

Death in the Congo, Why Did the US Want to Kill Patrice Lumumba?

Columbia University and the Elimination of Patrice Lumumba Revisited Part I

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Global Research, July 25, 2017

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

Theme: [History](#), [Law and Justice](#), [Media Disinformation](#), [United Nations](#)

Featured image: Former Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo Patrice Lumumba (Source: Bob Feldman 68)

*“...I have learned much about **William A.M. Burden II** from **Peggy and I**... I was best acquainted with his 20-year tenure... as Chairman of the Board of the **Institute for Defense Analyses [IDA]** and his contribution to the quality of the output of this “think tank’s serving the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff...His government service reached its apogee during his two years, 1959-61, as Ambassador to Belgium...He has been most responsive over these years also to the needs of **Columbia University** which he has served as a trustee...” - General and former **IDA President Maxwell Taylor** in foreword to **Columbia University** Life Trustee **William A.M. Burden’s** 1982 book, **Peggy and I: A Life Too Busy For A Dull Moment***

*“Before I accepted my ambassadorship in Belgium I had been given in 1957...appointment as ‘a public trustee’ of the **Institute for Defense Analyses [IDA]**. It became one of the top priorities of my life...I...was elected chairman in May, 1959...One of the unfortunate side-effects of the student protest movement against the Vietnam War was that **IDA** itself became a target for anti-war protests, and its member universities were subjected to faculty and student pressure to cancel their ties...” - **Columbia University** Life Trustee **William A.M. Burden** in his 1982 book, **Peggy and I***

*“Only prudent, therefore to plan on basis that Lumumba Government threatens our vital interests in Congo and Africa generally. A principal objective of our political and diplomatic action must therefore be to destroy Lumumba government as now constituted...” - **Columbia University** Life Trustee and U.S. Ambassador to Belgium **William A.M. Burden** in a July 19, 1960 cable to the U.S. State Department*

*“The Belgians were sort of toying with the idea of seeing to it that Lumumba was assassinated. I went beyond my instructions and said, well, I didn’t think it would be a bad idea either, but I naturally never reported this to Washington—but Lumumba was assassinated. I think it was all to the good...” - **Columbia University** Life Trustee **William A. M. Burden** in a 1968 Oral History Interview with **Columbia University** School of Journalism’s Advanced International Reporting Program Director John Luter*

When Columbia and Barnard students first occupied Hamilton Hall on **Columbia**

University's campus on Apr. 23, 1968, one of their six demands was "that the university sever all ties with the **Institute for Defense Analyses [IDA]** and that [then-Columbia] President Kirk and Trustee Burden resign their positions on the Executive Committee of that institution immediately."



Columbia Life Trustee William A.M. Burden (Source: [Find A Grave Memorial](#))

Coincidentally, besides representing Columbia University—with the (now-deceased) Grayson Kirk—on the Executive Committee of the Pentagon's **IDA** weapons research think-tank in 1968, Columbia Life Trustee **William A.M. Burden** was also the U.S. Ambassador to Belgium who recommended fifty-seven years ago, in July 1960, that "a principal objective" of the Republican administration in Washington, D.C. of former Columbia University President Eisenhower "must therefore be to destroy" the democratically-elected "Lumumba government as now constituted" in Belgium's former Congo [Zaire] colony. As **David Talbot** recalled in his 2015 book, ***The Devil's Chessboard: Allen Dulles, the CIA, and the Rise of America's Secret Government***:

"**Dulles, Doug Dillon** (then serving as a State Department undersecretary), and **William Burden**, the U.S. ambassador to Belgium, led the charge within the **Eisenhower** administration to first demonize and then dispose of [Patrice] Lumumba. All three men had financial interests in the Congo. The Dillon family's investment bank handled the Congo's bond issues. Dulles's old law firm represented the American Metal Climax (later AMAX), a mining giant with holdings in the Congo...Ambassador **Burden** was a company director...Ambassador **Burden** was a Vanderbilt heir...

"**Burden**, who had acquired his ambassadorship by contributing heavily to the 1956 **Eisenhower** campaign, spent his days in Brussels attending diplomatic receptions...It was the ambassador who first raised alarms about the rising **Patrice Lumumba**...**Burden** began sending agitated cables to Dulles in Washington well before Lumumba's election...By the...summer [of 1960], Burden was cabling Washington 'to destroy Lumumba government' as a threat to 'our vital interest in Congo.'..."

"...At an NSC [National Security Council] meeting in August 1960, **Eisenhower** gave [CIA Director Allen] Dulles direct approval to 'eliminate' Lumumba. **Robert Johnson**, the minutes taker at the NSC meeting...said there was nothing ambiguous about Eisenhower's lethal order. 'I was surprised that I would ever hear a president say anything like this in my presence or the presence of a group of people'..."

"...Lumumba 'would remain a grave danger,' Dulles told an NSC meeting on Sept. 21, 1960, 'as long as he was not yet disposed of.'..."

A Life Trustee of **Columbia University** since 1956, **Burden** (who died in 1984) was among the "people in the **Eisenhower** administration" who "hunted for ways to reduce Lumumba's influence" and, along with CIA Director Allen Dulles "and the CIA's man in Leopoldville [Kinshasa]," **Larry Devlin**, "devised actions," according to 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***.

The same book also noted that Devlin, was “a CIA agent from the late 1940s” who “began spying for the CIA in Brussels, where he had a cover position as an attaché” in 1958 and where he “made contacts with the Congo’s politicians, who came to Belgium for various deliberations.” After his appointment as the CIA’s chief of station in the Congo in “the second part of 1959,” Devlin “went there with **Burden**” in March 1960, when the Columbia Life Trustee and his wife traveled through the still not-yet independent Belgian Congo. Coincidentally, besides being a Columbia trustee in 1960, **Burden** was also a trustee of the Fairfield Foundation that was utilized by the CIA, during the Cold War Era of the 1950s and 1960s, as a conduit for covertly financing projects and journals, like the American Congress of Cultural Freedom [CCF] and **Encounter** magazine, which promoted U.S. power elite foreign policy objectives.

Following his March 1960 trip to the Congo with CIA Station Chief Devlin, “**Burden** told the Department of State that America could not permit the Congo to go left after independence,” according to **Death in the Congo**. And after the Congo [Zaire] was granted its formal independence on June 30, 1960, the Columbia Life Trustee—who also “maintained during his ambassadorship, a directorship in American Metal Climax, whose Rhodesian copper interests were to make it the leading corporate defender of a conservative order...in Katanga (where Belgian troops began supporting an illegally-established secessionist regime on July 11, 1960), according to **Roger Housen**’s 2002 paper “Why Did The US Want To Kill Prime Minister Lumumba Of The Congo?”—began pushing for the removal of the democratically-elected anti-imperialist Lumumba as Congolese Prime Minister in July 1960. As **Madeline Kalb** observed in her 1982 book, **The Congo Cables: The Cold War in Africa**:

“The U.S. Embassy in Brussels, replying to the U.S. State Department’s query on July 19...took a very strong line regarding Lumumba, recommending openly for the first time that the United States try to remove him from office. The U.S. ambassador, **William Burden**, said he believed the situation called for ‘urgent measures on various levels.’...**Burden** concluded by noting that while the U.S. Embassy in Leopoldville [Kinshasa] had the primary responsibility for dealing with the internal political situation in the Congo, the CIA in Brussels would be ‘reporting separately some specific suggestions.’”

The **Death in the Congo** book also noted:

“...**Burden** barraged Washington with memos asking greater sympathy for the [Belgian] imperialists...He understood, he told [then-U.S.] Secretary [of State Christian] Herter, why the United States would look at issues from the point of view of the Congo. Nevertheless, America should instead pressure the UN to support Belgium. At the end of July **Burden** briefed Dulles when returned to Washington for discussions. From Europe, **Burden** would continue as a mouthpiece for the more rabid anticommunism guiding Dulles’s report to the NSC [National Security Council]...”



Lawrence R. Devlin in the early 1960s when he was station chief in Congo. (Source: [The New York Times](#))

Columbia Trustee Burden also apparently pressured *Time* magazine's then-owner, Henry Luce, to not do a Lumumba cover story, with Lumumba's picture on the front of the magazine, during July 1960 discussions in Paris about the Congolese political situation between Burden and U.S. Ambassador to France Amory Houghton, U.S. Ambassador to the Congo Clair "Tim" Timberlake and CIA Chief of Station in the Congo Larry Devlin. As Devlin recalled in his 2007 book *Chief of Station, Congo: A Memoir of 1960-67*:

"We [Devlin and "Tim" Timberlake] moved to Ambassador Houghton's office where we were joined by Ambassador Burden for more detailed talks concerning the Congo and its problems. We were provided lodging at Ambassador Houghton's residence and dined there with the two ambassadors. During our discussions, Tim brought up a delicate matter: 'Time magazine plans to do a cover story on Lumumba with his picture on the front of the magazine.' He continued, 'Celebrity coverage at home will make him even more difficult to deal with. He's a first-class headache as it is.'

"Then why don't you get the story killed?' Burden asked. 'Or at least modified?'

"I tried to persuade the **Time** man in Leopoldville [Kinshasa] until I was blue in the face,' Tim replied. 'But he said there was nothing he could do about it because the story had already been sent to New York.'

"You can't expect much from a journalist at that level,' **Burden** said pulling out his address book and flipping through the pages. He picked up the phone and put a call through to the personal assistant of Henry Luce, **Time's** owner.

"Luce soon returned the call. After a brief, friendly exchange that made clear his personal relationship with Luce, **Burden** bluntly told him that he would have to change the Lumumba cover story. Luce apparently said that the magazine was about to go to press. 'Oh, come on, Henry,' Burden said, 'you must have other cover stories in the can.' They chatted for a few more minutes before Burden hung up.

“A few days later in the United States we picked up a copy of the magazine with a new and different cover story. Lumumba had been relegated to the international section...”

The *Death in the Congo* book indicated one reason that Columbia Life Trustee Burden was influential enough in U.S. Establishment circles to be able to stop *Time* magazine from putting Patrice Lumumba’s picture on the magazine’s front cover in the summer of 1960:

“Burden was born into the colossally rich Vanderbilt family. He had a background in aviation and finance...Burden used his great wealth and the contacts that came from it to secure upper-level governmental experience, socializing with moneyed internationally oriented Republicans...”

In 1973, for example, besides still being both a Columbia trustee and the honorary chairman of the board of the Pentagon’s Institute for Defense Analyses [IDA] weapons research think tank, Burden—a former Assistant for Research and Development to the Secretary of the Air Force—also sat on the board of directors of Lockheed, CBS, Manufacturers Hanover Trust and Allied Chemical and was still a director of American Metal Climax [AMAX], according to a Feb.6, 1973 *Columbia Daily Spectator* article. In addition, the former U.S. ambassador to Belgium also sat on the board of trustees of the Museum of Modern Art in 1973.

By August of 1960, former Columbia University President Eisenhower’s administration in Washington, D.C. “feared that Lumumba’s oratorical talent would make him a thorn in their side even if he were maneuvered out of power” and “decided it made more sense to kill him,” according to Mark Zepezauer’s 1994 book, *The CIA’s Greatest Hits*. After CIA Chief of Station in the Congo Devlin met with CIA Director Dulles at CIA headquarters and then returned to the Congo in August 1960, **Eisenhower** called for the elimination of Lumumba at an Aug. 18, 1960 meeting of the National Security Council, and the following happened, according to *Death in the Congo*:

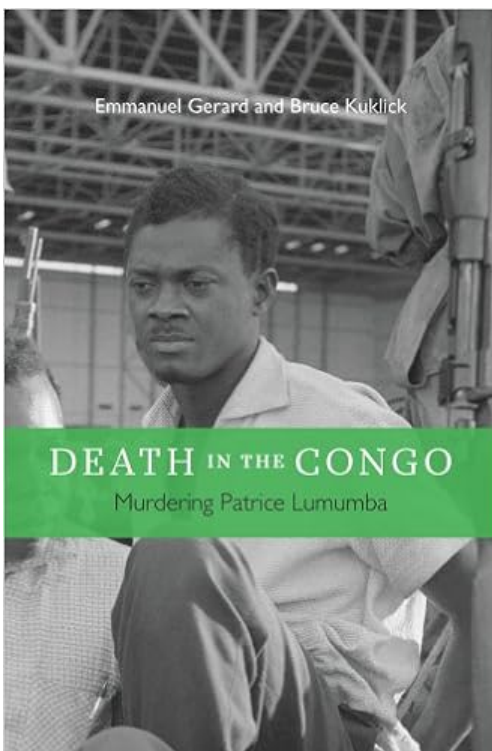
“Project Wizard had come into being. It grew out of Devlin’s ideas but also out of proposals of the Brussels CIA...The next day the CIA cabled Devlin to move forward with various ramped-up dirty tricks...Ultimate formal approval of the government’s most unpleasant jobs came through a standing four-person subcommittee of the National Security Council, the ‘Special Group.’ In addition to a note-taker, it consisted of a top man of the Department of State and of Defense; Dulles; and [White House National Security Adviser] Gordon Gray, who spoke for the president. On August 25 [1960], Dulles had his regular meeting with the Special Group. He outlined the mounting anti-Lumumba exercises of Project Wizard...After some discussion, the Special Group agreed not to ‘rule out’ consideration...of ‘any particular kind of activity which might contribute to getting rid of Lumumba.’

“The next day Dulles himself wired Devlin about the ‘removal’ of Lumumba as ‘an urgent and prime objective.’ With a State Department nod, Dulles allowed Devlin some freedom of operation and stipulated ‘more aggressive action if it can remain covert.’ The CIA also awarded ...an additional \$100,000 [equivalent to over \$821,000 in 2017 US dollars] to accomplish these goals should a ‘target of opportunity’ present itself and should Devlin not have time to sound out either the embassy in the Congo or the CIA at home...”

As the now-deceased Devlin recalled in his 2007 book *Chief of Station, Congo*:

“...To the best of my knowledge, no other station chief had ever been given such latitude...If further evidence was required that Washington supported our own conclusion about replacing Lumumba, that was it...We were already monitoring parliament and encouraging and guiding the actions of various parliamentary opposition groups that we had penetrated...We were also using [a Belgian citizen and CIA agent named] Jacque to insert anti-Lumumba articles in the country’s leading newspaper...

“With the full backing of Headquarters, the station began to work on a plan to remove Lumumba from power. One of our early operations, organized by Jacque who provided...financial support, was an anti-Lumumba demonstration when the latter spoke at meeting of African foreign ministers held in Leopoldville [Kinshasa] on Aug. 25 [1960]. On his arrival, hostile demonstrators shouted ‘a bas Lumumba’ (‘down with Lumumba’), and when he began to speak to the delegates, the mob drowned him out shouting anti-Lumumba slogans.”



Then, according to *Death in the Congo*, “on the evening of Sept. 3 [1960], Congolese **President Joseph Kasa-Vubu** summoned” the UN Secretary General’s Special Representative in Leopoldville [Kinshasha] during the first two weeks of September 1960, **Andrew Cordier**, for a meeting. Coincidentally, the **Columbia University** board of trustees (that included by-then former U.S. ambassador to the Congo Burden), would later appoint **Cordier** to be the Dean of its School of International Affairs [School of International and Public Affairs] between 1962 and 1968, to be the Columbia President who succeeded Grayson Kirk between August 1968 and September 1970 and to again be School of International Affairs Dean between September 1970 and 1972. The same book also observed:

“Cordier and Kasa-Vubu had more meetings over the next two days, Sept. 4 and 5 [1960]...A few minutes before 8 p.m. on Sept. 5, Kasa-Vubu sent his Belgian adviser Jef Van Bilsen to Cordier with a formal written exhortation. Cordier should close the airports and monitor the Leopoldville radio station. Then, at 8:12, Kasa-Vubu appeared at the station...He nervously

asserted that he was sacking Lumumba...Cordier immediately implemented Kasa-Vubu's written solicitations...The firing was invalid...Lumumba made the illegality of Kasavubu's ploy clear in a letter...delivered to Cordier at 4 a.m. on Sept. 6 [1960]...On Wednesday afternoon, Sept. 7 [1960], in the Congo's house of representatives Lumumba yet again explained the illegality of Kasa-Vubu's acts...For 5 days Cordier took instructions from politicians who had no justifiable authority. He had closed the radio station and shut the airports because Kasa-Vubu asked him...When Kasa-Vubu pitched Lumumba out [as Congolese prime minister], the Congo's [ceremonial] president had the help of Belgian and UN authorities...and also the goodwill of the CIA. At this time the Americans put Joseph Ileo, Kasa-Vubu's choice for prime minister, on the payroll, although he had already been funded to secure his election as president of the Congo's senate..."

According to Professor of Political Science **George Nzongola-Ntalaja's** 2003 book, ***The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History***, however, "both houses of" the Congo's "parliament, where Lumumba still had a working majority gave him a vote of confidence and rejected Kasa-Vubu's decision as null and void." But on Sept. 14, 1960, future Congolese/Zairean dictator Mobutu "pulled off his first military coup with the help of the CIA." Prior to Mobutu's Sept. 14, 1960 military coup, CIA Director Dulles had flown to Brussels to brief **Burden** "on the recent decisions of the National Security Council" and told **Burden** that "he believed the leader we could depend on in a showdown with Lumumba was young **Colonel Joseph Mobutu**, second in command of the Congolese army," according to **Burden's *Peggy and I*** book.

Back in the United States on Sept. 19, 1960, "Dulles and his immediate subordinates launched a top-secret communication channel to Devlin called PROP, which would only discuss assassination" of Lumumba, according to ***Death in the Congo***;" while "in a document signed in October 1960, the then-Belgian minister for African Affairs, **Count Harold d'Aspremot Lyden**, stated explicitly that Belgian interests "required 'the final elimination of Lumumba,' according to ***The Congo from Leopold to Kabila***. And by the end of January 1961, the democratically-elected and illegally ousted Congolese prime minister had been physically "eliminated."

Coincidentally, in a 1968 oral history interview with former ***Newsweek*** editor and **Columbia University** Journalism School faculty member **Joel Luter**, less than 8 years later, Columbia Life Trustee and then-**IDA** Executive Committee member and chairman of the **IDA** board of trustees **Burden** made the following comment about the murder of Lumumba and two colleagues, Congolese **Senate Vice-President Joseph Okito** and Congolese **Youth and Sports Minister Maurice Mpolo**, on Jan. 17, 1961 in the Katanga area of the Congo[Zaire]:

"The Belgians were sort of toying with the idea of seeing to it that Lumumba was assassinated. I went beyond my instructions and said, well, I didn't think it would be a bad idea either, but I naturally never reported this to Washington—but Lumumba was assassinated. I think it was all to the good..."

Bur in his 1967 book, ***Challenge of the Congo***, **Kwame Nkrumah** (the democratically-elected Ghanaian head of state who was forced out of office in a 1966 CIA-orchestrated military coup) wrote the following about what happened in the Congo during Columbia Life Trustee **Burden's** term as U.S. Ambassador to Belgium and during the period when former **Columbia University President Cordier** was the UN Secretary-General's Special

Representative in the Congo:

“Somewhere in Katanga in the Congo...three of our brother freedom fighters have been done to death...They have been killed because the United Nations...denied to the lawful Government of the Congo...means of self-protection...The murder of Patrice Lumumba and of his two colleagues...is unique in that it is the first time in history that the legal ruler of a country has been done to death with the open connivance of a world organization in whom that ruler put his trust...Kasa-Vubu illegally tried to remove Patrice Lumumba from office and to substitute another Government. When Lumumba wished to broadcast to the people, explaining what had happened, the United Nations...prevented him by force from speaking...

“...The United Nations, which could exert its authority to prevent Patrice Lumumba from broadcasting, was, so it pleaded, quite unable to prevent his arrest by mutineers or his transfer, through the use of airfields under United Nations control...The United Nations would not effectively intervene to save the life of the Prime Minister or his colleagues...Our dear brothers Patrice Lumumba, Maurice Mpolo and Joseph Okito are dead...”.

And as **Ludo De Witte** recalled in his 2001 preface to the English edition of his book ***The Assassination of Lumumba***:

“...Without the steps taken by Washington and the United Nations during the preceding months, the assassination could never have been carried out. In July 1960, after Belgium intervened in the Congo and after the rich copper state of Katanga seceded, the United States went into action...U.S. **President Dwight Eisenhower** had instructed his aides to liquidate Lumumba and a top secret CIA unit was given the task of eliminating him...Lumumba’s transfer to Katanga, delivering him into the hands of his worst enemies, was done with the full knowledge of Lawrence Devlin, the CIA station chief...UN complicity is demonstrated by the help given to Mobutu’s soldiers in capturing Lumumba...The assassination of Lumumba and tens of thousands of other Congolese nationalists, from 1960 to 1965, was the West’s ultimate attempt to destroy the continent’s authentic independent development...”

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