CHAPTER 4

The Visionary: Dag Hammarskjöld

It took a strong, outstanding personality like that of Hammarskjöld to give to the Secretary-General’s office such an impetus . . . by giving life and dynamism to the Secretary-General’s office, Hammarskjöld gave by the same token life and impetus to the Organization itself—Mongi Slim, past president of General Assembly.

(Slim 1965, 7)

INTRODUCTION

Looking back at Dag Hammarskjöld’s time in office, Larry Trachtenberg asks, “What kind of leader was Dag Hammarskjöld during his tenure as secretary-general? Much has been written about the man and his successes and failures, but little about the type of leader he was or the wellsprings of his leadership” (1982, 613). The content analysis coding results presented in the last chapter, which indicate that Hammarskjöld possessed a visionary leadership style, are the first step toward addressing Trachtenberg’s query. This chapter turns to the behavioral side of the equation to explore whether Hammarskjöld’s visionary leadership style had an impact on his actions as Secretary-General in the manner expected. As this chapter demonstrates, the visionary style is evident in his behavior while in office. He was notably involved in attempting to influence the handling of peace and security issues as an independent, dynamic Secretary-General who employed the full roster of influential tools in his repertoire.

To support this argument, the chapter first discusses Hammarskjöld’s visionary style. The chapter begins with his election, which was based on the misguided managerial expectations of the member-states.

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This discussion then turns to his overarching visionary style and the characteristics that make up this style in order to support the content analysis findings. The second part of the chapter discusses his behavior as Secretary-General. Since this section seeks to illustrate how he behaved in a visionary manner, it is preceded by a brief review of what Hammarskjöld’s vision entailed so that his attempts to put this into place may be better understood. The behavior section begins with an overview of the general visionary pattern of his political behavior and is followed by a specific analysis of his time in office based on the framework of influential activities that was set out in chapter 3.

**Hammarskjöld: The Man Behind the Office**

**The Election: A Visionary in Manager’s Clothing**

Hammarskjöld took office in 1953, was re-elected to a second term in 1957, and served until his untimely death in a plane crash in 1961. Before serving as Secretary-General, he had devoted his life to the civil service in his home country Sweden. Hammarskjöld seemed to be an unlikely candidate to become a visionary Secretary-General and he was selected precisely because the great powers did not expect him to act as such. As Jakobson, who later ran for Secretary-General but lost out to Waldheim, details,

How Hammarskjöld came to be appointed secretary-general in 1952 is a story abounding in irony. He did not seek the office, and those who selected him had no intention of launching him onto a spectacular career. The big powers of the time were tired of the political pretensions of Trygve Lie, the first secretary-general; they wanted a faceless bureaucrat to run the Secretariat, and Dag Hammarskjöld, a neutral civil servant from neutral Sweden seemed perfect for the part. (1998, 75)

As Jakobson indicates, Hammarskjöld did not pursue the Secretary-Generalship. When first informed that he had been chosen to be the second Secretary-General, he thought that the message was an April Fools Day joke. Once he was convinced that the offer was valid, he initially hesitated to accept the position, but quickly decided that this was a task from which he could not turn away.

Very little was known about Hammarskjöld during the selection process. Once his name was suggested, the Americans scrambled to