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UN INTERVIEW  
Brian Urquhart  
October 22, 1984  
Interviewer: Leon Gordenker

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QUESTION: This is an interview with Brian Urquhart on 22 October 1984.

Today we're going to concentrate primarily on the UN activities in the Congo which were directed toward ending the secession of Katanga province. Last time we left off the interview with some reminiscences about the terrible outcome of a dinner party in Lubumbashi, where Brian Urquhart and George Ivan Smith were beaten by the Katanga gendarmerie and where Urquhart was taken off to the barracks and later released, brought to a hospital - he obviously recovered and went on with the work there in Katanga. I think that we might look back to 2 <sup>November</sup> ~~September~~ 1961, when Indian troops - Gurkhas, I suppose - disarmed a group of Katangese at the airport and this led to a Katangese barricade on the roads and the Swedish camp - various UN personnel were attacked and killed. That was followed by an ultimatum and your forces tried to clear the road to the airport, resulting in the death of 38 Katangese. This was a pretty serious incident and it might be a good idea to talk about the political background here and the military situation that you were facing, to give us a word about what kind of policy directives you were getting and how they were coming through and what sorts of obstacles there were toward reaching the goals that were set out in the Security Council resolutions.

ANSWER: Yes, well that's a fairly tall order - let's try it. We never had any different objective in Katanga than to get Katanga back to a legitimate position as one of the provinces of the Congo.

QUESTION: Wasn't that an item of controversy - what was a legitimate position and whether or not they were part of the Congo?

ANSWER: ~~No, I don't know~~ no, it wasn't at all, I mean they had declared a secession; they had assumed the function of a State; they had printed postage stamps; they were masquerading as an independent State - with a lot ~~of sort~~ of passive winking and nudging from the British, the Belgians and to some extent the United States. When called on this, the British, the Belgians, the United States

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would say that they did not recognize the secession, but they did a hell of a lot to encourage it, ~~which was~~ and this was a very difficult situation to deal with. Tshombe had an army of sorts - it was called the gendarmerie, it was officered by mercenary officers, white, mostly South African, British, some Belgian and also French. He had Belgian military advisers who had a rather ~~sort of an~~ anomalous status which nobody could ever quite figure out. It was an enormously rich State, Katanga, because it had the Union Minière in one of the greatest geological freaks in the world, which produces gold, tin and copper in very nearly pure state ~~and it's almost unique~~. So it was a fairly difficult nut to crack. The reason why ~~Hammarskjold had originally before he died got us into this and why~~ the UN felt strongly about it and why it was important was that as long as Katanga was a secessionist State effectively run by various white agencies, it would be a bone of contention in the rest of the Congo and the Congo would never settle down to being an integrated State; in fact it would simply encourage other ~~sort of contrary~~ revolts and secessions, as indeed it did. We got into the second round of fighting there I think because the first round was believed to have been won by the mercenaries and Tshombe's forces, because they had made a monkey out of the UN, ~~The~~ Secretary-General had been killed in this process, and they evidently thought this was a victory. I went there with the firm intention of trying another tack and trying to play on Tshombe's vanity and his great desire to be a figure in history and to try eventually to persuade him to join the central Government, ~~which I think~~ *This* is what Hammarskjold had always intended to do and in any case it seemed to be much the most sensible thing to do in the circumstances, because the fact of the matter was there was no way that Tshombe could win militarily and there was no way we could win militarily because we couldn't use force in the adequate sense of the word in order to fix up his army. The round of fighting that started on 5 December was a mess. We had had, as you rightly said, a number of people killed already in

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ambushes and so on, the road to the airport was blocked by roadblocks, which Tshombé and later on Kimba and Mfonongo kept saying they were going to remove and never did. Our headquarters, which was in a ghastly house called the Clair Manoir, was under heavy mortar fire around the clock - in fact it began to diminish by about one storey every two days, so we kept moving down as they knocked the top off it, ~~which is not necessarily a healthy situation for a UN operation to be in.~~ I gave the order ~~that we~~ <sup>to</sup> open fire when I came to the conclusion that we were being dealt with in totally bad faith, both by Tshombé, by Kimba and by Mfonongo and by the mercenaries. <sup>Well,</sup> The mercenaries are always in bad faith, this was a game for them, they were making a hell of a lot of money out of it, ~~and we then went into it.~~

QUESTION: Did you have military advice that was pressing you at that time to give the order?

ANSWER: ~~Well the military are always~~ I have - I'm very sceptical about the military in a situation like that which is mostly political. They were all for being allowed to use maximum force, not realizing that the moment they did it they'd be stopped. I was interested in using selective force to try to clean the thing up. And that, with a number of ghastly episodes, is more or less what we did. The fighting went on for - I think I am right in saying about 18 days - and during that time it was extremely difficult to get around, <sup>and</sup> it was very difficult to try to get anything moving on the political side. I finally went down to see Tshombé and suggested to him that it was time to put a stop to all this, that it wasn't doing anybody any good. By that time he was very chastened, because he has realized that he had made a big mistake, he'd listened to his French military advisers instead of to us and he had got himself into one hell of a mess. We at that time were only fighting in Elisabethville, we were not going for the rest of the Congo; I told Tshombé we could perfectly easily do it but that we were

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interested solely in his legitimization and he finally listened to this and finally agreed that he would send the Katangese members of parliament to the central parliament in Leopoldville, which was supposedly a symbol of coming back into the Congolese <sup>state,</sup> ~~whatever it was - it wasn't a federation, it was a State made up of provinces.~~

QUESTION: Before you get farther on that line, the historical record shows that the UN forces captured the headquarters of the Katanga gendarmerie on 16 December 1961. Is that correct? Did you really capture that?

ANSWER: I think so. Well, you know, that sounds a good deal grander than it was.

QUESTION: That's why I'm asking.

ANSWER: The Katangese gendarmerie was a ~~kind of~~ gimcrack operation and they were useful and effective because they were backed in the first place by mercenary officers who were ~~extremely~~ though dirty were extremely skilful guerrilla fighters, and in the second place they were backed largely by the Western press, which developed a great kind of morbid admiration for these soldiers of fortune, and I never could see it; <sup>they</sup> ~~that~~ were the most ghastly collection of people - ~~not a single one of them one would want to see in a private house anywhere,~~ but none the less they were - the press thought they were - some kind of romantic thing, God only knows why, ~~because it was the most absolutely half-arsed notion,~~ they were <sup>pretty</sup> terrible people, and ~~also because~~ they were backed, which was much important than those two things, by a remarkable public relations operation based in Geneva, a firm called Markpress, and they were also backed by a quite large faction in the British Houses of Parliament, notably in the House of Lords, and they were backed by Senator Dodd in Washington, who was literally a paid lobbyist, ~~and he was~~ getting 10,000 bucks a month from Tshombé. So they had a lot going for them, and they ~~I must say~~ <sup>we</sup> were not in those days, or even now I think,

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adequately set up to deal with that kind of thing. So we were chugging along on the ground trying to get the thing straightened out. I finally did manage to get Tshombé to see the point, I think. He had been very much impressed by the fact that when he had tried to have me murdered earlier on, that I had not pursued it and I used this ruthlessly to try to pressure him, and we did finally get him to agree to send his people. <sup>to the parliament</sup> ~~But that, unfortunately, was only the~~ Tshombé was a very great escape artist. He was always playing both sides against the middle. When he agreed to send his people he also produced a whole series of very complicated conditions which in fact spun out the secession for a whole year more, and ~~I don't want to go into all that, it was a very depressing year all round I thought.~~

QUESTION: Were you there that whole year?

ANSWER: No. I came back in - I think it was March 1962 - from Katanga and I was in New York and it was over Christmas 1962 and into 1963 that Tshombé's people, for some unknown reason, got out of hand. I've never been able to understand why. They started shooting at the UN and the UN, which was then a great deal better organized militarily under a really first-~~call~~ <sup>class</sup> general, General Prem Chand of India, simply decided they were going to use this and they did, ~~it~~. ~~And~~ they proceeded in extremely short order to roll back the gendarmerie, to expose them for the gimcrack forces they really were and, contrary to orders from headquarters and a lot of rather fairly stiff cables from Bunch and me, they went right ahead and they took Kolwezi, they took - what's the other place called? -

QUESTION: Jadotville.

ANSWER: - Jadotville and they finished Tshombé off. Tshombé then did what I had suggested he do in December 1961, he made his peace with the central Government and very shortly thereafter became Prime Minister, which he could have done perfectly easily in 1960 if he'd put his mind to it. And then, of course, the

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was a better alternative really. Our job was to preserve the territorial integrity of the Congo, to deal with foreign interventions of all sorts, including the mercenaries, and to deal with the secessionist movements of which there were at various times about five, and I think that it can be said about the Congo operation -- I don't want to spend too much time on it after this bit -- that it's been ever since the synonym for disorder and confusion and exactly the kind of thing that the UN ought to avoid. Curiously enough, like many things, this is a myth. We were put into the Congo for two purposes only - or three. The first one was to get the Belgian soldiers out, the second one was to preserve the territorial integrity of the Congo and the third one was to help the Government to establish its authority and to run the country - and we did that.

QUESTION: Including the training of an army?

ANSWER: Including training the army. Well, actually we failed on that one, ~~not for political reasons but on everything else I think we did it.~~ There was a massive <sup>UN</sup> civilian operation there. We did, in fact, at one time more or less run the country. We spent our whole lives trying to hand it over as soon as possible to the Congolese. We did achieve, with enormous difficulty, a legitimate Government in Leopoldville. We did manage to get Tshombé to make his peace with that Government. And I don't think that given the appalling difficulties of that particular country, that this was by any means a negligible record. ~~I get very annoyed when I read that~~ I think that <sup>It</sup> was the Soviet Union which has deliberately, for obvious reasons, pursued the piece of disinformation that this was a disaster - and for them it was something of a disaster, because they didn't manage to take the Congo over, nor did the United States. <sup>after the UN left</sup> Instead they got an extraordinarily inefficient third-world administration under Mobutu, which survives to this day. I don't personally think that necessarily keeping the Congo all as one country was such a good idea and I don't think it's a very good idea now

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either, but that is what we were told to do and that's what we did. And maybe it was better that letting it split up and adding bits and pieces of it to the other very complicated situations in Africa - the struggle in Angola, the whole Rhodesian problem with Katanga as part of the Rhodesian kind of <sup>white</sup> cordon sanitaire under Ian Smith. I think this would have made a terrible further complication in that already very difficult situation, so maybe it wasn't so bad after all.

QUESTION: How do you account for the persistent lack of enthusiasm on the part of most of the other African countries for this kind of operation?

ANSWER: ~~Well, I think the trouble was that~~ well, I think the Africans in the first stage were very proud of taking part in it - this <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ the most effective peace-keeping operation they've ever taken part in. But then they discovered; of course, that in an African country of the complexity of the Congo, that the Africans themselves are not united. We had on the one side basically some of the more radical francophone countries; on the other side most of the English-speaking African countries - and there was a massive difference between their views. They didn't like that and I think they were right not to like that. I don't think that they were disillusioned with a UN peace-keeping operation<sup>s</sup> as such; they were disillusioned with the extraordinary confusion of the Congo and the way it reflected African differences and they didn't like that and ~~I think they~~ ~~were~~ it's very understandable why they didn't like it.

QUESTION: I would like to ask you one or two more questions about the fringes of this matter and then turn back to what we said we would discuss when we stopped last time and that is the difficulties with public information, the role of the mass media and so forth. One of the questions I want to put to you has to do with the task of training an army. The United States and Belgium principally conferred on this matter and apparently decided that there was no real UN role and that it ought to be a US-Belgian technical role.

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ANSWER: This was much later, wasn't it?

QUESTION: This was August 1964.

ANSWER: Yes, that's right.

QUESTION: Were you in on that?

ANSWER: No, by that time we had more or less pulled out. We pulled out, as I remember, in June or July <sup>1964</sup>. We had left simply a civilian operation. ~~This was~~ a ...

QUESTION: You really had given up on the possibility ...

ANSWER: We had started - we had made a very good start on training the army in 1960, with a very large training group from Morocco, and they were first-rate. That was blown up completely by the political crisis, because at that point the army became split on tribal and political lines and you couldn't train one or the other <sup>part of it</sup> (without being accused of being partisan and therefore you couldn't train any of them.

QUESTION: So you really couldn't get on further with that training mission and you couldn't resume it either, I take it?

ANSWER: Well, it was difficult to resume because, of course, the army didn't come back together again until a year later, by which time a whole lot of other priorities had entered in - that would be the Katanga priority - and we didn't ever get back to that, ~~we never got back to it~~. We did have training teams but there was nothing on the scale that was originally started and which was, in my view, a very promising and a great lost opportunity, because I think that the Moroccans would have got the Congolese army into a shape where they would have been able to stay out of politics, which was one of the great curses of the Congo.

QUESTION: Do you think that U Thant's decision to end the involvement in the Congo was a correctly taken decision and did it take into account all of the possibilities?

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ANSWER: Yes, I think it was. It was extremely unpopular in the West and there was a great deal of kicking and screaming. But if we'd stayed there there was no logical reason why we shouldn't have stayed there for ever, ~~and there was a~~ I think U Thant reasoned that the Congo wasn't making any progress on its own as long as it had this great <sup>UN</sup> ~~base~~ crutch to lean on. We were getting royally screwed in one way or another by various factions in the Congo. ~~We were getting~~ We were taking a great deal of nonsense from the Soviet Union, the United States, the Belgians, the French and the British. It was a constant source of bickering and it really wasn't proving anything any more. There wasn't a very dangerous situation in the Congo in 1964, with the one exception of the situation in the Orientale province, in Stanleyville, which was a situation which we couldn't control anyway. ~~This~~ <sup>There</sup> was a mercenary-led army trying to advance on the capital and that finally got sorted out. We couldn't control that. We didn't have enough troops to do it anyway and I think U Thant was quite right. He thought that the Congo had better try to sort itself out and stand on its own feet. It had four years to get ready for it after all. ~~I don't think it was such~~ I think it was a good decision.

QUESTION: Alright, now, in November 64 a new incident occurred in the Congo which attracted a very great deal of attention. This is an incident that also ties in to the subject of public relations. This is the drop of 600 Belgian paratroops from US air-transport planes near Stanleyville to save some hostages, most of whom were missionaries from what was thought to be their destruction. There is a tremendous political row over this. Did you have anything to do with this?

ANSWER: Well no, very little, except I remember sitting in the Security Council while this was going on. It just so happens that particular meeting of the Security Council is the only meeting of the Security Council which anybody fired a bazooka at and the bazooka was fired in fact by the Cubans from the other side of

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the East River to distract attention from the Assembly hall where Che Guevara was making a speech in order to get the security guards out of the Assembly hall so that an assassination squad could fix Che Guevara. The only trouble with that was that the assassination squad had reckoned without the traffic conditions in New York city and had got stuck in the Lincoln tunnel, where it was subsequently discovered by the FBI. But that was the only thing I remember about that. I can't remember even what happened to the hostages.

QUESTION: The hostages were gotten out.

ANSWER: They were got out by the parachutists or by some other means?

QUESTION: No, they were gotten out by the troops. They came in afterward and by 28 November they got the last 76 out; 1,800 whites and 300 Congolese had been rescued by the time it was over, according to my notes. But you don't think this was a major incident?

ANSWER: Well, it was a very important political incident, apart from anything else.

QUESTION: All right, what was the political importance of it

ANSWER: Well, ~~this after all was against the~~ Stanleyville had always been a ~~sort of~~ great place for insurgency, it was Lumumba's headquarters and the somewhat fire-breathing spirit of Lumumba lingered on and it was ~~I think it was~~ ~~then Gizerga that was~~ -- Gizerga's headquarters and Gizerga was running a rather desperate kind of splinter Government backed by a series of mercenaries, including a guy called Black Jack Schrammer, as I remember, he was a Belgian. The object was a four-pronged attack on Leopoldville, God help us all, but one of the prongs ~~was~~ ~~turned~~ led by somebody called Mike Hoare, mad Mike Hoare, who beneath all this nonsense about being a mercenary was quite a sensible chap and he suddenly decided that it was not a good idea, so he turned round and fought for Tshombe instead of being one of the insurgents. And this put a complete spike in the whole operation

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and the Stanleyville business, as I remember it, was a sort of last gasp of this whole thing. Tshombé then became established for a bit, <sup>as Prime Minister</sup> but then of course he lost out too and went into exile, Mobutu having once again surfaced. He's a great surfer, Mobutu, he'd been surfacing all this time and has survived - miraculously I don't know how - and Tshombé was out. Tshombé ~~then~~ of course started to plan his own insurgency from Madrid and in a very ingenious kidnapping plot organized <sup>presumably</sup> something by the CIA ~~others don't~~ was kidnapped over the Mediterranean in a Lear jet and taken to Algeria, where he subsequently died, I think of natural causes.

QUESTION: How much information do you get on matters like this?

ANSWER: On the kidnapping thing?

QUESTION: Yes.

ANSWER: Well, there was a very good book published about it actually.

It was ~~whose name I can't remember who wrote that now, but anyhow~~ it was an interesting case, because it was a very carefully prepared kidnapping carried out by a French convicted homicide called Baudena<sup>ant</sup>, who posed as a youth leader and tried to get Tshombé to sponsor the European-African Youth Federation, and Tshombé got very excited about all this - he was very easily taken in I must say - and then the guy also got him interested in real estate in ~~what's the name of that island, not Mallorca, the other one, the fashionable one, I can't~~ Ibiza and arranged for Tshombé to fly down and look at some properties and then they arranged to kidnap Tshombé on this flight, which they did. Sort of James Bond stuff.

QUESTION: Well let's turn back now to your earlier comment made in the last session and hinted at again in this session, that you had a persistent problem with mass media, that this is a matter which has concerned you a great deal, you've thought a lot about it and I take it that you have opinions on it without having any real way over some of the difficulties. Do you want to talk a bit about how

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this impinged on the Congo matter and any generalizations you want to make on it that go beyond that, especially this goes with regard to the peace-keeping function in the general third-party settlement of disputes.

ANSWER: Yes, I think that in the first place, the UN is very bad at public relations and always has been and still is. In fact it is lamentable. In the second place, I think it's in a very bad position to practice good public relations; it's not a sovereign organization, it has in everything always to consider a huge multiplicity of different points of view and it's not supposed to claim the credit for anything. I mean, if anything goes wrong it's our fault; if anything goes right it's some bright leader in some Government who's fixed it and that's still the rule. But I think in the Congo we were up against a whole lot of things we weren't ~~quite~~ ready for, really. In the first place, I don't think anybody understood what was at stake in the Congo when we got in - certainly I didn't and I'm <sup>pretty</sup> ~~perfectly~~ sure that Hammarskjold didn't. He <sup>had not</sup> ~~never~~ realized what a total mess the Congo was, he never realized how very complicated not only the white attitude towards the Congolese was, but the Congolese attitude was towards the whites, and he certainly didn't foresee early enough that the thing was likely to break down on East-West lines very quickly through the personalities of Lumumba and Kasavubu, which it did. ~~So all of these things - we got in there,~~ <sup>When</sup> we were doing extremely well for the first two months, we got a fantastic press. ~~It is,~~ <sup>As I</sup> said the other day, it was the only time in my whole 40 years here when we <sup>in the secretariat</sup> actually ran something ourselves without being interfered with. We weren't interfered with because the place was so bizarre and so distant and so violent that nobody could interfere, they didn't know how to do it. That broke down completely when there was the constitutional split between Lumumba and Kasavubu and the whole thing became polarized East-West, not to mention polarized with one African group against another and one tribal leader against another in the Congo. It was a completely

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disastrous mess. I think Hammaraskjold did the only thing he could possible do in <sup>the operation</sup> keeping going. Nobody really tried to understand - in the Western press certainly - what he was trying to do, because by that time we were up against the public relations people of Tshombé and <sup>de</sup> Union Minière and we were being portrayed all over the world by them as ~~sort of~~ communist destroyers of a great established peace <sup>ful</sup> and quite colonial empire, ~~and~~ <sup>A</sup> at the same time we were being described by the Soviet Union as imperialist running dogs of the CIA. It was really a peachy situation, I must say. It was very irritating sometimes. We didn't manage to cope with that. We also, I think, had quite a bad set-up latterly in the Congo. We had virtually no civilian head after Dayal had left - Linne<sup>r</sup> was a very weak operator - <sup>and</sup> ~~the~~ military command was a series of muddles. When the disastrous General Von Horn left at the end of 1960 - he was perhaps the most disastrous peace-keeping commander there's ever been - ~~but~~ he was succeeded by a much more genial but equally confused military administration. In my experience the military in the Congo at all times were never capable of making the kind of informed appreciation which is necessary if you're going to do very difficult military operations. They just were all over the place; they reacted to whatever happened; they didn't react very often; they didn't have a plan - not necessarily their fault, it was a very difficult place to have a plan in, but I think a better commander and a better staff would have got a much better result. And that is proved by the fact that when we finally did manage to get a good commander and a good staff into Elisabethville, ~~they simply~~ everything just simply collapsed before them, ~~they didn't have to do anything and~~ <sup>Q</sup> it was a great eye-opener to me, the degree to which a proficient, politically conscious military command is essential in these things.

QUESTION: But then the media was reporting the real situation, that there was confusion, there wasn't a ...

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ANSWER: Well, the media, you see, were very helpful. ~~I mean, we~~ <sup>For</sup> example <sup>we</sup> had David Halberstam, who was on his first foreign assignment for the New York Times, who was a great friend of mine. His reporting was wonderful. It wasn't bad at all. We had all the chaps from the various English papers; we had David Holden, for example, from The Times of London, who was a wonderful correspondent; we had Gavin Young and Patrick O'Donoghue <sup>van</sup> from the Observer, they were absolutely first-rate. But then ~~you got~~ in Elisabethville during the fighting ~~e~~ correspondents couldn't circulate, in fact, we had to rescue quite a number of them from various places where they'd had to hole up - and ~~there~~ the Tshombe apparatus was very good at feeding through the European consuls and through various stringers to the news agencies the line they wanted to get out to the world, and they did it. And that was of course eagerly picked up, first of all by Tshombé's own public relations apparatus, by the Tanganyika Concessions and Union Minière people in London, by Senator Dodd and his boys in Washington and by people in Europe and it was a very - we really, I think, <sup>we</sup> did an astoundingly bad job of public relations and that's one of the reasons why the Congo operation is still regarded as a failure. It seems to me, though it was very costly and we lost a lot of people, that in fact it was, in the circumstances, <sup>a surprisingly considerable</sup> ~~an astonishing~~ success. We actually kept that country going and we preserved it as a country, which is certainly a good deal more than I thought we'd ever be able to do.

QUESTION: Why did you have so much difficulty in countering this public relations?

ANSWER: Well, the UN has never gone in for public relations for a start, I mean, it believes in telling the truth as it knows it to correspondents, ~~which is~~ simply.

QUESTION: More than 15 per cent of the budget goes for it.

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ANSWER: Yes, exactly. Well I think this is a great mistake. Don't start me on that, I shall say something extremely disloyal, ~~I mean~~, I've always thought that the UN public information set-up is nobody's fault, it's based on a completely false pattern, it's based on the Office of War Information of the United States in <sup>World War II</sup> ~~the war~~. This was a propaganda agency in a war when there was almost total censorship. This is completely different from what you need in an organization which is sort of a shoestring operation all over the world trying to do very difficult things in unforeseen situations. ~~I just think it was hopeless.~~ I don't think <sup>the Public Information Department</sup> ~~has~~ ever ~~had~~ a hope in hell of meeting with this kind of challenge, ~~and~~ I have made a great number of suggestions over the last 15 years for changing it, but nobody ever pays any attention, so there you are.

QUESTION: Well I think you ought to talk about the kinds of changes you think are necessary, because it refers directly back to your experience over the years.

ANSWER: Yes, but you see now we're getting - we're straying away from oral history into a subject where I shall hurt the feelings of my colleagues and I've no wish to do that.

QUESTION: Let me ask you a few questions that will be fairly neutral. Were you able to keep contact with the press in Katanga province?

ANSWER: Well, I've never personally had much trouble with this.

QUESTION: Who did then?

ANSWER: But the difficulty is it's one thing for a solitary chap to be pressing on against the powers of darkness or whatever it is; it's quite another thing to try to explain what in the hell this great gallumphing world organization is supposed to be doing in a mess like the Congo and we never never were able to get it across.

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QUESTION: Was it because of your fault or is it because of your listeners' fault?

ANSWER: Well, I don't think you can blame the listeners. The listeners are manipulated by the most skilful manipulator after all, ~~I mean look at well, I was about to say look at what's going on now - but it's absolutely true.~~

QUESTION: But weren't you then in a position in the Congo where you're really at the mercy of those who can do politics better than you could do?

ANSWER: Well, I think we were at the mercy of some extremely skilful people who ran Tshombe<sup>e</sup> and they were, after all, people with a lot of money also, which makes a difference. ~~I think that it was very difficult - you see,~~ you've got to remember that all the time we were trying to deal with the Western media, we had this uninterrupted blast coming from our good old chums in Moscow, who were blasting us for being exactly the opposite, for being these horrible imperialists, lackeys and running dogs of Western intelligence agencies, which is something of a laugh if you come to think of it, <sup>for example,</sup> ~~because~~ it now turns out, ~~for example,~~ that the CIA's efforts to assassinate Lumumba were frustrated 100 per cent by none other than the good old UN - it came out in the Church report, a very interesting revelation to me, I'd never dreamed that they were trying to do it, but ~~it was we~~ frustrated. ~~Now, but for different political reasons everybody had,~~ <sup>U</sup> We had General De Gaulle blasting the whole thing, because the general thought that Hammarskjold was aspiring to be a great man like him, ~~I mean, it was really the most pathetic performance, it was awful. And so he was blasting it.~~ You had the money people in London and New York blasting it. ~~Now this...~~

QUESTION: So your real opposition in the public relations field was back in the capitals and it had very little to do with what was happening in the Congo?

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ANSWER: ~~Well, you could take -~~ let's take a single incident, for example. When I was kidnapped there was a momentary surge of annoyance largely because ~~it~~ <sup>it should be had</sup> done it when Senator Dodd was there and this made the Senator look like a bloody fool, which he was anyway. ~~There~~ <sup>There</sup> was no necessity to make Senator Dodd look like a bloody fool, he was one. But none the less they did it. He was very embarrassed, the Senator. I, in fact, tried to get the Senator to come to lunch with me the day after the kidnapping. I wasn't in very good shape, but none the less I was prepared to do it <sup>well</sup> and he just ran, he didn't want to have anything more to do with ~~it~~ <sup>the place</sup>, he was scared, he just got the hell out, something that I was never able to catch up with him about because I thought it was disgraceful. After all, he was ~~to some extent~~ a large contributor to the trouble. The moment we opened fire on anybody there were screams of rage in the Western press. O'Brien had been completely clobbered by the Western press for simply trying to do his job in a rather flamboyant manner. There was simply no way that we seemed to be able to deal with this and if good reporters like Halberstam and a few people like that wrote stuff saying "Look here, this isn't quite like that" and "These people are trying to do a job" and "Guess who's trying to look after the Baluba refugees, 96,000 of them in Elisabethville alone and so on - these people are doing it under shell fire" - which we were, nobody paid any attention, didn't want to hear that. <sup>also</sup> It became an East-West thing, ~~it became, you know, it was~~ Lumumba, and at some points the central Government, were supposedly in some way Russian-oriented and we were the amanuenses of the central Government and therefore we were on the Soviet side, which is quite a laugh considering the amount of time we spent trying to stop them from getting into things too. ~~It was a very - I think - I don't know what the answer is. I think that if we had - well,~~ <sup>As</sup> long as Hammarskjold was alive it remained to some extent manageable, because he was very famous. After that it became very unmanageable. What we could have done to change

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it I'm not quite sure. I think we should have all been much more outspoken. ~~I think we should have~~ - In those days we weren't <sup>supposed</sup> allowed to talk to the press. ~~I mean~~ I was not allowed, for example, to say to one or a group of correspondents "If you chaps want to know what the truth is, it's the following", ~~and all the rest - this was actually Bunch,~~ It was the whole idea of the then Department of Public Information that persons in the Secretariat didn't talk to the press. I think it was a colossal mistake. ~~I mean~~ it seems to me to be much worse than getting it wrong, because everything goes by default in that case, ~~you don't get~~ I think we've improved a little bit since then, but not necessarily too much.

QUESTION: Did you have a public that knew what you were doing?

ANSWER: Well, the trouble is you know, that the Congo was so far away and so mysterious to most people that it was extremely hard even to explain what it was like. ~~I mean, you know,~~ If you start talking about the Bakongo or the Baluba or the transport system or ...

QUESTION: Or Kasai.

ANSWER: - or Kasai, ~~nobody~~ people look at you as if you were a looney. They didn't know about it. It's a whole world all by itself, the Congo, ~~and~~.

QUESTION: Why didn't you get some help from the Belgians? They has people available.

ANSWER: No, the Belgians were not exactly very pro-UN. The Belgians were in a state of great pique until the Spaak Government came in. The Belgians, since they had failed, wished to see us fail. I think it's as simple as that. I don't blame them.

QUESTION: But there were people ...

ANSWER: When the Spaak Government came in it changed and they tried very hard.

QUESTION: They did.

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ANSWER: But by that time it was very very late.

QUESTION: But there were a number of Belgian experts who contributed to the Spaak point of view when he eventually came in. They were available in the early days, but you had no contact with such people? Some of them were people in the Church, some of them were scholars, ...

ANSWER: Well, I think it's true that the Church was always very helpful. The people at Lovanium, for example, were very helpful. A lot of the missionaries were very helpful and they were helpful because they were on the receiving end of the kind of things that we could deliver and they were very pro-UN, because they were the ones who were being helped by us and they needed it. But it was a very messy <sup>situation</sup> ~~occasion~~ and I think it's a pity in a way that it's been portrayed the way it has, ~~because I don't honestly think - I mean~~ I think the only question to be asked is whether it was smart ever to have got into it in the first place. But if we hadn't got into it, supposing then a vacuum had been left which the United States and the Soviet Union both tried to fill, how far would that have taken everybody? So I think one has to admit that it had to be done.

QUESTION: Did you get any assistance on public relations from any of the Governments?

ANSWER: Well the Americans actually, under the Kennedy Administration, made an enormous effort and it made a great difference. We had remarkable support from Kennedy, partially from Dean Rusk though not altogether, from the American Ambassador in Leopoldville whose name - who's an old old friend of mine but now his name's escaped me. *Edmund Gullion*

QUESTION: Timberlake?

ANSWER: No, no, no, Timberlake was the first one. It was the guy who was the head of Fletcher afterwards. What the hell is he called?

QUESTION: Head of what?

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ANSWER: He was the head of the Fletcher School afterwards. I can't remember his name, it will come back to me. And they were very helpful. They had decided that you had to get the Congo together, that you had to deal with the secession of Katanga otherwise you were going to run the whole thing into a much bigger problem in Africa, which I think is right, and that was their decision and they were very very helpful I must say, including providing way beyond the call of duty ~~in~~ air support and that kind of thing. I have a tremendous regard for the Kennedy policy in the Congo. I think they were very good and I think they were far-sighted too.

QUESTION: Did they help reporters to come in and help journalists to learn about this and to understand?

ANSWER: I don't think they were really called on to do that. I mean there were enough journalists there anyway. The trouble really was at any given point to be able to communicate with them. I mean, If you have, as I had during the second round of fighting in Katanga, you have your headquarters under 24 hour a day mortar fire, very few journalists are going to show up for press conferences, they really are. So ~~they were then given~~ <sup>use</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>head</sup> alternative of going out to look for the poor buggers and of course they're mostly hiding in basements, so it isn't a very satisfactory way of doing things. It's very difficult to communicate.

QUESTION: I'm going to ask you one or two more questions along this line, because we're rapidly running out of time. One thing that I would like to put to you is this: you portray a picture of a public relations campaign which was directed against you by the mining interests in Katanga province and by people who were sympathetic to that. This is, however, central Africa, verging on southern Africa. Down below there you had the benign influence of the South Africans. How much did you see of that?

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ANSWER: ~~well~~ Very little. ~~I think a lot of money probably, but well, I~~  
~~mean, the campaign wasn't so much against us as it was to legitimize Tshombé, the~~  
*South African aim*  
 great slogan being that the only place where there is peace and quiet in the Congo  
 is in Katanga under good old Moise with his Western advisors. This is why they  
 were so annoyed when there was this bust-up, when I got kidnapped when Senator Dodd  
 was there, because Senator Dodd was scared stiff. He saw about the most disorderly  
 scene he could possibly imagine and it wasn't at all what he'd been told. He was  
 so stupid that he didn't really haul it in, but none the less there it was. I  
 think that that was the basis of that. The idea was to legitimize Tshombé <sup>as</sup>...

QUESTION: You were in the way.

ANSWER: And we were in the way. ~~And furthermore, we kept going on~~  
~~about - and also the trouble also is that people don't like secessionist~~  
~~movements.~~ Governments are very nervous of secessionist movements because whoever  
 you are, you're quite likely to have one. I mean the British have got the Scots  
 and the Welsh; the Americans already had their little go at secession last  
 century. Everybody's got it. The Soviet Union have got God knows how many and  
 most African countries have bits and pieces which are likely to fall off, not to  
 mention all other countries. So everybody is very touchy about taking sides on  
 secession. On the other hand, if you can put across this enormously rich area as a  
 haven of peace and quiet, you can get people to sort of hedge the secession  
 business and say "Now look, you mustn't be nasty to Tshombé, he's a good guy, ~~he's~~  
~~got~~ - his guard is dressed in Napoleonic uniforms". It's a lot of bullshit, but  
 you can get away with it and they did get away with it up to a point. The fact  
 that <sup>Tshombé</sup> ~~he~~ was suppressing about three-quarters of the inhabitants of Katanga and had  
 more or less clobbered the Baluba <sup>tribe</sup> refugees is neither here nor there and he was  
 getting away with that too. He was getting away with plenty. But he just managed  
 it a hell of a lot better than we did.

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QUESTION: That suggests another aspect of your work there. You were, after all, in an environment where the people didn't understand very much about what you were doing, they had never -

ANSWER: Not at all, none at all.

QUESTION: - they had little contact with the outside during the years of the Belgian colonies. What did you do about local public information?

ANSWER: Well virtually nothing. Frankly I don't think that would have made too much difference because the medium of information in the Congo, which we couldn't get into at all because it was interference in internal affairs, was demagoguery on the radio. That was the big political medium. Most people couldn't read and didn't read newspapers. ~~So what you had~~ This is why Lumumba was so important; Lumumba was a demagogue of genius and his addresses, either in French or in Lingala, were famous. I mean, it was a tremendously emotive <sup>technique</sup> affair and he could get people out on the streets in hundreds of thousands and that's why people were so scared of him. Tshombé wasn't very good at that. <sup>U</sup> Mbanongo was quite good at it. ~~but~~ we couldn't compete with that. And I don't think we should have either, that would have been a gross interference. I don't think that would have been any good. What we could have done, I think, would have been to have done a much better job with opinion abroad. because actually when it came to it, most of the Congolese were very anxious to be helped by us, including Tshombé. We did a great deal for him, including getting him legitimized, which he was quite grateful for. Of course, that all went wrong too, because the moment he became legitimate everybody else started to plot against him, so that ~~was~~ <sup>par</sup> which was ~~power~~ for the course, ~~but~~ <sup>but</sup>

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QUESTION: What about the impingement of the other provinces in the Congo on what you were doing there? Did events that occurred elsewhere in the Congo - there was always unrest in Stanleyville, there was a pretty disastrous situation in Kasai most of the time that you were there -

ANSWER: And there was a very bad situation in Kivu at one point too, we lost a lot of people there.

QUESTION: - and a pretty bad situation in Kivu. How did that impinge on you and did it complicate your public-relations work?

ANSWER: Well, no, it didn't really. Katanga always commanded a special place, certainly in the Western press. ~~I mean you could~~ We lost our whole Italian hospital at one point in Kivu. I mean, they were literally killed. It was a terrible thing. And it really didn't create much of a stir. If it had been in Katanga it would have been headlines. ~~Katanga you know they had,~~ With their public relations and all of the legends about the great wealth of Katanga, they'd sort of upped the ante. ~~It was interesting.~~

QUESTION: All right. The last question is supposing we admit all that you've said about your difficulties in public relations. Did it really make any difference?

ANSWER: I don't know. I think that everything in the UN, unless you do something to stop it, contributes to the what I call the fashionable cynicism in the Western world about the UN ever since they lost the automatic majority in the Assembly. ~~I think that you know, you still hear people~~ Every now and then some looney somewhere or other comes up with "What about the atrocities in the Congo?" and you say "What atrocities?". "Oh, your Indian troops killed ..." - I forget what and you still hear it. This was - I think this is a lasting legend which is very hard to get rid of. The legend is: a. - that we shouldn't have been there, which is crazy; b. - that we didn't do a very good job, which is not true because

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we did what we were told to do; and c. - that we managed in some way to win some gold medal for barbarism and that kind of thing, ~~and it's simply~~ <sup>of course</sup> ~~I mean~~ there were people killed but there were a hell of a lot of our people killed too, it was a very rough - this wasn't South Kensington or Wisconsin or somewhere, this was a quite rough and rather marginally evolved tribal area, it was very tough stuff. ~~I mean, you know,~~ <sup>quite a bit</sup> it wasn't much fun in the Congo. ~~I mean, I've~~ <sup>we</sup> ~~people like FT or~~ I spent a ~~great deal~~ of time getting arrested or getting put up in front of a firing squad or something. It was just ~~power~~ <sup>power</sup> for the course and you had to talk your way out of it. It wasn't a very orderly place, but in some way that has been parlayed over the years into a minus for the UN. My view is that it was a remarkable effort which deserved to succeed better than it did and in fact did succeed quite a bit. And I doubt if we shall ever do anything like that again.