How US Spies Secured the Hiroshima Uranium

A dark secret behind the Hiroshima bomb is where the uranium came from, a spy-vs.-spy race to secure naturally enriched uranium from Congo to fuel the Manhattan Project and keep the rare mineral out of Nazi hands, reports Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

Since the first use of a nuclear weapon in Hiroshima 71 years ago, on Aug. 6, 1945, the story of where the uranium for the bomb came from and the covert operation the U.S. employed to secure it has been little known.

That is until the publication next week in the United States of a new book, Spies in the Congo, by British researcher Susan Williams (Public Affairs Books, New York), which unveils for the first time the detailed story of the deep cover race between the Americans and the Nazis to get their hands on the deadliest metal on earth.

At the outset of World War II, when the U.S. launched the extraordinarily secret Manhattan Project, uranium from North America and most of the rest of the world was less than one percent enriched and considered inadequate to build the first atom bombs. But there was one mine in the world where, through a freak of nature, the ore contained up to an unheard of 75 percent enriched uranium: Shinkolobwe mine in the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo.

The link between Shinkolobwe and Hiroshima, where more than 200,000 people were killed, is still largely unknown in the West, in the Congo and even in Japan among the few survivors still alive. Another ignored link is the disastrous health effect on Congolese miners who handled the uranium as virtual slaves of the Belgium mining giant Union Minière, owners of Shinkolobwe in the then Belgian Congo.

Though it turned out the Nazis had not got very far in their quest for the bomb (because of a lack of highly-enriched uranium), the Americans were unaware of that in 1939, and were fearful Hitler would get a nuclear weapon before they did. That would have almost certainly affected the outcome of the war. As early as that year, Albert Einstein wrote President Franklin D. Roosevelt to advise him to keep the Nazis away from Shinkolobwe.

Williams’s meticulously-researched and masterfully written book tells the intricate tale of a special unit of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency, that was set up to purchase
and secretly remove all the uranium from Shinkolowbe that the U.S. could get its hands on.

The unit was headed in Washington by OSS Director William “Wild Bill” Donovan and Rud Boulton, head of the OSS’s Africa section. Donovan was obsessed with stopping the Nazis from getting the bomb and mistrustful of Britain’s role in the uranium operation. Britain on the other hand feared the U.S. was trying to take over its West African colonies. Williams tells us that Donovan trained his agents to not only target Nazism but colonialism as well.

The OSS agents used a number of covers, such as ornithologists, naturalists collecting live gorillas, silk importers, and posing as an executive for the Texaco oil company, such as agent Lanier Violett did. This became an issue after Texaco’s president, Torkild Rieber, was forced to resign in 1940 after being exposed as an oil smuggler to the Nazis.

Williams also tells us that the American spies had difficulties operating in French Congo and other colonies under General Charles De Gaulle’s Free French control because the U.S. recognized the Vichy government until the Normandy invasion.

**A Real-Life Thriller**

Williams’s real-life spy thriller focuses on a number of OSS agents involved in securing the uranium and stopping the Nazis from accessing the unique mine in Katanga province, a mission so secretive most of the agents involved thought they were preventing diamond smuggling. The few OSS agents who knew it was uranium that the U.S. was after, didn’t know what the ore was for.

Once such agent, Wilbur “Dock” Hogue, the protagonist of the story, only found out after Aug. 6, 1945, why he had helped uncover Nazi smuggling routes from the Congo and helped spirit uranium out of the country. It was brought by train to Port-Francqui, then on barges down the Kasai to the Congo River to Leopoldville (Kinshasa), where it was reloaded on a train to the port of Matadi.

There the uranium was put on Pan American airplanes or on ships, both bound for New York, where it was unloaded and stored on the New York City borough of Staten Island. There the uranium remained until it was ready to be used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. (The New York site under the Bayonne Bridge still registers radiation levels today high enough for the U.S. government to order a clean-up.)

Williams also reveals that the U.S. mission was complicated by some Belgian officials in the Congo, as well as Union Minière, who cooperated at times with the Nazis to smuggle out some of the lethal ore. As Williams explains, after
the Germans surrendered, the U.S. learned how far from a bomb the Nazis actually were, and after Japan was defeated, learned for the first time that Tokyo also had had a rudimentary nuclear weapons program.

After VE Day, Einstein tried to convince Truman to shut down the Manhattan Project. But it was too late. Though Generals Dwight Eisenhower, Douglas MacArthur and three other senior American military commanders were opposed to using the bomb, Truman dropped it anyway, not to end the war and save lives, as most historians now agree, but to test the weapon and send a message to the world, and especially the Soviets, about America’s coming dominance.

“The Japanese were ready to surrender, and it wasn’t necessary to hit them with that awful thing,” Eisenhower said.

Though OSS agent Hogue did not know what the uranium was for, he knew he was on a highly dangerous mission. Nazi agents three times tried to kill him, with a bomb, a knife and a gun. He survived the war only to succumb to stomach cancer at the age of 42.

As Williams points out: “Risk factors for this disease include exposure to radiation, which explains why atomic bomb survivors in the Second World War were more likely than most people to get stomach cancer.”

Two other of Hogue’s OSS colleagues from the Congo mission also died at very young ages. But Williams’s concern also extends to the Congolese mine workers who handled the stuff for days on end and about which neither Belgium, Union Minière nor the Americans seemed to have the slightest concern.

“Astonishingly, hardly any attention has been paid to the Congolese, not one of whom was consulted about plans to make atomic bombs with Shinkolobwe’s uranium,” Williams writes. “What would have been their reaction, on a moral basis, to the building of such a destructive and terrible weapon with a mineral from their own land?”

“What would be their reaction today, if the disinformation, shadows and mirrors were swept aside and the full history was set out?” she asks. “Nor were the Congolese informed about the terrible health and safety hazards to which they were exposed; they were simply used as workers, as if they had no rights as equal human beings. This was a process for which the US, the UK and Belgium bear a heavy responsibility.”

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The Mysterious Death of a UN Hero

From the Archive: In reopening the investigation into the mysterious plane crash that killed UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld in 1961, the United Nations is appealing to member states to release long-secret files related to this cold case from a tense moment in the Cold War in Africa, which Lisa Pease examined in 2013.

By Lisa Pease (Originally published on Sept. 16. 2013)

More than a half century ago, just after midnight on Sept. 18, 1961, the plane carrying UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and 15 others went down in a plane crash over Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). All 16 died, but the facts of the crash were provocatively mysterious.

There have been three investigations into the crash: an initial civil aviation Board of Inquiry, a Rhodesian Commission of Inquiry, and a UN Commission in 1962. Not one of them could definitively answer why the plane crashed or whether a deliberate act had been responsible.

While a few authors have looked into and written about the strange facts of the crash in the years since the last official inquiry in 1962, none did a more thorough reinvestigation than Dr. Susan Williams, a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at the University of London, whose book Who Killed Hammarskjöld? was released in 2011, 50 years after the crash.

Her presentation of the evidence was so powerful it launched a new UN commission to determine whether the UN should reopen its initial investigation. “It is a fact,” the current Commission wrote in its report, “that none of these inquiries was conducted to the standard to which a modern inquiry into a fatal event would be conducted.”

The Commission was formed by Lord Lea of Crondall, who assembled a group of volunteer jurists, solicitors and others from the Netherlands, South Africa, Sweden and elsewhere to tabulate and review the evidence the Commission collected from past investigations, Williams’s book, and independent witnesses,
such as myself.

I was one of the 28 witnesses (and one of only three Americans) who provided testimony to the Commission, based on information gathered in the course of my research into the assassinations of the Sixties.

“It is legitimate to ask whether an inquiry such as this, a full half-century after the events with which it is concerned, can achieve anything except possibly to feed speculation and conspiracy theories surrounding the crash,” the most recent Commission wrote in its report.

“Our answer, and the reason why we have been willing to give our time and effort to the task, is first that knowledge is always better than ignorance, and secondly that the passage of time, far from obscuring facts, can sometimes bring them to light.”

The Congo Crisis

The report summarized the historical situation Hammarskjöld was faced with in 1961. In June of 1960, under pressure from forces in the Congo as well as from the United Nations, Belgium had relinquished its claim to the Congo, a move which brought Patrice Lumumba to power.

Lumumba faced a near civil war in his country immediately. The military mutinied, the Belgians stepped back in to protect Belgian settlers, and local leader Moise Tshombe declared Katanga, a mineral-rich province, an independent state.

As the Commission’s report noted, “Katanga contained the majority of the Congo’s known mineral resources. These included the world’s richest uranium and four fifths of the West’s cobalt supply. Katanga’s minerals were mined principally by a Belgian company, the Union Minière du Haut Katanga, which immediately recognised and began paying royalties to the secessionist government in Elisabethville. One result of this was that Moise Tshombe’s regime was well funded. Another was that, so long as Katanga remained independent of the Congo, there was no risk that the assets of Union Minière would be expropriated.”

The U.S. government feared that Katanga’s rich uranium reserves would fall under Soviet control if the nationalist movement that brought Lumumba to power succeeded in unifying the country. Indeed, rebuffed by Western interests, Lumumba did reach out to the Soviets for help, a move that caused CIA Director Allen Dulles to initiate CIA plans for Lumumba’s assassination. Lumumba was ultimately captured and killed by forces of Joseph Mobutu, whom Andrew Tully called “the CIA’s man” in the Congo just days before President Kennedy’s inauguration.
On the southern border of Katanga lay Northern Rhodesia, where Hammarskjöld’s plane would eventually go down, Sir Roy Welensky, a British politician, ruled as prime minister. Welensky, too, pushed for an independent Katanga. Along with the resources, there was also the fear that an integrated Congo and Katanga could lead to the end of apartheid in Rhodesia which might spread to its larger and more prosperous neighbor South Africa.

The British situation was divided, with the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Landsdowne, backing the UN’s efforts at preserving a unified Congo, while the British High Commissioner to the Rhodesian Foundation, Lord Alport, was upset with the UN’s meddling, saying African issues were “better left to Europeans with experience in that part of the world.”

Similarly, U.S. policy appeared split in 1961. Allen Dulles and possibly President Dwight D. Eisenhower had worked to kill Lumumba just before President John F. Kennedy took office. But President Kennedy had been a supporter of Lumumba and fully backed the UN’s efforts in the Congo.

As the report notes, “There is evidence of a cleft in policy between the US Administration and the US Central Intelligence Agency. While the policy of the Administration was to support the UN, the CIA may have been providing materiel to Katanga.”

So British, Belgian and American interests that weren’t always representative of their official heads of state had designs on Katanga, its politics and its resources. What stood in their way? The UN, under the firm leadership of Dag Hammarskjöld.

The UN forces had been unsuccessful in unifying the Congo, so Hammarskjöld and his team flew to Leopoldville on Sept. 13, 1961. Hammarskjöld planned to meet Tshombe to discuss aid, contingent on a ceasefire, and the two decided to meet on Sept. 18 in Ndola in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia).

On Sept. 17, the last day of Hammarskjöld’s life, Neil Ritchie, an MI6 officer, went to pick up Tshombe and the British consul in Katanga, Denzil Dunnett. He found them in the company of a high-level Union Minière employee.

That night, Hammarskjöld embarked on the Albertina, a DC6 plane, and flew from Leopoldville to Ndola, where he was to arrive shortly after midnight. Lord Landsdowne, the British leader opposing a unified Congo, flew separately, although the report goes out of its way to say there was nothing sinister in them flying in separate planes and that this was “diplomatically and politically appropriate.”

A large group of diplomats, Africans, journalists and at least three mercenaries
waited for Hammarskjöld’s plane at the Ndola airport. The Commission found the presence of mercenaries there strange as a police inspector was on duty specifically “to ensure nobody was at the airport who had no good reason to be there.”

The Crash

Hammarskjöld’s plane deliberately circumvented Katanga, fearing interception. The pilot radioed Ndola 25 minutes before midnight with an estimate that they plane was about 45 minutes from landing. At 12:10 a.m., the pilot notified the Ndola airport “Your lights in sight” and requested confirmation of the air pressure reading (QNH). “Roger QNH 1021mb, report reaching 6000 feet,” the airport replied. “Roger 1021,” the Albertina responded. That was the last communication received from Hammarskjöld’s plane. It crashed within minutes.

The Commission found the airport gave the plane correct information, that there was no indication the plane’s altimeter had been tampered with, that the landing gear had been lowered into the proper position and locked, and that the wing flaps had been correctly set. In other words, pilot error, the verdict of the initial Rhodesian inquiry into Dag Hammarskjöld’s death in 1962, did not seem to be the likely cause.

At the crash site, several of the crash victims had bullets in their bodies. In addition, the Commission found “evidence from more than one source that holes resembling bullet-holes were observed in the burnt-out fuselage.”

The Commission’s two aviation experts concluded the most likely cause of the crash seemed to be a “controlled flight into terrain,” meaning, no in-air explosion. This suggests someone deliberately or mistakenly drove the plane right into the ground. However, the report notes, this does not rule out some form of sabotage that could have distracted or injured the pilots, preventing a successful landing.

And the Commission noted contradictory evidence from a few eyewitnesses who claimed they saw the plane explode in mid-air. Another eyewitness, a member of the flight crew, found alive but badly burned, told a police inspector that the plane “blew up” and that “There was a lot of small explosions all around.”

The Commission interviewed African eyewitnesses who had feared coming forward years ago. One of them described seeing the plane on fire before it hit the ground. Another described seeing a “ball of fire coming on top of the plane.” Still another described a “flame on top of the plane like a ball of fire.”

Several witnesses saw a second plane near the one that crashed. One witness saw a second, smaller plane following a larger one, and told the Commission, “I saw
that the fire came from the small plane” And another witness also recalled seeing two planes in the sky with the larger one on fire. A third witness noted that he saw a flash of flame from one plane strike another. Several witnesses reported two smaller planes following a larger one just before the larger one caught fire.

A Swedish flight instructor described in 1994 how he had heard dialog via a short-wave radio the night of the crash. He recalled hearing the following from an airport control tower at the time of the crash: “He’s approaching the airport. He’s turning. He’s leveling. Another plane is approaching from behind, what is that?”

In one of the more bizarre elements of the case, Hammarskjöld’s body was not burnt, yet the other victims of the crash were severely burnt. The Commission concluded the most likely explanation, though not the sole one, was that Hammarskjöld’s body had been thrown from the plane before it caught fire.

And even more strangely, the commission found the evidence “strongly suggests” that someone moved Hammarskjöld’s body after the crash and stuck a playing card in his collar before the photographs of his body were taken. (The card “or something like it” was plainly visible “in the photographs taken of the body on a stretcher at the site.”)

Given the proximity of the plane to the airport, the Commission had a hard time explaining the nine-hour delay between the time of the crash and the Rhodesian authorities’ acknowledgement of its discovery of the wreckage.

While the Commission found a “substantial amount of evidence” that Hammarskjöld’s body had been “found and tampered with well before the afternoon of 18 September and possibly very shortly after the crash,” they also stated the evidence was “no more consistent with hostile persons assuring themselves that he was dead than with bystanders, or possibly looters, examining his body.” But the Commission also noted that “The failure to summon or send help, however, remains an issue.”

The Commission tried very hard to find the autopsy X-rays, as there were reports that a bullet hole had been found in Hammarskjöld’s head. But the X-rays appear lost forever.

Was Hammarskjöld deliberately assassinated?

Former President Harry S. Truman was convinced Hammarskjöld had been murdered. A Sept. 20, 1961 New York Times article quoted Truman as having told reporters, “Dag Hammarskjöld was on the point of getting something done when they killed him. Notice that I said ‘When they killed him.’”
Years later, when the CIA was revealed to have been engaged in assassination plots, reporter Daniel Schorr speculated that the CIA may have been involved in Hammarskjöld’s death.

The report references the report of David Doyle, the chief of the CIA’s Elizabethville base in Katanga who wrote in a memoir how three armed Fouga planes were being delivered to Katanga “in direct violation” of U.S. policy. Doyle doubted this was an official CIA operation, since he had not been notified of the delivery.

Bronson Tweedy, the head of the CIA’s Africa division, questioned Doyle about the possibility of a CIA operation to interfere with Hammarskjöld’s plane. The report notes that this could indicate a lack of CIA involvement in Hammarskjöld’s death, “unless, conceivably, Tweedy was simply trying to find out how much Doyle knew.”

It is the essence of CIA operations that they are highly compartmentalized and often kept secret between people even within the Agency itself. Meaning, Allen Dulles or someone high up the chain could easily have ordered a single operator to take out Hammarskjöld’s plane without using any official CIA channels. Indeed, that is what one would expect were so sensitive an operation as the assassination of a UN head contemplated.

After Lumumba’s death, in early 1961, the UN passed resolution 161, which urged the immediate removal of Belgian forces and “other foreign military and paramilitary personnel and political advisors not under the United Nations Command, and mercenaries” from the Congo.

Confession from a CIA operative

When I heard such a commission was forming, I reached out to Lord Lea of Crondall to offer some evidence of my own. John Armstrong, a fellow researcher into the JFK assassination, had forwarded me a series of Church Committee files and correspondence to and from a CIA operative named Roland “Bud” Culligan.

Culligan claimed the CIA had set him up on a phony bank fraud charge, and his way out of jail appears to have been to offer the Church Committee information on CIA assassinations (which he called “executive actions” or “E.A.’s”). Culligan was asked to list some “E.A.’s” that he had been involved in. Culligan mentioned, among high-profile others, Dag Hammarskjöld.

“Damn it, I did not want the job,” Culligan wrote to his legal adviser at Yale Law School. Culligan described the plane and the route, he named his CIA handler and his contact on the ground in Libya, and he described how he shot Hammarskjöld’s plane, which subsequently crashed.
As I testified, and as the Commission quoted in its report: “You will see from the correspondence that Culligan’s material was referred to an Attorney General, a Senator, and ultimately, the Senate investigation of the CIA’s activities at home and abroad that became known as the Church Committee after its leader, Senator Frank Church. Clearly, others in high places had reasons to believe Culligan’s assertions were worthy of further investigation.”

Culligan’s claims fit neatly with a broadcast allegedly heard by Navy Cmdr. Charles Southall, another Commission witness. The morning before the crash, Charles Southall, a naval pilot and intelligence officer, was stationed at the NSA’s facility in Cyprus.

At about 9 p.m. that night, Southall reported he was called at home by the communications watch officer and told to get down to the listening post because “something interesting” was going to happen that night. Southall described hearing a recording shortly after midnight in which a cool pilot’s voice said, “I see a transport plane coming low. All the lights are on. I’m going to make a run on it. Yes, it’s the Transair DC6. It’s the plane.”

Southall heard what sounded like cannon fire, then: “I’ve hit it. There are flames. It’s going down. It’s crashing.” Given that Cyprus was in the same time zone as Ndola, the Commission concluded it was possible that Southall had indeed heard a recording from Ndola. Southall was certain that what he heard indicated a deliberate act.

**Bullets**

Several witnesses described seeing bullet holes in the plane before it burnt. The report described one witness’s account that the fuselage was “‘riddled with bullet-holes’ which appeared to have been made by a machine-gun.”

This account was disputed by AP journalist Errol Friedmann, however, who claimed no bullet holes were present. However, bullets were definitely found embedded in the bodies of several of the plane crash victims, which tends to give the former claim more credence.

The same journalist Friedmann also noted to a fellow journalist that the day after the crash, in a hotel, he had heard a couple of Belgian pilots who had perhaps had too much to drink discussing the crash. One of the pilots claimed he had been in contact with Hammarskjöld’s plane and had “buzzed” it, forcing the pilot of the Albertina to take evasive action. When the pilot buzzed the plane a second time, he forced it towards the ground.

A third-party account allegedly from a Belgian pilot named Beukels was investigated with some skepticism by the Commission. Beukels allegedly gave an
account to a French Diplomat named Claude de Kemoularia, who evidently first relayed Beukels’s account to UN diplomat George Ivan Smith in 1980 (not long after Culligan’s 1975 account, I would note).

Smith’s source, however, appeared to be a transcript, about which the Commission noted “the literary quality of the narrative suggests an editorial hand, probably that of one or both of the two intermediaries.” Allegedly, Beukels fired what he meant to be warning shots which then hit the tail of the plane.

While Beukels’s alleged narrative matched several known facts, the Commission wisely noted, “there was little in Beukels’s narrative, as reported, that could not have been ascertained from press coverage and the three inquiries, elaborated by his experience as a pilot.” The Commission wrote of other elements which invited skepticism of this account, but did concede it’s possible this account was self-serving, designed to excuse a deliberate shooting down by Beukels.

The Commission’s recommendation

While the Commission had no desire to place blame for the crash, the report states: “There is persuasive evidence that the aircraft was subjected to some form of attack or threat as it circled to land at Ndola, which was by then widely known to be its destination,” adding “we consider that the possibility that the plane was in fact forced into its descent by some form of hostile action is supported by sufficient evidence to merit further inquiry.”

The key evidence that the Commission thinks could prove or disprove a deliberate act would be the Ndola airport’s radio traffic that night. The Commission reported “it is highly likely that the entirety of the local and regional Ndola radio traffic on the night of 17-18 September 1961 was tracked and recorded by the NSA, and possibly also by the CIA.”

The Commission filed a Freedom of Information request for any such evidence with the National Archives but did not appear hopeful that such records would be released unless pressure was brought to bear.

In its discussion of Culligan, the Commission felt there were no leads there that could be pursued. But if any of Culligan’s many conversations with his legal adviser was captured on tape, and if tapes of the radio traffic cited above could be obtained, a voice match could be sought.

Based on its year-long investigation, the Commission stated that the UN “would be justified” in reopening its initial 1962 inquiry in light of the new evidence “about an event of global significance with deserves the attention both of history and of justice.”
[Regarding President Eisenhower’s possibly role in ordering the assassination of Lumumba, Robert Johnson, a National Security Council staff member, told the Church Committee he heard Eisenhower give an order that Lumumba be killed. He remembered being shocked to hear this. Under questioning, however, Johnson allowed that may have been a mistaken impression, that perhaps Eisenhower was referring to Lumumba’s political, not physical, removal.]

Lisa Pease is a writer who has examined issues ranging from the Kennedy assassination to voting irregularities in recent U.S. elections.

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**JFK’s Embrace of Third World Nationalists**

**Exclusive:** The intensive media coverage of the half-century anniversary of John F. Kennedy’s murder was long on hype and emotion but short on explaining how revolutionary JFK’s foreign policy was in his extraordinary support for Third World nationalists, as Jim DiEugenio explains.

By Jim DiEugenio

Most knowledgeable people understood that the 50th anniversary of the assassination of President Kennedy would be marked by an extraordinary outpouring of media programming commemorating his life and death. But the volume probably exceeded expectations.

There were even programs aired that were not announced in advance, e.g., “The Assassination of President Kennedy” produced by Tom Hanks and his Playtone production company, which featured an aged and very ill-looking Vincent Bugliosi, author of *Reclaiming History*, one more defense of the Warren Commission’s report.

Perhaps the longest 50th anniversary program was the two-part, four-hour “JFK” on the PBS series “American Experience.” It was largely based on the work of historian Robert Dallek, who has written two books about Kennedy, *An Unfinished Life* and *Camelot’s Court*. Combined, the books amounted to over 1,100 pages of biography and analysis.

Although Dallek did much work on Kennedy’s medical records, there were some commentators who wondered if the historian was actually diligent enough in informing his readers about Kennedy’s policies, especially his foreign policy initiatives. In fact, in the introduction to the second book, Dallek suggests
that he wrote the second tome because he couldn’t understand why an intervening poll showed President Kennedy as, far and away, the most admired of the last nine presidents. Dallek mused: Did I miss something?

Having read both of Dallek’s books, I would venture to say that, yes, he did miss something. Actually, more than just something. He missed a major part of the story that the general public however vaguely, however inchoately somehow does understand about President Kennedy. Namely this fact: There is as much a battle over who JFK was, as over the circumstances of his assassination.

Those two continuing controversies who was Kennedy and who killed him would lead some to ask if there may be a relationship between the two questions. In other words, was Kennedy killed because of the policies he tried to enact as president, particularly in the foreign policy sphere? However, in Dallek’s quest to discount this angle, he once wrote an article for Salon about Kennedy that was titled, “Why do we admire a President who did so little?”

But is that really the case? There is a growing body of scholarship that holds that, even though Kennedy was cut down after less than three years in office, he achieved quite a lot and was trying for even more. Authors like Irving Bernstein, Donald Gibson, Richard Mahoney, John Newman, James Bill, Philip Muehlenbeck and Robert Rakove have all tried to detail the serious achievements and goals Kennedy had while in office.

**A Foreign Policy Revolution**

Further, most of these authors have tried to demonstrate two foreign policy shifts that Kennedy set in motion but that his assassination reversed. The first were the series of changes that Kennedy made in the policies which preceded him, those of President Dwight Eisenhower and his foreign policy team, consisting largely of the Dulles brothers and Richard Nixon.

The second series of changes occurred after Kennedy was killed and Lyndon Johnson took office. These changes essentially returned to the status quo ante established by the Dulles brothers. Because the subject of Kennedy’s entire presidency would take a book to review, let us concentrate here just on a few segments of his foreign policy that still resonate today.

To understand the import of President Kennedy's foreign policy ideas, one needs to contemplate the photo of Kennedy getting the news of the murder of Patrice Lumumba. The black African revolutionary leader of Congo was shot to death on Jan. 17, 1961, just three days before Kennedy was to take office, although his death was not confirmed for several weeks.

Eisenhower would not have reacted with the distress shown on Kennedy’s face
because, as the Church Committee discovered, Lumumba’s murder was linked to the approval of a plan by Eisenhower and CIA Director Allen Dulles to eliminate him. (William Blum, The CIA: A Forgotten History, pgs. 175-176) Former CIA officer John Stockwell wrote in his book In Search of Enemies that he later talked to a CIA colleague who said it was his job to dispose of Lumumba’s body. (Stockwell, p. 50)

To fully understand the difference between how Kennedy viewed Africa and how Eisenhower, the Dulles brothers and later Lyndon Johnson did, one must appreciate why Eisenhower and his national security team felt it necessary to eliminate Lumumba. As Philip Muehlenbeck has noted in his book Betting on the Africans, Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles essentially ignored the tidal wave of decolonization that swept through Africa in the Fifties and Sixties. Nearly 30 new nations emerged in Africa during this time period.

Even though most of this transformation occurred while Eisenhower was president, the United States never voted against a European power over a colonial dispute in Africa. Neither did Dulles or Eisenhower criticize colonial rule by NATO allies. Not only did the White House appear to favor continued colonial domination, but with the nations already freed, they looked upon the emerging leaders with, too put it mildly, much condescension.

At an NSC meeting, Vice President Nixon claimed that, “some of these peoples of Africa have been out of the trees for only about fifty years.” (Muehlenbeck, p. 6) And, of course, John Foster Dulles saw this epochal anti-colonial struggle through the magnifying glass of the Cold War. As Muehlenbeck writes, “Dulles believed that Third World nationalism was a tool of Moscow’s creation rather than a natural outgrowth of the colonial experience.” (ibid, p. 6) Therefore, to Eisenhower and his team, Lumumba was a communist.

**Kennedy’s Anti-Colonialism**

To Kennedy, however, Lumumba was a nationalistic leader who was trying to guide his country to independence, both politically and economically. Lumumba wanted Congo to be free of economic exploitation from foreigners. Kennedy agreed with that idea. As his Under Secretary of State for Africa, G. Mennen Williams, succinctly stated, “What we want for the Africans is what the Africans want for themselves.” (ibid, p. 45) The Kennedy administration’s policy deliberately made European interests secondary.

The crisis in Congo was exacerbated by the fact that Congo’s Katanga province contained abundant natural resources, including gold, copper and uranium. Therefore, when the Belgians abruptly left, they ensured that their departure
would leave behind enough tumult so that certain friends in Katanga, like Moise Tshombe, would ask for their return. The problem was that Prime Minister Lumumba had no desire to ask.

So, in July 1960, Lumumba went to Washington to seek help in kicking the Belgians out. When Lumumba arrived, Eisenhower remained on a golfing trip in Newport, Rhode Island. (Mahoney, JFK: Ordeal in Africa, p. 38) And, it was clear from Lumumba’s discussion with other officials that America was not going to help him expel the Belgians. Then, Lumumba turned to the Russians, who did supply military assistance. (ibid, p. 40)

This development played into the hands of CIA Director Allen Dulles, who declared that the “communist” Lumumba must be removed. He was killed on Jan. 17, 1961, apparently by a firing squad organized by Belgian officers and Katangan authorities (although his fate was covered up for several weeks).

There are some writers, like John Morton Blum and the late Jonathan Kwitny, who did not believe the timing of Lumumba’s murder to be a coincidence, just three days before Kennedy’s inauguration. It may have been done then because the CIA suspected that Kennedy would side with Lumumba, which, when his new plan for Congo was formulated, was clearly what JFK was going to do. (Mahoney, pgs. 65-67)

Kennedy decided to cooperate with Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold at the United Nations to try and save the country’s independence. Kennedy wanted to neutralize any East-West competition, to stop the creation of an economic puppet state in Katanga, and to free all political prisoners. Not knowing Lumumba was dead during the first weeks of his administration, Kennedy meant to restore Lumumba to power. If Lumumba’s death was accelerated to defeat an expected policy change by JFK, in practical terms, it was successful.

Who Was Gullion?

The man Kennedy chose to be his ambassador to Congo was Edmund Gullion, who was the one who had altered Kennedy’s consciousness about Third World nationalism. There are some writers who would maintain that perhaps no other person had as much influence on the evolution of Kennedy’s foreign policy thinking as did Gullion. Yet, Gullion’s name is not in the index to either of Dallek’s books on Kennedy.

Edmund Gullion entered the State Department in the late 1930s. His first assignment was to Marseilles, France, where he became fluent in the French language and was then transferred to French Indochina during France’s struggle to re-colonize the area after World War II.
Kennedy briefly met Gullion in Washington in the late 1940s when the aspiring young politician needed some information for a speech on foreign policy. In 1951, when the 34-year-old congressman flew into Saigon, he decided to look up Gullion. In the midst of France’s long and bloody war to take back Indochina, one that then had been going on for five years, Gullion’s point of view was unique among American diplomats and jarringly candid.

As Thurston Clarke described the rooftop restaurant meeting, Gullion told Kennedy that France could never win the war. Ho Chi Minh had inspired tens of thousands of Viet Minh to the point they would rather die than return to a state of French colonialism. France could never win a war of attrition like that, because the home front would not support it.

This meeting had an immediate impact on young Kennedy. When he returned home, he began making speeches that highlighted these thoughts which were underscored by the Viet Minh’s eventual defeat of the French colonial forces in 1954. In criticizing the U.S. Establishment’s view of these anti-colonial struggles, Kennedy did not play favorites. He criticized Democrats as well as Republicans who failed to see that the United States had to have a positive appeal to the Third World. There had to be something more than just anti-communism.

For instance, in a speech Kennedy gave during the 1956 presidential campaign for Adlai Stevenson, the then-Massachusetts senator said: “The Afro-Asian revolution of nationalism, the revolt against colonialism, the determination of people to control their national destinies. In my opinion, the tragic failure of both Republican and Democratic administrations since World War II to comprehend the nature of this revolution, and its potentialities for good and evil, had reaped a bitter harvest today, and it is by rights and by necessity a major foreign policy campaign issue that has nothing to do with anti-communism.”

Stevenson’s office then sent a wire to Kennedy asking him not to make any more foreign policy speeches for the campaign. (Mahoney, p. 18) Considering that Stevenson was the darling of the liberal intellectual set, this handwringing may come as a surprise, but his campaign’s worries reflected the political realities of the day.

**The Algerian War**

In 1957, Kennedy found the perfect time and place to launch a rhetorical broadside against the orthodoxies of both parties on colonialism and anti-communism. By that time, France had inserted 500,000 troops into Algeria to thwart a bloody, terrifying and debilitating colonial war. But because the Algerians fought guerrilla-style, using snipers, explosives and hit-and-run tactics, the war degenerated into torture, atrocities and unmitigated horror.
When the grim facts on the ground were exposed in Paris, the Fourth Republic fell and World War II hero Charles DeGaulle returned to power. When Sen. Kennedy rose in the Senate to address the painful subject of Algeria, the war had been going on for three years. As yet, no high-profile U.S. politician had analyzed the issue with any depth or perspective for the public.

On July 2, 1957, Kennedy started the speech with an understanding tone, observing that many American leaders had chosen not to say anything since this was an internal French matter and France had been America’s first ally. Kennedy then switched gears, noting that a true friend of France would not stand by and watch France tear itself asunder in a futile war, one that would only delay the inevitable. He then got to his real point:

“Yet, did we not learn in Indochina that we might have served both the French and our own causes infinitely better had we taken a more firm stand much earlier than we did? Did that tragic episode not teach us that, whether France likes it or not, admits it or not, or has our support or not, their overseas territories are sooner or later, one by one, inevitably going to break free and look with suspicion on the Western nations who impeded their steps to independence?”

I have read this fascinating speech several times, and there is one part of the speech that today stands out like a beacon in the night for today’s world. Kennedy understood the history of North Africa. That is, its conquest by the Ottoman Empire and the resultant fact that many, many native Algerians were Moslem. Therefore, he added the following:

“In these days, we can help fulfill a great and promising opportunity to show the world that a new nation, with an Arab heritage, can establish itself in the Western tradition and successfully withstand both the pull toward Arab feudalism and fanaticism and the pull toward Communist authoritarianism.”

This acute perception that America needed to do everything possible to moderate emerging Arab nationalism so that it did not degenerate into “feudalism and fanaticism” is something Kennedy would act upon once he gained the White House.

As historian Allan Nevins wrote, no speech by Sen. Kennedy had attracted more attention than this one, and much was negative. Naturally, those he criticized harshly attacked Kennedy: John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower and Nixon. But again, as in 1956, Stevenson and another fellow Democrat, former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, also attacked him. Kennedy’s staff collected the many newspaper editorials the speech generated: 90 of the 138 responses were negative. (Mahoney, p. 21)

The World’s Reaction
But the reaction abroad was different. Many commentators in France were impressed by Kennedy’s insights into the conflict. And in Africa, Kennedy became the man to see in Washington for visiting African dignitaries. The Algerian guerrillas hiding in the hills were exhilarated by Kennedy’s breadth of understanding of their dilemma. They listened excitedly as the results of the 1960 presidential election were tallied.

Many books and films have been written and produced about what Kennedy did while in office in the foreign policy sphere. Most books concerning his assassination deal almost exclusively with Vietnam and Cuba. In the second edition of *Destiny Betrayed*, I tried to make the argument that, to understand Kennedy’s view of the world, it was necessary to broaden the focus.

In fact, the first foreign policy crisis that Kennedy reviewed once in office was neither Cuba nor Vietnam. It was the conflict in Congo. And as we can see from his reaction to both African crises, Kennedy had learned his lessons from Gullion well, to the point that he was willing to endanger relations with European and NATO allies in order to support Third World nationalism.

But there was another case where Kennedy did the same, the giant island archipelago of Indonesia, which the Netherlands had colonized since the late 1500s. After World War II, a guerrilla war challenged a restoration of colonialism and Indonesia won its independence in 1949. But, as with Katanga in Congo, the Dutch decided to keep control of the eastern island of West Irian because of its wealth.

In 1958, the Dulles brothers tried to overthrow Achmed Sukarno, the nationalist president of Indonesia, but the coup attempt failed. The shoot-down of American pilot Allen Pope exposed the coup as being organized and run by the CIA. Sukarno kept Pope imprisoned after the change of administrations.

President Kennedy invited Sukarno to the U.S. for a state visit. He wanted to discuss the release of Pope, so he asked CIA Director Allen Dulles for the report on how Pope was captured. Dulles gave him a redacted copy. But even in this form, Kennedy discerned what had happened. He exclaimed, “No wonder Sukarno doesn’t like us very much. He has to sit down with people who tried to overthrow his government.” (DiEugenio, *Destiny Betrayed*, p. 33)

Because of Kennedy’s different view of the issues at hand, he was able to achieve a much improved relationship with Indonesia. He secured the release of Pope, put together a package of non-military aid for Indonesia, and finally, with the help of Robert Kennedy and veteran diplomat Ellsworth Bunker, West Irian was released by the Netherlands and eventually returned to Indonesia.
Embracing Nationalism

What is clear from these examples is that Kennedy was a proponent of nationalism: the belief that native peoples living in areas emerging from colonialism and imperialism should have control of their own natural resources. This concept challenged the system of European imperialism that the United States also joined after the Spanish-American War at the end of the 19th Century.

The Dulles brothers, with their strong ties to the Eastern Establishment and, through banker David Rockefeller, to the Council on Foreign Relations, had been a part of this imperial system. One way was through their service to giant American international conglomerates at the Wall Street law firm of Sullivan and Cromwell. John Foster Dulles had joined the firm in 1911 and became the managing partner at a relatively young age. Later, he brought his brother Allen into the firm where he made senior partner in just four years.

But, beyond that, the Dulles brothers were born into power. Their grandfather, through their mother, was John Watson Foster, Secretary of State under President Benjamin Harrison in 1892. Their uncle, Robert Lansing, served in that same office under President Woodrow Wilson.

After World War I, through Wall Street financier Bernard Baruch, the Dulles brothers gained entry to the Treaty of Versailles. There, from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, they were instrumental in setting up the mandate system in the Middle East. This made it easier for their corporate clients, which included the Rockefeller family trust, to set up oil exploration deals in these European-supervised principalities.

This is one reason the Dulles brothers favored the monarchical system in the Middle East. After all, if Arab nationalism advanced, it ran the risk of handing the oil riches of the Middle East to the people who lived there rather than to British and American petroleum companies.

The best-known example of the Dulles brothers’ strategy was the 1953 CIA-backed coup in Iran that ousted nationalist leader Mohammad Mosaddegh and returned the Shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, to power. The Shah then amassed an appalling human rights record by deploying his CIA-trained security service, the SAVAK, against his political enemies.

As author James Bill notes in his book, *The Eagle and the Lion*, the Kennedy brothers disdained the Shah’s monarchical rule. At one stage, they commissioned a State Department paper on the costs and liabilities of returning Mosaddegh to power. To counter the negative image held by the Kennedys, the Shah launched a series of economic and social reforms called the White Revolution but they were
unsuccessful.

After Kennedy’s death, the pressure on the Shah was relaxed due to the closeness of presidents like Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter to the Rockefellers. But history would see Kennedy as prescient for his 1957 warning about how neocolonialism could lead to “fanaticism.” The prime example was the Iranian revolution that overthrew the Shah in 1979.

**Working with Nasser**

In contrast to the Eisenhower administration, President Kennedy had a much more favorable view of the nationalist leader of Egypt, Gamel Abdel Nasser, who held a special place in the geography of Middle East and African leaders. Because of the Suez Canal and his charismatic leadership of Arab nationalism and pan-Arab unity, Nasser emerged as a central figure in both regions.

Under Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles had poisoned the American relationship with Nasser by trying to pressure him into joining a U.S. military pact against the Soviet Union. Nasser replied that such an arrangement would cost him his standing with the Egyptian people. (Muehlenbeck, p. 10)

Keeping with his non-aligned status, Nasser also decided to recognize China’s communist government. John Foster Dulles with his myopic “you’re either with us or against us” attitude cut food shipments to Egypt and cancelled support for the Aswan Dam project.

This provoked Nasser’s occupation of the Suez Canal and the subsequent tripartite invasion of Sinai by England, France and Israel. But this blatant reassertion of European colonialism was too much for Eisenhower who joined with the USSR at the United Nations in demanding that the invaders leave. But much damage between Egypt and the West had already been done. The Russians stepped in to supply the necessary loans to construct Aswan.

The next chess move by Dulles looks even worse today than it did then. Realizing that these events had built up Nasser even further in the eyes of the Arab world, Dulles turned toward King Saud of Saudi Arabia and tried to use him as a counterweight to Nasser’s nationalism. Dulles arranged to have Saud do what Nasser would not: sign onto the Eisenhower Doctrine, a treaty which would, if needed, forcibly keep the Russians out of the Middle East.

Many saw this as a clever geopolitical tactic to keep Nasser in check. But it was perceived in the Middle East as Dulles allying himself with royalty and against nationalism. (ibid, p. 15) It was a repeat of what the Dulles brothers and Eisenhower had done in Iran in 1953.
Kennedy wanted to reverse this perception of the United States aligning itself with the old order. He told National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy that rebuilding the American relationship with Egypt would be a priority focus of his administration. He was determined that Egypt would stay non-aligned, but he also wanted to end the idea that the United States was close to the Saudis.

To Kennedy, charismatic and influential moderates like Nasser represented the best hope for American foreign policy in the Middle East. In a reference to what Dulles had done with the Aswan project, Kennedy said: “If we can learn the lessons of the past, if we can refrain from pressing our case so hard that the Arabs feel their neutrality and nationalism threatened, the Middle East can become an area of strength and hope.” (ibid, p. 124)

**Repairing Egypt Ties**

Kennedy tried to patch up the U.S.-Egypt relationship by doing something that seems rare today. He chose his ambassador to Egypt on pure merit, Dr. John S. Badeau, who headed the Near East Foundation and probably knew more about the history of Egypt than any American.

Badeau already knew Nasser and the Speaker of the National Assembly, Anwar El Sadat. This, plus the way Kennedy changed American policy in Congo, helped to tone down Nasser’s anti-American and anti-Israeli rhetoric. Kennedy then went further. After Syria left the United Arab Republic in 1961, Kennedy made hundreds of millions of dollars in loans to keep the Egyptian economy afloat.

In Kennedy’s view it was important for America to favor men like Nasser and Sadat over the monarchies of the Middle East because it was the nationalists, and not King Saud, who could capture the popular support of the public and channel it in a positive and progressive way. Or, as author Philip Muehlenbeck writes, “For Kennedy the Saudi monarchy was an archaic relic of the past and Nasser was the wave of the future.” (ibid, p. 133)

Like the Shah, Saud exemplified brutality, corruption and civil rights abuses. So, Kennedy did something symbolic to demonstrate the new U.S. attitude. In 1961, King Saud was in a Boston hospital for a medical condition. Kennedy did not visit him, even though the man was in his hometown. Instead, Kennedy went south to Palm Beach, Florida. After constant badgering from the State Department, Kennedy did visit Saud afterwards when he was in a convalescent home. But he couldn’t help registering his disgust by telling his companion in the car, “What am I doing calling on this guy?” (ibid, p. 134)

During the civil war in Yemen, Nasser backed Abdullah al-Sallal against the last Mutawakklite King of Yemen, Muhammad al-Badr. Saudi Arabia supported the king to
stop the spread of Nasser’s influence and prevent the rise of nationalism. To
demonstrate his alliance with Nasser over Saudi Arabia, Kennedy recognized al-
Sallal, even though the leaders of England and Israel criticized Kennedy about
it. (ibid, p. 135)

As historian Muehlenbeck notes, this conflict ended with a truce only because of
the mutual trust and admiration between Kennedy and Nasser. Kennedy was so
sympathetic to Nasser and Algerian leader Ahmed Ben Bella that the Senate passed
an amendment limiting his aid to the two leaders.

Kennedy’s policies, at the very least, delayed the rise of anti-Americanism in
the region. At best, they showed why future presidents should not forge ties to
the reactionary monarchy in Saudi Arabia, which essentially has contributed to
terrorist groups to preserve its power. Like no president before or since,
Kennedy risked relations with traditional allies over the issue of nascent
nationalism.

**Portugal and Africa**

Due to Prince Henry the Navigator’s success in expanding Portuguese interests
into Africa in the 1400s, Portugal became the first country to develop the
African slave trade and retained considerable colonial possessions in Africa
over the next five centuries.

Just two months after Kennedy was inaugurated, Liberia sponsored a United
Nations motion to begin a reform program so that Angola could gain its
independence from Portugal. Kennedy had his UN representative Adlai Stevenson
vote for Liberia and against Portugal, France and England.

Further underscoring this sea change in U.S. policy, American was now voting
with the Soviet Union. Even the *New York Times* understood something big was
afoot, calling it a “major shift” in traditional foreign policy by Kennedy.
(ibid, p. 97)

Kennedy understood that he had to embrace anti-colonialism in order to compete
with Russia in the non-aligned world. As he learned from Gullion in Vietnam,
America could not be perceived as a counter-revolutionary country. If the U.S.
grew against the powerful emotions of nationalism, there would be little
alternative but to support fascist dictators or even send in American combat
troops, which Kennedy considered counter-productive and didn’t want to do.

Therefore, when the Angola vote was cast, Kennedy was trying to show the
developing world that the USSR was not the only great power in the Caucasian
world to oppose colonialism. (ibid, pgs. 97-98) In other words, for Kennedy,
this was not just the right thing to do; it was the practical thing to do. And
it was another clean break with Eisenhower and the Dulles brothers. The best they would do in these types of situations was to abstain from voting.

To say the Angola vote was not popular with Establishment forces is putting it mildly. Acheson again criticized Kennedy. Portuguese demonstrators in Lisbon stoned the U.S. embassy. But Kennedy understood that it would send a clear signal to the leaders of the developing world, a reversal of an earlier era of disdain for African nationalists. A few years before, when Julius Nyerere of Tanganyika went to New York to lobby for such a UN resolution, he was limited to a 24-hour visa and an eight-block travel radius.

But Kennedy went beyond just supporting a UN resolution. He offered to raise U.S. foreign aid to Portugal to $500 million per year for eight years if Portuguese President Antonio Salazar would free all of its African colonies. Since aid to Portugal was very minimal at the time, this was a staggering amount of money. Today it would be about $16 billion. After Salazar turned down the offer, Kennedy sent aid to the rebels in Angola and Mozambique. (ibid, pgs. 102,107)

Kennedy was even willing to risk relations with a major ally France over the issue of colonialism. In theory, French President DeGaulle had granted many of the former states of the French colonial empire freedom in 1960. But, after analysis, it was clear that DeGaulle planned to keep optimum influence in these states, a process called neocolonialism.

For instance, DeGaulle favored the states that would stay aligned with France with large amounts of aid. Those that decided to go their own way were given paltry sums. So, Kennedy targeted those countries ignored by DeGaulle, giving them more than $30 million by 1962. (ibid, p. 161) DeGaulle also backed the Belgian lackey Moise Tshombe in the Congo crisis.

Viewing these strategies as a continuation of European imperialism in Africa, Kennedy decided to compete with France, even if it meant weakening his relationship with DeGaulle. As Muelhenbeck notes, in November 1963, Kennedy commissioned a study of methods to compete with France and to formulate countermeasures designed to undermine the French grip in Africa.

Worrying About Laos

Before Eisenhower left office, he had two meetings with President-elect Kennedy. Contrary to what most might think, he did not tell Kennedy that the most looming and important foreign policy area was Vietnam, Congo or Cuba. He told him it was Laos. (Arthur Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 163)

Eisenhower and his advisers painted the picture in stark Cold War terms, warning
against any kind of coalition government that would include communist representation. The talk got so stark and martial that Kennedy ended up asking how long it would take to put a division of American troops into the area. (ibid)

On Jan. 3, 1961 Eisenhower said that “if the communists establish a strong position in Laos, the West is finished in the whole southeast Asian area.” (David Kaiser, American Tragedy, p. 32)

As historian David Kaiser later noted, the Eisenhower-Dulles definition of what a communist was often included people who, by objective standards, were actually neutralists. Later on, as Kennedy would show, if properly handled, these neutralists could actually become American allies.

But in the Dulles-Eisenhower Cold War meme as with Egypt’s Nasser you were either in the U.S. camp or against it. As Kaiser noted, it was this attitude that had left Indochina in such a highly agitated, militaristic state by the end of Eisenhower’s term in office. In fact, Eisenhower had approved war plans for Indochina as early as 1955. (ibid, p. 34)

The Dulles brothers never pursued a diplomatic resolution in Indochina, just as they never pressured France to the bargaining table in Algeria. Fitting their globalist and imperialist views, the Dulles brothers dismissed the idea of rapprochement over both large and small issues. All their energies seemed to be expended in political offensives and plans for war, hence this presentation to Kennedy on Laos.

But Kennedy did not take the advice. He reversed the policy again and parried an attempt to insert American troops by asking for estimates of how many men the North Vietnamese and Chinese could place into this conflict in their neighboring area. The estimates came back at 160,000 men within 30 days. (ibid, p. 40)

On the same day those estimates were returned, at his first press conference, Kennedy stated that he wished to establish in Laos “a peaceful country, an independent country not dominated by either side but concerned with the life of the people within the country.” (ibid)

Dissatisfied with the military option, Kennedy then went to the State Department and called upon Ambassador Winthrop Brown, who told the President that the Laotian army was simply not capable of fighting a civil war on its own. Kennedy asked him what he would propose instead. Brown said he would offer up a neutralist solution with a coalition government, noting that this is what U.S. allies in Europe favored. In fact, the allies thought that this was the only solution, and they felt the communist Pathet Lao should be included. (ibid)
Kennedy, who Isaiah Berlin once called the best listener he ever met, signaled to the Soviets a willingness to arrange a peaceful settlement. Kennedy would use the military option only as a bluff to strengthen his hand at the bargaining table. (ibid, p. 41) Although his military advisers continued to push for the introduction of combat troops, and even the use of atomic weapons, Kennedy continued to brush this advice aside.

In fact, Kennedy gave a press backgrounder where he himself argued against the military option from his 1951 experience with Gullion. Kennedy argued that if the Laotian government fell and the U.S. had to intervene, U.S. troops would likely be opposed by China and the Viet Minh. Kennedy added, “The French had 400,000 men and could not hold. I was in Hanoi in 1951 and saw for myself.” (ibid, p. 47)

After telling the Russians to get the Pathet Lao to stop their offensive in May of 1961, a truce was called. A conference was then convened in Geneva to hammer out conditions for a neutral Laos. By July 1962, a new government, including the Pathet Lao, was constructed.

Kennedy later explained his position to rival Richard Nixon: “I just don’t think we should get involved in Laos, particularly where we might find ourselves fighting millions of Chinese troops in the jungles. In any event, I don’t see how we can make any move in Laos, which is 5,000 miles away, if we don’t make a move in Cuba which is only 90 miles away.” (Schlesinger, p. 337)

**Onward to Vietnam**

So, there was a context of anti-colonialism and diplomacy in understanding President Kennedy’s resistance to the pressure from his military advisers when they pushed for sending combat troops to Vietnam. As with Laos, Kennedy bucked that advice and never dispatched combat troops, although he increased the number of U.S. military personnel advising the South Vietnamese army from about 900 under Eisenhower to about 16,000 by 1963.

The declassified files of the Assassination Records Review Board further illuminate this story of tension and intrigue over Vietnam policy, first highlighted to the American public by Oliver Stone’s 1991 film *JFK*. As it turned out, Kennedy was not just fighting his military advisers on the Vietnam issue. He was opposed by many of his civilian advisers, too.

In April 1962, Ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith volunteered to get a message to North Vietnam through Indian diplomats about a possible truce in return for a phased withdrawal of American forces. Almost everyone at senior levels of the Kennedy administration opposed Galbraith’s venture. The one man
who liked the idea was Kennedy, who instructed Assistant Secretary of State Averell Harriman to follow up on the proposal.

Apparently, Kennedy did not understand that, although Harriman was in charge of the Laotian talks, he was not in favor of the same solution in Vietnam. Thus, Harriman subverted Kennedy’s intentions on this assignment. In the wire to Galbraith, Harriman struck out the wording of the language on de-escalation with a heavy pencil line. It was changed into a threat of American escalation in the war if North Vietnam refused to accept U.S. terms. When Harriman’s assistant tried to reword the cable to stay true to Kennedy’s intent, Harriman changed it back again. He then simply killed the telegram altogether. (Gareth Porter, *Perils of Dominance*, pgs. 158-59)

In 2005, Galbraith confirmed to *Boston Globe* reporter Bryan Bender that he never received any instructions about his proposal from President Kennedy.

By 1963, as confirmed by Assistant Defense Secretary Roswell Gilpatric and Defense Department analyst John McNaughton, Kennedy had decided that he was going to use Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara as his point man to go ahead and implement a withdrawal from Vietnam. McNamara’s instructions to begin planning the withdrawal of U.S. military personnel had been relayed to Saigon in summer 1962.

At a key meeting in Hawaii in May 1963, McNamara was presented with an update on the planning for the withdrawal. He deemed the plans too slow and asked them to be speeded up. (James DiEugenio, *Destiny Betrayed*, pgs. 366-367) But the point was that the plan was in place. Kennedy activated it in October 1963 by signing National Security Action Memorandum 263, stating that the withdrawal would begin in December of 1963 and be completed in 1965.

In other words, Kennedy’s plan for a military withdrawal wasn’t just some vague notion or, as New York Times executive editor Jill Abramson recently wrote, a belief among his admirers “rooted as much in the romance of ‘what might have been’ as in the documented record.”

In a letter to the New York Times in response to Abramson’s JFK article, James K. Galbraith, a professor of government at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas and son of the late John Kenneth Galbraith, challenged Abramson’s characterization of Kennedy’s withdrawal plan.

“The relevant documents include records of the Secretary of Defense conference in Honolulu in May 1963; tapes and transcripts of the decision meetings in the White House; and a memorandum from Gen. Maxwell Taylor to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Oct. 4, 1963, which states: ‘All planning will be directed towards preparing RVN [South Vietnamese government] forces for the withdrawal of all U.S. special assistance units and personnel by the end of calendar year 1965.’”

Kennedy on Cuba

The last major area of foreign policy that Kennedy was changing was Cuba. After the Missile Crisis in October 1962, Kennedy and Fidel Castro opened up a back channel through three intermediaries: ABC reporter Lisa Howard, State Department employee William Attwood, and French journalist Jean Daniel.

This attempt at secret communication and a détente between the two countries was in high gear in the fall of 1963. In his last message relayed to Castro through Daniel, Kennedy made one of the most candid and bold statements ever to a communist head of state. He said to Castro, “In the matter of the Batista regime, I am in agreement with the first Cuban revolutionaries. That is perfectly clear.” (ibid, p. 74)

When Castro got this message, he was overjoyed. He exuberantly told Daniel that Kennedy would go down in history as the greatest president since Abraham Lincoln. Three days later, Castro got the news that Kennedy had been shot. He was thunderstruck. He put down the phone, sat down and repeated over and over, “This is bad news, this is bad news, this is bad news.”

A few moments later, a radio broadcast announced that Kennedy was dead. Castro stood up and said, “Everything is changed, everything is going to change.” (ibid, p. 75)

As it turned out, Castro was not just speaking for himself. It’s true that Lyndon Johnson did not continue the Cuban back-channel negotiations, and that promising diplomatic attempt died along with Kennedy. But Castro was probably not aware that all the ventures described above were about to change back, more or less, to where they were under Eisenhower.

Kennedy’s attempt to withdraw from Vietnam was first stopped, and then reversed in three months. With NSAM 288, in March 1964, President Johnson signed off on battle plans for a huge air war against North Vietnam. In other words, what Kennedy refused to do for three years, LBJ did in three months. Less than 18 months after Kennedy’s death, Johnson inserted combat troops into Vietnam, something Kennedy had never contemplated and specifically rejected eight specific times. This would result in the deaths of over 2 million Vietnamese and
Johnson also reversed Kennedy’s policy in Congo. Kennedy had stopped the attempt of Katanga to secede through a UN special military mission. But by 1964, the CIA was unilaterally flying air sorties over the country to stop a leftist rebellion. White-supremacist and right-wing South Africans and Rhodesians were called on to join the Congolese army. The pretext was that the Chinese were fomenting a communist takeover.

This rightward tilt went unabated into 1965. By then, Josef Mobutu had gained complete power. In 1966, he installed himself as military dictator. The enormous mineral wealth of Congo would go to him and his wealthy foreign backers. (ibid, p. 373)

The same thing happened in Indonesia. Without Kennedy’s backing of Sukarno, the CIA began plotting a second coup attempt. A Dutch intelligence officer attached to NATO had predicted it less than a year earlier in December 1964. He said Indonesia was about to fall into the hands of the West like a rotten apple. (ibid, p. 375)

The coup began in October 1964 and ended with General Suharto, long known for his willingness to cooperate with colonizing countries like Japan and the Netherlands, becoming the country’s leader. Sukarno was placed under house arrest, never to return to power.

Suharto then led one of the bloodiest pogroms in modern history, targeting the PKI, the communist party in Indonesia, but also slaughtering many other Indonesians including ethnic Chinese. The death toll was about 500,000, with many of the victims decapitated and their bodies dumped into rivers.

Like Mobutu, Suharto became a long-ruling dictator (holding power for three decades) and becoming an incredibly wealthy man by selling out his country to foreign businesses. Again, unlike what Kennedy had envisioned, the wealth of Indonesia would not go to its citizens, but to Suharto, his cronies and foreign corporations.

This pattern repeated itself almost everywhere. Africa went back to being neglected. Kennedy’s truce in Laos was shattered as the country descended into a civil war that featured heroin trading by the CIA’s Air America fleet. U.S. policy toward the Middle East embraced the Shah of Iran and his oppressive policies, sowing the seeds for the first explosion of Moslem fundamentalism in 1979.

Mideast Blowback
Rather than Kennedy’s disdain for the corrupt and repressive Saudi monarchy, that leadership was dubbed “moderate” and given the label “Arab ally.” With Saudi Arabia’s oil wells and deep pockets, its power and wealth attracted the friendship and loyalty of influential Americans, including the dynastic Bush family and its closely associated Carlyle Group.

Meanwhile, as demonstrated by author Steve Coll and other investigators, the Saudis provided cover and funding for Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda terrorists. The fanaticism that Kennedy warned about in 1957 if the United States did not break with European colonialism and neocolonialism came back to inflict destruction on U.S. targets, including attacks on U.S. embassies in Africa and eventually on New York and Washington.

When Kennedy designed his foreign policy, he was very deliberate about his plan to move in a new direction. In 1957, he said the single most important test of America was the way it was going to separate itself from European imperialism. Though Kennedy often talked as a Cold War hardliner during the 1960 campaign and the early days of his presidency he was intent on creating a foreign policy that would shatter the confines of the Cold War.

Before the 1960 convention, Kennedy told adviser Harris Wofford that if Sen. Stuart Symington or Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson was the nominee, “we might as well elect Dulles or Acheson; it would be the same cold-war foreign policy all over again.” (Muelhenbeck, p. 37)

Under Secretary of State George Ball amplified this by saying, that after World War II, America was thought of as a status-quo power, while the Soviets were thought of as being on the side of the oppressed and revolution: “The Kennedy Doctrine challenged this approach. If America failed to encourage the young revolutionaries in the new countries, they would inevitably turn toward the Soviet Union. America should therefore, stop trying to sustain traditional societies and ally itself with the side of revolution.”

Authors such as Larry Sabato assert that Kennedy left no lasting legacy and that is becoming the chic conventional take on his aborted presidency. What Sabato and these others fail to note is the remarkable changes Kennedy made in the Eisenhower/Dulles imperialist foreign policy in less than three years. They also ignore how fast the policies were snapped back by the old order operating through the CIA and President Johnson. If you don’t note these clear changes, then you can say they did not occur.

But the people Kennedy was aiming his policies at certainly understood what happened on Nov. 22, 1963. In Nairobi, Kenya, over 6,000 people crammed into a cathedral for a memorial service. The peasants of the Yucatan peninsula
immediately started planting a Kennedy Memorial garden. Schools in Argentina were named after Kennedy. Nasser sunk into a deep depression and ordered Kennedy’s funeral shown four times on Egyptian television.

In the Third World, the public seemed to instantly know what had really happened and what was about to occur. A progressive and humane foreign policy was about to revert back to something oppressive and profit-oriented. A brief three-year glow of hope was ending.

Because of the laziness and corporate orientation of the mainstream media, it has taken many Americans 50 years to figure out what the rest of the world knew instantaneously. And despite today’s conventional wisdom obsessing on Kennedy’s “shallowness” and “celebrity” the discovery of what Kennedy truly represented to the rest of the world during his “thousand-day” presidency is beginning to register in America.

Jim DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era. His most recent book is *Reclaiming Parkland*.

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**The Mysterious Death of a UN Hero**

**Exclusive:** More than a half-century ago at a pivotal moment in the emergence of independent African states UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld was brokering peace in a divisive civil war in Congo when he died in a plane crash, leaving behind an enduring Cold War mystery, as Lisa Pease reports.

By Lisa Pease

Fifty-two years ago, just after midnight on Sept. 18, 1961, the plane carrying UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and 15 others went down in a plane crash over Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). All 16 died, but the facts of the crash were provocatively mysterious.

There have been three investigations into the crash: an initial civil aviation Board of Inquiry, a Rhodesian Commission of Inquiry, and a UN Commission in 1962. Not one of them could definitively answer why the plane crashed or whether a deliberate act had been responsible.

While a few authors have looked into and written about the strange facts of the crash in the years since the last official inquiry in 1962, none did a more
thorough reinvestigation than Dr. Susan Williams, a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at the University of London, whose book *Who Killed Hammarskjöld?* was released in 2011, 50 years after the crash.

Her presentation of the evidence was so powerful it launched a new UN commission to determine whether the UN should reopen its initial investigation. “It is a fact,” the current Commission wrote in its report, “that none of these inquiries was conducted to the standard to which a modern inquiry into a fatal event would be conducted.”

The Commission was formed by Lord Lea of Crondall, who assembled a group of volunteer jurists, solicitors and others from the Netherlands, South Africa, Sweden and elsewhere to tabulate and review the evidence the Commission collected from past investigations, Williams’s book, and independent witnesses, such as myself.

I was one of the 28 witnesses (and one of only three Americans) who provided testimony to the Commission, based on information gathered in the course of my research into the assassinations of the Sixties.

“It is legitimate to ask whether an inquiry such as this, a full half-century after the events with which it is concerned, can achieve anything except possibly to feed speculation and conspiracy theories surrounding the crash,” the most recent Commission wrote in its report.

“Our answer, and the reason why we have been willing to give our time and effort to the task, is first that knowledge is always better than ignorance, and secondly that the passage of time, far from obscuring facts, can sometimes bring them to light.”

**The Congo Crisis**

The report summarized the historical situation Hammarskjöld was faced with in 1961. In June of 1960, under pressure from forces in the Congo as well as from the United Nations, Belgium had relinquished its claim to the Congo, a move which brought Patrice Lumumba to power.

Lumumba faced a near civil war in his country immediately. The military mutinied, the Belgians stepped back in to protect Belgian settlers, and local leader Moise Tshombe declared Katanga, a mineral-rich province, an independent state.

As the Commission’s report noted, “Katanga contained the majority of the Congo’s known mineral resources. These included the world’s richest uranium and four fifths of the West’s cobalt supply. Katanga’s minerals were mined principally by
a Belgian company, the Union Minière du Haut Katanga, which immediately recognized and began paying royalties to the secessionist government in Elisabethville. One result of this was that Moise Tshombe’s regime was well funded. Another was that, so long as Katanga remained independent of the Congo, there was no risk that the assets of Union Minière would be expropriated.”

The U.S. government feared that Katanga’s rich uranium reserves would fall under Soviet control if the nationalist movement that brought Lumumba to power succeeded in unifying the country. Indeed, rebuffed by Western interests, Lumumba did reach out to the Soviets for help, a move that caused CIA Director Allen Dulles to initiate CIA plans for Lumumba’s assassination. Lumumba was ultimately captured and killed by forces of Joseph Mobutu, whom Andrew Tully called “the CIA’s man” in the Congo just days before President Kennedy’s inauguration.

On the southern border of Katanga lay Northern Rhodesia, where Hammarskjöld’s plane would eventually go down, Sir Roy Welensky, a British politician, ruled as prime minister. Welensky, too, pushed for an independent Katanga. Along with the resources, there was also the fear that an integrated Congo and Katanga could lead to the end of apartheid in Rhodesia which might spread to its larger and more prosperous neighbor South Africa.

The British situation was divided, with the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Landsdowne, backing the UN’s efforts at preserving a unified Congo, while the British High Commissioner to the Rhodesian Foundation, Lord Alport, was upset with the UN’s meddling, saying African issues were “better left to Europeans with experience in that part of the world.”

Similarly, U.S. policy appeared split in 1961. Allen Dulles and possibly President Dwight D. Eisenhower had worked to kill Lumumba just before President John F. Kennedy took office. But President Kennedy had been a supporter of Lumumba and fully backed the UN’s efforts in the Congo.

As the report notes, “There is evidence of a cleft in policy between the US Administration and the US Central Intelligence Agency. While the policy of the Administration was to support the UN, the CIA may have been providing materiel to Katanga.”

So British, Belgian and American interests that weren’t always representative of their official heads of state had designs on Katanga, its politics and its resources. What stood in their way? The UN, under the firm leadership of Dag Hammarskjöld.

The UN forces had been unsuccessful in unifying the Congo, so Hammarskjöld and
his team flew to Leopoldville on Sept. 13, 1961. Hammarskjöld planned to meet Tshombe to discuss aid, contingent on a ceasefire, and the two decided to meet on Sept. 18 in Ndola in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia).

On Sept. 17, the last day of Hammarskjöld’s life, Neil Ritchie, an MI6 officer, went to pick up Tshombe and the British consul in Katanga, Denzil Dunnett. He found them in the company of a high-level Union Minière employee.

That night, Hammarskjöld embarked on the Albertina, a DC6 plane, and flew from Leopoldville to Ndola, where he was to arrive shortly after midnight. Lord Landsdowne, the British leader opposing a unified Congo, flew separately, although the report goes out of its way to say there was nothing sinister in them flying in separate planes and that this was “diplomatically and politically appropriate.”

A large group of diplomats, Africans, journalists and at least three mercenaries waited for Hammarskjöld’s plane at the Ndola airport. The Commission found the presence of mercenaries there strange as a police inspector was on duty specifically “to ensure nobody was at the airport who had no good reason to be there.”

The Crash

Hammarskjöld’s plane deliberately circumvented Katanga, fearing interception. The pilot radioed Ndola 25 minutes before midnight with an estimate that they plane was about 45 minutes from landing. At 12:10 a.m., the pilot notified the Ndola airport “Your lights in sight” and requested confirmation of the air pressure reading (QNH). “Roger QNH 1021mb, report reaching 6000 feet,” the airport replied. “Roger 1021,” the Albertina responded. That was the last communication received from Hammarskjöld’s plane. It crashed within minutes.

The Commission found the airport gave the plane correct information, that there was no indication the plane’s altimeter had been tampered with, that the landing gear had been lowered into the proper position and locked, and that the wing flaps had been correctly set. In other words, pilot error, the verdict of the initial Rhodesian inquiry into Dag Hammarskjöld’s death in 1962, did not seem to be the likely cause.

At the crash site, several of the crash victims had bullets in their bodies. In addition, the Commission found “evidence from more than one source that holes resembling bullet-holes were observed in the burnt-out fuselage.”

The Commission’s two aviation experts concluded the most likely cause of the
crash seemed to be a “controlled flight into terrain,” meaning, no in-air explosion. This suggests someone deliberately or mistakenly drove the plane right into the ground. However, the report notes, this does not rule out some form of sabotage that could have distracted or injured the pilots, preventing a successful landing.

And the Commission noted contradictory evidence from a few eyewitnesses who claimed they saw the plane explode in mid-air. Another eyewitness, a member of the flight crew, found alive but badly burned, told a police inspector that the plane “blew up” and that “There was a lot of small explosions all around.”

The Commission interviewed African eyewitnesses who had feared coming forward years ago. One of them described seeing the plane on fire before it hit the ground. Another described seeing a “ball of fire coming on top of the plane.” Still another described a “flame on top of the plane like a ball of fire.”

Several witnesses saw a second plane near the one that crashed. One witness saw a second, smaller plane following a larger one, and told the Commission, “I saw that the fire came from the small plane” And another witness also recalled seeing two planes in the sky with the larger one on fire. A third witness noted that he saw a flash of flame from one plane strike another. Several witnesses reported two smaller planes following a larger one just before the larger one caught fire.

A Swedish flight instructor described in 1994 how he had heard dialog via a short-wave radio the night of the crash. He recalled hearing the following from an airport control tower at the time of the crash: “He’s approaching the airport. He’s turning. He’s leveling. Another plane is approaching from behind, what is that?”

In one of the more bizarre elements of the case, Hammarskjöld’s body was not burnt, yet the other victims of the crash were severely burnt. The Commission concluded the most likely explanation, though not the sole one, was that Hammarskjöld’s body had been thrown from the plane before it caught fire.

And even more strangely, the commission found the evidence “strongly suggests” that someone moved Hammarskjöld’s body after the crash and stuck a playing card in his collar before the photographs of his body were taken. (The card “or something like it” was plainly visible “in the photographs taken of the body on a stretcher at the site.”)

Given the proximity of the plane to the airport, the Commission had a hard time explaining the nine-hour
delay between the time of the crash and the Rhodesian authorities’ acknowledgement of its discovery of the wreckage.

While the Commission found a “substantial amount of evidence” that Hammarskjöld’s body had been “found and tampered with well before the afternoon of 18 September and possibly very shortly after the crash,” they also stated the evidence was “no more consistent with hostile persons assuring themselves that he was dead than with bystanders, or possibly looters, examining his body.” But the Commission also noted that “The failure to summon or send help, however, remains an issue.”

The Commission tried very hard to find the autopsy X-rays, as there were reports that a bullet hole had been found in Hammarskjöld’s head. But the X-rays appear lost forever.

Was Hammarskjöld deliberately assassinated?

Former President Harry S. Truman was convinced Hammarskjöld had been murdered. A Sept. 20, 1961 New York Times article quoted Truman as having told reporters, “Dag Hammarskjöld was on the point of getting something done when they killed him. Notice that I said ‘When they killed him.’”

Years later, when the CIA was revealed to have been engaged in assassination plots, reporter Daniel Schorr speculated that the CIA may have been involved in Hammarskjöld’s death.

The report references the report of David Doyle, the chief of the CIA’s Elizabethville base in Katanga who wrote in a memoir how three armed Fouga planes were being delivered to Katanga “in direct violation” of U.S. policy. Doyle doubted this was an official CIA operation, since he had not been notified of the delivery.

Bronson Tweedy, the head of the CIA’s Africa division, questioned Doyle about the possibility of a CIA operation to interfere with Hammarskjöld’s plane. The report notes that this could indicate a lack of CIA involvement in Hammarskjöld’s death, “unless, conceivably, Tweedy was simply trying to find out how much Doyle knew.”

It is the essence of CIA operations that they are highly compartmentalized and often kept secret between people even within the Agency itself. Meaning, Allen Dulles or someone high up the chain could easily have ordered a single operator to take out Hammarskjöld’s plane without using any official CIA channels. Indeed, that is what one would expect were so sensitive an operation as the assassination of a UN head contemplated.
After Lumumba’s death, in early 1961, the UN passed resolution 161, which urged the immediate removal of Belgian forces and “other foreign military and paramilitary personnel and political advisors not under the United Nations Command, and mercenaries” from the Congo.

Confession from a CIA operative

When I heard such a commission was forming, I reached out to Lord Lea of Crondall to offer some evidence of my own. John Armstrong, a fellow researcher into the JFK assassination, had forwarded me a series of Church Committee files and correspondence to and from a CIA operative named Roland “Bud” Culligan.

Culligan claimed the CIA had set him up on a phony bank fraud charge, and his way out of jail appears to have been to offer the Church Committee information on CIA assassinations (which he called “executive actions” or “E.A.’s”). Culligan was asked to list some “E.A.’s” that he had been involved in. Culligan mentioned, among high-profile others, Dag Hammarskjöld.

“Damn it, I did not want the job,” Culligan wrote to his legal adviser at Yale Law School. Culligan described the plane and the route, he named his CIA handler and his contact on the ground in Libya, and he described how he shot Hammarskjöld’s plane, which subsequently crashed.

As I testified, and as the Commission quoted in its report: “You will see from the correspondence that Culligan’s material was referred to an Attorney General, a Senator, and ultimately, the Senate investigation of the CIA’s activities at home and abroad that became known as the Church Committee after its leader, Senator Frank Church. Clearly, others in high places had reasons to believe Culligan’s assertions were worthy of further investigation.”

Culligan’s claims fit neatly with a broadcast allegedly heard by Navy Cmdr. Charles Southall, another Commission witness. The morning before the crash, Charles Southall, a naval pilot and intelligence officer, was stationed at the NSA’s facility in Cyprus.

At about 9 p.m. that night, Southall reported he was called at home by the communications watch officer and told to get down to the listening post because “something interesting” was going to happen that night. Southall described hearing a recording shortly after midnight in which a cool pilot’s voice said, “I see a transport plane coming low. All the lights are on. I’m going to make a run on it. Yes, it’s the Transair DC6. It’s the plane.”

Southall heard what sounded like cannon fire, then: “I’ve hit it. There are flames. It’s going down. It’s crashing.” Given that Cyprus was in the same time zone as Ndola, the Commission concluded it was possible that Southall had indeed
heard a recording from Ndola. Southall was certain that what he heard indicated a deliberate act.

**Bullets**

Several witnesses described seeing bullet holes in the plane before it burnt. The report described one witness’s account that the fuselage was “’riddled with bullet-holes’ which appeared to have been made by a machine-gun.”

This account was disputed by AP journalist Errol Friedmann, however, who claimed no bullet holes were present. However, bullets were definitely found embedded in the bodies of several of the plane crash victims, which tends to give the former claim more credence.

The same journalist Friedmann also noted to a fellow journalist that the day after the crash, in a hotel, he had heard a couple of Belgian pilots who had perhaps had too much to drink discussing the crash. One of the pilots claimed he had been in contact with Hammarskjöld’s plane and had “buzzed” it, forcing the pilot of the Albertina to take evasive action. When the pilot buzzed the plane a second time, he forced it towards the ground.

A third-party account allegedly from a Belgian pilot named Beukels was investigated with some skepticism by the Commission. Beukels allegedly gave an account to a French Diplomat named Claude de Kemoularia, who evidently first relayed Beukels’s account to UN diplomat George Ivan Smith in 1980 (not long after Culligan’s 1975 account, I would note).

Smith’s source, however, appeared to be a transcript, about which the Commission noted “the literary quality of the narrative suggests an editorial hand, probably that of one or both of the two intermediaries.” Allegedly, Beukels fired what he meant to be warning shots which then hit the tail of the plane.

While Beukels’s alleged narrative matched several known facts, the Commission wisely noted, “there was little in Beukels’s narrative, as reported, that could not have been ascertained from press coverage and the three inquiries, elaborated by his experience as a pilot.” The Commission wrote of other elements which invited skepticism of this account, but did concede it’s possible this account was self-serving, designed to excuse a deliberate shooting down by Beukels.

**The Commission’s recommendation**

While the Commission had no desire to place blame for the crash, the report states: “There is persuasive evidence that the aircraft was subjected to some form of attack or threat as it circled to land at Ndola, which was by then
widely known to be its destination,” adding “we consider that the possibility that the plane was in fact forced into its descent by some form of hostile action is supported by sufficient evidence to merit further inquiry.”

The key evidence that the Commission thinks could prove or disprove a deliberate act would be the Ndola airport’s radio traffic that night. The Commission reported “it is highly likely that the entirety of the local and regional Ndola radio traffic on the night of 17-18 September 1961 was tracked and recorded by the NSA, and possibly also by the CIA.”

The Commission filed a Freedom of Information request for any such evidence with the National Archives but did not appear hopeful that such records would be released unless pressure was brought to bear.

In its discussion of Culligan, the Commission felt there were no leads there that could be pursued. But if any of Culligan’s many conversations with his legal adviser was captured on tape, and if tapes of the radio traffic cited above could be obtained, a voice match could be sought.

Based on its year-long investigation, the Commission stated that the UN “would be justified” in reopening its initial 1962 inquiry in light of the new evidence “about an event of global significance with deserves the attention both of history and of justice.”

[Regarding President Eisenhower’s possibly role in ordering the assassination of Lumumba, Robert Johnson, a National Security Council staff member, told the Church Committee he heard Eisenhower give an order that Lumumba be killed. He remembered being shocked to hear this. Under questioning, however, Johnson allowed that may have been a mistaken impression, that perhaps Eisenhower was referring to Lumumba’s political, not physical, removal.]

Lisa Pease is a writer who has examined issues ranging from the Kennedy assassination to voting irregularities in recent U.S. elections.

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**Congo’s Troubled Future**

A Congolese rebel group, M23, has won a series of victories against the disorganized troops of the central government, raising the prospect of more turmoil in that troubled African country. But more division of Congo and even partitioning may not be the worst outcome, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.
There’s been more fighting lately in the eastern portion of Congo. Again we are led to think about how a country that occupies such a large part of the map can get pushed around by a much smaller neighbor such as Rwanda.

This time a rebel group known as M23 and suspected of being backed by both Rwanda and Uganda has scored advances against Congolese government forces and recently seized the provincial capital of Goma.

What ought to gain our attention about conflict in this painfully conflict-prone section of Africa, besides any complications regarding access to its mineral resources, is the repeated involvement of multiple nations and the sheer magnitude of some of the bloodshed and human suffering in the area.

The five years of warfare, ending in 2003, that centered in this same portion of Congo involved the forces of eight countries and a couple of dozen armed groups and led to the deaths of more than five million people, many of them from disease or starvation connected directly to the fighting. That toll made it the deadliest war anywhere since World War II.

None of this means there is much of anything the United States can or should try to do about the situation in Congo. The complicated and confusing lines of conflict make this area one of the least promising venues for effective outside intervention. (A United Nations force is present; it has mostly been only a spectator as M23 has made its advances.)

To the extent that bloody events in this part of Africa have had any influence on American policy thinking it has probably not been on balance good. The war of 1998-2003 came on the heels of a shorter war in Congo that in turn was triggered by developments that followed the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

Subsequent hand-wringing over that latter event has served mainly to inject more emotion than reason into U.S. policy deliberations. An intervention in Libya based on a dubious rationale about preventing a presumed bloodbath was one result.

The situation in Congo, although it does not imply a particular policy response, may have more general implications about sovereignty, territory, and what makes for a viable nation-state. Maybe Congo is just too big. No one has ever really governed it all, although the autocratic kleptomaniac-strongman Joseph Mobutu came closest.

The territory that is now Congo was first assembled as an ill-managed private possession of a 19th Century Belgian monarch. The Belgian government later took
over the mess and did some good things, but effective governance of a territory that is 75 times the size of Belgium itself was beyond its capacity.

When Congo became independent in 1960 it was in turmoil from day one, with a president and prime minister trying to remove each other and the wealthiest province trying to secede. With more than half a century having gone by since independence, there probably is sufficient grounds for calling this experiment in nation-building a failure.

Africans have since independence generally refrained from challenging the often illogical boundaries that European colonialists had left them, lest this lead to unstoppable unraveling. The secession of the southern portion of Sudan is a recent and conspicuous exception.

The jury is still very much out on how that story will turn out, and there is not an obvious line of division in Congo that is even as clear as the (nonetheless contested) line in Sudan. But if Congo were to break up that would not necessarily be cause for regret.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency’s top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The National Interest’s Web site. Reprinted with author’s permission.)