries to supply troops and transport craft, are striking. Today it is common to count on several

months after a decision is made until UN troops are in place. Because communications technology has improved and it should now be even easier to move military forces, the difference must be explained in other ways. A sense of controlled but deliberate urgency drove the decision makers in 1960. The Afro-Asian countries wanted to avoid the collapse of the Congo as a country, which would strengthen arguments against decolonization. Nor did they want to see the country turn into a battlefield between East and West. The Soviet Union wanted to get rid of the Belgian military presence as soon as possible in order to extend its own influence. The United States wanted independence and stability in a resource-rich central African country. All these factors may have contributed to the sense of urgency.

Hammar skjöld's actions were also part of the explanation. He was driven by a personal desire to act quickly. It suited his temperament and fit his perception that problems should be solved early, before they became complicated. His understanding of the Congo gave him premonitions of potential conflicts. It is a measure of Hammar skjöld's skill in capturing and focusing the interest of the major powers that the Congo operation was mounted so quickly. It is also easy to understand that without ONUC, the Congo could, at that stage, have experienced the meltdown that later occurred after the Cold War (1997-2002).

Hammar skjöld's first political problem was to remove the Belgian troops. This put the spotlight on Katanga. ONUC troops were not being allowed into the breakaway province, and Belgian soldiers were maintaining order there. An initial attempt to negotiate the peaceful stationing of UN troops in Katanga failed. The Security Council made a new decision on August 9, 1960. Belgium was ordered to withdraw its forces from the province. At the same time, the Council declared that UN forces could not be employed to resolve internal political or constitutional conflicts. Hammar skjöld acted in characteristically daring fashion. The resolution meant that UN forces would be

sent into Katanga, but that the constitutional issues would be worked out between the two sides through negotiations, Hammarskjöld believed. He flew to the capital of Katanga in his own aircraft, accompanied by four planeloads of Swedish UN soldiers. When only Hammarskjöld's plane was given permission to land, he discussed the situation with Tshombe by radio while circling the airfield. Hammarskjöld refused to land if the accompanying four planes did not receive permission to do the same. Tshombe finally gave in. Hammarskjöld and the Swedish troops were able to land. The UN had thus established its presence in Katanga. Ethiopian and Moroccan troops followed. The Belgian soldiers were withdrawn, and the last of them left Katanga in early September.

The fact that ONUC was now present throughout the Congo represented a success. Lumumba was not satisfied, however. The secession of Katanga had not been stopped, because according to Hammarskjöld and the Security Council, this was an internal and constitutional matter. The Soviet Union criticized Hammarskjöld for having negotiated with Tshombe, a traitor. A rapprochement took place between the Soviet Union and Lumumba. The Congo was still at risk of becoming a pawn in the Cold War.

These problems became acute in September 1960 when President Kasavubu announced that he had dismissed Lumumba as prime minister. Kasavubu was supported by the head of the army, Joseph-Désiré Mobutu (later called Mobutu Sese Seko, who ruled the country from 1965 to 1997). Lumumba responded with a radio speech declaring that Kasavubu was no longer head of state. In practice, the country had two heads of government. Now the question arose: Which was the constitutional government, responsible for law and order? According to the Congolese constitution, the president was entitled to dismiss the prime minister. Kasavubu could thus claim to represent a legitimate government. On the other hand, Lumumba was apparently an internationally respected personality with substantial support



Moïse Tshombé was the leader of the Belgian-supported breakaway province of Katanga, and was a major factor behind many twists and turns of the Congo crisis. Here he meets Hammarskjöld in September 1960. Pressens Bild.

within his own country. The UN tried to treat the two factions even-handedly. Neither side could win their political tug-of-war with the aid of the UN. Meanwhile, the UN would prevent a civil war between the two. This was not easy. The UN's first action was to keep all airfields in the country open only to ONUC. All radio stations were shut down. Critics argued that these measures hurt Lumumba more than Kasavubu. For example, it turned out that Kasavubu was able to use radio transmitters in a neighboring country. Lumumba was the one who needed reinforcements by air transport.

The United States criticized the UN for not supporting

Kasavubu. The Soviet Union took the side of Lumumba and criticized Hammarskjöld for “colonialist behavior.” Hammarskjöld asked the Security Council for instructions on how he should act. However, the Security Council could not reach agreement. The Soviet Union escalated its critique of Hammarskjöld, while France also criticized the operation. Member countries that had supplied troops weighed the option of bringing them home. Because the Security Council failed to reach any decision, the issue was raised in the General Assembly. A proposal by the African countries that all aid to the Congo should be channeled through the UN received overwhelming support. Among the objectives of this policy was to prevent outsiders from supporting different factions in the country. Seventy countries voted Yes, and none voted No. Importantly, the Soviet bloc, France and South Africa abstained. To Hammarskjöld, this support was satisfactory. But his relations with the Soviet Union became frostier.

One of the many high-ranking guests at the regular session of the General Assembly in the autumn of 1960 was the Soviet Communist Party leader, Nikita Khrushchev, who used his speech to the Assembly to condemn UN activities in the Congo. He also launched a proposal that the Secretariat no longer be headed by a single Secretary-General. Instead, there should be three top officials: one each representing the Western countries, the socialist bloc and the non-aligned. This became known as the *troika* proposal. It would mean a dramatic change in the UN and would eliminate the strong position of the Secretary-General. A lengthy process would have been required to implement such a reform of the Charter. The organization would be paralyzed. Hammarskjöld took the floor and spoke against the proposal because, he said, it would make it impossible for the Secretariat to act independently, impartially and objectively. Khrushchev reacted to Hammarskjöld’s statement by repeatedly slamming his fist on the table in front of him.



The Secretary-General has his own seat in the Security Council. During the Congo crisis in the autumn of 1960, he was occasionally hard pressed. Meanwhile, the Security Council was unable to reach agreement on its own plan of action. United Nations.

No other leader supported the Soviet proposal. Various compromise resolutions were floated, however. Hammarskjöld stood his ground. Khrushchev attacked Hammarskjöld again. On October 3, he said Hammarskjöld “cannot muster the courage to resign.” Khrushchev declared that the UN had no place for a man who had “violated the elementary principles of justice.” Hammarskjöld’s reply was historic: “By resigning I would therefore at the present difficult and dangerous juncture throw the Organization to the winds. I have no right to do so because I have a responsibility to all those Member states for which the Organization is of decisive importance – a responsibility which overrides all other considerations.

“It is not the Soviet Union or indeed any other Big Power who need the United Nations for their protection: it is all the others. In this sense, the Organization is first of all *their* Organization, and I deeply believe in the wisdom with which they will be able to use it and guide it. I shall remain in my post during the term of my office as a servant of the Organization in the interest of all those other nations, as long as *they* wish me to do so.

“In this context the representative of the Soviet Union spoke of courage. It is very easy to resign. It is not so easy to stay on. It is very easy to bow to the wishes of a Big Power. It is another matter to resist. As is well known to all members of this Assembly, I have done so before on many occasions and in many directions. If it is the wish of those nations who see in the Organization their best protection in the present world, I shall now do so again.”

The speech was punctuated several times by applause. When Hammarskjöld spoke the words “I shall remain in my post” he was interrupted by a huge ovation. He had to start his sentence over again. When the speech ended, the delegates applauded for several minutes. Khrushchev and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko pounded their fists on the table.

This massive support for Hammarskjöld probably made an impression on the Soviet leader. When they met at a Soviet reception the following day, Khrushchev was friendly. The same conciliatory tone recurred in Khrushchev’s parting speech to the General Assembly a week later, when he told about the rowboat trip the two had taken together on the Black Sea the year before, with Khrushchev at the oars. Hammarskjöld replied that he would like to take another rowboat excursion with the Soviet leader to show that he also knew how to row – following only his own compass.

The Soviet Union’s criticism had to be taken seriously, and it was important to Hammarskjöld and the Congo operation. It is also worth discussing whether other factors were behind

Khrushchev's behavior. One hypothesis is that the 1958 Nobel Prize in Literature, which had been awarded to novelist Boris Pasternak, played a role. Since 1954 Hammarskjöld had been a member of the Swedish Academy, which selects the Nobel laureates in literature. At an earlier meeting, Khrushchev had raised the issue. Hammarskjöld had defended the choice of Pasternak and the Soviet dissident writer's literary merits. Khrushchev believed that Pasternak's writings also had to be judged in political terms. Khrushchev and Hammarskjöld obviously had different philosophical backgrounds. Another example is that Khrushchev could not accept the concept of a neutral Secretary-General. Apparently the Marxist view that everything is ultimately a matter of politics was being confronted by a more multidimensional perspective. However, the views of the Soviet Union and the Secretary-General had coincided in other cases. The Soviet government had even proposed that the Secretary-General should participate in the summit meetings of the great powers. It is therefore reasonable to assume that differences of political opinion on the Congo operation were essential, and that Hammarskjöld had read the situation in the autumn of 1960 correctly. The UN had become an independent power factor. However, the UN was not moving in the direction the Soviet Union preferred, Khrushchev consequently considered it important to undermine Hammarskjöld's position. The troika proposal was aimed at doing this.

Tragedy

IN NOVEMBER 1960, the General Assembly voted that the Kasavubu government should take the Congo's seat in the UN. This meant that the UN and the West was supporting one side in the Congo crisis. Meanwhile, the mandate of ONUC stipulated that the military operation should remain outside of

Congolese internal conflicts. UN forces thus stood guard outside Lumumba's house in Léopoldville to prevent him from being attacked. On the other hand, they had no right to prevent Lumumba from leaving his house. After the vote in the General Assembly, this was precisely what happened. The same evening that Kasavubu was celebrating his victory, Lumumba left his protected headquarters, probably bound for Stanleyville (now Kisangani) where he had strong support. However, he was captured by the Congolese army and brought to Léopoldville. The Soviet Union immediately accused ONUC of complicity. Kasavubu, on the other hand, criticized the UN for having interfered with the movements of the Congolese army.

The Security Council met in mid-December but failed to reach agreement on what should now be done. The Soviet Union demanded that Lumumba be freed and the Congolese military be disarmed. The Western countries proposed a resolution on humane treatment of political prisoners. The General Assembly was unable to reach any decision either. A paradoxical situation had arisen. The UN was running a large military operation in the Congo, but none of its leading organs was capable of deciding what should be done. Hammarskjöld alone had to decide on a strategy. Whatever he did, it would be questioned by someone.

In mid-January 1961, Kasavubu and Mobutu handed over three political prisoners to Tshombe in Katanga. Among them was Lumumba. There are many indications that Lumumba was immediately murdered, but the Katanga leaders did not admit that he was dead until mid-February. The UN operation entered a new crisis. The new Soviet UN ambassador, Valerian Zorin, demanded sanctions against Belgium, the arrest of Mobutu and Tshombe, the termination of the UN operation in the Congo and the dismissal of Hammarskjöld. It is doubtful whether the Soviet Union actually expected Hammarskjöld to leave the organization. Four months earlier, of course, he had declared that he would stay for the rest of his term and had received the support

of the General Assembly for this. Hammarskjöld's position had weakened, however. In the long run, a confrontation with the Soviet Union might well make his situation untenable.

Hammarskjöld enjoyed the continued support of the Afro-Asian countries as well as the United States. The Security Council was now also able to reach agreement on a clearer Congo policy. The Afro-Asian countries proposed that the UN be authorized to forcefully prevent the outbreak of a civil war in the Congo and that Belgian advisors should leave the country. They also demanded that the Congolese Parliament be convened. The United States was prepared to support this resolution but preferred that the Secretary-General be explicitly mentioned in its text. The authors of the resolution had avoided doing so, in order to prevent the Soviet Union from using its veto. The resolution was adopted on February 21, 1961. France and the Soviet Union abstained.

Under the resolution, more UN troops would be needed in the Congo. The Secretary-General would accomplish this, but without being explicitly mentioned. To Hammarskjöld, this was something new. It meant that he did not possess the same authority as before. It would be more difficult to obtain troop contributions from member countries. As Hammarskjöld interpreted the resolution, small and medium-sized countries would find it increasingly difficult to stand up to a major power like the Soviet Union. The Soviet attacks on him were beginning to have serious consequences.

The issue was further complicated by the fact that Kasavubu was not prepared to accept the new ONUC mandate. He regarded it as a form of intervention in the internal affairs of the Congo. Convening Parliament was a sovereign matter for the Congolese to decide. Hostilities broke out between the Congolese army and Sudanese UN troops in the port city of Matadi. The Congolese army took control. Hammarskjöld nevertheless decided to begin by testing the issue of convening Parliament.

The UN needed a functioning and legitimate Congolese government to work with.

In March 1961, the Soviet Union declared that it would not pay for its share of the UN's Congo operation. Shortly afterward, France adopted the same position. This raised an issue that would soon grow in importance. It revealed a crucial weakness in the ability of the international community to act. In practice, a few countries could block majority decisions by refusing to pay their share of costs. This implied a kind of financial veto power. Hammarskjöld was the first Secretary-General to run into this problem, which has also plagued all his successors.

One promising development was that relations with Kasavubu improved. The Congolese Parliament was convened under the supervision of ONUC. In early August, the legislature reached agreement on a new government under the leadership of Cyrille Adoula. There was thus a clear, constitutionally legitimate authority for the UN to work with. Hammarskjöld intended to begin a training program for the Congolese army, so that it could gradually take over the responsibilities of the UN forces. A new government also took power in Belgium. Although public opinion in that country still favored the secession of Katanga from the Congo, the new Belgian government and its foreign minister, Paul-Henri Spaak, were eager to improve relations with the UN.

The issue of Katanga again became pivotal. Hammarskjöld appointed a new UN representative in the provincial capital of Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi), Ireland's Conor Cruise O'Brien, who was to play a crucial role. In July, he had one of Tshombe's most important Belgian advisors arrested and deported. Late in August, a similar action was taken against other European advisors. ONUC's actions were based on the Security Council resolution of February 21 on deporting all foreign advisors from Katanga except those under UN command. Beginning



"Who does he think he is—a man of destiny?"

This cartoon showing an odd couple – Charles de Gaulle, president of France, and Nikita Khrushchev, leader of the Soviet Union – united in their dislike of Hammar skjöld, was sent by Hammar skjöld to a Swedish friend, artist Bo Beskow, with a greeting. The Telegraph plc, London, 1961.

on September 13, however, the UN forces in Katanga encountered growing opposition. O'Brien was quoted by the media as saying that the objective of the UN operation in the province was to end the secession of Katanga. This view was not directly supported by the decision of the Security Council or by Ham-

marskjöld's instructions. O'Brien might not have known all the factors that Hammarskjöld had to take into consideration, which made it important for ONUC to adhere strictly to the Security Council resolution. After all, the resolution was not merely an instruction for the UN operation itself, but also a politically negotiated document. Its underlying unity had to be maintained, or the entire UN operation might collapse. Maintaining a united front was especially important in a situation where two major powers were refusing to finance their share of the operation. Ending the secession of Katanga by force might be popular among the Afro-Asian countries, but risked opposition from other countries. The British government was critical. The new president of the United States, John F. Kennedy, was reportedly upset that he had not been informed about the UN action in Katanga, especially since his country was the main financier of ONUC. Hammarskjöld was in a position to foresee these reactions. What was now happening in Katanga might destroy the whole unspoken coalition that was holding the Congo operation together.

Hammarskjöld was on his way to Léopoldville for other reasons when the Katanga crisis broke out. He received a full briefing only upon his arrival. There was widespread resistance from Katanga forces against ONUC forces. The Elisabethville government's only aircraft was operating freely throughout southern Katanga. It was firing at UN forces. Hammarskjöld reached the conclusion that a cease-fire was necessary. Direct negotiations on a solution to the Congolese situation between Adoula and Tshombe also had to begin immediately. This could only happen, Hammarskjöld believed, if he and Tshombe met. Hammarskjöld would talk to Tshombe in his capacity as Secretary-General, i.e. not only as head of ONUC. The meeting was set for September 18 in Ndola, Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia).

Hammarskjöld was flying in a plane with a Swedish crew. Only a few staff members accompanied him, including his per-

manent bodyguard. The plane flew east from Léopoldville, over Lake Tanganyika, then south toward Ndola. At 11:35 p.m. local time on September 17, the pilot informed the control tower at Ndola that he would land shortly after midnight. At 12:10 a.m. the plane reported seeing the airfield lights of Ndola. After that, contact was lost. It took sixteen hours to locate the wreckage, 15 kilometers from the airport. This is one of many peculiarities surrounding Hammarskjöld's death. The clocks on the plane had stopped at 12:20 a.m. local time on September 18 (22:20 GMT on September 17). Most of the victims were found severely burned in the wreckage. Hammarskjöld, however, had been thrown clear of the aircraft. His injuries were massive. Among other things, his spine had been broken in several places. Hammarskjöld disliked safety belts, which may explain why he was found in this location. Six different investigations have been conducted to determine why the plane crashed and why the rescue operation did not begin immediately. One passenger was still alive and could answer a few questions when the rescue team arrived. Hammarskjöld's life would not have been saved by a speedier rescue operation, but a number of unclear points might well have been resolved.

There are numerous theories about what caused Hammarskjöld's plane to crash. One is that it was shot down by the one aircraft Katanga had at its disposal. However, Ndola is too far away for this to have been possible. Other theories suggest that there were additional planes in the same airspace, that bombs were smuggled aboard, that Hammarskjöld had committed suicide, that fuel ran out, that the pilots were exhausted etc. There is hardly any consistent support for these theories. The simplest explanation appears to be the most reasonable: the plane, which was about to land, came in somewhat too low and struck the treetops. In that case, it was an explainable accident of the kind that should not happen, but that seems too simple when it happens to prominent people.

Ten days after the crash, Hammarskjöld's body was flown home to Sweden. A state funeral, which was broadcast on television, took place at Uppsala Cathedral. Hammarskjöld was laid to his final rest in the family grave plot in Uppsala. Sweden was in a state of shock.

The UN operation in the Congo continued for another three years. The secession of Katanga ended in January 1963. It is difficult to say how successful the operation was. However, the fact remains that no political intervention by the major powers ever took place. The Congo was preserved as a single nation. A full-scale civil war was avoided. Despite all the complications that continuously plagued the Congo operation, it must be viewed as a preventive action. Its aim was to prevent even worse developments, such as those that have affected other African countries, for example support by major powers for different factions in civil wars (cf. Angola, the Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967-70), wars involving troops from major powers (cf. France in Algeria) or a total collapse into smaller but, in practice, self-governing territories (cf. Somalia after 1991). It is difficult to believe that developments in the Congo would have been more peaceful without UN intervention. Neither Lumumba nor Kasavubu had the requisite stature. Nor did they have the administrative and political resources that would have made this possible. There are many indications that Hammarskjöld's analysis of the importance of early action was correct.

It is also remarkable that Hammarskjöld managed for so long and so efficiently to hold together the "unholy" alliance required to put the operation in place and make it work. It seems even more remarkable considering that the Congo operation took place at a time of growing superpower confrontation. Against difficult odds, Hammarskjöld kept the Congo outside the Cold War.

His Congo experience gave Hammarskjöld reason to reflect on the post of Secretary-General and the role of the internation-

al civil servant. He did so publicly in a speech at Oxford, England on May 30, 1961, where he emphasized the concepts of duty and responsibility. While the UN Secretariat should be impartial, it must still implement the – often unclear – decisions that others had made. In Hammarskjöld's words: "The responsibilities of the Secretary-General under the Charter cannot be laid aside merely because the execution of decisions by him is likely to be politically controversial. The Secretary-General remains under the obligation to carry out the policies as adopted by the organs; the essential requirement is that he does this only on the basis of his exclusively international responsibility and not in the interest of any particular state or group of states."

In other words, the Secretary-General was left to carry out decisions whose consequences have not always been foreseen. By various means, the Secretary-General had to determine what was intended and what was specified in the UN Charter. This was a way of "reducing the sphere" within which the Secretary-General had to take stands, and of ensuring that nothing but the intended measures were implemented. This was admittedly a form of policy making, but not a *different* policy than that of his employers. The Secretary-General thus maintained the neutrality of a civil servant. It is not difficult to recognize a classic Swedish civil service tradition being applied to international conditions.

Hammarskjöld's book of personal reflections, *Markings*, can be regarded as a continuous inner dialogue about such questions of principle and ultimately about existential issues. By turning to literature, as Hammarskjöld did to such a great degree, he gained this additional dimension. Hammarskjöld regarded the great literature of the world as a source of help and inspiration.

Hammarskjöld made use of both the Security Council and the General Assembly to carry out his actions. His good contacts with the majority – the Afro-Asian countries – enabled him to

give the UN a global legitimacy it had not previously enjoyed. Joining the UN today seems like a self-evident step to every newly independent country. There is no guarantee that a UN controlled by the great powers would have enjoyed the same confidence. It is symptomatic that Hammarskjöld's biggest problems were with those great powers that saw their influence diminish as the number of UN members grew. This was true, for example, of France. He also found himself competing with the Soviet Union. Meanwhile Hammarskjöld's actions benefited the major powers, especially the United States and the Soviet Union. By solving the problem of the American airmen in China, he created good will for the UN among Americans. His way of handling the Suez crisis inspired the trust of the Soviet Union. It is difficult to explain why he found himself in such a severe conflict with the Soviets during the Congo crisis. He kept not only the Eastern bloc but also the West outside the action. The UN operation was aimed primarily at Belgium. Perhaps the explanation is that the Soviet Union wanted to act as the sole spokesman of the Third World in the UN. This role was "stolen" by Hammarskjöld.

A successful Secretary-General must satisfy groups with widely varying interests. Putting it in another way: it is a matter of finding the common interests of the parties, before they discover the irreconcilable differences they also have. Acting early, quickly and after careful thought was Hammarskjöld's special strength. It gave him a role in world politics that few have enjoyed. It was not at all self-evident that the UN Secretary-General would achieve the position that Dag Hammarskjöld attained. He created his own role and it grew over time. Fundamentally, it was based on one document: the UN Charter. It was not based on money or soldiers, but only on loyalties and expectations. The reason why Dag Hammarskjöld achieved his unique position must be sought primarily in his personality, and not only in the circumstances that surrounded him.



Dag Hammarskjöld had a serious interest in photography. Many of his photos focus on the beauty of nature. This picture was taken during one of his many visits to the northern Swedish mountains.

Dag Hammarskjöld was posthumously awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1961.

Hammar skjöld and the UN today

DURING HIS PERIOD as Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld was involved in at least twenty documented international crises. Based on these, it is possible to say that Hammarskjöld made three clear, lasting contributions: peacekeeping operations (a new UN instrument), his realization of the importance of acting at an early stage in crises (preventive diplomacy) and his emphasis

on the position of the UN as an international resource (an internationally independent Secretariat). These three contributions need further elaboration.

Peacekeeping operations

The world's first genuine peacekeeping operation was the one that Hammarskjöld designed in 1956 (UNEP, see p. 20). By late 2004, the UN had dispatched nearly sixty such operations. They have become a model for other international organizations, which have contributed more than fifty additional missions of their own. In more than a hundred situations, the international community has thus shouldered the commendable task of trying to help handle acute armed conflicts. Until the end of the Cold War, the principles that Hammarskjöld had formulated during a few hectic days in November 1956 served as a guide. They concerned conflicts between countries in which quick local action and reporting of incidents were important. If something happened to the troops, or they observed anything that violated the agreements in force, they could act directly and also activate the central UN system. In this way, they could help manage a crisis.

Many operations mounted since the Cold War have functioned differently from the original Suez crisis pattern. Today they often involve complex missions with civilian, police and military components. They have been established at the end of, or directly after, devastating civil wars. Helping to form new national governments has sometimes been part of the mandate. The UN has even become the administrator of a region or future country (Kosovo, East Timor). The Cold War witnessed few such situations. Today the term "peacekeeping" no longer suffices. It is also a matter of peace making, peace supporting and conflict prevention. "Peace operations" have become a new way of describing these tasks, which reflect the concept that peace is made by the involved parties themselves, not by an outside party.

Preventive diplomacy

Hammarskjöld's travels were extensive and undoubtedly stressful. Major international conferences and regular meetings had not yet become the routine they are today. Contacts between leaders were limited. Hammarskjöld's aim was to create a personal relationship with decision makers around the world. By meeting them, gaining their respect and demonstrating the capabilities of the UN, Hammarskjöld repeatedly managed to assume a role at an early stage of a conflict. The second Secretary-General who took similar advantage of such opportunities was Javier Pérez de Cuéllar (who headed the UN from 1982 to 1991). He used the period of Cold War détente during the second half of the 1980s to pursue solutions of conflicts that had become devastating and that had been underway for years (for example Afghanistan, Lebanon and the Iraq-Iran war).

Not until the end of the Cold War did conflict prevention issues regain the importance they had under Hammarskjöld. Kofi Annan took office in 1997 and is the UN Secretary-General who has done the most so far to develop conflict prevention, supported by a kind of personal diplomacy similar to that of Hammarskjöld. This is, however, no longer a pure UN strategy. Conflict-prevention measures are an integral part of the foreign policy of many countries and are emphasized by many international bodies, including the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The experience of crises during the 1990s also resulted in an expansion of the conflict prevention concept. Today there are two mutual compatible strategies. Measures aimed at stimulating democratic development and economic diversification, for example, comprise *structural prevention*, which in the long term is assumed to help reduce the number of conflicts in countries plagued today by civil wars and disorder. The second strategy is comparable to Hammarskjöld's agenda, which focused on *direct, operational prevention*. This is action designed to steer threatening conflicts

in a peaceful direction, with the hope of reducing the risk of violence and increasing the chances of a solution. Today preventive actions are not only a matter of “diplomacy” but also include financial assistance, economic development efforts and nation-building.

International independence

As we have seen, Hammarskjöld tried to make the UN and its Secretariat a tool for the collective will of its member countries, as expressed by Security Council or General Assembly decisions. This implied that the Secretariat would be neutral in relation to individual member countries and that its officials would be loyal only to the organization. Hammarskjöld undoubtedly succeeded in creating such a spirit within the Secretariat. To some extent, this reflected loyalty to Hammarskjöld personally and his skills in advancing the work of the UN. He made the Secretariat politically relevant. Another element of this vision is that UN employees would be reasonably well paid and have acceptable working conditions. Of central importance was that they would only take orders from the leadership of the organization.

Implementing this vision has proved more difficult. The UN's financial crisis, which began during Hammarskjöld's final years, has increasingly plagued the organization since then. One outcome is that voluntary contributions from members have become vital, which has influenced what the organization can and cannot do. Member countries have gained greater influence on the organization, including its choice of employees. The UN still has a long way to go before it achieves the ideals that Hammarskjöld established. Among other things, even today the UN Secretariat lacks one of the most important resources: a strong analytical unit, directly at the disposal of the Secretary-General. Member countries quite unnecessarily view such a unit as a danger. In actuality, it would make the organization even better suited to protecting small and medium-sized countries in a

world of strong countries and dominant economic interests. This was Hammarskjöld's dream. It still remains to be fulfilled.

Literature

Dag Hammarskjöld's life has interested many writers. A rather large proportion of this literature deals with Hammarskjöld's religious interests and with the book *Markings*, which was published posthumously. His political contributions have not been the subject of as many or as penetrating biographies. This can be explained in part by the fact that not all the archives have yet been opened, but also because Brian Urquhart's 1972 biography is regarded as exhaustive. Urquhart's presentation has also been one point of departure for this publication. As the availability of source material changes, our view of Hammarskjöld's contributions may also be re-evaluated. In the near future, it may be especially interesting to examine Western archives concerning the events surrounding the Suez crisis of 1956 and the formation of the first UN peacekeeping force. Another topic that has spawned a disproportionately large, speculative literature is the circumstances surrounding Hammarskjöld's death in 1961, without offering any more reasonable explanations for the fate of his aircraft.

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During his period as UN Secretary-General from 1953 until his death in 1961, Dag Hammarskjöld made himself known as an extremely effective, very dedicated and self-sacrificing civil servant. He was driven by a personal desire to act quickly, which fitted his perception that problems should be solved before they became complicated.

As a negotiator, Hammarskjöld pursued a neutral line and emphasized that the tasks of the UN included protecting small countries from major powers. Dag Hammarskjöld was also the man who shaped the UN's mandate to establish peacekeeping forces, which became a permanent feature of its conflict resolution efforts.

This publication deals with some of the crises faced by the UN during 1953–1961 and how they were handled by Dag Hammarskjöld: they include his diplomatic efforts in Guatemala, the People's Republic of China, Suez, Hungary and the Congo.

Hammarskjöld's lasting contributions in his capacity as Secretary-General are further examined in a new section on Hammarskjöld and the UN today.

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