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Letters from Sir Brian Unwin, Private Secretary to Lord Alport, British High Commissioner in Salisbury, Rhodesia at the time of the crash and Ms Joy Dorsett, both published on 31 August and from Justice Richard Goldstone, member of the Hammarskjöld Commission, published 2 September, following those from Dr Mandy Banton, Dr Henning Melber and David Wardrop, published on 29 August.

* Several of your correspondents have complained of lack of transparency on the part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office over the tragic death of UN secretary general Dag Hammarskjöld in an air crash near Ndola in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) on the night of 17-18 September 1961 ([Letters](#), 29 August). There is ample evidence available for study. As almost certainly the only British official still living who was present at Ndola airport throughout that fateful night (as a junior diplomat I accompanied the British high commissioner, Lord Alport, who had been instructed to arrange ceasefire talks between Hammarskjöld and Moïse Tshombe, the president of the breakaway Congolese province of Katanga), I have written [an account of the night's events that was published in the Guardian](#) (25 August 2011). Lord Alport's official dispatch to the FCO of 25 September 1961, formally reporting on the developments prior to, during and immediately after the crash, is publicly available, as also, among other sources, is the report and voluminous accompanying documentation of the privately sponsored inquiry by Stephen Sedley of September 2013, to which I also gave lengthy evidence.

There are many conspiracy theories, but unless further inquiries initiated by the present UN secretary general produce new and conclusive evidence to the contrary, I shall continue to believe that the tragic crash was due to pilot error.

Brian Unwin

Dorking, Surrey

- My brother Bengt-Åke Bengs wrote to you in 1966 including a pamphlet he had written about the Ndola accident. My brother had been a captain with the airline SAS and had 4,000 piloting hours with the UN in similar operations in [Africa](#). He put forward the theory that the accident was due to pilot error. He had seen reports and interviews taken immediately after the accident which had been flown direct to Stockholm and kept secret.

Joy (Hjordis) Dorsett

St Albans, Hertfordshire

The 2013 report of an independent international commission of jurists, of which I was a member, concluded that, pilot error, though unproven, was the default explanation of the 1961 crash at Ndola in which [Dag Hammarskjöld](#) died. However, there was at least one other well-supported explanation, namely that the UN chartered airliner had been fired on by a jet fighter – probably a Katangan plane piloted by a Belgian or South African mercenary – as it came in over the forest to land.

As to recent suggestions made by some of your readers, Hammarskjöld (who would not wear a seat belt) and a security guard were thrown clear, but the former died almost instantly from the impact and the latter a few days later from burns. Bullets were found in the charred bodies in the burnt-out aircraft, but whether these had come from outside the plane or from the explosion of UN bodyguards' ammunition in the blaze has never been established.

Sir Brian Unwin ([Letters](#), 31 August) is entitled to his view that the cause was pilot error, but not all the alternatives are, as he suggests, conspiracy theories – that is to say, theories which reject all contrary evidence as part of the postulated conspiracy. The [Sedley commission's report](#) picked its way with care through copious evidential material and was accepted and acted on by the UN, whose own panel of independent experts broadly endorsed our views.

Perhaps the most important of these is that it is highly likely that some member states of the UN, especially but not only the US, hold records or transcripts of cockpit transmissions in the minutes before the plane came down. If so, these may well put the cause of the crash, whatever it was, beyond doubt. But neither the US National Security Agency, which has gradually resiled from its admission to our commission that it held two relevant records, nor, as Dr Banton's [letter](#) (29 August) suggests, the UK government, has so far responded with any vigour to the secretary-general's plea for cooperation.

Richard J Goldstone

Morningside, South Africa

[Justice Richard Goldstone was a member of the Hammarskjöld Commission]