

# The Illegal Overthrow of Patrice Lumumba's Government: The Congo and the Elimination of Patrice Lumumba Revisited

The Role of Columbia University. Part II

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Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Law and Justice](#), [United Nations](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

*"...I would like to refer specifically to the painful case of the Congo, unique in the history of the modern world, which shows how, with absolute impunity, with the most insolent cynicism, the rights of peoples can be flouted. The direct reason for all this is the enormous wealth of the Congo, which the imperialist countries want to keep under their control...How can we forget the betrayal of the hope that Patrice Lumumba placed in the United Nations? How can we forget the machinations and maneuvers that followed in the wake of the occupation of that country by UN troops, under whose auspices the assassins of this great African patriot acted with impunity?..."*

—Che Guevara in his Dec. 11, 1964 speech to the UN General Assembly

*"...Cordier was part of the Congo Club, a group of senior UN officials intent on making sure that the international organization safeguarded Western interests in the Congo.... "*

—Ludo De Witte in his 2001 book, *The Assassination of Lumumba*

*"Lumumba's fall and assassination were the result of a vast conspiracy involving U.S., Belgian and UN officials...My own research in the United Nations Archives in New York has yielded data on...the anti-Lumumba activities of Andrew Cordier..."*

—Howard University Professor Emeritus of African Studies Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja in his 2003 book, *The Congo From Leopold to Kabula: A People's History*

*"Students for a Democratic Society will hold a rally today to protest the University's expansion policies and the alleged involvement of Acting [Columbia University] President Andrew W. Cordier in the assassination of former Congolese Premier Patrice Lumumba....The radical student organization has...accused President Cordier, who was formerly dean of the School of International Affairs...of helping to plot...the downfall of his government...A leader of the Brooklyn Black Panther Party, known as Captain Ford, is scheduled to speak at this evening's rally..."*

—from a Sept. 26, 1968 *Columbia Daily Spectator* article

*"...Mr. Lumumba, the Prime Minister....is completely irresponsible—if not a mad man...He is wildly ambitious, lusting for power and strikes fear into anyone who crosses his path. There is really no such thing as a Congolese Government...There is a cabinet, but Lumumba uses it*

*as his tool. Some members of the Cabinet share his vision and lust for power...The only real solution of the problem is a change of leadership. It will not be easy, however, to remove Lumumba from his position..."*

-Former Columbia University President and School of International Affairs [SIPA] Dean and United Nations Under-Secretary General Andrew Cordier in an Aug. 18, 1960 letter to Manchester College in Indiana Emeritus Professor V.F. Schwalm

In his 2009 book *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Student Power in the late 1960s*, Professor of History and African American Studies Stefan Bradley noted that on Aug. 23, 1968—three months after they had requested on May 22, 1968 that New York City police be used to clear Columbia University's campus of protesting students for a second time—"Grayson Kirk and David Truman stepped down as the president and vice president" of Columbia University; and "Andrew Cordier, from the School of International Affairs [SIPA]" of Columbia University "took over the reins of the university as acting president." Cordier then spent two years as Columbia University's fifteenth president until September 1970, before spending an additional two years as Dean of Columbia's School of International Affairs [SIPA] prior to his 1975 death—from cirrhosis of the liver—at the age of 74.

Before being appointed as Columbia's School of International Affairs Dean in 1962 (by a Columbia University board of trustees that included the former U.S. Ambassador to Belgium between 1959 and 1961, Columbia Life Trustee William A.M. Burden), Cordier had worked since 1946 at the United Nations as advisor to the President of the General Assembly and executive assistant to the Secretary General. And, as UN Under-Secretary General, Cordier, coincidentally, "had a large role in the Congo" in the summer of 1960, 57 years ago, according to Professor Katholieke Universiteit Leuven Professor of History Emmanuel Gerard and University of Pennsylvania Professor of History Bruce Kuklick's 2015 book, *Death in the Congo: Murdering Patrice Lumumba*.

As Carole Collins observed in an article, titled "The Cold War Comes to Africa: Cordier and the 1960 Congo Crisis," that appeared in the June 22, 1993 issue of the *Journal of International Affairs*:

"...In early September 1960, while filling in as the Secretary-General's interim special representative to the Congo... Cordier's decisions effectively...reinforced U.S. and Belgian efforts to oust Lumumba... Some scholars argue that Cordier's actions ultimately served to help abort the Congo's transition to democracy, set in motion a series of events culminating in the murder of Lumumba — the Congo's first democratically elected prime minister — and facilitated the rise to power of a young Congolese army officer, Joseph Desire Mobutu...The Zairian [Congolese] people are still grappling to this day with the tragic legacy of these decisions..."

"...Several sources, including Madeleine Kalb's study based on declassified diplomatic cable traffic, document the extent to which Cordier continually briefed and was briefed by U.S. diplomats and collaborated with them on Congo policy...." "...Cordier's 15 September [1960] letter to [Manchester College in Indiana Emeritus Professor V.F.] Schwalm reveals that he had advance notice of Kasavubu's intent to dismiss Lumumba, and that he welcomed the move...Cordier notes he met four times with Kasavubu...to discuss the firing of Lumumba... When Kasavubu announced his dismissal of Lumumba from office on the radio on Monday, 5 September, Cordier...made his `two most

important decisions:’ to send U.N. troops to close the airport and to seize the radio station.

“These...actions...primarily hurt Lumumba because only Kasavubu enjoyed access to radio facilities in the neighboring state of Congo Brazzaville. Similarly, Kasavubu’s allies were allowed to use the ostensibly closed airport to travel into the Congolese interior to mobilize support for the president while Lumumba’s supporters were grounded....Near the end of his three-week stay in early September, Cordier ...authorized the United Nations to offer food and pay to the Congolese Army... This action...allowed Mobutu — a one-time Lumumba aide who had been appointed chief-of-staff of the army by Kasavubu just days earlier — to win credit for paying the soldiers their past-due salaries...and to pave the way for his coup attempt a few days later.... The combination of U.N. and U.S. support was pivotal for Mobutu’s subsequent seizure of power.

“...On 14 September [1960], Mobutu seized power... In the end, Cordier’s actions served to fuel the Congolese civil war.... After his dismissal by Kasavubu, Lumumba was placed under virtual house arrest, but even this failed to dampen his popular or legislative support....In January 1961, he was killed through the coordinated efforts of Mobutu, Kasavubu, Tshombe and the CIA...[Connor Cruise] O’Brien – the...Irish diplomat...who had represented the United Nations in Katanga in 1961...believes that Cordierdeliberately helped Washington plot Lumumba’s ouster...”

Howard University Professor Emeritus of African Studies Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja’s 2003 book, *The Congo From Leopold to Kabula: A People’s History*, also contains a reference to the role that former Columbia University President Cordier played in Congolese history:

“...The dismissal [of Lumumba] was...clearly a civilian coup and therefore illegal. Both houses of[the Congolese] parliament, where Lumumba still had a working majority, gave him a vote of confidence and rejected Kasa-Vubu’s decisions as null and void...Cordier and U.S. Ambassador [to the Congo] Timberlake worked hand in hand to implement U.S. policy objectives. Acting as a viceroy, Cordier helped engineer and execute the illegal overthrow of Lumumba from power, beginning with his active support of the Kasa-Vubu coup of 5 September [1960]...”

Conor Cruise O’Brien’s 1962 book *To Katanga and Back: A UN Case History*, also indicated how former Columbia University President Cordier contributed to the illegal overthrow of Patrice Lumumba’s democratically-elected Congolese government in September 1960:

“...Andrew Cordier...had taken a decision which, politically, had broken the back of Lumumba—the Prime Minister who had called in the United Nations [to end Belgian military intervention in support of the illegal Belgium-backed secessionist Tshombe regime in the Congo’s Katanga province]...Had it not been for Mr. Cordier’s...action, there is little doubt that the support Lumumba could have rallied at this crucial moment would have been most formidable...Mr. Cordier’s actions...had played a decisive part in this crucial series of events, as a result of which the Congo no longer possessed a universally recognized Government...”



Former President of Ghana  
Kwame Nkrumah (Source:  
[Wikimedia Commons](#))

But as Kwame Nkrumah [the democratically-elected Ghanaian president who was overthrown in a CIA-backed military coup in 1966] argued in his 1967 book *Challenge Of The Congo*, “how could such action of the United Nations be justified when Lumumba was the lawful Prime Minister?” Nkrumah also noted in the same book that “the executive assistant to the Secretary-General, Andrew Cordier, knew in advance of Kasavubu’s plan to dismiss Lumumba;” and during the period in early September 1960 when former “acting” Columbia University President Cordier was the “acting” head of the UN Congo Mission in Kinshasa[Leopoldville], “press correspondents in Leopoldville at the time were convinced that the UN were helping to oust Lumumba...”

Coincidentally, a now de-classified “Telegram From the Station in the Congo to the Central Intelligence Agency” that was sent from Leopoldville[Kinshasa] on Sept. 5, 1960 also stated:

“...An unimpeachable source...advised [Embassy] that Kasavubu plans to oust Lumumba...As soon as this step taken, he plans to broadcast a message to Congolese people from Radio Congo requesting them to remain calm and accept the new government....Kasavubu plan includes following steps: A. For the UN Operation Congo (UNOC) to guarantee his personal safety with UN troops. B. Request UNOC to guard the radio station, thus guaranteeing his personal safety when he speaks and insuring that Lumumba forces will not be able take control of the radio and mount a propaganda campaign in support of Lumumba. C. Airports Congo would be closed to all departures. 4.Kasavubu’s plan has been coordinated with UNOC at highest levels here. He already has taken the first step, to demand protection by UN troops. The rest of the plan was to be implemented 5 September but timing may well be changed.”

According to Ludo De Witte’s 2001 book *The Assassination of Lumumba*, as Acting Head of the UN Operation Congo [UNOC] in Kinshasa/Leopoldville during early September 1960, Cordier “did exactly what was expected of him.”

In discussing, at a September 2004 Woodrow Wilson International Center for Cold War Studies conference at Princeton University, what happened in the Congo between July 1960 and the Jan. 17, 1961 murder of the democratically elected, but illegally ousted, Congolese Premier Lumumba and two of Lumumba's colleagues, CUNY Emeritus Professor of Political Science Herbert Weiss characterized former Columbia President Cordier's historical role in the following way:

"There is a very important event...that is the closing of the airport and the closing of the radio, without which the dismissal of Lumumba would have had a very different end...The key person there is Andrew Cordier...Cordier was, at the very minimum, a profoundly non-neutral person whose writings suggest that he was a racist...It's Cordier's actions that cut the feet from under Lumumba..."

And at the same September 2004 conference, another conference participant, Thomas Kanza, the Congo's first permanent representative to the UN, said:

"If I may, I would like to support what Herbert said....Your...points are really correct. When Cordier came to Kinshasa...and Cordier stepped in, as special representative of the Secretary General. Number one, the dismissal of Lumumba...Cordier stepped in and said that he must be dismissed... Cordier was really acting as the number one UN [man] in the Congo...Cordier, as far as I'm concerned, was responsible for many things, including what would happen later...."

According to the *Death in the Congo* book, in the month before the former Columbia president used his UN power in the Congo to coordinate with Kasa-Vubu's plan to illegally dismiss Lumumba in early September 1960, Cordier had personally interviewed Lumumba in New York City on Aug. 1, 1960, when "Lumumba made a last visit to the UN;" and the following personal interaction happened during this interview:

"Cordier began his interview with Lumumba with a lengthy and condescending exposition...Ignoring the white man's speech, Lumumba made his own long reply. He admonished Cordier and expressed disappointment...that the UN had not evicted the Belgians..."

During the same month that Cordier was coordinating with Kasa-Vubu to illegally remove Lumumba from power in a "civilian coup," the CIA's Chief of Station in the Congo, Larry Devlin (using illegally the diplomatic cover of "consul" at the U.S. Embassy in Kinshasa/Leopoldville), was also covertly working to overthrow the democratically-elected government of Patrice Lumumba. In his 2007 book *Chief of Station, Congo: A Memoir of 1960-67*, Devlin (who died in 2008) describes what happened when he visited the Congolese presidential palace shortly after the "civilian coup" of Kasavubu that Cordier backed:

"...[Congolese National Army/ANC] Colonel Mobutu stood in the doorway flanked by two soldiers...'Wait for me outside,' he said softly to the soldiers. He closed the door and shook hands with me...Finally, he said, 'Here is the situation: the army is prepared to overthrow Lumumba. But only on the condition that the United States will recognize the government that would replace Lumumba's...'



"[CIA Director] Allen Dulles had made it absolutely clear to me that the United States wanted Lumumba removed from power, but I had always thought in terms of a legal or parliamentary change, not an army coup...Yet the more I considered Mobutu's plan, the better it sounded...

"`I've got to get back to my commanders,' Mobutu said, turning to leave. `I have to give them a `go' or a `no go' order. Lumumba doesn't know they're here, so they must get back to their bases before he finds out.'...

"...I held out my hand to Mobutu and said with as much conviction as I could muster: `I can assure you the United States government will recognize a temporary government composed of civilian technocrats.'

"...`The coup will take place within a week,' he said. `But I will need five thousand dollars[equivalent to around \$41,000 in 2017 U.S. dollars]to provide for my senior officers...'`

"...I assured Mobutu that the money would be available and arranged to meet him in his office...I left the presidential palace without further incident...I arrived at army headquarters at the early hour agreed upon with Mobutu...Mobutu said he had met his area commanders and told them that the coup was on. `I'll be setting a date and time shortly but it will be within the next week,' he said. `I'll take control of the radio station, announce the formation of new government.'...On the evening of Sept. 14 [1960]...at a party...at the home of Alison `Tally' Palmer, the American vice-consul...I...had a call with the news that Mobutu was on the radio announcing that the army was installing a government of technocrats...Our efforts to remove Lumumba...were at last bearing fruit..."



M'hamed Boucetta (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

In a statement at a Dec. 10, 1960 UN Security Council meeting, the Moroccan representative to the UN, Mhamet Boucetta, indicated how the CIA-supported Mobutu used some of the Congolese National Army [ANC] troops (that Cordier had paid with U.S. government-provided UN money) to "install a government of technocrats" between Sept. 13 (when a joint meeting of the Congolese Chamber of Representatives and Senate restored full power to the illegally "dismissed" Lumumba by 88 votes to 5 with 3 abstentions) and Sept. 14, 1960:

"I should like to tell you something I saw with my own eyes. I was present at the last two meetings held by this [Congolese] Parliament...By an overwhelming majority, the Parliament gave the legitimate Government a vote of confidence and renewed its mandate..."

"The next morning, a hundred soldiers with helmets and submachine guns at the ready and an old tank with a rusty gun were stationed in front of the Parliament building. The elected representatives of the people were not allowed to enter...The members of Parliament were rounded up and hustled away, payment of their allowances was stopped...That is what...we saw..."

And less than five months after Mobutu's first CIA-backed coup in September 1960, the 35-year-old Lumumba was murdered in the Katanga region of the Congo. As *The Congo From Leopold To Kabila: A People's History* book observed:

"As it turned out, Mobutu played a critical role in every step leading to Lumumba's assassination...He did so by the coup of 14 September [1960], Lumumba's arrest on 1 December [1960], and his incarceration at the elite military garrison of Mbano-Ngungu[Thysville]. And Mobutu was among the...Congolese involved in the...plan of sending Lumumba to his death in Katanga..."

And, according to *Death in the Congo*:

"CIA turncoats, among others, have testified that in the immediate aftermath of the assassination Devlin boasted to people in the Agency about his role in the murder...In 1960 he persisted in trying to finish off Lumumba and immediately took credit when the African was killed; he later persisted in denying that he tried...Justin O'Donnell, a senior officer from CIA headquarters got to Leopoldville[Kinshasa] on November 3[1960]. O'Donnell would oversee the murder and report to Devlin. In asking for O'Donnell after Washington's encouragement, Devlin let headquarters know that he still had...poisons, but also wanted a 'high-powered foreign make rifle with telescopic and silencer.'...Devlin asked for the rifle in writing a week after an unusual appearance by Lumumba on the balcony of his residents where he spoke to a crowd below...Devlin and those around him in the Congo would not rest until someone finished the job...The Belgians and the American fixated on murder..."

In a 2010 *All Africa* website column, a former Staff Director of the U.S. House of Representatives' Subcommittee on Africa, Stephen R. Weissman, also asserted that "Devlin gave a green light to delivering Lumumba to men who had publicly vowed to kill him" and "shortly before" Lumumba's "transfer" to where he was murdered, "Mobutu indicated to Devlin that Lumumba 'might be executed,' according to a Church Committee [of the U.S. Senate] interview," but "Devlin did not suggest that he offered any objection or caution."

In an Aug. 18, 1960 letter to Manchester College in Indiana Emeritus Professor V.F. Schwalm, former Columbia University President Cordier wrote the following about the democratically-elected Congolese prime minister that he would help oust from power less than a month later:

"...Mr. Lumumba, the Prime Minister....is completely irresponsible—if not a mad

man...He is wildly ambitious, lusting for power and strikes fear into anyone who crosses his path. There is really no such thing as a Congolese Government...There is a cabinet, but Lumumba uses it as his tool. Some members of the Cabinet share his vision and lust for power....The only real solution of the problem is a change of leadership. It will not be easy, however to remove Lumumba from his position...In various ways the Secretary-General has given encouragement to the moderates and they are also receiving encouragement from other powerful political sources..."

Patrice Lumumba, however, presented an alternative historical point of view in the last letter he wrote from the Camp Hardy military prison in Mbano-Ngungu[Thysville]-a letter to his wife-before being assassinated on January 17, 1961:

"My dear wife,

"I am writing these words not knowing whether they will reach you, when they will reach you, and whether I shall still be alive when you read them...What we wished for our country, its right to an honorable life, to unstained dignity, to independence without restrictions, was never desired by the Belgian imperialists and the Western allies, who found direct and indirect support, both deliberate and unintentional, amongst certain high officials of the United Nations, that organization in which we placed all our trust when we called on its assistance. Neither brutal assaults, nor cruel mistreatment, nor torture have ever led me to beg for mercy, for I prefer to die with my head held high, unshakable faith, and the greatest confidence in the destiny of my country rather than live in slavery and contempt for sacred principles. History will one day have its say, but it will not be the history that is taught in Brussels, Paris, Washington or in the United Nations, but the history which will be taught in the countries freed from imperialism and its puppets... Love live the Congo! Long live Africa!

"Patrice"

Listen to this [historical protest folk song](#) from 2017 about role of Belgian and U.S. governments, UN and former Columbia University administration officials in eliminating democratically elected Congolese PM Patrice Lumumba, between July 1960 and January 1961.

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