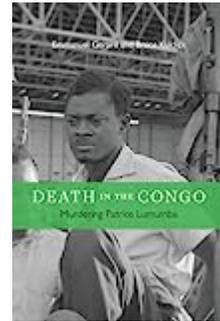


Emmanuel Gerard, Bruce Kuklick. *Death in the Congo: Murdering Patrice Lumumba.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015. xiii + 276 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-72527-0.



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The assassination of the Congo's first democratically elected prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, seven months after the Congo gained independence from Belgium on June 30, 1960, was a shot heard around the world. For the Congolese people, the loss of their most charismatic politician had a profound effect on the unity of the state and struck at the heart of ideas about the Congolese nation. Arguably, the assassination also affected the contours of the state as it grappled with unstable government before the imposition of a dictatorship by General Joseph-Desiré Mobutu Sese Seko in 1965 which lasted until 1997. For other African states, the fate of the decolonization project as a whole seemed to hang in the balance. The assassination of Lumumba drew protests in African and European capitals from Accra to Dublin as newly independent African states and their supporters railed against what they perceived as a blatant manifestation of neocolonialism in the Congo. Leaders such as Ghanaian prime minister Kwame Nkrumah publicly pointed the finger of blame towards Britain, Belgium, and the United States. At the UN, the perceived duplicity of the secretary-general, Dag Hammarskjöld, who had promised to defend the sovereignty of the Congo, led to the closing of the General Assembly when protestors stormed UN buildings in New York. In the fifty-five years

since the murder, the question of who killed Lumumba has continued to intrigue historians and the general public alike.

Death in the Congo, Murdering Patrice Lumumba is an eminently readable and absorbing book by Emmanuel Gerard and Bruce Kuklick which examines the evidence in a balanced and coherent manner while examining the complex tapestry of the alliances, pacts, and promises that comprised relations over the Congo between Leopoldville (now Kinshasa), Brussels, the Katangan capital Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi), London, New York, and Washington. It has long been known from the inquiry mounted by the US Senate, the Church Committee, which in 1975 conducted an investigation into the assassination, and later investigations by the UN and by the Belgian government in 2001, that in 1960 there was an array of plots to assassinate Lumumba. Although the book does not offer a definitive verdict on how these murderous plots may have intersected, nor a clear line of responsibility, what it does with excellent clarity is to outline the complexity of the relationship between Brussels, Elisabethville, and Leopoldville, and the wider frames of decolonization and the Cold War that effectively sealed Lumumba's fate as a variety of aims collided.

The book has two prominent features from the beginning which outline its important contribution to the rather crowded field of literature on the history of the Congo and the assassination of Lumumba.[1] First, the book centers the story in the Congo itself. It reveals in impressive depth the variety of connections and alliances that existed between the African politicians and their Belgian counterparts, even as administrations in both countries changed during this period. Crucially, the research brings to light the often intimate contacts that existed between Belgian intelligence officers, members of the Belgian King Baudouin's court, and advisors to the Armée Nationale Congolais (ANC). Through this network of formal and informal cooperation, the authors describe how for a variety of different aims, the plan to eliminate Lumumba evolved from August-December 1960 before he was finally killed in January 1961. While there is no clear line of direction, it is argued that Lumumba threatened the stability of the government led by Joseph Kasavubu, challenged the loyalty of troops in the ANC, which was problematic for the head of the army General Joseph Moubutu (later Mobutu Sese Seko), and directly denounced the legitimacy of the secessionist regime in Katanga, led by Moïse Tshombe. This internal African opposition was not however, enough to lead to Lumumba's murder. It was the role of the Belgians in supporting this idea which proved crucial during these months.

This is the second important contribution of the book. While previous works, such as that of Ludo de Witte, have outlined the role of members of the Belgian intelligence agency, the Surete, in advancing the plot to kill Lumumba, Gerard and Kuklick use recent interviews with the last remaining members of the organization to reconstruct the events which lead to Lumumba's death and how what they term the *process* of murder unfolded (p. 218). What emerges is a chilling portrait of deceit, political bargaining, and ultimately, betrayal of the basic principles of human dignity.

Drama characterized much of Lumumba's short-lived political career. He emerged on the political scene in the Congo in 1958 as one of the founders of the Mouvement National Congolais (MNC) one of the main political parties in the state. He quickly became identified as a rabble-rouser and was arrested a year later for leading a protest against the Belgian colonial administration in Leopoldville in which thirty people were killed. Despite being arrested for his part in inciting the riots, following the MNC's sweeping victory in the first elections held in December 1959, he was dramatically freed from prison and flown to Brussels to participate in a series of

roundtable talks to prepare the Congo for independence. The authors sketch a provocative outline of Lumumba in a way that highlights his perspicacity, vigor, and vision for the Congo, rather than the mercurial and insecure image of him that has been advanced by others.

During the independence ceremony on June 30, Lumumba's relationship with Belgium got off to a rocky start when he changed his speech at the last minute to denounce Belgium's colonial record in the Congo—an act that soured any bonds of friendship that may have existed between the two states. His appeal to the UN a week later to intervene to defend Congolese sovereignty from Belgian incursion served to deepen the divide. Belgian paratroopers had been dispatched back to the Congo less than a week after independence when the ANC revolted against their commanding officers (who were primarily Belgian). Brussels argued that they were necessary to protect the European populations of Leopoldville and Elisabethville, though this was also a convenient cover to ensure that they continued to protect their business interests. The crisis deepened when the wealthy province of Katanga, in the southeast of the country, seceded under Moïse Tshombe, taking with it most of the resources and revenue on which the Congolese economy was reliant.

The UN responded to the request for aid by mandating the largest peacekeeping operation to date in order to restore peace and the rule of law. Hammarskjöld was concerned that the Congo crisis might become infused with Cold War politics and sought to prevent either the United States or the USSR from becoming directly involved. The actions of the UN immediately internationalized the conflict and the legacy of the organization became tarnished as the crisis continued to unfold until the official withdrawal of troops in 1964. Disappointingly, Gerard and Kuklick paint a dismal and rather oversimplified view of the UN and how it worked at the time, describing the organization as *scrawny* and sometimes *feckless* (p. 74). Despite the fact that they grant the organization and its officials little agency in the evolution of events, they still maintain that the UN was ultimately duplicitous as it failed to prevent Lumumba from being captured by his enemies and murdered.

Gerard and Kuklick also take a dim view of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in attempting to shape the political landscape in Leopoldville and in advancing its own nefarious schemes to dispose the prime minister. By September 1960, Kasavubu, with the support of the United States, announced that he was dismissing Lu-

mumba as prime minister, throwing the Congolese government into chaos. Mobutu arranged his own coup several weeks later when he created a College of Commissioners to replace the elected government until the internal political situation could be stabilized. In the process, Lumumba was effectively placed under house arrest. A ring of UN soldiers encircled him at his home in order to protect him from the ANC. For its part the United States, under President Dwight D. Eisenhower's administration, was concerned that Lumumba would push the UN out of Congo and invite the USSR in. The increasing contacts between Lumumba and the Soviet Union over the summer of 1960 persuaded American officials, including head of the CIA Allen Dulles and the president himself, that Lumumba posed a serious threat to international peace in Africa. In response, they turned to the subversive activities of the CIA in order to provide a solution. It has been alleged by some, including Robert Johnson, the official record-taker at the National Security Council meeting where it took place, that Eisenhower gave the order for the assassination. The authors concur, arguing that "Eisenhower endorsed an assassination more than the head of the CIA" (p. 149).

Although Eisenhower's specific role is disputed by other historians, there is a consensus that there was widespread irritation with Lumumba. The authors argue that Dulles instructed the chief of the CIA station, Lawrence Devlin, that Lumumba in opposition still posed a threat to the careful balance of power in Leopoldville. Therefore, ample scope and opportunity was given to Devlin to finish the job, even if he did not have time to consult Washington first (p. 146). In his own recollection, Devlin maintains that he circumvented orders from Washington to commit the murder, but rather opted to put Lumumba in harm's way. His largely discredited personal account is dismissed by the authors, who point to "his desire to validate his credentials within the Agency" (p. 152). The CIA, it seems, was determined to get the job done and dispatched two further agents and an outside freelancer called ROUGE to execute the mission. It is argued that this was an effort to insulate Devlin and the CIA from any blowback which would result if the assassination attempts were successful. But the authors also raise issues of morality: did CIA agents and officials have the sense that the murder of a democratically elected leader was fundamentally wrong? Moreover, the book also points to, but frustratingly does not pursue, lines of inquiry with regard to the activities of other intelligence agencies from Britain and France, long suspected to have played a role. They also leave open the question whether

Lumumba was aware of these reprehensible schemes and also if UN protection really did serve to thwart the efforts of these countries to finish him off.

It is difficult to assess how much Lumumba was aware of the intersecting plots to kill him while he remained under the protection of the UN from September to November 1960. What emerged, however, was, as the authors argue, a situation in which the CIA had "a little need to kill" (p. 189). Following the instructions of Rajeshwar Dayal, special representative of the secretary-general, the UN sought to protect Lumumba from local threats by stationing its forces between him and the ANC. This was an act which was viewed by the United States as granting him an opportunity to reposition himself and led to disputes with the UN over how the Congo operation was to be handled. This contrasts with Gerard and Kuklick's allegations that the UN acted "ambiguously and duplicitously" (p. 181). In fact, in light of the political bargaining which was simultaneously taking place between leaders in Leopoldville, Elisabethville, and Brussels, it appears that for a time, UN protection kept Lumumba out of the hands of his enemies until one fateful night in November when, hidden in the back of a car, he decided to flee to join his supporters in the northern city of Stanleyville.

In the months leading up to Lumumba's flight, negotiations were ongoing between the Belgians and the Congolese regarding the problem of the prime minister. The authors recount, with remarkable detail, how in October, Mobutu and Tshombe agreed to "neutralize" Lumumba in return for an increased share of Katanga's revenue (p. 170). In the meantime, Count Harold d'Aspremont Lynden, the former head of the Belgian technical mission to Katanga, was appointed minister of African affairs. D'Aspremont is described as behaving "as if decolonization had not taken place" (p. 162). He was granted a discretionary budget of \$1 million which he soon put to good use in helping Mobutu pay the ANC to ensure his loyalty in opposing Lumumba, and expanding the network and activities of the Belgian intelligence agency the Sûreté in conspiring with Mobutu and Lumumba's enemy Victor Nendaka to find a solution to definitively remove him. At the same time as Belgium accelerated its secret campaign to dispose of Lumumba, the relationship between Brussels and the UN deteriorated. Hammarskjöld's demands, and successive Security Council resolutions that the Belgians halt their activities in opposing the UN force, were received as a mark of disrespect by the Belgian government. Dayal's controversial report detailing how Belgian advisors were shaping

Congolese opposition to UN activity in November angered the Belgian government further. What is absent from this analysis however, is the role of other African states in urging Hammarskjöld to take a stronger line against the Belgians. Indeed, outspoken leaders such as Nkrumah who dominated the public discourse in the General Assembly on the Congo question during these months, and led the campaign of criticism against Belgium, appear only as shadowy figures in this interaction.

Lumumba's attempt to flee to Stanleyville was the action which brought the situation to a head. His supporters, led by Antione Gizenga, established a provincial government in the northern city between December 1960 and January 1961 while Lumumbist forces extended into Kivu and north Katanga, threatening the stability of the regimes in both Elisabethville and Leopoldville. Lumumba sought to join the provincial government but was hindered on his journey by the decisions to take back roads and stop to make speeches to his supporters along the way. Eventually, the Congolese SAS and the ANC caught up with him at a village called Lodi. With Lumumba finally in custody, a radio message was sent on behalf of the Kasavubu regime to Katanga: "Will the Jew accept Satan?" (Will Tshombe accept Lumumba?) (p. 181). Initially Tshombe refused to accept him and Lumumba was moved to Camp Hardy, a military base in Thysville, south of the capital. Further insistence from the Belgians that Lumumba be handed over to Katanga, lest Leopoldville agree to a prisoner exchange in Stanleyville, alongside the tenuous grip of Mobutu and Kasavubu over the ANC accelerated the decision to finally hand Lumumba over to his sworn enemies on January 16, 1961.

Once Lumumba arrived in Katanga, with the connivance of the Belgians, the advisors and Francophone politicians now distanced themselves from the Elisabethville Africans. Lumumba was transported to a farm near the airport, where he was "in all likelihood" tortured and tormented (p. 202). In comparison to other accounts, especially that of Ludo de Witte's *The Assassination of Lumumba* (2003), the authors spare the reader the more grisly details of his detention and instead focus on Tshombe's movements. He convened a war cabinet at his residence from 6 pm and here, along with four other Elisabethville politicians, decided the manner of Lumumba's end. Fueled by alcohol, which raises questions about the righteousness of their decision-making process, the ministers soon headed for the farm, where they abused Lumumba and his fellow prisoners further before transporting them to the execution spot where a firing squad

finished the job. The story turns a little more gruesome when the reburial and finally the dissolving of the bodies in acid is recounted alongside the allegation that Gerard Soete, another Flemish Belgian officer, who carried out two days of destroying the body parts, kept teeth as keepsakes (p. 208). Although the details of Lumumba's final hours have long been known, the focus here on the movements and direct involvement of the Elisabethville politicians and in particular the precise role of the Belgian SAS and the police officers completes the puzzle.

The question of precisely who killed Lumumba is only partially resolved by the end of the book. The authors cite the diary of Flemish police officer Frans Verscheure, discovered during the Belgian parliamentary inquiry in 2000 and 2001, as the only piece of archival evidence of the murder. On January 17, 1961, Verscheure entered: "9.43 L. dood [dead]" (p. 210). Later he changed this to "9.43 L. doorgevoerd [transferred]." In the original entry, shown in this book, the attempt to alter the first diary entry is clear. The plot thickens further when details of an oral history interview with Verscheure are revealed. The book reverts to more dramatic prose as the authors record that it is as if he relives the moments of Lumumba's final hours during this interview as he recounts, minute by minute, the final ordeal, adding details about the torture the prisoners had suffered and their physical condition by the time they arrive at the graveside where the firing squad waited. When questioned about the diary, Verscheure breaks down, ripping open his shirt and screaming at the interviewers in an unrecognizable African language. This is important. He records only his entry about Lumumba in his native Flemish but the working language in Congo was French. The explosion of their subject in a completely foreign African tongue leads the authors to wonder whether "in this final and unnerving existential moment did Verscheure try to express a common humanity?" (p. 214).

These details which arise from the most recent investigation is what really adds a substantially new research element and a reasoned analysis to this book. The authors manage to weave their narrative convincingly with the facts available while expending some time investigating cul-de-sacs of speculation about the motivations of the other actors, in the process constructing a reasonable and logical sequence of events which leads to Lumumba's assassination. However, even in their account, the chain of command, as twisty as it is made out to be, does not reflect all the possible influences. While they find evidence of a clear conspiracy "less compelling," what they offer is a picture of the assassination as the outcome of a

process of contingency, confusion, duplication of labor and bunglingâ (p. 216).

How can this depiction of the traveling carnival of deathâ be assessed (p. 215)? Gerard and Kuklick do not fully make the case that âWith Lumumbaâs death, the West had given its first postcolonial tutorialâ (p. 217). Although the book does help reposition the Congo dilemma in the longer history of decolonization, it paints only in very broad strokes the impact of the assassination in the wider context of the Cold War, the postcolonial history of Africa, and the emergence of the Global South. Part of the reason that the book fails to fulfill this broad mandate is due to its hasty and rather deflated conclusion, which reads as a rushed summary of what happened to the main actors and the Congo. Further reflection on the assassination and its wider and deeper significance for Congo, Africa, the UN, and decolonization would have strengthened the impact of this book. It also wrongly undercuts the agency of the African actors themselves,

referring to their activities within the Congo as âpalaver-ingâ and barely mentioning the role of other states negotiating at the UN in New York (p. 111). It also renders a rather conventional, uninspired, and inaccurate reading of the activities of the organization in the Congo, in particular HammarskjÃ¶ldâs shift towards Lumumba in the latter part of 1960. This points towards one of the flaws of the book, which is a false reading of the relationship between the United States and the UN over the Congo which also deteriorated during this period as the Afro-Asian bloc drove policy for Congo from the General Assembly and HammarskjÃ¶ld seized the opportunity to utilize the organization to realize a particular vision of world order. While the intricacies of the plot to kill Lumumba here are revealed in terrific detail in a very stimulating narrative, the book would have benefitted from a closer positioning of why this issue was important in the wider context. While it remains a though-provoking work of history, it also straddles the boundary between academic and popular literature.

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