

Dag Hammarskjöld's Death

*Why Did the Swedish Government Change Its View
on the Cause of the Crash?*

Report of the Brunegård Group

June 4, 2026

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Table of Contents

1. The Swedish Government's Special Working Group	4
1.1 February 1962: Critical Stance Toward the Pilot Error Theory	4
1.2 24 April 1962: The UN's 'Open Verdict'	5
1.3 2 May 1962: Sweden's Categorical Conclusion	5
1.4 25 May 1962: Classified Forensic Report	6
1.5 Summary	6
2. Additional Observations	7
2.1 Sten Rudholm's Position	7
2.2 Change of Mandate	7
2.3 Summary	8
3. A Contextualisation of Swedish Policy at the Time	8
3.1 The Cold War and the Balancing Act of Neutrality Policy	8
3.1.1 The Fragility of Neutrality and Sweden's Dependence on the USA	8
3.1.2 The USA, the UK, and Belgium in the Congo – and as International Actors	9
3.1.2.1 The USA	9
3.1.2.2 The United Kingdom	10
3.1.2.3 Belgium	10
3.2 Commercial and Economic Considerations	11
3.2.1 Sweden's Position	11
3.2.2 EEC Negotiations	12
3.3 The Congo Crisis and Swedish UN Presence as a Security Policy Factor	12
3.3.1 Sweden's Military Engagement	12
3.3.2 The UN's Standing and Sweden's International Role	13
3.4 Summary	13
4. Evidence	14
4.1 Procedural Evidence	14
4.1.1 Reformulation of the Mandate	14
4.1.2 Confidentiality Obligation for Experts Behind Critical Reports	15
4.1.3 An Eight-Day Gap Between Two Diametrically Opposed Conclusions	15
4.2 Substantive Evidence	15
4.2.1 Edelstam's U-Turn	15
4.2.2 Swedish Experts' Reports Were Disregarded	16
4.2.3 The Radio Message Was Omitted	16
4.3 Contextual Evidence	17
4.3.1 Active British Influence	17
4.3.2 The Ongoing Congo Crisis with Swedish Soldiers at Risk	18
4.3.3 The USA's Security Guarantee to Sweden 1960–62	18
4.3.4 Recent Political Admissions	18
4.4 Independent UN Confirmation	19
4.5 The Convergence of Pressure	20
4.6 Summary and Conclusion	20
5. Summary of Arguments/Insights	20

Introduction and Conclusion

UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and all 15 other persons on board of the plane, nine of whom were Swedish citizens, did not survive when on 18 September 1961 the aircraft SE-BDY ('Albertina') crashed upon approaching the airport of Ndola. The mining town close to the border of the Congo was in Northern Rhodesia (present-day Zambia), part of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, which was under British suzerainty. Two Federal Rhodesian investigations and one UN investigation were established. The Federal Rhodesian Technical Accident Board concluded in January 1962 that the available evidence did not permit the determination of any definite cause of the crash.¹ The second Federal Rhodesian investigation was a commission of inquiry. The report, presented in February 1962, lists twelve possible causes of the aircraft's crash. The conclusion, presented as definitive, was that the aircraft's pilots had 'permitted the aircraft to descend to such a low altitude that it struck the treetops and crashed to the ground'.²

In addition, there was an UN-appointed committee of investigation³, which had been mandated by a resolution of the General Assembly on 26 October 1961. Its report was published on 2 May 1962. The question of pilot error as the cause of the crash was discussed. It was concluded that while this could not be ruled out, nothing pointed to it as a probable cause.⁴

Swedish experts on the ground reported early on about strongly preconceived bias on the part of authorities in Salisbury and British and Rhodesian investigators, including the handling of witness testimony⁵ and forensic findings, which was later highlighted in independent international reviews.⁶ The Swedish Government had at the time established a special working group under Chancellor Justice Sten Rudholm to critically scrutinise all available material.

¹ Possible causes of the crash given were some misunderstanding regarding the altitude of the airfield, that the three pilots on board had been suddenly rendered unable to perform their duties, that the aircraft's altimeter had been misread and that one of the aircraft's altimeters had given a faulty reading, and a combination of some of these possibilities.

² Ambassador Eyvind Bratt, Under strecket: Tio år efter Ndolakatastrofen [Under the line: Ten years after the Ndola disaster], Svenska Dagbladet, 17 September 1971 (copy in the Bengt Rösiö collection).

³ More details offer the background information summarised by the Hammarskjöld Commission: <http://www.hammarskjoldcommission.org>.

⁴ Ambassador Eyvind Bratt, op. cit.

⁵ Ndola observers' Report No. 8 regarding SE-BDY, 24 October 1961: 'He [Evans] did not consider the witness statements submitted regarding two aircraft in the air over Ndola at the time of the accident to be reliable. He regarded the possibilities of sabotage or shooting from the ground as improbable and referred to the fact that the investigation had not yielded any evidence or indications thereof. In his opinion, the cause of the accident was to be sought in pilot error.' Ref. 241061 Report No. 8, F11 Hemliga Arkivet [Secret Archive], Riksarkivet Arninge.

⁶ 'Mr. Bratt stated that from as early as 19 September 1961, when the cause of the crash could not possibly have been known, Rhodesian officials attempted to impress on him that the crash could not have resulted from an attack or sabotage. Specifically, Mr. Bratt was said to have been informed by Parry, the Secretary-General of the Rhodesian Administration Branch, that there was a one to a million chance that the cause had been sabotage or attack.' Report by the United Nations appointed Eminent Person Mohamed Chande Othman submitted to the UN General Assembly, 25 August 2022, Investigation into the conditions and circumstances resulting in the tragic death of Dag Hammarskjöld and of the members of the party accompanying him, A/76/892, para. 337, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n22/447/98/pdf/n2244798.pdf>

Over the following nearly six months, the official position of the Swedish Government underwent a remarkable metamorphosis — from clear scepticism toward the pilot error theory to a categorical conclusion in which attack or other external interference was assessed as the least probable cause. The most controversial aspect of Rudholm's investigation is the dramatic shift between February and May 1962 — a reversal that analyses and statements by Swedish foreign ministers more than sixty years later have linked to possible diplomatic, commercial, or realpolitik considerations. Our report presents factors that may have contributed to the change in the Swedish Government's special working group's position during this critical period, possibly motivated by expediency.

We argue that there are strong reasons for a new, thorough investigation into the matter. Not least, because the conduct of the Swedish Government of the time calls for a rehabilitation of the Swedish pilots. Their families had ever since to cope with the stigma that these were blamed for causing the crash. This error in judgement requires a correction and an apology by Government.

1. The Swedish Government's Special Working Group

On 16 November 1961, the Swedish Government established a special working group to investigate the causes of the plane crash. It had the mandate to 'review and evaluate the material available and received' and to 'sift out what was probable and reasonable'. Prime Minister Tage Erlander explicitly stated in Parliament that the material should be 'critically examined'. Chancellor of Justice Sten Rudholm was appointed to lead the group, with Axel Edelstam, First Secretary at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, as secretary.⁷

1.1 February 1962: Critical Stance Toward the Pilot Error Theory

On 27 February 1962, Axel Edelstam presented Sweden's closing submission at the UN Commission's final hearing in Geneva. He stated that the analysis conducted by Sweden's representative before the Commission, barrister Thompson, showed that it could not be established with any certainty that pilot error had contributed to the crash. On behalf of the Swedish Government, Edelstam submitted to the Commission that evidence supporting such a cause should be treated on equal terms with evidence supporting other conceivable causes. *'We would find it hard to accept that the failure to pinpoint any other cause should lead to the conclusion that the crash was a result of pilot error. Of course this remains a possibility, but as long as it is only a possibility it has no logical priority over anything else which is regarded as a possibility'*.⁸

⁷ Mathias Mossberg, Tragedin i Ndola – den mänskliga faktorn eller yttre påverkan? Final Report to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, presented there on 18 November 2019, pp. 18-19, with references to the government decision of 16 November 1961. Mossberg's report is not publicly available. Its substantive elements were summarised in parliamentary motions 2022/23:2429 and 2023/24:1578 (riksdagen.se).

⁸ Final Statement by the Swedish Representative to the United Nations Commission to investigate conditions and circumstances resulting in the death of the Secretary General and Members of his party, Geneva, February 27, 1962, UD HP-Dossier, Politiska avdelningens ärenden, Förenta Nationerna, Mål: S/Generalsekreterare Dag Feb-Aug Flygolyckan 1962-, HP 48 388, Swedish National Archives, Arninge. *Our Italics*.

On 26 February, the Swedish Government had already submitted a paper with comments on the final report of the Rhodesian Commission of Inquiry, including three pages of critical and detailed observations.⁹ Edelstam represented the Government's position at that time. It stood in sharp contrast to the Northern Rhodesian investigations' tendency to assume pilot error, and the colonial power's likely interest to avoid any hypotheses about external interference.¹⁰

British government counsel Stuart Bevan was present at the same series of meetings. He was identified in later international reviews as a central actor in efforts to steer the UN-led review commission away from theories of external interference. Bevan is said to have removed from a draft report reference to a critical radio message indicating that SE-BDY was expected to be 'abeam Ndola' at a certain time — something that has subsequently been analysed as significant for understanding the timeline surrounding the crash.¹¹

1.2 24 April 1962: The UN's 'Open Verdict'

On 24 April 1962, the UN investigation's report to the General Assembly was signed with an 'open verdict', in which the Commission found that it could neither confirm nor exclude any of the hypotheses examined — technical failure, external interference, internal interference, or human error.¹² The Commission simultaneously highlighted limitations in the then-available material and noted deficiencies in the earlier Northern Rhodesian investigations, particularly with regard to the handling of local witness testimony, but also lack of any proper, forensic analyses of the aircraft wreckage.

It may be added that in later UN reports, particularly the reports of the investigator Mohamed Chande Othman in 2017 and 2019, the original 'open verdict' position has been confirmed as methodologically cautious, while new indications of possible external interference have been highlighted.¹³

1.3 2 May 1962: Sweden's Categorical Conclusion

On 2 May 1962, the same day as the UN report was published, the Rudholm working group submitted its final report to the Swedish Government. It concluded that the least probable reasonable cause of the crash was an attack or interference from another aircraft, that it was shot down, or a fire on board. In contrast to the UN Commission, which in more restrictive

⁹ Mathias Mossberg, op. cit., p. 18, with reference to Swedish government's comments, A/AC.107/L.8, S-0246-0002-0008-00001 UC, UN Archives, New York.

¹⁰ See the references in Camilla Rinaldo Miller et al. (KD), Klarläggande av Sveriges agerande kring Dag Hammarskjölds död [Clarification of Sweden's conduct regarding the death of Dag Hammarskjöld], Motion 2023/24:1578, Riksdagen. https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/motion/klarlaggande-av-sveriges-agerande-kring-dag_hb021578/ and Mohamed Chande Othman, Report of the Eminent Person, A/73/973, United Nations General Assembly (2019). http://www.hammar skjold inquiry.info/pdf/ham_263_UN_Final_Report_complete.pdf.

¹¹ Mohamed Chande Othman, A/76/892 op. cit., 334, p. 83.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Mohamed Chande Othman, Investigation into the conditions and circumstances resulting in the tragic death of Dag Hammarskjöld and members of the party accompanying him, A/71/1042, United Nations General Assembly, 5 September 2017; idem, Report of the Eminent Person, A/73/973, United Nations General Assembly, 2019. http://www.hammar skjold inquiry.info/pdf/ham_150_Othman_report_251017.pdf; http://www.hammar skjold inquiry.info/pdf/ham_263_UN_Final_Report_complete.pdf.

language stated that there were 'no indications' of pilot error, the Swedish report observed there was 'no direct evidence' of pilot error.¹⁴ This placed Sweden's position closer to the Northern Rhodesian investigations' pilot error theory.¹⁵

On the same day that the special working group's final report was submitted — 2 May 1962 — the Board of Civil Aviation declassified its report. However, it appears that the Board of Civil Aviation, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Justice, citing foreign affairs regulations, retained the classification of several critical Swedish expert opinions from the Board of Civil Aviation and forensic expertise. These observed deficiencies in the Rhodesian investigations concerning the possibility of external interference. The Swedish experts behind these reports were bound by a duty of confidentiality. The connection between the final report and the classification has been highlighted in later investigations as a central procedural indication of political control of the flow of information.¹⁶

1.4 25 May 1962: Classified Forensic Report

On 25 May 1962, Swedish forensic experts summarised in a special memorandum that neither shooting nor sabotage could be excluded as technically possible primary causes of the crash. This was in sharp contrast to the working group's categorical dismissal of external interference. But the report was classified and played no prominent role in the Swedish official position. Subsequent independent reviews — both the Hammarskjöld Commission's report and UN investigator Othman's reports — have highlighted this discrepancy between forensic reservations and political conclusion as a central procedural weakness in Northern Rhodesia's handling of the matter, a deficiency that also came to characterise Sweden's continued conduct in the affair in 1961–62.¹⁷

1.5 Summary

The Swedish Government established a special working group to critically review and evaluate all available material from the ongoing investigations. Initially, the working group criticised the

¹⁴ Mathias Mossberg, op. cit., p.18 (on the working group's formulation that 'no direct evidence' of pilot error was found, respectively the UN Commission's assessment that there were 'no indications' of pilot error).

¹⁵ Mohamed Chande Othman, A/76/892, op. cit., especially paras. 9–15 and 76–88, with reference to Ambassador Mathias Mossberg's report. In his government commissioned investigation, presented in Parliament and submitted to the UN's Eminent Person in 2019, former Ambassador Mathias Mossberg highlighted how the working group's mandated role during spring 1962 appears to have changed from a 'critical examination' to a more limited and confirmatory role, without the shift being formally documented nor any reason given.

¹⁶ Mathias Mossberg, op. cit., especially pp. 22, 37–38.

¹⁷ Hammarskjöld Commission background material (technical/forensic reservations): Report on the Statements of Witnesses in Former Inquiries into the Death of Dag Hammarskjöld – technical review of earlier investigations in which, among other things, sabotage and attack from another aircraft are not excluded. Direct link: <http://www.hammarskjoldcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Report-on-the-statements-of-witnesses-in-former-inquiries1.pdf>.

See also Interpellation 2019/20:444, Gudrun Brunegård (KD) addressed to Foreign Minister Ann Linde, 'Sveriges ställningstagande kring orsaken till Dag Hammarskjölds död' [Sweden's position on the cause of Dag Hammarskjöld's death], with the associated interpellation debate on 10 September 2020.

https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/webb-tv/video/interpellationsdebatt/sveriges-stallningstagande-kring-orsaken-till-dag_h710444/.

simultaneously ongoing Northern Rhodesian investigations' preconceived assumptions about pilot error. Despite this, the working group's final report closely aligned with the Northern Rhodesian conclusion. It thereby deviated from both its initial position and from the UN investigation's open verdict, which pointed out that too many critical data were missing. It is noteworthy that all critical reports were classified and their authors were bound by a duty of confidentiality.

2. Additional Observations

2.1 Sten Rudholm's Position

When the special working group was established in November 1961, Sten Rudholm was Head of Department at the Ministry of Justice. But he had on 22 September 1961 been appointed Chancellor of Justice as from 1 January 1962.¹⁸ The office of Chancellor of Justice at that time held a dual role, both as a supervisory authority and as legal adviser to the Government. This meant that the same person could move in the borderland between legal scrutiny and political considerations.¹⁹ In subsequent Swedish parliamentary debates on the Hammarskjöld matter, both Rudholm's central role and the sensitive connection between his function as Chancellor of Justice and his assignment to lead the working group were raised as a potential vulnerability to political influence, without insinuating any direct misconduct.²⁰ But notably so, Prime Minister Tage Erlander had initially emphasised in Parliament that the working group should 'critically examine' all available material. As later analyses point out — including Mossberg's report to the Government — this mandate appears to have been neglected as the work progressed.²¹

2.2 Change of Mandate

Mathias Mossberg observed that the working group 'had reformulated and limited its mandate' between November 1961 and May 1962. Background materials show that the group

¹⁸ Dagens Nyheter, 23 September 1961, Aktuellt porträtt ['Current portrait']: 'Juridisk nötknäckare' ['Legal nutcracker'].

¹⁹ This was pointed out in the Motion to the Riksdag 2022/23:1600 by Gudrun Brunegård (KD). <https://data.riksdagen.se/dokument/HA021600.html>.

²⁰ Interpellation 2019/20:444, Gudrun Brunegård (KD), 'Sveriges ställningstagande kring orsaken till Dag Hammarskjölds död', with the associated interpellation debate on 10 September 2020, in which both Brunegård and Foreign Minister Ann Linde touch on Rudholm's role and possible diplomatic and political considerations in connection with the Government's positions in 1961–62. Available via: https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/interpellation/sveriges-stallningstagande-kring-orsaken-till-dag_h710444.

²¹ See i.a. Gudrun Brunegård's written question 2019/20:1740 'Utredningarna om Hammarskjölds död' ['The investigations into Hammarskjöld's death'], with reference to Mathias Mossberg's report, in which it is stated that 'Prime Minister Erlander used the words "critically examine" in Parliament' (Mossberg, pp. 14, 22) and that the working group in May 1962 'had reformulated and limited its mandate' so that it 'was no longer a matter of reviewing and evaluating, even less to "critically" examine' (Mossberg, p. 22). Available via: https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/skriftlig-frag/utredningarna-om-hammarskjolds-dod_h7111740/. See also: Revisiting The Swedish Investigations Into The Death Of Dag Hammarskjöld, Seminar in the Swedish Riksdag 2021-12-15, during which in response to a number of questions raised by the Brunegård Group, among others the late Mathias Mossberg and Ove Bring add thoughts on Sten Rudholm's role. Available via: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azOTacvp00Q&t=68s>.

was originally established to 'review and evaluate the collected material' and to provide the Government with an independent assessment. But the final report aligned more closely with the Rhodesian investigations' conclusion on pilot error rather than the UN Commission's open verdict. Neither in public documentation nor in Mossberg's review is there a clear explanation why this happened, nor if there was any instruction to reformulate and limit the mandate. But the temporal coincidence between the reorientation, British influence on the investigations and the UN Commission's report, has been raised in both Swedish and international debate as a possible indicator of external political pressure.²²

2.3 Summary

Chancellor of Justice Rudholm, as chairman of the special working group, had a role in the borderland between legal scrutiny and political considerations. There is currently no public documentation as to when during the process the original mandate — to critically review and evaluate all collected material — was reformulated and changed to essentially align with the Northern Rhodesian conclusions, or on whose initiative critical reports were classified and the Swedish experts who drafted those reports were bound by a duty of confidentiality.

3. A Contextualisation of Swedish Policy at the Time

3.1 The Cold War and the Balancing Act of Neutrality Policy

3.1.1 The Fragility of Neutrality and Sweden's Dependence on the USA

During the early 1960s, Sweden pursued a neutrality policy often captured as 'non-alignment in peace, aiming at neutrality in war'. Later research and official investigations show that this position was supplemented by an extensive, informal security and defence cooperation with the Western powers, particularly the USA. An American policy directive (NSC 6006/1) from 1960 constituted an informal security policy assurance that the USA would assist Sweden militarily in the event of a Soviet attack.²³ The directive was renewed in 1962²⁴, without

²² Mathias Mossberg, *op. cit.*, pp.18-19.

²³ NSC 6006/1, Statement of U.S. Policy Toward Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway and Sweden), adopted by the U.S. National Security Council on 6 April 1960. The document's content regarding Sweden was declassified and analysed within the framework of the Neutrality Policy Commission's work; see Neutralitetspolitikkommissionen, *Om kriget kommit... Förberedelser för mottagande av militärt bistånd 1949–1969 [If War Had Come... Preparations for the receipt of military assistance 1949–1969]*, SOU 1994:11 (Statsrådsberedningen, Stockholm 1994), available at https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/kommitteberattelse/neutralitetspolitikkommissionen-sb-199201_ggb2sb01/, and in annex form via <https://filedn.com/ljdBas5OJsrLJOq6KhtBYC4/forarbeten/sou/1994/sou-1994-11-del-b.pdf>.

²⁴ NSC 6006/1 was replaced by a new policy directive (Guidelines for Policy and Operations – Sweden, Department of State, June 1962), see: *Den säkerhetspolitiska utredningen, Fred och säkerhet [Peace and Security]*, SOU 2002:108 (Utrikesdepartementet, Stockholm 2002), available in its entirety at https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/fred-och-sakerhet-del-1_gqb3108d1/html/. See also Thomas Jonter, 'Sverige, Nato och frågan om säkerhetsgarantier' [Sweden, NATO, and the question of security guarantees], *Mänsklig säkerhet*, 29 October 2015, <https://manskligsakerhet.se/2015/10/29/sverige-nato-och-fragan-om-sakerhetsgarantier/>, and Robert Dalsjö, *Life-Line Lost: The Rise and Demise of 'Neutral' Sweden's Secret Reserve Option of Wartime Help from the West* (Santérus Academic Press, Stockholm 2006), presented at <https://santerus.se/vara-bocker/life-line-lost.html>.

Sweden being a NATO member. Sweden's security policy rested on a fragile equilibrium: strict outward neutrality, but in reality depending on Western support in a crisis.

Tage Erlander had met John F. Kennedy in Washington on 29 March 1961. Their exchange has in retrospect been viewed as a signal of common support for the UN and a rapprochement between Sweden and the USA.²⁵ During the autumn of 1961, the geopolitical climate hardened. The construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 had already heightened tensions, and the Soviet Union was actively pushing to weaken the independence of the UN Secretary-General's office while the Congo crisis intensified. This is likely to have increased the value of Western security guarantees for Sweden. To publicly point, in this context, to possible Western involvement in a UN Secretary-General's death (or only knowledge thereof) would have risked undermining the very relationships upon which Swedish security policy rested.²⁶

3.1.2 The USA, the UK, and Belgium in the Congo – and as International Actors

3.1.2.1 The USA

The USA feared expanded Soviet influence in the Congo following independence in 1960. It viewed the country as a central arena in the Cold War. Katanga province's mineral wealth — particularly copper, cobalt, and uranium — made the region strategically significant not only economically but also for the Western powers' military capability. Uranium from the Shinkolobwe mine had previously been used in the Manhattan Project for the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki²⁷; cobalt was a key component in advanced aviation and weapon technology.

The CIA conducted extensive operations on the African continent²⁸, with particular focus on the Congo/Katanga during the period 1960–63, including support for regime changes, political influence, and delivery of military equipment. This included arrangements supplying Katanga with fighter aircraft, as noted in several independent reviews of Hammarskjöld's death. A series of witness testimonies and documents also indicate a tension between the Kennedy

²⁵ The meeting is documented in the JFK Library; see press release and video recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zC_n830r25o. Its significance for a rapprochement between Sweden and the USA — and as a signal of Swedish support for the UN's role in world politics — is analysed in Mats Bergquist, Erlander och Undén. *Svensk utrikespolitik 1945–1962* [Erlander and Undén. *Swedish foreign policy 1945–1962*] (Stockholm: Atlantis 2014). See the review in *Tidskriften Respons*, <https://tidskriftenrespons.se/artikel/undens-trakighet-sakrade-neutraliteten/>. See also Ulf Olsson, 'Erlander och den bevärliga neutraliteten' [Erlander and the problematic neutrality], *Kungl. Krigsvetenskapsakademiens Handlingar och Tidskrift*, No. 1/2012, pp. 63–74, https://kkv.se/wp-content/uploads/Artiklar/121/kkrvaht_1_2012_9.pdf.

²⁶ The assessment is consistent with the conclusions in the report of Mathias Mossberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–22, where he maintains that Sweden for 'diplomatic or other reasons had allowed itself to be influenced in its positions'. See also Mossberg's contribution in Ove Bring, *Gåtan Hammarskjöld: berättelsen om flygkraschen i Ndola* [The Hammarskjöld Enigma: the story of the air crash at Ndola] (Stockholm: Medströms Bokförlag 2020), pp. 240ff., https://books.google.com/books/about/G%C3%A5tan_Hammarskj%C3%B6ld.html?id=CitgzQEACAA. See also the interpellation 2019/20:444 by Gudrun Brunegård (KD), *Sveriges ställningstagande kring orsaken till Dag Hammarskjölds död*, submitted 11 August 2020, https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/interpellation/sveriges-stallningstagande-kring-orsaken-till-dag_h710444.

²⁷ Susan Williams, *Spies in the Congo. The Race for the Ore that Built the Atomic Bomb*. London: Hurst 2018.

²⁸ Susan Williams, *White Malice. The CIA and the Neocolonisation of Africa*. London: Hurst 2023.

administration's official line of supporting the UN operation and parts of the intelligence apparatus acting with their own agenda in the region.²⁹

When it comes to Sweden's situation, both the Neutrality Policy Commission³⁰ and the later investigation 'Peace and Security'³¹ establish that American security guarantees were formulated unilaterally by the USA. They did not require formal Swedish reciprocal obligations, even though in practice a dependence existed. Thomas Jonter and Robert Dalsjö have discussed the extent to which Swedish decision-makers were aware of these American considerations. They agree that Sweden in practice found itself in a grey area of security policy, where Western support was a prerequisite for defence planning.

3.1.2.2 The United Kingdom

In 1961 Northern Rhodesia was colonial territory of the United Kingdom. British and Northern Rhodesian authorities had a decisive influence over the early investigations in Ndola. In his 2019 report, UN investigator Mohamed Chande Othman highlighted strong indications that their representatives sought to steer the 1961–62 investigations toward the conclusion of pilot error rather than external interference.³² Historian Susan Williams presents documentary evidence in a submission to the Hammarskjöld Inquiry that British intelligence and colonial authorities were deeply involved in Katanga, including through MI6-linked contacts and close cooperation with the mining company Union Minière. British authorities were aware of the approximate location of the crash site long before it was officially 'discovered' and UN communications were systematically intercepted by Rhodesia and the United Kingdom.³³

3.1.2.3 Belgium

Belgian interests were to a large degree focused on protecting major economic assets — particularly linked to Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (UMHK) — and on limiting the political damage from the chaotic decolonisation. UMHK and related companies controlled significant parts of Katanga's mining industry. After the proclamation of secession in 1960, Belgian authorities provided extensive technical, military, and administrative support to Moïse Tshombe's regime, while seeking to appear formally restrained on the diplomatic stage.³⁴

²⁹ Notable other scholarly engagements include Erik M. Davis, *The United States and the Congo, 1960–1965: Containment, Minerals and Strategic Location*. MA Thesis, University of Kentucky 2013, https://uknowledge.uky.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=history_etds. See also Glen Andrew Glady, *The CIA in Central Africa, 1960–1990: A Foreign Policy Perspective*. MA Thesis, University of Ohio 1996, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA311632.pdf>.

³⁰ SOU 1994, op. cit., p. 11.

³¹ SOU 2002, op. cit., p. 108.

³² Former BBC journalist and researcher Martin Plaut publishes Othman's 95-page report in the affirmative, <https://martinplaut.com/2019/10/09/un-report-bolsters-theory-that-hammarskjold-plane-was-downed/>.

³³ Based on archival findings, Williams documents the role of MI6 officer Neil Ritchie at the British High Commission in Salisbury, and his contacts with Union Minière and the Katanga lobby. It shows that British intelligence and colonial authorities were deeply involved. Williams confirms MI6's presence at the crash site as non-coincidental,

http://www.hammarskjoldinquiry.info/pdf/ham_240r4_Susan_williams_address_250419.pdf.

³⁴ P Miles Larmer & Erik Kennes, 'Rethinking the Katangese Secession', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 42(4), pp. 741-761. The final manuscript is accessible at <https://repository.up.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/4dbae952-725b-4f11-8a98-4f7ac0af2a5b/content>.

UN Security Council resolutions from 1960 onwards had explicitly aimed to remove foreign troops and mercenaries, including Belgian elements, and to restore Congo's territorial integrity, placing Belgium in a sensitive position. In the Hammarskjöld Commission's background materials and later studies of the Congo crisis, it becomes clear how Belgian interests often ran counter to the UN's attempts to demilitarise Katanga, and how this interplay between economic interests and political prestige shaped the dynamics of the conflict. For a country like Sweden, with strong trade relations with Western European states, this meant that a public confrontation with Belgium over the Hammarskjöld matter could have had wider repercussions.

3.2 Commercial and Economic Considerations

Its resources made Katanga a key region for the Western powers' military and industrial capacity, which in turn influenced how the USA, the United Kingdom, and Belgium acted in the Congo crisis.³⁵ Western governments often weighed the UN's demands for decolonisation and territorial integrity against the risks of losing control over strategic raw materials. This created a structural incentive to support or tolerate Katanga's secession, at least as long as it guaranteed continued access to the minerals, and meant that a UN-driven reintegration process — as Hammarskjöld advocated — could be perceived as a threat to important Western commercial interests, with an imminent risk of spread to other colonies.³⁶

3.2.1 Sweden's Position

Even if direct Swedish economic interests in Katanga have not been documented to the same extent as the Belgian and British ones, Sweden at this time was strongly integrated into the Western economy and dependent on trade and investment relations with countries such as Belgium and the United Kingdom. Swedish public documents from the early 1960s emphasise the importance of stable commercial relations with Western Europe for the development of export industries.³⁷ In a parliamentary debate in autumn 2020, Foreign Minister Ann Linde agreed that it was 'impossible to rule out' that diplomatic, commercial, or realpolitik reasons influenced the Government's conduct, including the findings of the report on Hammarskjöld's death.³⁸ The possibility that Swedish decision-makers considered any potential indirect economic consequences — for example in relation to Western mining, financial, or industrial partners — emerges as a likely part influencing the Swedish report in the Hammarskjöld investigation.

³⁵ Retrospect Journal, 'Beyond the "Puppet State": Rethinking the 1960–63 Katangese Secession', 15 March 2026, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2026/03/15/beyond-the-puppet-state-rethinking-the-1960-63-katangese-secession/>.

³⁶ John Miller, 'The Katanga Secession, the Five Factors Model, and COIN Theory', Small Wars Journal, 21 November 2024, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/2024/11/21/the-katanga-secession-counterinsurgency-coin-theory/>.

³⁷ Douglas Brommesson/Ann-Marie Ekengren/Anna Michalski, Sweden's Grand Strategy: Predicaments of a Small Liberal State in a Hostile World, chapter 4: The Evolution of Sweden's Grand Strategy: Autonomy, Solidarity and Great-Power Politics, pp. 59-122. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2025, <https://academic.oup.com/book/60088/chapter/519746154>

³⁸ https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/interpellation/sveriges-stallningstagande-kring-orsaken-till-dag_h710444.

3.2.2 EEC Negotiations

During 1961–62, Sweden was in a sensitive position between EFTA and the EEC. Sweden had been a member of EFTA since 1960 and had actively worked for the establishment of the free trade association, while the British application for EEC membership in the summer of 1961 forced Stockholm to take a position as well. Prime Minister Tage Erlander in the so-called 'Metal Speech' of 1961 distanced Sweden from EEC membership, but the Government submitted the same year an application for an association agreement with the EEC and explored closer economic cooperation. Negotiations on association broke down in early 1963 after the French veto against Britain's entry. But in 1961/62 intensive discussions took place between Sweden, the EFTA countries, and the EEC on future trade relations.³⁹

3.3 *The Congo Crisis and Swedish UN Presence as a Security Policy Factor*

3.3.1 Sweden's Military Engagement

At the time of Hammarskjöld's death, Sweden had over 6,000 soldiers stationed in the Congo as part of the UN force ONUC, one of the largest Swedish troop deployments abroad during the post-war era. The Swedish contingents were mainly active in Katanga and participated in several combat operations. These included operations in Elisabethville and later Operation Grand Slam, when Katanga's military capacity was broken. Swedish J 29 fighter aircraft ('the flying barrel') were deployed in offensive missions in late 1962, and Swedish troops were on several occasions subjected to direct fire and outright assaults.⁴⁰ Research on ONUC and Swedish experiences in the Congo shows that the situation on the ground was both militarily hazardous and politically sensitive, with Swedish soldiers operating within a UN mandate but in friction with local actors and foreign interests.⁴¹ If Sweden during spring 1962 had chosen to officially advance the line that Hammarskjöld had most likely been murdered by Katanga-affiliated forces with Western support (or at least knowledge), this could have risked both the safety of Swedish troops and the ability carrying out the UN operation.⁴²

³⁹ Hilding Eek, 'Neutralitet, neutralitetspolitik och EEC' [Neutrality, neutrality policy and the EEC], *Svensk Juristtidning* 1971, pp. 1–26, especially pp. 6 ff., <https://svjt.se/svjt/1971/6>.

⁴⁰ Andreas Tullberg, "We are in the Congo now": Sweden and the trinity of peacekeeping during the Congo crisis 1960–1964. PhD Thesis, Lund University 2021, <https://lucris.lub.lu.se/ws/files/4042936/3941179.pdf>.

⁴¹ As Tullberg shows, the operation on the ground quickly went from a putative peacekeeping exercise for many soldiers to an unforeseen, violence-characterised, and politically sensitive operation. Swedish battalions became involved in direct combat, Swedish soldiers both killed and were killed. ONUC was simultaneously criticised by influential opinion-formers in, among others, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and France for acting in an unjust manner. In the Swedish debate, both the idea of what 'peacekeeping' would mean and the political will to stand firm with the operation were thereby tested, creating a complex friction between military assessments, local actors on the ground, and international interests.

⁴² Several studies emphasise that the operation quickly took on the character of regular warfare, with an extensive international debate about the legitimacy and methods of the UN operation. See Tullberg, *op. cit.*; Walter Dorn, 'UN's First Air Force – Peacekeepers in Combat: Congo 1960–64', *Journal of Military History*, 77(4) 2013, pp. 1399-1425, https://www.walterdorn.net/pdf/AirForceInCongo-ONUC_Dorn_JMH_Oct2013.pdf. This created a politically sensitive situation in which Swedish decision-makers were forced to weigh military risk, UN loyalty, and relations with the Western powers against one another. Against that background, it appears a reasonable interpretation that the Government in spring 1962 may have taken into account the risk of increased threats to Swedish troops and more difficult working conditions for the UN operation, if Sweden had

3.3.2 The UN's Standing and Sweden's International Role

During Hammarskjöld's tenure as Secretary-General, Sweden gained a profile as an active UN Member State ambitious to act as a neutral mediator and constructive partner in international conflicts. This role was closely linked to the country's self-image as a non-aligned state contributing to the UN's legitimacy. To openly accuse Western powers at the height of the Congo crisis of having been implicated in the UN Secretary-General's death would possibly have risked disqualifying Sweden as a credible mediator in the great-power rivalries.⁴³

Dag Hammarskjöld and the office of Secretary-General were the subject of harsh great-power criticism: the Soviet Union openly demanded his resignation and wanted to replace the post with a 'troika', while several Western powers were concerned that the UN's operation in the Congo could harm their colonial and strategic interests.⁴⁴ In retrospect, both the independent Hammarskjöld Commission (2013) and the UN's special investigator Mohamed Chande Othman (2017, 2019) have drawn the conclusion that there are compelling or plausible indications of external interference with the aircraft, and that the early national investigations — including the Swedish one — suffered from serious deficiencies and continued concealment by key states.

Taken together, these assessments show that the question of responsibility for Hammarskjöld's death also concerned the UN's own legitimacy: an overly aggressive line against Western powers risked deepening the great-power conflict and further undermining the organisation's standing during the Cold War. The UN's institutional standing was vulnerable: an overly aggressive line on the question of responsibility for Hammarskjöld's death could have risked further damaging the organisation's standing during the Cold War. For Sweden, which strongly identified with the UN project, the balancing act between truth-seeking and institutional stability thus became part of the political calculus.

3.4 Summary

In the early 1960s, Sweden was formally non-aligned but in practice strongly dependent on the Western powers — through informal security guarantees from the USA, through trade and integration processes with Western Europe, and through its role as an active UN state. Katanga's strategic minerals, the Congo crisis's significance for the Western powers, and the large Swedish UN operation with thousands of soldiers in a hazardous area are likely to have made the question of responsibility politically sensitive.

publicly pursued a line pointing out Katanga-affiliated forces with Western support as the probable cause of Hammarskjöld's death. This is, however, an analytical conclusion, not a documented Government position.

⁴³ Sweden's early, extensive troop contribution to ONUC — nine battalions in one of the UN's largest operations during the Cold War — helped to cement the image of Sweden as an active and loyal UN state with the ambition to play a constructive role in international crisis management. See Andreas Tullberg, *op. cit.*; Peter Kristensson, 'Det svenska FN-uppdraget i Kongo' [The Swedish UN mission in the Congo], *Nättidningen Svensk Historia*, 29 October 2012, <https://svenskhistoria.se/det-svenska-fn-uppdraget-i-kongo>.

⁴⁴ Henning Melber, *Dag Hammarskjöld, the United Nations and the Decolonisation of Africa*. London: Hurst and New York: Oxford University Press 2019.

Even if no single document has been found that confirms that such context influenced the change of course in 1962, the combination of security policy, diplomatic, commercial, and institutional factors constitute a strong indication of this. Othman concluded in 2019 that the USA, the United Kingdom, and South Africa 'almost certainly' hold additional classified material of significance for clarifying the circumstances surrounding Hammarskjöld's death.⁴⁵ Against this background, a Swedish public questioning of the British-Rhodesian pilot error theory in 1962 would have carried clear diplomatic costs for a state that at the same time was dependent on Western support in the broader security policy game.

4. Evidence

4.1 Procedural Evidence

4.1.1 Reformulation of the Mandate

The Government's special working group was, as previously mentioned, given the mandate to 'review and evaluate the material available and subsequently to be received' and to 'sift out what was probable and reasonable'. This is apparent from Prime Minister Tage Erlander's statement in Parliament on 16 November 1961 and from the Government's decision to establish a special working group under the leadership of Chancellor of Justice Sten Rudholm. In Mathias Mossberg's report to the Government in 2019, it is established that the working group during spring 1962 appears to have reformulated and limited its mandate and in practice moved closer to the Rhodesian version, rather than conducting an independent, critical examination.⁴⁶

A mandate is set by the body that establishes the working group (here the Government). A working group can in practice interpret and specify its mandate or propose changes but lacks competence to unilaterally restrict its assignment. That the working group in its final report de facto deviates from the original direction of critical review of all available material can in principle be explained in two ways: either through explicit or implicit Government signals regarding a narrower direction, or that the working group, out of loyalty to the Government, had opted for a more limited interpretation of its mandate. In both cases, however, the Government ultimately bears responsibility for maintaining the mandate. Since no new facts or evidence that would justify such a change between Erlander's original description of the assignment and the final report's more categorical stance have been reported, and viewed in the light of the procedural circumstances described in this chapter, it appears highly probable that political and diplomatic considerations played a significant role in the mandate being practically restricted. The Government, endorsing the special working group's final report,

⁴⁵ Mohamed Chande Othman, Investigation into the conditions and circumstances resulting in the tragic death of Dag Hammarskjöld and of the members of the party accompanying him, p. 9/84, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/78/1006>.

⁴⁶ Mathias Mossberg, op. cit., especially pp. 14 and 22 (on Erlander's formulation 'critically examine' and the working group's reformulation and limitation of its mandate) and p. 38 (on possible diplomatic and other considerations). Cited in the Riksdag's interpellation 2019/20:444 Sveriges ställningstagande kring orsaken till Dag Hammarskjölds död (annex, pp. 3–4, 7, <https://data.riksdagen.se/fil/E7CEAC0E-359E-4092-9BAC-098C5DB83496>).

accepted the modification of its mandate, defining Sweden's official position for the following six decades.

4.1.2 Confidentiality Obligation for Experts Behind Critical Reports

The report from the Board of Civil Aviation and forensic expertise was declassified by the Board on 2 May 1962, the same day that Rudholm's working group submitted its final report to the Government. However, classification remained for critical reports from the experts of the National Aviation Board and forensic experts. The Swedish experts responsible for the assessments were bound by a confidentiality obligation, their findings could not be disclosed or commented on publicly.

In later parliamentary debates and in Mathias Mossberg's review, this simultaneity between the final report, the classification, and the imposition of confidentiality has been noted as a procedural circumstance of particular interest.⁴⁷ Parliament and the public were not given the opportunity to access the material available to the Government. The flow of information regarding the investigation's results was controlled in a manner that made an independent and transparent examination of how the Swedish conclusion had been reached more difficult if not impossible.

4.1.3 An Eight-Day Gap Between Two Diametrically Opposed Conclusions

The UN investigation presented an 'open verdict' on 24 April 1962, in which the Commission established that none of the tested hypotheses — technical failure, external interference, internal interference, or human error — could be confirmed or excluded based on the available material. Eight days later, on 2 May 1962, the Swedish working group submitted its final report to the Government. This report concluded that an attack or any form of external interference was the least probable of the reasonable causes of the crash, while 'no direct evidence' of pilot error was found. The Swedish position thereby was closer to the Northern Rhodesian report's pilot error theory than to the UN Commission's open verdict.

The short period between the UN Commission's cautious 'open verdict' and the Swedish working group's more categorical assessment left no room for a proper process of knowledge acquisition or any extensive new analysis. Nor has new evidentiary material been reported that could justify such a marked departure from the UN report's line during these eight days. That Sweden changed its position, initially close to the UN Commission's open conclusion to a report that in practice aligned with the Northern Rhodesian pilot error theory seems to indicate that considerations other than a strictly factual examination may have influenced the Swedish final assessment.

4.2 Substantive Evidence

4.2.1 Edelstam's U-Turn

⁴⁷ Mathias Mossberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 22 and 38.

Axel Edelstam as secretary to the Rudholm working group presented Sweden's closing submission at the UN Commission's hearing in Geneva on 27 February 1962. He then emphasised that the analysis conducted by Sweden's representative, barrister Thompson, did not permit any certain conclusion about pilot error as the cause of the crash. He stressed that the hypothesis of pilot error should not be given any logical priority over other possible explanations. But three months later, Edelstam was one of the signatories of the working group's final report, which as shown deviated from this view.⁴⁸

This change is not accompanied by any documented account of new substantive evidence or an intervening reassessment of his earlier argumentation. Given the personal continuity this constitutes substantive evidence that considerations other than solely a gradual factual reassessment may have played a role in the final Swedish report.

4.2.2 Swedish Experts' Reports Were Disregarded

Swedish forensic expertise and the Board of Civil Aviation concluded in their technical opinions that neither shooting nor sabotage could be excluded as technically possible primary causes of the crash. These memoranda included, among other things, information about bullets in bodies as well as detailed criticism of how the Rhodesian investigations had been conducted. They pointed out missing or omitted investigations that could have clarified the possibility of external interference and the British authorities' dismissive and explanatory attitude toward eyewitnesses describing more aircraft in the air and various light phenomena. This meant that central Swedish technical authorities did not consider the pilot error theory to be the only, not even the most robustly substantiated, explanation for the crash. On the contrary they indicated that alternative scenarios had to be kept open based on the known technical evidence.⁴⁹

Despite this substantial expert criticism, the working group's final report adopted a position in which external interference was described as the least probable of the reasonable causes, without the merits of the reservations from the Swedish experts being reported or discussed. The discrepancy between the experts' cautious stance and the working group's categorical assessment constitutes substantive evidence that expert opinions commissioned were not fully reflected in the official Swedish conclusion on the cause of the crash.

4.2.3 The Radio Message Was Omitted

A radio message indicating that SE-BDY was expected to be 'abeam Ndola 21.47Z' has been identified in later technical reviews as a central piece of information for establishing the aircraft's approximate position and the timeline shortly before the crash. The significance of this information for the reconstruction of the sequence of events was not sufficiently reflected in all reports and summaries, albeit in the international investigation's material, handled among others by British government counsel Stuart Bevan. The Swedish working group's final report does not contain any in-depth review of this radio message, or an analysis of what

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 18–19 and 22.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 19–20 and 38.

conclusions could be drawn from it regarding the aircraft's trajectory and possible external interference.⁵⁰

It is not established to what extent the Swedish working group had access to the same technical assessments of the radio message's significance as later independent reviews have presented. Therefore, the absence of a developed analysis in the Swedish report cannot as such be taken as evidence of deliberate omission. However, the fact that a piece of information subsequently assessed as central for reconstructing the timeline did not give rise to a more thorough examination shows that the investigation at the time had substantial gaps.

4.3 Contextual Evidence

4.3.1 Active British Influence

In his reports of 2017 and 2019, UN investigator Mohamed Chande Othman pointed to strong indications that British and Northern Rhodesian representatives actively sought to steer the investigations toward the conclusion of pilot error. Historian Susan Williams has, through studies of British archives, shown that British intelligence and colonial authorities were deeply involved in Katanga, including through MI6-linked contacts and close cooperation with the mining company Union Minière. Williams and others also disclosed that British authorities were aware of the location of the crash site much earlier than the official discovery of the wreckage. UN communications were systematically intercepted by Rhodesia and the United Kingdom, something later confirmed in UN material. Othman has also established that the United Kingdom, as well as the USA and South Africa, in all probability still possess classified material of significance for clarifying the circumstances surrounding Hammarskjöld's death.⁵¹⁵³

There was a documented endeavour on the part of British and Northern Rhodesian parties to influence the direction of the investigations to minimise the recognition of external interference as a plausible cause. The Swedish working group operated in an environment in which central parts of the material produced under British influence could not be trusted as neutral or free from political considerations. The British influence is an important context: it shows that the Swedish investigation did not happen in isolation. It should be assessed against the background that one of the principal partners in the investigation work had an interest in diverting attention from hypotheses about external interference.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 19–20.

⁵¹ See primarily Mohamed Chande Othman's reports to the UN General Assembly on the investigation into Dag Hammarskjöld's death, especially A/71/1042 (2017) and A/73/973 (2019), in which he reviews the early commissions and their dependence on the colonial authorities. An accessible overview of Othman's conclusions offers Martin Plaut, *op. cit.*; for the British intelligence presence and MI6's role in Katanga, including Neil Ritchie's function at the British High Commission in Salisbury and his contacts with Union Minière and the Katanga lobby, see especially Susan Williams, *Who Killed Hammarskjöld? The UN, the Cold War and White Supremacy in Africa*, London: Hurst 2016 (updated edition), as well as her submissions and testimony before the Hammarskjöld Commission Inquiry, in which she summarises the archival findings on British intelligence and colonial involvement in the events surrounding the crash.

4.3.2 The Ongoing Congo Crisis with Swedish Soldiers at Risk

The over 6,000 Swedish soldiers deployed in ONUC made the operation one of the largest Swedish military presences abroad during the post-war era. Swedish contingents were mainly active in Katanga and participated in combat operations, including in Elisabethville and later during Operation Grand Slam, when Katanga's military capacity was broken. Swedish J 29 fighter aircraft were deployed in offensive missions, and Swedish troops were on several occasions subjected to direct attacks. The situation on the ground was both militarily hazardous and politically sensitive, with Swedish contingents as part of a complex interaction between local actors, mercenaries, and foreign interests.⁵²

It is reasonable to assume that the Government had a strong interest in avoiding measures that could be perceived as escalation toward the Western actors who had influence over developments in Katanga, particularly if such measures could have increased the risks for Swedish contingents. A Swedish public questioning of the British-Rhodesian pilot error theory, or a clear indication that external interference from Katanga-affiliated forces could not be excluded, could have risked a political confrontation with potential consequences for the safety of Swedish troops and for completing the ONUC mission.

4.3.3 The USA's Security Guarantee to Sweden 1960–62

The wider context to take note of at the time was a far-reaching but informal security and defence cooperation between Sweden and the Western powers. This included dependency on the USA and the United Kingdom, manifested in unilateral American security assurances to Sweden and close contacts with NATO countries.⁵³

This too can be seen as a possible explanatory factor rather than evidence. If Swedish security policy in the early 1960s rested on informal American security assurances, it is a reasonable assumption that the Government weighed the risk of damaging relations with the USA when taking a stance on the Hammarskjöld matter. Openly pursuing a line pointing to possible Western involvement in a UN Secretary-General's death could have been perceived as a direct questioning of a central security policy partner. This may have contributed to the restraint of the Swedish final report.

4.3.4 Recent Political Admissions

In a parliamentary debate in 2020, Foreign Minister Ann Linde stated that it was 'impossible to rule out' that diplomatic, commercial, or realpolitik reasons influenced the Swedish

⁵² Mathias Mossberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 16–18 summarises the development of the Congo crisis, the Katanga secession, and the foreign and security policy context in which the Swedish handling of the Hammarskjöld matter took place. Scholarly studies already referred to earlier provide a general background to the Congo crisis, the Swedish UN mission in the Congo and on Dag Hammarskjöld's role. See for an overview among others Henning Melber, *op. cit.*

⁵³ See Neutralitetspolitikkommisionen [the Neutrality Policy Commission], *Om kriget kommit* (SOU 1994:11), on Sweden's Western security and defence cooperation during the Cold War, and *Fred och säkerhet* (SOU 2002:108) on informal contacts with the USA and NATO countries. Cf. also Thomas Jonter, *op. cit.*, for a review of the unilateral American security assurances to Sweden.

Government's conduct in spring 1962, including the Swedish report.⁵⁴ In 2023, Foreign Minister Tobias Billström emphasised that 'the political landscape of the time and foreign and security policy considerations' may have been significant for how the Government acted and for the content of the report. These statements mark a welcome openness in contrast to previous governments' more defensive reactions to the matter and have been noted also internationally.

These admissions do not constitute evidence of any specific external influence or that a particular actor exerted pressure on Sweden. But they confirm at a political level that government representatives today regard it as plausible that diplomatic, commercial, or security policy considerations may have influenced the Swedish position in 1962. As contextual evidence, this strengthens the assumption that the change of course between the early criticism of the pilot error theory and the more categorical final report cannot be understood solely as the result of an internal factual reassessment, but that political considerations may have played a role.

4.4 Independent UN Confirmation

Mohamed Chande Othman, appointed by the UN General Assembly as Eminent Person mandated to undertake new investigations, has in his reports of 2017, 2019, and 2024 assessed it as plausible that an external attack or an external threat may have been the cause of the crash. He has simultaneously directed criticism at both the Rhodesian and the Swedish investigations from 1961–62, for deficiencies in the handling of witness testimony, technical evidence, and in the examination of alternative explanatory models. Othman has urged the USA, the United Kingdom, and South Africa to declassify remaining relevant documents, assuming that these countries 'almost certainly' hold material of central relevance for clarifying the events.⁵⁵

The independent assessment made by Othman, which is based on a significantly more extensive body of material than was available in 1962, does not constitute a definitive clarification. But it confirms that the hypothesis of external interference remains a seriously possible explanation. Together with the Hammarskjöld Commission's conclusion in 2013 — that there are compelling reasons to assume that the aircraft may have been subjected to some form of attack or threat as it approached Ndola — this shows that the investigations conducted in the early 1960s did not have the robustness that can in retrospect be required

⁵⁴ Parliamentary interpellation debate on 10 September 2020 on Sweden's position on the cause of Dag Hammarskjöld's death (interpellation 2019/20:444 by Gudrun Brunegård et al.), in which Foreign Minister Ann Linde states that it is 'impossible to rule out' that diplomatic, commercial, or realpolitik considerations may have influenced the Government's conduct in spring 1962. See the Riksdag's records and documentation: https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/interpellation/sveriges-stallningstagande-kring-orsaken-till-dag_h710444 and the summary 'Nya fynd kring Dag Hammarskjölds död' [New findings on Dag Hammarskjöld's death] (2024/25:1739) in which this admission is reproduced.

⁵⁵ See Mohamed Chande Othman's reports to the UN General Assembly on the investigation into Dag Hammarskjöld's death, especially A/73/973 (2019) and A/78/1006 (2024), in which it is assessed as plausible that an external attack or an external threat may have been a cause of the crash, while sabotage and accidental human error also remain possible explanations. The reports are available via the UN's document portal, e.g. <https://docs.un.org/en/a/73/973> and <https://docs.un.org/en/A/78/1006>.

to definitively rank or dismiss different causal models. In this sense, the UN's later reviews suggest that the Swedish final report was based on an insufficient foundation.

4.5 The Convergence of Pressure

We find no single factor that explains why the Swedish position changed between February 1962 and the final report in May. However, various observations form a *chain of evidence* in which several different kinds of pressure interact. This casts doubts, to explain the change of course as the result of an internal, gradual factual reassessment.

4.6 Summary and Conclusion

Given the context presented, it seems untenable to accept the Swedish Government's handling of the Hammarskjöld matter in 1961–62 as an entirely open-minded and independent examination of the evidentiary position. The practical limitation of the mandate, the rapid change of course without reported new evidence, the classification of central expert opinions, and the documented uncertainty in the technical evidence stand in contrast to the categorical ranking of possible causes presented in the Swedish report.

It is impossible to reliably identify which political or security policy considerations were decisive, or if a particular foreign actor has deliberately influenced the Swedish line. The convergence of pressure does, however, support the conclusion that political, security policy, and diplomatic considerations influenced to a tangible degree how the material was assessed and presented. The Swedish pilots and their families were thereby not afforded an examination that fully meets requirements of independence and robustness in a matter of this kind. There are reasons to question the tenability of the Swedish report as a definitive explanation, which in turn constitutes a central starting point for the reasoning in chapter five for an independent investigation.

5. Summary of Arguments/Insights

The Swedish report from 1962 cannot be considered a reliable answer to the question of the cause of the crash. Instead, a picture emerges of an investigation that was formally given a broad and critical mandate but which in practice came to be restricted, both through the rapid change of course in spring 1962 and through how central expert opinions were handled. Both the Swedish expertise's own reservations at the time and later UN-led reviews indicate that the hypothesis of external interference must be regarded as a serious possible explanation.

Against this background, the need for a continued, independent investigation appears as a logical consequence. It concerns examining the actual sequence of events — technical evidence, witness testimony, timelines — and efforts to clarify how the Swedish change of course in 1962 came about. Such an investigation must have a clear mandate to collect and analyse material from both Swedish and foreign archives, with a particular focus on states already identified by the UN's appointed investigator as being most likely in possession of potentially decisive, hitherto unreleased information.

For Sweden, the matter concerns a special responsibility for the Swedish pilots and their families. The Swedish report contributed to pilot error long appearing as the 'natural' explanation, despite the evidence never justified such an emphasis. A new, independent examination would not only have a general truth-seeking value but would also constitute a step toward rehabilitation of those who bore the operational responsibility on board.

The matter also has an international dimension. The UN's investigator has explicitly pointed out that certain states likely still hold classified material of central significance. If Sweden, as a closely affected state, openly admits that its own handling in 1961–62 did not live up to the requirements of transparency and independence, this could send an important signal to other affected countries that the time has come to reconsider previous positions. Such a Swedish statement could thereby contribute to *lowering the political threshold while increasing the moral and ethical pressure* for other governments to acknowledge that they have not yet fully cooperated in seeking the truth, and that they should therefore consider opening their archives in the spirit of transparency and accountability that the UN has called for.

Finally, the matter also concerns *Sweden's standing as a state governed by the rule of law and as a UN Member State*. If a Swedish Government in so serious a matter allowed security policy and diplomatic considerations to influence 'truth', this is incompatible with the requirements of openness and independence. It is of principled significance that this be acknowledged and analysed. A continued investigation, with a clear mandate, full access to relevant archives, and a methodology that takes account of the deficiencies identified in this report, would therefore not only contribute to clarity on a historical trauma, but would also function as a touchstone for how Sweden today is able to live up to its own ideals of the rule of law, accountability, and international solidarity in the search for truth.

4 June 2026

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