Revisiting the 'Hammarskjöld approach'

Henning Melber

During a debate in the UN Security Council in 2011, the Chinese Permanent Representative Li Baodong demanded that the peacekeeping operations of the organisation 'should adhere to the Hammarskjöld principles'[1]. On the occasion of a United Nations Day event the same year, the Cyprus Foreign Minister Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis praised Dag Hammarskjöld as 'the dove of preventive diplomacy'[2]. Finally, when Pope Francis addressed the 2015 UN General Assembly, the only former Secretary-General he mentioned by name was Dag Hammarskjöld[3]. These are a few examples that testify to the lasting legacy he created during his eight years in office (1953-1961).

Hammarskjöld was guided by strong personal values and ethics, and committed to global governance and a notion of social justice, integrity and international solidarity[4]. Applying such normative values was also a deliberate effort to involve, consult and thereby include all those affected, so that no party felt side-lined, ignored or bypassed. He realised that lasting solutions required a common sense of purpose and that inclusivity was an important component in mediating, peacebuilding and peacekeeping efforts. With a background as a high-ranking Swedish civil servant (who had never been a member of a political party but was directly involved in creating the Swedish welfare state as a trained economist)[5], Hammarskjöld was impregnated by the Swedish practice of broad participation by social agencies and representatives of the people in negotiation processes, seeking to find common ground.

During his terms in office, Hammarskjöld and his team at the Secretariat introduced several pioneering innovations to the proactive role of the UN in mediating conflict, undertaking preventative diplomacy and building peace. These included, most notably, the conceptualisation and design of peacekeeping[6], the introduction of special representatives to the UN Secretary-General[7] and the notion of 'silent diplomacy'[8]. The 'Hammarskjöld approach' and its underlying principles are well documented in many of his numerous speeches and reports.

Despite an elaborate diplomacy vested in the office of the Secretary-General, not every conflict that called for responsible international management would – due to the prohibitive stance of the directly affected party – allow the UN to act accordingly. And not every intervention was successful. The track record during the Hammarskjöld era showed the limitations of both his office and the international body during the Cold War polarisation. Yet, the practices and experiences then still offer relevant lessons for today as regards the potential role of the world body's intervention in conflicts despite the change of times and constellations[9].

CONTENT

Dag Hammarskjöld visiting the school of Givath-Jearim, a village for new immigrants in the Jerusalem hills, during his visit to Israel in 1956.

The Hammarskjöld principles

Inclusivity, like 'otherness' – during Hammarskjöld's era not a term in common parlance – were integral parts of what could be described as the Hammarskjöld principles. They were based on an understanding that it was only by embracing a variety of different interests and actors that a framework for lasting conflict resolution and peacebuilding could be achieved. For Hammarskjöld, the work of the UN should build on the commonality of humankind, its conduct and experience. He was of the conviction that the organisation represents more than the sum of its members. Many of his Introductions to the Annual Reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly – in as much as his speeches – were masterfully crafted reflections, which capture and re-think fundamental principles of international organisation. They address inter alia the distinction between 'impartiality' and 'neutrality' (1954), 'mediation' and 'reconciliation' (1955), 'good offices' (1959), the contours of the Charter as a 'constitutional framework for world-wide cooperation' (1960) and 'international civil service' (1961).

For Hammarskjöld, the UN was supposed to be the unique instrument for a peaceful solution of conflicts through negotiations guided not least by an all-embracing approach. The new member states, who after decolonisation joined the UN system in growing numbers from the 1950s onwards, were for him equal partners, to be treated with respect, and in full recognition of their sovereign rights (as well as obligations). He deliberately involved them in UN missions and relied on their support for peacekeeping initiatives. This implied a shift of emphasis, away from the focus on preserving the established international (dis)order of superpower rivalry between West and East, and towards a constructive way of dealing with the challenges represented by the changing international configuration. An important element of the negotiations was the modified agenda established through dialogue with the newly independent member states. This was based on Hammarskjöld's inclusive strategy of seeking support from those not trying to acquire or retain control over world affairs on the basis of material strength.

During the Suez crisis in 1956, Hammarskjöld stated in no uncertain terms to the Security Council that in his view 'the discretion and impartiality… imposed on the Secretary-General…[should] not degenerate into a policy of expediency'[10]. His even-handedness towards the big powers is demonstrated in an incident that Sture Linnér recalled in his Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture in 2007[11]. In July 1961, President J. F. Kennedy tried to intervene directly in the prevailing conflict in the Congo. Afraid that Antoine Gizenga, suspected of representing Soviet interests, would seize political power, and then campaign for election as prime minister, Kennedy demanded that the UN should oppose Gizenga's candidacy. He threatened that if this did not meet with compliance from member states, the United States of America and other Western powers might withdraw their support from the UN[12].

Reportedly, Hammarskjöld, in a phone conversation with Linnér, dismissed this unveiled threat with the following words: 'I do not intend to give way to any pressure, be it from the East or the West; we shall sink or swim. Continue to follow the line you find to be in accordance with the UN Charter[13].'

Dag Hammarskjöld held a firm belief in the autonomy of the office of the UN Secretary-General and the Secretariat, which he maintained ought not to be degraded to a mere instrument and conference machinery serving the interests of the powerful states. Hammarskjöld was repeatedly challenged by the Soviet Union to resign. In response, he delivered one of his most famous speeches. As he stressed, his office was supposed to serve not the most influential members of the organisation, but to be a loyal servant to the less influential states, many of which had no voice in the club of the powerful. As he stated:

> It is not the Soviet Union or indeed any other Big Powers which need the United Nations for their protection. It is all the others. In this sense, the Organization is first of all their Organization and I deeply believe in the wisdom with which they will be able to use it and guide it. I shall remain in my post during the term of office as a servant of the Organization in the interest of all those other nations as long as they wish me to do so. [Here the speech was interrupted for several minutes by a standing ovation.]
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> In this context the representative of the Soviet Union spoke of courage. It is very easy to resign. It is not so easy to stay on. It is very easy to bow to the wish of a Big Power. It is another matter to resist. As is well known to all members of this Assembly I have done so before on many occasions and in many directions. If it is the wish of those nations who see in the Organization their best protection in the present world, I shall now do so again[14].

Dag Hammarskjöld visiting a Palestinian refugee camp near Beirut.

The link between Hammarskjöld's intellectual background and his approach towards international law might be instructive[15]. Hammarskjöld adopted a 'flexible' approach, which reconciled the recognition of global norms and principles with the application of ethical principles[16]. This is reflected in his contextual vision of norms and principles. Hammarskjöld was one of the early defenders of the link between peace, security and human rights. Being convinced of the universal nature and character of these human rights may at the same time have promoted further his commitment to inclusivity. He perceived fundamental concepts, such as collective security or non-intervention through the lens of human rights and human security, by means of a focus on 'men' in addition to states, and on 'dignity' in addition to security – a nexus that is recognised in UN peace maintenance today. Hammarskjöld's personal ethics explain his openness towards UN intervention and protection, when the UN crossed the boundaries between peacekeeping and peace enforcement in the Congo.

The Hammarskjöld legacy

During his period in office, Hammarskjöld can be seen to have made three lasting contributions: 'peacekeeping operations (a new UN instrument), his realisation of the importance of acting at an early stage in crises (preventive diplomacy) and his emphasis on the position of the UN as an international resource (an internationally independent Secretariat)'[17]. Hammarskjöld's awareness of the dialectics and interrelationship between peace, security and human rights is apparent, as elsewhere, in his address to the American Jewish Committee in New York on 10 April 1957: 'We know that the question of peace and the question of human rights are closely related. Without recognition of human rights we shall never have peace, and it is only within the framework of peace that human rights can be fully developed[18].' Hammarskjöld's ethics, his concept of solidarity, his sense of fundamental universal values and human rights in combination with his respect for the multitude of identities within the human family, as well as his global leadership as the world's highest international civil servant, set standards that have lost none of their value and relevance[19]. These also included the insight that policy ultimately has its core in the inner nature of the individual actors involved.

Dag Hammarskjöld in front of the United Nations Headquarters, New York.

His approach to mediation, peacekeeping and peacebuilding is anything but an anachronistic matter, belonging to the past. Several specific abilities deserve to be considered in today's efforts to negotiate peace and find lasting solutions to conflicts. These include:

- his ability to acknowledge diverse interests as a point of departure for exploring settlements for a conflict (including so-called face-saving compromises);
- his willingness to listen and to understand first before offering his own ideas for a possible solution;
- his determination to honour the spirit and word of the UN Charter as the sole guiding principle for the values pursued;
- his steadfastness in resisting being used as a tool or instrument by any member state due to its influence or political orientation;
- his belief that every UN member state deserves respect and that the UN is as much there for the 'weak' as it is for the 'strong';
- his conviction that any internationally lasting agreement should be brokered by and through the authority of the UN Secretariat, which should always be in charge of and maintain the ultimate control over UN interventions, not least through the executive power vested in the Secretary-General.

The above list points to his firm belief in what we now call inclusivity: the importance of engaging with the variety of agencies and actors in their own right and on equal footing. In many ways he saw his own role as one of showing respect and recognition for the 'weak', who otherwise would not be included in negotiations and the search for solutions.

These were certainly factors that contributed to his relative success in several cases of silent diplomacy as well as direct intervention in conflicts. But it was the credibility Hammarskjöld gained as Secretary-General, through living up to the ideals he articulated, which may have been the single most important aspect of his track record. The respect for and recognition of his integrity and the belief in his trustworthiness made him an accepted counterpart for dialogue in search of solutions among most of those who were opponents in conflicts. It seems appropriate to end with a longer entry in Hammarskjöld's personal, posthumously published notebook, *Markings*, written towards the end of 1955, which is a testimony to the moral compass he consistently followed. It still reads like a vade mecum for efforts to engage in peacebuilding today:

> It is more important to be aware of the grounds for your own behaviour than to understand the motives of another.
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> The other's 'face' is more important than your own. If, while pleasing another's cause, you are at the same time seeking something for yourself, you cannot hope to succeed.
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> You can only hope to find a lasting solution to a conflict if you have learned to see the other objectively, but, at the same time, to experience his difficulties subjectively.
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> The man who 'likes people' disposes once and for all of the man who despises them.
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> All first-hand experience is valuable, and he who has given up looking for it will one day find that he lacks what he needs: a closed mind is a weakness, and he who approaches persons or painting or poetry without the useful ambition to learn a new language and so gain access to someone else's perspective of life, let him beware[20].

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Notes

[1] 'China calls for necessary improvement of peacekeeping theory, practice', *People's Daily Online,* 27 August 2011.

[2] 'FM: UN must prove its effectiveness', *Famagusta Gazette,* 21 October 2011.

[3] Lily Rothman, 'Why Pope Francis Praised Dag Hammarskjöld', *Time*, 25 September 2015.

[4] See, for an introduction, Hans Corell, Inge Lønning and Henning Melber, *The Ethics of Hammarskjöld.* Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation 2010; Ove Bring, Henning Melber and Peter Tejler, *Dag Hammarskjöld and Global Governance* (Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2011); Monica Bouman, 'Dag Hammarskjöld and the politics of hope', in Carsten Stahn and Henning Melber (eds), *Peace Diplomacy, Global Justice and International Agency: Rethinking Human Security and Ethics in the Spirit of Dag Hammarskjöld* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 130.

[5] Maybe the hitherto most instructive essay on the close linkage between Swedish social norms and values at the time and Hammarskjöld's translation of these into his work as an international civil servant is Helmut Klumpjan, 'Eine Synthese zwischen Nation und Welt: Dag Hammarskjöld – Der Weltbürger, der stets ein Schwede blieb', in *Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961): Für eine friedliche Welt – Ideen und Impulse des zweiten UN-Generalsekretärs.* ed. Manuel Fröhlich, Helmut Klumpjan and Henning Melber, (Frankfurt/Main: Brandes & Apsel, 2011). An intimate in-depth study of the spiritual and the secular Hammarskjöld is offered by Roger Lipsey in his *Hammarskjöld: A Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

[6] The introduction of such planned intervention through a UN military contingency under the Secretary-General was as much the achievement of Lester B. Pearson, born during the Suez crisis, who became Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs and later Prime Minister, and who was a close confidant of Hammarskjöld. See Terence Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy*. London: Hutchinson 1965.

[7] See Manuel Fröhlich, 'The John Holmes Memorial Lecture: Representing the United Nations–Individual Actors, International Agency, and Leadership', *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2014, 169-193.

[8] Cf. Peter Wallensteen, 'Dag Hammarskjöld's diplomacy: lessons learned', in Stahn and Melber, ' *Peace Diplomacy*'.

[9] See, among the most authoritative analyses on the political legacy of Hammarskjöld, Manuel Fröhlich, *Dag Hammarskjöld und die Vereinten Nationen: Die politische Ethik des UNO-Generalsekretärs* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002); also published in a considerably shorter version as *Political Ethics and the United Nations: Dag Hammarskjöld as Secretary-General* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

[10] Security Council Official Records, Eleventh Year, 751st Meeting, 31 October 1956, in *Public Papers of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations. Volume III: Dag Hammarskjöld 1956-1957*, selected and edited with commentary by Andrew W. Cordier and Wilder Foote (New York and London: Columbia University Press 1973), 309.

[11] Linnér (1917-2010) was at the time of Hammarskjöld's death Under-Secretary-General in charge of the UN mission in the Congo. He presented the Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture in Uppsala on 15 October 2007.

[12] For more details on this period and the unusually blunt intervention see the comprehensive documentation in Madeleine G. Kalb, *The Congo Cables: The Cold War in Africa – From Eisenhower to Kennedy* (New York: MacMillan, 1982), 274-276. See also on this period and US policy, John Kent, *America, the UN and Decolonisation: Cold War conflict in the Congo* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2010).

[13] Sture Linnér, 'Dag Hammarskjöld and the Congo crisis, 1960-61', in Sture Linnér and Sverker Åström, *UN Secretary-General Hammarskjöld. Reflections and personal experiences: The 2007 Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture* (Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2008) 26.

[14] Dag Hammarskjöld, 'I Shall Remain in My Post…' – Second Statement of Reply, New York, 3 October 1960, General Assembly Official Records, Fifteenth Session, 883rd plenary meeting, in *Public Papers of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations. Volume V: Dag Hammarskjöld 1960-1961*, selected and edited with commentary by Andrew W. Cordier and Wilder Foote (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1975), 200-201.

[15] See, i.a., Ove Bring, 'Hammarskjöld's dynamic approach to the UN Charter and international law', in Stahn and Melber, *Peace Diplomacy, Global Justice and International Agency*.

[16] See also Oscar Schachter, 'Dag Hammarskjöld and the Relation of Law to Politics', *American Journal of International Law,* vol. 56, no. 1, 1962, 1-8.

[17] Peter Wallensteen, *Dag Hammarskjöld* (Stockholm: The Swedish Institute. 2004), 41ff.

[18] Dag Hammarskjöld, 'Address on Human Rights and the Work for Peace at the Fiftieth Anniversary Dinner of the American Jewish Committee, New York, 10 April 1957', in *Public Papers of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations. Volume III*, 555.

[19] See, as a recent affirmation, Hans Corell, 'Dag Hammarskjöld, the United Nations and the rule of law in today's world', in Stahn and Melber, *Peace Diplomacy, Global Justice and International Agency*.

[20] Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings* (New York: Random House/Ballantines,1983), 96.