

COVERT ACTION AS A FOREIGN POLICY TOOL OF THE U.S.:

EXPLAINING THE ROLE OF SECRECY

by

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(Under the Direction of Loch K. Johnson)

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the role of secrecy when U.S. decision makers used covert actions as a foreign policy tool to accomplish their foreign policy objectives during the Cold War period. Two hypotheses offer different explanations about the role of secrecy in covert action. ‘External constraint’ hypothesis stipulates that decision makers used covert action in order to evade negative international publicity, to avoid direct confrontation with the Soviet over the regions that U.S. was intervening, and to protect agents and agencies that already infiltrated the target states of U.S. covert action. In contrast, ‘internal constraint’ hypothesis stipulates that U.S. decision makers attempted to outskirt domestic institutional constraints by using covert action. Two case studies – Operation PBSUCCESS in Guatemala from the early Cold War period and Contra War in Nicaragua from the late Cold War period – were conducted to evaluate validity of internal and external hypotheses. The results of case studies seem to indicate that U.S. decision makers used covert action to evade both negative international and domestic publicity.

INDEX WORDS: Intelligence, U.S. Foreign policy, U.S. Covert Action, Guatemala, Nicaragua

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PREFACE

By its broadest definition, covert action means any activity carried out in a manner that conceals the identities of the parties who are responsible for that action. In everyday life, ordinary people might engage in “covert action” for a variety of reasons, in a variety of circumstances. In the jargon of the U.S. intelligence community, covert action is usually understood as action undertaken by the U.S. government in foreign states or territories for the purpose of accomplishing U.S. foreign policy objectives without disclosing American involvement. (Lowenthan, 2009; Schumitt & Shusky, 2002; Richelson, 1999) During the Cold War, U.S. decision-makers made extensive use of covert action to bring about regime change in “Third World” countries. Some of the more famous cases of the U.S. covert action during the Cold War include: Operation AJAX in Iran to topple the Mossadeq regime in 1952, Operation PBSUCCESS in Guatemala to unseat the Arbenz regime in 1953, and Operation FUBELT in Chile to overthrow the Allende regime in 1973 (Lilley & Downes, 2007).

The terms ‘covert action’ and ‘covert operation’ are used interchangeably in U.S. intelligence lexicon, but covert action is an activity separate from clandestine action. According to the definition adopted by the U.S. Defense Department, “a covert operation differs from a clandestine operation in that emphasis is placed on concealment of identity of its sponsor rather than on concealment of the operation (U.S. DOD 2001, 91).” At the time of American covert actions in Iran, Guatemala, and Chile, the U.S. was able to deny its involvement in those of actions, although actions to replace existing regimes were not carried out clandestinely. That is, actions themselves were not clandestine, but American involvement was concealed for many

years. Why was the U.S. so anxious to conceal its role in these actions? What motivated U.S. decision-makers to use covert action instead of other foreign policy means? My thesis explores the motives of American decision makers in using covert action to accomplish their foreign policy objectives during the Cold War period.

The thesis is organized as follows: Chapter I discusses the development of U.S. covert action and its place in American intelligence activities. Theories explaining motivations behind choosing to explore covert action are introduced in Chapter II. Chapter III consists of case studies evaluating different theories that attempt to explain what motivates decision makers to choose covert action rather than other foreign policy means. Changes to U.S. covert action and to the structure of the American intelligence community are presented in Chapter IV. Chapter V summarizes my major findings.

CHAPTER I

COVERT ACTION IN THE U.S. INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES

This Chapter traces the evolution of U.S. covert action, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the U.S. Intelligence Community (IC) and their activities. In so doing, this Chapter attempts to place U.S. covert action in the larger context of American intelligence activities and policies. Tracing the history of the CIA is also necessary to better understand U.S. covert action, as the CIA is the organization most responsible for employing covert action.

1. The U.S. Intelligence Community and Intelligence Activity

Common people unfamiliar with intelligence activities in the U.S. tend to think of the CIA as an agency that single-handedly controls the entire gamut of U.S. intelligence activities. In reality, the CIA is only one of sixteen intelligence agencies that make up the U.S. IC. To understand the nature of covert action undertaken by the United States, it is important to assess the development of the U.S. IC, the role of covert action in U.S. intelligence activity, and to examine the CIA's role in initiating covert action. It is also important to understand what exactly is meant when we refer to 'intelligence.'

The concept of intelligence and the types of intelligence activities

How does intelligence differ from information? To begin, the concept of information is far more comprehensive than that of intelligence. Where 'information' implies all kinds of knowledge and data regardless of verification, 'intelligence' is defined as the "product resulting from the collection, processing, integration, analysis, evaluation and interpretation of available information concerning foreign countries or areas" (U.S. DOD 1999, 183). According to Schmitt

and Shulsky (2002: 2), intelligence includes not only the “raw data collected by means of espionage or otherwise but also analysis and assessments based on it.” Since intelligence usually concerns military matters and contains secret information relevant to national interests, it should be distinguished from unverified information. As a result, intelligence activity denotes a government’s formulation and implementation of policy to further its national security interests and to deal with threats from actual or potential adversaries (Schmitt and Shulsky, 2002: 1).

According to Grady (2005), a former U.S. Military Intelligence official, intelligence activities are generally organized into four functional areas: Intelligence Collection, Analysis, Counterintelligence, and Covert Action. ‘Intelligence Collection’ is activity designed to collect raw information through a variety of means, including spies, interrogation, satellite imagery, and others. ‘Intelligence Analysis’ involves processing and assessing the raw intelligence produced in the collection cycle. (Lawenthal, 2009) ‘Counterintelligence’ is defined as efforts taken to protect one’s own intelligence operations from penetration and disruption by hostile nations or their intelligence services.”(Lawenthal, 2009: 151) Finally, ‘covert action’ refers to “the attempt by one government to pursue its foreign policy objectives by conducting secret activity to influence the behavior of a foreign government or political, military, economic, or societal events and circumstances in a foreign country” (Schmitt and Shulsky, 2002: 75).

Depending on the issue area in question, intelligence activity can be classified into political intelligence, military intelligence, economic intelligence, scientific and technical intelligence, sociological intelligence, or environmental intelligence. Political intelligence allows the U.S. to correctly assess political situations in other countries in a way that U.S. can use to advance its national interests. Correct assessment of political situations of other countries or regions is instrumental for the U.S. to make proper policies related those countries or regions.

(Richelson, 1999) For instance, the outcome of the 2008 Korean presidential election had great consequences for the U.S. policy stance toward the Korean peninsula. Therefore, advanced assessment of the most probable outcome of the election was extremely beneficial in preparing a better policy toward North and South Korea. In order to protect the U.S. from military threats, maintaining credible military intelligence is also very important. Assessing the military capabilities of foreign countries is one important facet of military intelligence. (Richelson, 1999) For instance, knowledge of the amount of weapons grade plutonium produced in North Korea and extent to which the North Korean Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) program has advanced are of critical importance. With the deepening of globalization in the world's economic system, the importance of economic intelligence has also increased. The same goes for increasing demand for scientific and technical intelligence given the essential role that technology has taken on in determining who holds the advantage in a myriad of international arenas. (Richelson, 1999)

The methods used in intelligence activities can also be divided into more specific sub-categories. Technical Intelligence (TECHINT) relies on technological methods of gathering information, such as computers and satellites, whereas human spies carry out Human Intelligence (HUMINT) activities. Despite the emphasis placed on human spies in popular culture, TECHINT may be the more significant of the two in U.S. intelligence, as it accounts for more than two thirds of spending in the intelligence budget. (Lowenthal, 2009)

Within TECHINT, Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) and Imagery Intelligence (IMINT) compose the bulk of intelligence activities. SIGINT involves the process of intercepting and decoding signals (usually encoded) exchanged by enemies, which can provide data on diplomatic, military scientific and economic plans or events of enemies. SIGINT can be broken down into two basic components: Communications Intelligence (COMINT) and Electronics Intelligence

(ELINT). COMINT is intelligence obtained through the interception, processing, and analysis of the electronic communications of foreign governments or organization including voice, radio-telephone, and facsimile. ELINT intercepts and analyzes electromagnetic signals or other countries including radar, radio, telephony, and microwave transmissions. (Lowenthal, 2009) SIGINT was used as an important tool of cryptanalysis. After World War II the U.S. signed the UKUSA agreement with Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand to shore up SIGINT. (Atkinson, 2002) Under this agreement, ECHELON, the global SIGINT network, which is controlled by the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) is operated in conjunction with the Government Communications Head Quarters (GCHQ) of England, the Communications Security Establishment (CSE) of Canada, the Australian Defense Security Directorate (DSD), and the General Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) of New Zealand. (Poole 1999/2000: 4) This network can capture and analyze literally every phone call, fax, and telex message sent anywhere in the world. The existence of the network had not been disclosed but was finally exposed to the public through a report from the European Parliament in 2001¹.

IMINT denotes intelligence activity where a photographic interpreter examines intelligence photographed by a satellite or a reconnaissance aircraft. Both the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) and the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (NGA) are in charge of American IMINT. HUMINT is an intelligence activity where human spies (or secret agents) collect, analyze, and assess information and conduct espionage and covert action. The role of human spies is critical to the effectiveness HUMINT. Of the many intelligence agencies in the U.S., the CIA is in charge of running American covert action. The development of the CIA and its tasks are highlighted in the following sections. (Lowenthal, 2009; Richelson, 1999)

¹ BBC News, June 1st 2001. (Retrieved September 20, 2009)

CIA and the U.S. intelligence community

To understand the place of covert action in U.S. foreign policy in general and U.S. intelligence activity specifically, it is important to trace the evolution of the CIA since its beginnings as the primary agency responsible for U.S. covert action programs. It is also important to place the CIA in the big picture of the larger U.S. intelligence community to understand the roles that the CIA plays in U.S. intelligence activity.

Sixteen intelligence agencies make up the U.S. Intelligence Community (IC).² While the CIA has functioned as the lead intelligence agency for the U.S., it is only one of several others that perform essential functions. Among these sixteen agencies, the CIA is the only independent agency not affiliated with other governmental departments or branches of military.³ The others function under the auspices of one of the following U.S. governmental departments: the Department of Defense (DOD), the Department of State (DOS), the Department of Justice (DOJ), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). (Lowenthal, 2009)

Although CIA is the best-known member of the U.S. IC, the bulk of the nation's intelligence effort is undertaken by the intelligence agencies of the Department of Defense (DOD). (Best, 2004: 2) The DOD oversees eight intelligence agencies: the National Security Agency (NSA), the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the Intelligence and Security Command (INSOCOM), the Office of Naval Intelligence Activity (ONI), the Air Intelligence Agency (AIA), and the Marine Corps Intelligence Agency (MCIA). Under the authority of the DOJ are the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). The

² See United States Intelligence Community <http://www.intelligence.gov>. (Retrieved October 2, 2009)

³ However, after the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) was established. If we count the ODNI as independent agency, the number of independent US intelligence agencies amount to two, not one. (Lowenthal, 2009)

Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) belongs to the Department of State. The DHS, which is responsible for safeguarding the U.S. from terrorist attack and for responding to natural disasters, oversees two intelligence agencies: the Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection Directorate (IAIP) and the United States Coast Guard (USCG). (Lowenthal, 2009: 32)

In response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, President Bush established the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) in August 2004. The NCTC was created to serve as the primary organization in the U.S. government responsible for integrating and analyzing all intelligence pertaining to terrorism and counterterrorism (CT) and for conducting strategic operational planning through the integration of all instruments of national power.⁴ The U.S. Congress later passed the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA) in order to reform the intelligence community and intelligence-related activities undertaken by the U.S. government.⁵ The most remarkable change that was made in U.S. intelligence after IRTPA was the creation of the office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI). The DNI replaced the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) as the leader of the U.S. IC.⁶ DNI is the principal advisor to the President (particularly through a daily brief to the President), the National Security Council, and the Homeland Security Council for matters related to intelligence.⁷ Figure 1.1 illustrates the structure of the U.S. IC after the 2004 IRTPA.

⁴ See National Counterterrorism Center, <http://www.nctc.gov>. (Retrieved September 28, 2009)

⁵ The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 is divided into eight components: (1) Reform of the intelligence community, (2) Federal Bureau of Investigation, (3) Security clearances, (4) Transportation security, (5) Border protection, immigration, and visa matters, (6) Terrorism prevention, (7) Implementation of 9/11 Commission recommendations, (8) Other matters. From National Counterterrorism Center. (Retrieved September 30, 2009)

⁶ The DCI was the Director of the CIA, but was also the leader of the US Intelligence Community. As the leader of US IC, the role of the DCI was to coordinate and integrate the different intelligence activities of different US intelligence organizations. But the DCI's role as the head of CIA limited the role of DCI as leader of US IC. Lack of coordination and integration of US intelligence was considered one of the reasons for not being able to prevent 9/11. According to Tim Weiner of the New York Times, the CIA wrongfully assessed that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD). When George Tenet, then the DCI, finally acknowledged what he reported was not true, the White House, the DOD, and DOS were infuriated. This led George W. Bush to decide to create the office of the DNI. From Chosun.com, Interview with Tim Weiner, September 17, 2007. (Retrieved October 1, 2009)

⁷ For further information, <http://www.intelligence.gov>.

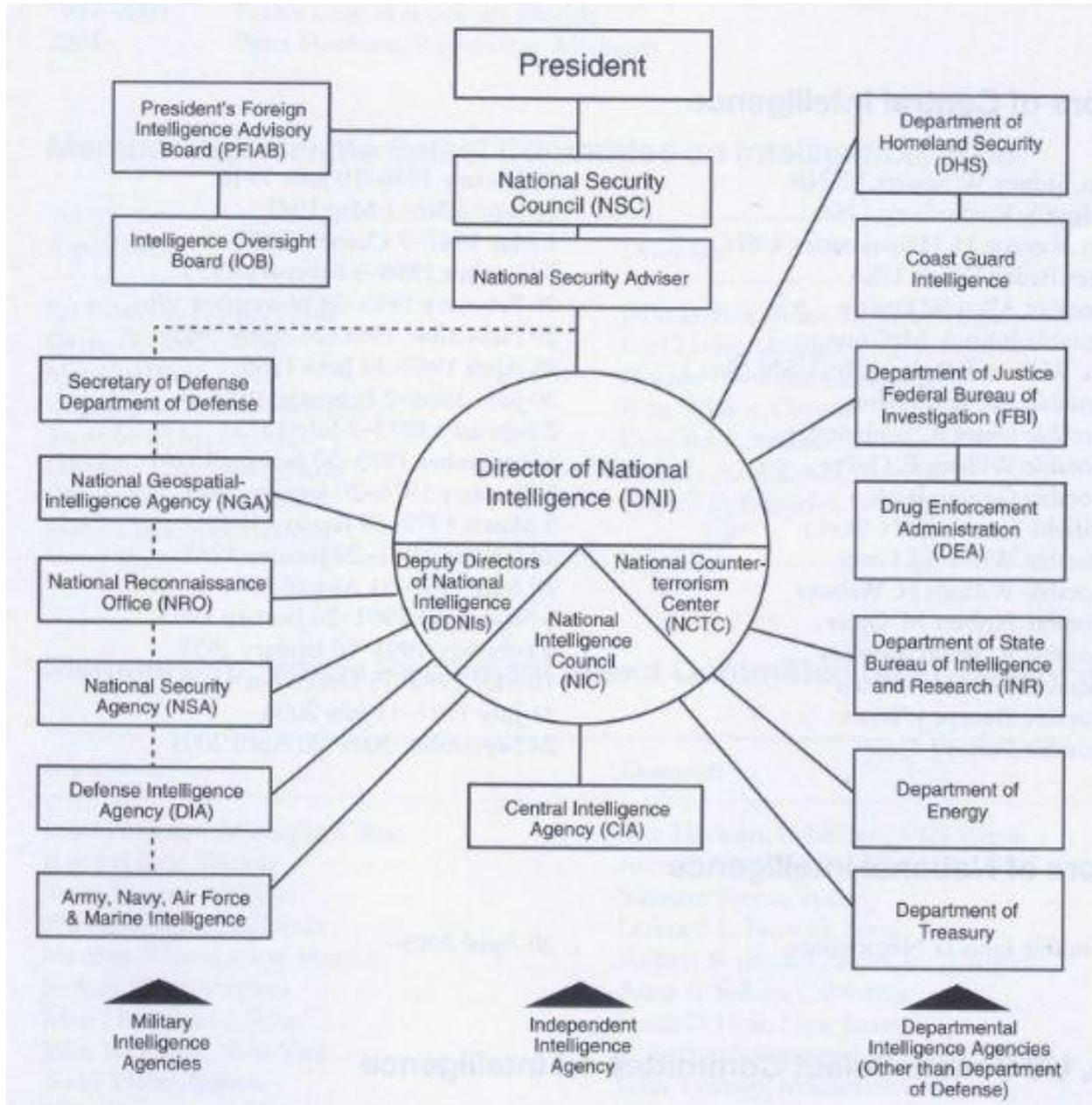


Figure 1.1 The U.S. Intelligence Community after IRTPA of 2004 (Johnson, 2009: 363)

The origin and development of the CIA

As the lead intelligence agency in the U.S., the CIA plays an integral role for the U.S. intelligence. How did the CIA come into existence? How did it evolve? To understand the nature of covert action, it is important to understand the origin and the development of the CIA, especially given its central role in determining how and when covert action is employed as a foreign policy tool of the United States.

Before World War II, the level of U.S. intelligence collection, analysis, and operations were rudimentary at best. At this time, the United States did not have an independent intelligence agency. This made it difficult for the U.S. government to control and coordinate intelligence collected and assessed by different agencies through various means. The attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, was an eye-opener for the U.S. policymakers. Although the U.S. navy was involved in a decryption program targeting the Japanese navy, it was not able to predict the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Failure to predict the Pearl Harbor attack was considered the most egregious intelligence failure in U.S. history, thereby leading the U.S. government to conduct a sweeping reform of the U.S. intelligence system. To begin, it was critical to coordinate and control the various U.S. intelligence activities. As a result, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Office of the Coordinator of Information (COI) to supervise the U.S. intelligence community. William Donovan served as the first COI, whose responsibilities included reporting the intelligence collected and analyzed to the President. Later the COI was reorganized into the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). The OSS was created to replace the COI, but in addition to this, OSS was granted with another “special duty”: covert action. (McNeil, 1996; Forsythe, 1992)

After WWII, President Harry S. Truman dissolved the OSS in September of 1945. In recognition of the need for a new intelligence system, the Truman administration established the

Central Intelligence Group (CIG) and the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI). The National Security Act of 1947 created the CIA. To cope with the threat of the Soviet Union, Truman concluded that the U.S. should be able to launch covert action. He created the Office of Special Projects to fulfill this need. This new office was incorporated into the CIA, but was not placed under the control of the DCI. Instead, the Secretary of State appointed the director of this office. In addition, both the DOS and the DOD sent representatives to this office to keep the CIA in check. The structure of the CIA was stabilized during Walter B. Smith's tenure as the DCI. Smith restructured the existing organizations and created the Directorate of Plans in 1952, which was in close cooperation with the U.S. Army's Special Forces. (Richelson, 1999; McNeil, 1996)

2. The Development of U.S. Covert Action

So far, this chapter has assessed the nature of U.S. intelligence, the composition of the U.S. intelligence community and the development of CIA. Since the objective of my thesis is to evaluate the motives behind U.S. decision makers' choice to use covert action during the Cold War, it is important to understand what covert action is. This section defines covert action, examines different types of covert action, and presents two cases where the U.S. employed covert action during the Cold War.

The notion of covert action

Covert action, an American term-of-art, has been used as an important foreign policy tool of the U.S. since World War II (Godson, 1995). According to the definition written by Schmitt and Shusky (2002: 75), "covert action refers to the attempt by one government to pursue its foreign policy objectives by conducting some secret activity to influence the behavior of a foreign government or political, military, economic, or societal events and circumstances in a foreign country." Richelson (1999: 349) points out that "a covert action includes any operation

designed to influence foreign governments, persons, or events in support of the sponsoring government's foreign policy objectives, while keeping the sponsoring government's support of the operation secret." Covert action is understood as "all activities conducted pursuant to this directive which are so planned and executed that any U.S. Government responsibility for them is not evident to unauthorized persons and that if uncovered the U.S. Government can plausibly disclaim any responsibility for them". (Keane and Warner, 2007: 9) The term, 'covert war' is used when U.S. covert operations or covert actions are conducted in a large scale military setting.

During the Cold War, U.S. covert operations conducted by the CIA included: (1) political advice and counsel; (2) subsidies to individuals; (3) financial support and technical assistance to political parties or groups; (4) support to private organizations, including labor unions and business firms; (5) covert propaganda; (6) individual training; (7) economic operations; and (8) paramilitary or political action designed to overthrow or support a regime. up until the mid-1960s, operations also included attempted assassination.⁸ These special activities are intended to affect the actions of foreign governments or influence events with political implications in foreign countries. The objectives usually include the overthrow of a regime or the defeat of an insurgent force through a civil war or through the support of counter-government forces.

On April 18, 2002, *The New York Time* reported that the Bush administration had attempted to overthrow the regime of President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela.⁹ According an article in *The International Herald Tribune* that appeared on May 30, 2007, the Bush administration was alleged to have planned a covert that targeted the regime of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran.¹⁰ On January 12, 2008 the *IHT* wrote: "President Pervez Musharraf of

⁸ See <http://www.answers.com/topic/central-intelligence-agency> (Retrieved October 11, 2009).

⁹ McCoy, J. (2002). Chavez's Second Chance. *New York Times*. April 18. (Retrieved October 20, 2009)

¹⁰ Ebadi, S. & Sahimi, M. (2007). The follies of Bush's Iran policy. *International Herald Tribune*. May 30. (Retrieved November 7, 2009)

Pakistan warned that any unilateral attacks by the U.S. against Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters in his country's tribal areas would be treated as an invasion."¹¹ The statement made by Musharraf suggests that the U.S. was suspected of planning covert action in Pakistan. Nonetheless, the Bush administration was able to deny the allegations above that U.S. was involved, and its denial seemed plausible. In order for covert operations to be successful, it is imperative for the U.S. to be able to maintain what is known as 'plausible deniability.' In other words, when a government carries out a covert action, the operation must be done in such way that the government can claim that it knows nothing about it (Grady 2005).

There are numerous activities that can be grouped under the broad umbrella of covert action. Scholars and analysts have categorized covert action in myriad ways. A simple yet illustrative taxonomy of covert operations is outlined below. Johnson (1989) divides covert action into the following four main types: propaganda, political, economic, and paramilitary.¹² The U.S. has used propaganda to influence events in opposing states by manipulating media and public opinion. These operations are sometimes called 'black or unattributed propaganda.' (Lowenthal, 2009) For instance, the CIA can employ a foreign reporter to write an untrue article or to fabricate mass media such as radio or a television. Political operations involve the funding (some would suggest bribing) of individual politicians and bureaucrats overseas, which Johnson (1989: 25) describes as "quiet assistance" after that which had been so termed and promoted by former CIA director William Colby. This type of covert activity also includes the funding of specific political parties, actions against other "unacceptable" political parties, and the rigging or influence of elections in foreign states. Economic operations involve clandestine efforts to upset

¹¹ Schmitt, E. (2008). Musharraf warns U.S. not to attack within Pakistan. *International Herald Tribune*. January 12. (Retrieved November 11, 2009)

¹² Johnson (1989: 21) notes the rough proportions by numbers of covert actions that have taken place thus far: propaganda 40 percent; political 30 percent; economic 10 percent; and paramilitary 20 percent.

the economies of foreign nations, and include such methods as counterfeiting, motivating labor unions or other groups to disrupt the flow of everyday business, damaging commodities and interfering with a nation's global trade, and tampering with the international price of products and commodities including natural resources or agricultural output.

In the meantime Johnson (1996: 60-69) offers an intriguing framework to explore the implications of covert actions. He outlines a “covert operations ladder of escalation” with thirty-eight options. These are codified within four thresholds: Routine Intelligence Operations, Modest Intrusions, High-Risk Operations, and Extreme Options. Passive security measures, observation, and sharing of low-level intelligence are examples of routine operations. The second tier involves recruitment of targets, technical surveillance, truthful propaganda, and low-level funding of groups. The third tier expands upon the modest intrusions and could frustrate domestic or international harmony if revealed. Truthful, but contentious propaganda, disinformation, high-level recruitment, more sophisticated technical surveillance, massive funding, economic, paramilitary, and ultimately military attacks clearly delineate a hierarchy of options potentially available. Domestic, especially media, furor over the revelation of the Department of Defense's Office of Strategic Information's propaganda and disinformation support to the global war on terrorism demonstrate the sensitivities associated with employing these type activities. And, the final tier of especially dangerous and controversial extreme options range from theft, hostage taking, torture, environmental alterations, economic dislocations, coup d'état, assassinations, secret wars, to using chemical, biological, or radiological agents.

Cases of covert action during the Cold War

The U.S. made extensive use of covert action during the Cold War. Table 1.1 is a list of ‘successful’ covert action to assassinate a state’s leader or to overthrow a state’s regime. Small-scale covert operations are not included on this list. The list is by not complete, considering that some U.S. covert actions are likely still unknown to the public. The list includes only cases of U.S. action that are generally accepted as confirmed cases of U.S. covert action.

Table 1.1 The List of U.S. Covert Action

Year	State	Achievements
1953	Iran	The change in regime from Mossadeq to Pahlavi
1954	Guatemala	The overthrow of Arbenz
1961	Ecuador	The regime change from Jose Belasco to Clarlos Arosemana
1961	Congo (former Zaire)	The assassination of Lumumba and the support of Mobutu regime
1963	Dominican Republic	The overthrow of Bosch
1964	Brazil	The transition on regime from Goulart to Branco
1945	Indonesia	The overturn of Sukarno and the support of Suharto
1970	Cambodia	The overthrow of Prince Sahounek and the help of replacement of Lon Lol
1971	Bolivia	The change in regime from Juan Torres to Hogo Banzer
1973	Chile	The overthrow of Allende and the support of Pinochet
1980	Nicaragua	The regime change from Sandinista to Chamorro

CHAPTER II

WHY COVERT ACTION?

Covert action is one of many foreign policy tools that are available to the decision making elites of the U.S. When the U.S. has conflicts with other states, American decision makers most often use diplomatic means to resolve such conflicts. If diplomacy does not appear to be a viable option to resolve such conflict, elites may use more violent means such as war or the threat of war. Still another option available to the U.S. is the use of covert action to resolve conflicts. What, then, motivates American decision makers to make use of covert action? More specifically, why were American decision makers so eager to hide their involvement in covert operations during the Cold War? What was the purpose of their secrecy? At present, various explanations have been offered which attempt to assess the motivations behind covert action. By and large, these explanations fit into two broad categories: those that claim covert action is motivated by ‘external constraints’ and those that claim that covert actions stems from ‘internal constraints’ (Kim, 2001).

1. The “External Constraint” Explanation of Covert Action

An ‘external constraint’ explanation of U.S. covert action asserts that the objects of secrecy lie outside the territorial boundary of the U.S. Within this explanation, U.S. decision makers need the secrecy of covert action to deceive people or countries outside the U.S. First and foremost, the secrecy of covert action is intended to deceive the targets of activities. For instance, if the U.S. were to launch a covert action to promote a coup in a foreign country, concealment of that action would be instrumental to its successful implementation. (Kim, 2001) In short, keeping

targets in the dark is critical the success of covert operations launched by the U.S., as who were aware of American intentions would likely attempt to frustrate U.S. covert action.

Other risks of disclosing American involvement in covert are that such action could put American agents and agencies in harm's way. Additionally, disclosing American involvement in covert action to promote a coup or other action targeting a foreign government could fuel anti-American sentiments in target states. (Kim, 2001) Ultimately, concealing American involvement in controversial projects is necessary to deceive target governments and contain Anti-American sentiments in the target country.

Another consideration in the external constraint explanation of covert action is that secrecy allows the U.S. decision makers to avoid conflict with other states that are major stakeholders in the target of covert action (Gibbs, 1995). For instance, during the Cold War the U.S. might have attempted to conceal American involvement in covert action in Iran in 1953, because the open involvement in Iran could invite confrontation with the Soviet Union, which had a stake in Iraq in the early 1950s. Employing covert operations in this case thereby allowed the U.S. to avoid open confrontation with the Soviet Union, which might have been extremely costly to national interests.

Finally, secrecy in covert action is necessary to stave off negative international opinion of activities intended to intervene in the domestic affairs of other states or organizations (James & Mitchell, 1995). For instance, French covert action to sink the Rainbow Warrior, a Pacific Ocean Campaign vessel of the U.S. based environmental organization Greenpeace, without disclosing French involvement in 1985 was intended to avoid adverse international reaction to French policy, which Greenpeace was attempting to highlight. In the early 1980's, a controversial French nuclear test in Pacific created negative international opinion about French environmental

degradation. In protest, Greenpeace planned to send a flotilla to the Pacific, drawing attention to the incident. The French public generally felt that the nuclear test was in the national interest of France and thought the Greenpeace protest was jeopardizing those interests. On the night of July 10, 1985, the French government secretly sank the Rainbow Warrior while it was docked in Auckland harbor in New Zealand. Even after the revelation of the French government's complicity, the French public stood behind its government's action. Secrecy of French covert action to sink the Rainbow Warrior was intended to circumvent negative international publicity which inevitably sprang from the incident (Gidley & Shears, 1986; Dyson, 1986). As with this French example and with other cases, it is possible that U.S. decision makers resort to covert to skirt negative international publicity – international opinion condemning American action that infringes upon the sovereign rights of other states.

Hypothesis 1: Secrecy allows the U.S. to deceive target countries of its covert action, thereby avoiding conflicts with other stakeholders in the regions and negative international opinion.

2. The “Internal Constraint” Explanation of Covert Action

The internal constraint explanation of covert action posits that “government officials use secrecy as a device to mislead the public and to ensure elite control over foreign policy” (Gibbs, 1995: 215). This line of explanation asserts that elites in the governments may resort to covert use means in order skirt constraints imposed by domestic political actors (Kim, 2002). When decision makers have difficulty mobilizing support for certain foreign policy objectives, they may need secrecy to keep those controversial foreign policy decisions hidden from public scrutiny. The targets of secrecy in this case are not foreign governments or adversarial states, but the public, Congress, and/or mass media (Golnoor, 1977; Franck & Weisband, 1989). This need

for secrecy may loom larger in democratic states due to the way that democratic political institutions constrain the decision-making processes of elites. These institutions provide the mechanism whereby the public sets the parameters within which decision-making elites should act (Golnoor, 1977). In this context, covert action allows decision makers in the U.S. to pursue foreign policies, which could otherwise provoke public rage, in a secret manner. For instance, the Johnson Administration used covert action in Vietnam to avoid backlash at home stemming from a public that opposed continued American military involvement in the region (Mazzetti & Weiner, 2007). In this and other cases, secrecy in covert action provided an avenue through which leaders in democracies could preempt 'public furor' which might have accompanied open foreign policy decisions (Lilley & Downes, 2007: 13).

Hypothesis 2: Secrecy allows U.S. decision makers to circumvent domestic oppositions against the U.S. involvement in target countries.

In American foreign policy making circles, scholars of U.S. covert action generally subscribe to one of the two aforementioned rationales for covert action. Decision making elites, particularly those who have track record of endorsing U.S. covert action usually support the external explanation of covert action (Kim, 2001). However, it is still possible that U.S. decision makers use covert action and conceal American involvement for the purpose of skirting U.S. domestic opposition to their objectives. Constraints to elite foreign policy choices arise from a variety of political actors, including: (a) participating elites within the administration itself (e.g., State Department officials), (b) attentive elites/public (e.g., Congress via legislation or the War Powers Act and opinion leaders such as journalists and scholars), and (c) the American public or voters (via either an ex ante approval mechanism or ex post electoral punishment). Elites in the U.S. are not always in agreement with one another on how to cope with any particular foreign

policy issue. For example, during the India-Pakistan Crisis of 1971, core decision-making elites, most notably Nixon and Kissinger, favored a hard-line policy toward India, whereas State Department officials, media elites, and Congress expressed more sympathy toward India. After open discussions and consultations, the policy advocated by Nixon and Kissinger prevailed. Evidence suggesting that decision-making elites used secrecy to circumvent the due process of open policy debate or the procedure of checks and balances inherent in democratic political institutions support this explanation (Lilley & Downes, 2007; Franck & Weisband, 1989).

CHAPTER III

CASE STUDIES

The objective of the following case studies is to evaluate two rival explanations of the motivations that compelled American decision makers to use covert action instead of open aggression. I selected two cases of U.S. covert action from two different time periods: one from the early stages of the Cold War and the other from the later Cold War period. I chose the 1954 Operation PBSUCCESS in Guatemala because it was a very important case of U.S. covert action early in the Cold War, one which set the tone for later U.S. covert actions. My other case, the U.S. Contra War in Nicaragua was the last covert that the Americans initiated during the Cold War and it stayed at the top of the U.S. foreign policy agenda throughout the 1980s (Lilley & Downes, 2007). The case studies do not use rigorous ‘comparative method’ enunciated by Lijphart (1971). In examining two cases of U.S. covert action – one in early 1950s and the other in 1980s, I attempt to assess motivations of U.S. decision makers for using covert action in both contexts.

1. U.S. Covert Action in Guatemala in 1954: Operation PBSUCCESS to Overthrow the Arbenz Regime

A brief history of the case

Before the popular revolution that ousted military dictator General Jorge Ubico took place in 1944, Guatemala was ruled by a series of authoritarian regimes after it achieved independence in 1821. The ‘October Revolution’ of 1944 opened the door for democracy for the first time in the history of Guatemala. Following the October Revolution, Guatemalans elected a

former university professor, Juan Jose Arevalo into the office of presidency in 1944. Arevalo was the first leader of Guatemala who came to power through democratic political processes; he won 85 percent of the popular vote (Lilley & Downes, 2007: 19). Arevalo was a social democrat who believed that the government should play a proactive role to rectify social injustices. Soon after his inauguration Arevalo initiated overarching reformist programs such as massive public health and literacy programs. He also implemented land reforms to improve the lot of less privileged Guatemalans whose lives had been impoverished during the Ubico dictatorship. In 1947 Arevalo enacted a controversial piece of legislation, the Labor Code, whose objective was to guarantee fundamental rights to laborers (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 1999). Democracy seemed to flourish in Guatemala from 1944 until 1954, but the so-called 'Ten Years of Spring' ended when the U.S. pursued covert action to overthrow the democratically elected president of Guatemala, Jacobo Arbenz (Appy, 2000: 191).

Arbenz was the second president of Guatemala who rose to power by winning a fair and democratic election in 1950 (Immerman 1980/1981, 633). After he came to power, Arbenz continued most of the reform programs initiated by Arevalo. Most of Arbenz's reform programs proceeded within the broad framework of democracy. In fact, many scholars have evaluated the reform programs of Arbenz as substantially democratic, arguing that the fight to organize a labor union and reform land distribution were guided by a desire to establish mass support for institutional bases of democracy (Aybar de Soto, 1978). In fact, many of Guatemala's new social welfare programs were less ambitious than those advocated by the liberal parties of the United States and Great Britain (Rabe, 1988).

One of the most conspicuous changes that the Arbenz Presidency brought about in Guatemalan politics was the legalization of the Guatemalan Communist Party (PGT).

Subsequently, some PGT members became advisors to Arbenz. While these developments were some cause for concern among U.S. governmental officials, what was most upsetting to the Eisenhower Administration was Arbenz's decision to expropriate 40% of property owned by the United Fruit Company (UFC).¹³ Arguably the most ambitious reform program Arbenz pursued was the completion of the land reform that Arevalo had initiated. The land reform act put forth by Arbenz – Decree 900 – was deemed necessary to rectify the skewed distribution of land ownership.¹⁴ Like many other large landowners, UFC lost a great portion of its uncultivated land, with little reimbursement.¹⁵ The Eisenhower administration believed that Arbenz's land reform would hurt American commercial interests and open the door for communist influence in the region. (Gleijeses, 1991)

The UFC launched massive lobbying efforts in Washington to persuade the U.S. government to bring down the Arbenz regime. In the summer of 1953, the Eisenhower Administration decided to pursue covert action to unseat Arbenz. Operation PBSUCCESS began with lending paramilitary support to a group of Guatemalan insurgents in Honduras (Huck, 2003). In the mean time, the CIA also bribed high ranking military officers in Guatemala.¹⁶ These military officers demanded that the Arbenz purge communists from his government. When Arbenz refused, they demanded his resignation. Carlos Castillo Armas, who thought of himself as the archenemy of Arbenz, led the insurgents in Honduras. The CIA not only provided Armas and his troops with money and military equipment, but also with rigorous training to prepare them for the invasion of Guatemala. Alongside the paramilitary aspect of PBSUCCESS, the CIA

¹³ Arbenz wanted to offer \$1,185,000 but UFC demanded higher compensation, \$15.6 million. (Gleijeses, 1991)

¹⁴ At the time of land reform, an overwhelming 72 percent of arable land was owned by 2 percent of landowners. Much of the Guatemalan population was poor because of this skewed distribution of land ownership. (Huck, 2003)

¹⁵ UFC only received \$1.1 million for expropriated lands, because UFC has undervalued its property for tax purposes. Arbenz government's reimbursement scheme was based on the value the land owners declared for tax returns. (Gleijeses, 1991)

¹⁶ The first CIA effort to overthrow Arbenz regime was collaborative work with Nicaraguan dictator Anastacio Somoza. This covert action was authorized by President Truman in 1952, and the codename for this covert action was PBFORTUNE (Huck, 2003).

launched a massive psychological campaign in Guatemala to undermine public confidence in Arbenz. By the time Armas launched a beach invasion of Guatemala, CIA propaganda had already convinced many in Guatemala, particularly conservative military officers, that the continuation of the Arbenz regime would pit their country against the U.S., a superpower. The implicit threat of open military attack by the U.S. was quite successful in inducing a large segment of Guatemalan society to turn against Arbenz (Powers, 1979).¹⁷ Even the paramilitary program served a largely psychological function. As a CIA memo prepared for Eisenhower explained, the operation had relied “on psychological impact rather than actual military strength” (Cullather, 1994: 55). After ousting Arbenz, the U.S. installed Castillo Armas as his replacement. Armas quickly restored the expropriated lands to the UFC, and Guatemala once again became a clientele state of the U.S. as the brief introduction of democracy in this impoverished country in the Central America ended abruptly (Immerman, 1980/1981).

The national interests of the U.S. in Guatemala

Why did the Eisenhower administration decide to intervene in the internal affairs of Guatemala and to oust the legitimate regime of Arbenz? What was there in this small country that compelled the American decision makers to topple democratic and popularly supported president of another country? Evidence suggests that American government officials were worried about communist intrusion in the region, since the Arbenz was understood to be soft on communism. Among Arbenz’s ruling coalition of 51 congressional deputies, four were communists (Appy, 2000). The Eisenhower administration estimated that the number of communists in the country amounted to 1,000 and believed that communists were gaining an influence in organized labor and in the agrarian reform movement. In January, 1954, President

¹⁷ A variety of instruments-(black) propaganda, sabotage, aircraft, an army of insurrectionists, and the implicit threat of US military power were used to topple the Arbenz regime. (Powers, 1979).

Eisenhower told Guatemala's foreign minister that he couldn't help a government which was openly playing ball with communists and that the United States was determined to block the international communist conspiracy (Rabe, 1988). The Arbenz regime replied that their land reform would undermine the appeal of communism. Ultimately, the Eisenhower administration rejected explanations from the Arbenz administration and concluded that Arbenz was either a 'dupe' of the communists or worse (Rabe, 1988). Secretary Dulles and the administration carried a deep conviction that a relationship between Guatemala and Soviet Union existed.

Still, the threat of communism in Guatemala appears to have been greatly exaggerated. According to Gleijeses (1991: 365), "the communists were not in control of Guatemala. Neither the CIA nor embassy officials ever claimed that the Guatemalan army was infiltrated by communists... But they were worried about the future." In reality, the communists had very little influence in Guatemala and the Guatemalan government had no ties with the Soviet Union, despite the Eisenhower Administration's claims. Schneider and Kinzer (1999) also found no traces of Soviet influence in the country. Bowen (1983: 91) claims that "insights from a thorough 1955 Department of State analysis of the communist movement in Guatemala, based on years of DOS and CIA intelligence reports and over 50,000 pages of captured PGT documents, reinforce this interpretation." Analysts confirmed this assessment, writing that, "the material does not reveal the existence of a well organized system of administrative dependence of centers of international communism."¹⁸

Evidence suggests that Eisenhower's decision to topple Arbenz was influenced more by commercial interests than by geostrategic considerations, though it important to acknowledge that these factors are often intertwined. Jonas (1991), Schlesinger and Kinzer (1999), and Blum

¹⁸ "Communism in Guatemala," July 1st, 1955, Office of Intelligence Research Psychological Intelligence Digest Supplement No.1/Intelligence Research Report 6712, declassified 1979. (Retrieved February 5, 2010)

(1986) all point out the influential role played by private commercial interests in instigating the U.S. decision to oust Arbenz. Also Treverton (1987: 52) testified, in Guatemala, “Washington policy making mixed private interests with strategic concerns.” Historical evidence suggests that CIA officials fabricated the evidence of the ‘communist menace’ in Guatemala, to a certain extent, in collaboration with the UFC public relations team. According to former UFC public relations official Thomas McCann (1988), the CIA and UFC implanted unconfirmed reports in the American press about the ‘red menace’ in Guatemala (McCann, 1988: 57-62).

The UFC also used Washington connections to oust Guatemala’s new regime, with overwhelming ties existing between the corporation and government. Walter Bedell, former CIA Director and Undersecretary of the U.S. was a UFC executive. UFC president Sam Zemurray recruited Thomas Corcoran, a Washington lobbyist, to push for the idea of a coup. Thomas Dudley, former President of the UFC, was the brother of Eisenhower’s first Assistant Secretary of State for Central America. J.F. Dulles was a partner with the Sullivan & Cromwell (S&C) law firm, which represented the UFC. His brother, CIA Director Allen Dulles was an S&C attorney. Ann Whitman, Eisenhower’s personal secretary, married UFC’s main lobbyist. Assistant Secretary of State John Cabot owned UFC stock and his brother was its former president (McCann, 1988). Each of these relationships served to deepen the shared interests of the UFC and the U.S. government in Guatemala.

Why covert action in Guatemala?

Of all of the foreign policy tools that were available, why did the Eisenhower decide to use covert action to topple the Arbenz regime? More specifically, what was the goal of secrecy associated with PBSUCCESS? By keeping PBSUCCESS secret, who did the Eisenhower Administration intend to deceive? Most evidence suggests that U.S. government officials wanted

to keep the action secret because of the international repercussions that knowledge of intervention in Guatemala could bring about. Most of all, the Eisenhower Administration worried that the overt intervention in Guatemala could damage American standing in Latin America. It was no secret that the U.S. treated Latin America as its backyard at the turn of the 20th century (Appy, 2000). The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 declared that any European intrusion in this region would be treated as an act tantamount to intruding into domestic affairs of the U.S. The Roosevelt Corollary in 1904 to The Monroe Doctrine made it clear that the U.S. would exercise a police role to safeguard Latin America from European colonialists. The U.S. had maintained exclusive hegemonic authority in this region throughout the first half of the 20th century, during which the U.S. enjoyed *de facto* sovereign rights over many Latin American countries. But after WWII, as new independent Third World countries began to blossom, the U.S. declared that it would not intervene in the internal affairs of other sovereign states. Franklin Roosevelt's new policy stance toward Latin America was the 'Good Neighbor Policy,' in which Roosevelt pledged that the U.S. would be a 'good neighbor' of Latin America, rather than playing the role of international police in the hemisphere. During the Monroe Doctrine era, Latin American countries did not appreciate the imperialist policy of the U.S. in the region. As a result, the U.S. was particularly careful in dealing with the Latin American governments after WWII. (Cullather, 2006) As Nick Cullather writes:

“The United States had pledged not to intervene in the domestic affairs of any American state... The appearance that the United States was supporting the invasion of any OAS member state in retaliation for expropriating American property would set U.S. policy back 20 years” (2006: 31).

As a former U.S. diplomat pointed out in his memo to the White House concerning open intervention in Guatemala, this path was not a viable option “because of the immense complications which it would raise all over the hemisphere,” so an open military plan should not be used “except as an extremely bad last resort” (Gleijeses, 1991: 24). According to Gleijeses (1991: 247), “President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles wanted to protect the image of the United States abroad, particularly in Latin America...NSC 144/1 stated that the United States must ‘avoid the appearance of unilateral action’ in the internal affairs of the Latin American republics.” A document released by the CIA reported:

“We need a general go-round with consideration being given to (a) is PBSUCCESS the way to handle this operation (b) if it is the way to handle it are we using all possible means not attributable to the United States to carry the operation to a successful conclusion. If attributable to the United States, it should not be done. High level State thinking is that an act which can be pinned on the United States will set us back in our relations with Latin American countries by fifty years.”¹⁹

U.S. elites were clearly worried that overt intervention in Guatemala ran “the risk of turning all of Latin America against the United States and patently violating the Good Neighbor Policy of Franklin Roosevelt as well as the OAS and UN charters” (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 1999: 111). Given this evidence, it is plausible to suggest that the Eisenhower administration used covert action instead of open aggression to oust Arbenz because it did not want to pit all of Latin America against the U.S.

The bulk of the available evidence lends credence to an external constraint explanation of covert action that recognizes intent to circumvent negative international publicity as the primary

¹⁹ “Weekly PBSUCCESS Meeting with [excised],” March 9, 1954, p.3, the original scanned-document is available at http://www.foia.cia.gov/browse_docs.asp?doc_no=0000135895. (Retrieved January 28, 2010)

reason that these activities are conducted in secret. One of the sticking points of the external constraint explanation is that most of the people in Latin America, including Guatemalans themselves, were aware that the U.S. had been deeply involved in the plot to oust Arbenz while the U.S. public was kept in the dark. On January 29, 1954, the Guatemalan government published several documents it had intercepted detailing Castillo Armas' plot and the involvement of Somoza and the 'Government of the North.' The government of Guatemala knew that the U.S. was plotting a covert action. The American public did not believe this. Rather than investigating the veracity of the allegations of American interference in the internal affairs of Latin American governments, American publications tended to blindly dismiss the charge that the United States was plotting against Arbenz (Gleijeses, 1991).

The *New York Times* warned Guatemalans that in "railing against 'Yankee Imperialism,'" they were fighting against a relic of the past, "resurrected only in the imagination of extreme nationalists and Communists."²⁰ Even the most liberal member of the Senate, William Fulbright, accused the 'Communist-dominated Government of Guatemala' of conducting a 'vicious propaganda attack' (Gleijeses, 1991: 262). Contrary to the lack of awareness among Americans, Guatemala and the rest of the world seemed fully cognizant of the American conspiracy in Guatemala (Kim, 2002: 73). Still, the State Department continued to deny U.S. involvement, stating: "It is the policy of the U.S. not to intervene in the internal affairs of other nations." PBSUCCESS remained one of "the best-kept secrets of the Eisenhower administration for a long time" (Treverton, 1987: 46). If avoiding negative international publicity was the reason for American secrecy during PBSUCCESS, the U.S. government should not place its greatest emphasis on hiding the operations from the American public.

²⁰ *New York Times*, March 1, 1954. (Retrieved January 25, 2010)

The early 1950s saw Cold War tensions reach their peak. In the U.S., not only government officials, but Congress, the media, and the public believed that the President and a small number of his foreign policy advisors should have the absolute authority in crafting foreign policy. Foreign policy efforts were understood to be the domain of the President. In subscribing to this understanding, the public believed that it was in the best interest of the nation as a whole not to interfere with the foreign policy decisions of the president and his advisors (Franck & Weisband, 1989). Given this ‘Cold War consensus’ in the U.S. in the early Cold War period, the majority of the American public would have supported their government’s decision to overthrow Arbenz, even if the plan had proceeded in an overt manner. The mass media in the U.S. in the 1950s had a history of being ‘government-friendly,’ seldom challenging the U.S. government’s explanation of its Guatemalan policy (Gleijeses, 1991). In 1954, the *New York Times* reflected the dominant view within the White House, State Department, and Congress, writing that the “constant harassment here [in Guatemala] to which the company [UFC] now is being subjected is largely a Communist tactic.”²¹ The American press portrayed the coup that overthrew Arbenz as a totally indigenous affair. Americans who followed what transpired in Guatemala in 1954 similarly believed that Guatemalan citizens revolted against the communist-friendly Arbenz regime out of their own volition (Gleijeses, 1991).

Had the American press and public been fully aware of the true nature of the Arbenz regime and the reform policies that he pursued, would they have supported open policy to oust Arbenz? Arbenz was the democratically elected president of Guatemala. There is scant evidence that the U.S. public strongly identified with the emerging democracy of Guatemala. Still, overthrowing a democracy in open manner could have created public backlash at home. For this reason, the Eisenhower administration went to great lengths to manipulate the American media

²¹ *New York Times*, March 3, 1954. (Retrieved January 12, 2010)

coverage and public perception of the Arbenz regime (Appy, 2000; Bowen, 1983). According to Bowen (1983: 95), in order to influence public opinion in the U.S. and Latin America, CIA director Allen Dulles fabricated some of what was released to the American press. Many American elites were painfully aware that the regime that they were about to overthrow was a democratic one.

It is also important to acknowledge that the threat that Arbenz posed to the U.S. was largely commercial in nature. Although U.S. government officials went to great lengths to highlight the security threats associated with Arbenz and his reform policy, many government officials suggested that Arbenz and his policy were compatible with American national interests. Thus, emphasizing communist threats from Guatemala to American security interests were necessary for “domestic political purposes” (Bowen, 1983: 98). Taken at face value, the policy of Arbenz was simply not radical enough to call for overt U.S. intervention. The American public did not see any vital national interests at stake in Arbenz’s Guatemala. Open aggression that might produce substantial American casualties would not have been justified given the insignificance of the American national interests at stake. Against this backdrop, the Eisenhower administration would have been hard-pressed to mobilize public support for an open American military invasion of Guatemala. Evidence suggests that by going covert instead of using open war the Eisenhower Administration was able to minimize public relations risks at home as well as abroad.

2. U.S. Covert Action in Nicaragua In 1980: Contra War to Overthrow Sandinista Regime

A brief history of the case

In 1979 in Nicaragua, the Sandinista revolution ousted the regime of Anastasio Somoza. Somoza’s regime was typical of Third World dictators in this period, as he and his father ruled

the country for 43 years and came to possess more than half of the national wealth of Nicaragua. The Somoza family received American support because both father and son diligently followed American foreign policy guidelines in the region during the Cold War (Ryan, 1995). Toward the end of 1970s it became clear that a Nicaraguan mass revolt led by Sandinistas would put the Somoza regime in jeopardy. The Carter Administration launched a covert action to prevent Sandinista revolution, but as the collapse of Somoza regime was imminent, it withdrew support for Somoza. The 1979 revolution gave birth to the popularly supported Sandinista regime, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) (Kagan, 1996).

Sandinistas were not aspirants of Soviet style militant communism, but the socio-political reform programs that they were trying to implement in Nicaragua were based on Marxist ideology. The political predilection of Sandinistas and the nature of their reform programs were not well received by the Reagan Administration (Ryan, 1995). As Reagan replaced Carter in the 1980 election, he wanted to show to the world that the U.S. was now beyond the perceived passivity associated with U.S. foreign policy after Vietnam. Reagan's inauguration as President signaled the beginning of a second Cold War, ending détente with the Soviet Union. Reagan escalated anti-Soviet rhetoric and resumed interventionist policies in Third World countries. One thing that particularly bothered Reagan was a legitimate Marxist regime in America's backyard – Central America. Carter's Administration had attempted to accommodate the Sandinistas and sort out differences between the two countries mostly through negotiations and diplomacy, but Reagan virtually severed the diplomatic channels with the Nicaraguans (Scott, 1977: 239). Reagan was not interested in any diplomatic settlements with the Sandinista regime; he just wanted them out. With awareness that open war against Nicaragua to oust the Sandinistas was

not politically viable, Reagan ordered a covert action to help organize and support Contra rebel forces (Kim, 2004: 57).

From its onset, the Nicaraguan civil war known as the Contra war was not a 'civil war' in the traditional sense. The Contra War was America's secret proxy war against the Sandinista regime, until a *Newsweek* cover story blew its cover on November 8, 1982.²² As American involvement and support for Contras was revealed, the American mass public began voicing its opposition to Reagan's Nicaraguan policy. The U.S. congress passed two laws, Boland I and Boland II, to prevent Reagan from aiding the Contras.²³ Still, public and Congressional opposition was not able to deter Reagan's belligerent policy toward the Sandinista regime. In 1984, Reagan ordered the CIA to secretly mine harbors in Nicaragua. The Sandinista government brought this incident to the World Court, and its verdict indicated that the U.S. violated international law. This verdict fell on deaf ears within the Reagan administration. To overcome growing domestic opposition to his policy toward Nicaragua, Reagan launched massive public relations programs to address negative public opinion (Kim, 2001; Kagan, 1996).

In November 1984, Daniel Ortega, the leader of the Sandinista regime, won the presidential election and was inaugurated as president of Nicaragua. Still, Reagan did not intend to soften his hostile policy toward the now democratically elected Sandinista government. In 1987 news about Reagan's secret hostage-for-arms deal and subsequent diversion of profits to Contras began surfacing on American political scenes. Because of this scandal, dubbed the 'Iran-Contra Affair,' Reagan was brought to the verge of being impeached by the House. Even in the

²² On November 8, 1982, *Newsweek*, in its lead story entitled "American Secret War: Target Nicaragua," confirmed U.S. covert involvement in the Contra War and revealed that the covert paramilitary war was aimed at overthrowing the Nicaraguan government. The Reagan Administration responded that the purpose of the covert war was not to overthrow the Sandinista regime, but to interdict the arms flow from Nicaragua to Salvadoran rebel forces. (Kim, 2001)

²³ The report of the Congressional committees investigating the Iran-Contra affair argued that the Contra support program was an evasion of the law, called the Boland Amendment that restricted United States military assistance to the Contras (Inouye & Hamilton, 1987).

midst of serious allegations of wrongdoing, Reagan attempted to persuade the Congress to approve his proposal for aggressive aid to Nicaraguan Contras. In March 1988, due mainly to the diplomatic efforts of Nicaragua's neighboring countries, the Sandinistas and Contras entered into armistice pact and agreed to hold an election in 1989. In the 1989 election, Violeta Chamorro of UNO (United Nicaragua Opposition) won over the incumbent president, Ortega. The Sandinista regime relinquished political power to UNO as scheduled, and the rationale for American interventionist policy in Nicaragua came to an end (Ryan, 1995; Kagan, 1996).

The national interests of the U.S. in Nicaragua

According to Kornbluh (1987), most Americans had difficulty locating Nicaragua on a map, with many unsure whether Nicaragua was located in Central America or in South America. Nonetheless, the key decision makers in the Reagan Administration were so determined to topple the Sandinista that Nicaragua was at the top of the U.S. foreign policy agenda through the eight years of the Reagan presidency. Although most ordinary Americans did not think any key national interests were at stake in Sandinista rule in Nicaragua, U.S. government elites obviously thought otherwise. What was the nature of threat that Sandinistas posed to the U.S.? What kinds of U.S. national interests were threatened by the Sandinistas' ascendancy to power in Nicaragua in the early 1980s? What compelled American decision makers to intervene in this small and impoverished country in Central America that the American public had little knowledge of or interest in? To assess the motivations of American government officials for choosing covert action to settle its differences with the Sandinistas, we must examine the American national interests at stake in a Sandinista-led Nicaragua.

According to the speeches and writings of American decision makers who pursued an adversarial Nicaraguan policy agenda, the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua was an obvious threat

to American geopolitical interests in the Western Hemisphere. They interpreted the Sandinista revolution to be a communist revolution; elites argued that, left undeterred, Sandinistas would export communism to neighboring countries, and soon the entire region would ‘go red’ (Ryan, 1995). Reagan expressed this concern in his memoir:

“Although El Salvador was the immediate target, the evidence showed that the Soviets and Fidel Castro were targeting all of Central America for a Communist takeover. El Salvador and Nicaragua were only a down payment. Honduras, Guatemala and Costa Rica were next, and then would come Mexico” (Reagan, 1992: 238-9).

Robert MacFarlane, one of the key players in shaping Reagan’s Nicaragua policy, had similar opinions:

“We had just witnessed a five-year period where the Soviet Union tried out a stratagem of sponsoring guerrilla movements that would topple moderate regimes, and install their own totalitarian successor... If we could not muster an effective counter to Cuban-Sandinista strategy in our own backyard, it was far less likely that we could do so in the years ahead in more distant location.”²⁴

Unfortunately, assessments by American decision makers were either intentionally exaggerated or mistakenly inaccurate. First of all, the Sandinista revolution was the result of around 40 years of brutal dictatorship, which should not be interpreted as an intrusion of communism in the region, particularly communism of the militant Soviet Union ilk. Sandinistas did not aspire to follow Soviet style militant communism. Instead, their ideological predilection for Marxism reflected a desire for fairer distribution of wealth (that had previously been dominated by Somoza family) and for land reform (Kim, 2001). According to Ryan (1995: 4), “the FSLN was moving most concertedly against the far left... both Cuba and the Soviet Union

²⁴ Interview with Robert McFarlane, cited from *Nicaragua: The making of U.S. Policy, 1978-1990* (Kornbluh, 1991).

kept some distance from the Sandinistas, and urged them to maintain a mixed economy". It is true that Sandinistas received financial help from countries in the communist bloc including the Soviet Union and Cuba, but they were seeking aid from everywhere in the world after President Reagan severed virtually all the Carter Administration's Nicaraguan aid programs. It was also obvious that the Soviet Union did not want to create a conflict with the U.S. over Nicaragua. The Soviets basically acknowledged that Central America belonged to the American sphere of influence. According to a former Soviet diplomat, "...reasonable people did not believe that we could have a foothold in Latin America and Central America ... reasonable people were not interested in fostering some kind of anti-American activities in this area" (Strober & Strober, 1998: 66).

Second, despite the claims made by American government officials, the potential for the Sandinistas to spread communism to neighboring countries was extremely remote. Sandinistas simply did not have the resources or the intention to become an outpost of communism in the region. A former CIA agent noted that "the administration and the CIA have systemically misrepresented Nicaraguan involvement in the supply of arms to Salvadoran guerrillas to justify efforts to overthrow the Nicaraguan Government" (Kim, 2001).²⁵

The problems that the UFC faced due to Arbenz's land reform in Guatemala appear to have been the primary reason for U.S. intervention in the country. While it is true that the Nicaraguan economy had been controlled by the U.S. in collaboration with Nicaraguan elites at one time, American economic interest in Nicaragua paled in comparison to the interests at stake during Arbenz's land reform in Guatemala in 1954. The discussion up to this point indicates there were not any significant American national interests at stake in Nicaragua related to the Sandinistas' rise to power (Schmitt & Kinzer, 1999; McCann, 1988). Why, then, did President

²⁵ *New York Times*, June 11, 1984. (Retrieved February 24, 2010)

Reagan place such an emphasis on bringing down the Sandinista regime? It is most likely that Reagan and his core advisors interpreted Sandinistas' rise to power in Nicaragua to be a challenge to American hegemony in the region, although Sandinistas did not pose a direct threat to U.S. national interests. A Marxist regime in America's backyard was sure to trouble American prestige and hegemony in the region. Additionally, by standing firm in Nicaragua, Reagan wanted to use his policy toward the Sandinistas as a test case for the so-called 'Reagan Doctrine' (Carpenter, 1986):

“The Reagan Doctrine bears a modest resemblance to proposals for a ‘roll back’ of communism ... One crucial difference is that the roll-back concept applied almost exclusively to Eastern Europe, whereas the Reagan doctrine is explicitly designed to exploit developments in the Third World” (Carpenter, 1986: 74).

A serious question for the members of the Reagan Administration was whether their concern in Nicaragua justified an openly aggressive policy in Nicaragua to oust the legitimate and popularly supported Sandinista regime.

Why covert action in Nicaragua?

Given the superior military capabilities of the U.S., the Reagan Administration could have easily invaded Nicaragua and overthrown the Sandinista regime. Even so, President Reagan decided to resort to covert action, not the open use of American military force, to oust the Sandinistas. Why did Reagan decide to use covert action? What was the purpose of secrecy? Most of all, we need to consider the domestic public opinion of the U.S. that was not favorable to interventionist leaning in U.S. foreign policy. Although Reagan tried very hard to pull the country out of a defeatist mindset in the wake of the Vietnam War, the overall public mood in

the U.S. after the failure of the Vietnam War was doubtful of the efficacy of overseas military adventures (Strober & Strober, 1998).

Following the Vietnam War, American public opinion shifted to the general belief that interventionist policies abroad, particularly those involving American military engagement, should be discouraged. This new sentiment tended toward the view that the American government should rearrange national priorities and withdraw overseas commitments. The impact of the Vietnam War on American society was so great that the term ‘Post Vietnam Syndrome’ entered the vernacular of both the American media and scholarly work. It eroded the ‘Cold War consensus’ and the popular belief in American military adventurism abroad (Strober & Strober, 1998; Lilley & Downes, 2007).

According to a series of polls conducted in the 1980s, a majority of Americans were against the use of military force in Nicaragua. American public opinion throughout the 1980s was overwhelmingly opposed to interventionist policy of any sort, open or covert. According to one survey, the majority of Americans (regardless of their occupations) thought that intervention in Nicaragua would only be justified in the case of an impending attack by the Sandinistas against the U.S. (Secrest & Brunk & Tamashiro, 1991). Table 3.1 shows that diplomats, editors, and clergymen – all opinion leaders in the U.S. – were opposed to United States intervention in Nicaragua.

Given constraints imposed by negative public opinion, it was not a politically viable option for Reagan to use open military aggression against Nicaragua to bring down the Sandinista regime. In fact, some of the key decision makers within the Reagan administration were leaning toward a military option to solve the Nicaraguan problem before covert action was selected. Covert action to organize and support Contra forces, then have them overthrow the

Table 3.1 Situations that would Justify the U.S. going to War with Nicaragua

Specific Scenarios	Percentage Indicating that this Action by Nicaragua Justifies War		
	Diplomats	Editors	Clergy
A. Nicaragua Establishes a Communist Government	4.3	3.5	5.0
B. Nicaragua Starts a Major Military Buildup	7.6	6.5	7.8
C. Nicaragua Aids other Communist Movements	14.3	16.7	13.4
D. Nicaragua Asks the Soviet to Establish Bases	35.5	41.2	25.7
E. Nicaragua Attacks a Neighboring Country	62.9	45.8	35.8
F. Nicaragua is about to Attack the U.S.	82.7	80.3	65.3
Average Response	34.6	28.1	21.8
Number of Respondents	511	371	481

Source: Secret, D., & Brunk, G. G., & Tamashiro. H. (1991). Moral Justifications for Resort to War with Nicaragua: The Attitudes of Three American Elite Groups. *The Western Political Quarterly*, 44(3), 548.

Sandinistas was not supported by ‘senior administration officials’ in the Reagan administration (Kagan, 1996; 46). The Secretary of the State of the Reagan Administration, Alexander Haig, was among the key decision makers who supported a military option. In his memoir, Haig explains:

The military was the guarantor of a democratic solution in El Salvador ... But in the NSC and out of it, he (Reagan) was buffeted by the winds of opinion and tugged by the advice of those who doubted the wisdom of a decisive policy based on the strategic

consideration ... The Secretary of Defense (Weinberger) genuinely feared the creation of another unmanageable tropical war into which American troops and American money would be poured ... The Joint Chiefs of Staff ... resisted a major commitment ... [But] firm, prudent handling was needed. Military strength was one of our assets (Haig, 1984: 126-9).

A group of government officials in the Reagan Administration drafted an options paper, 'Taking the War to Nicaragua' in November 1981, calling for a serious military solution for the Nicaraguan dilemma (Kornbluh, 1987: 11). In the end, 'Haig's call to war' was rejected on the grounds that it would not draw support from American public and Congress. Simply put, an open military effort by the U.S. in Nicaragua would have been too costly in terms of human lives and financial resources and American public would not have tolerated such loss, particularly after the failure of Vietnam. As Kornbluh (1987: 11) notes, "Any overt use of force would conjure up the image of 'another Vietnam.'" It was impossible for the Reagan Administration to fight Congress and public opinion at the same time (Weinberger, 1990: 29-32). Consequently, Haig's call to war was not heeded by President Reagan (Cannon, 1991: 346).

CHAPTER IV

THE U.S. INTELLIGENCE AND COVERT ACTION IN THE POST-COLD WAR

The previous Chapter assessed the validity of two different explanations of the motivations for using covert action during the Cold War among U.S. decision makers. In Guatemalan and Nicaraguan contexts, evidence suggests the use of covert action was intended to reduce public relations risks both at home and abroad. American decision makers relied heavily on covert action during the Cold War when the open use of American force and diplomatic options were not viable. Nonetheless, as the Cold War international order was drawing to a close, covert action became a less attractive foreign policy option. The 9/11 terrorist attacks brought covert action back to the forefront of the American War on Terror. The goal of this Chapter is to discuss the roles that U.S. covert action has played in the War on Terror and to assess the major changes that the U.S. intelligence policies have undergone since the end of the Cold War.

1. The Crisis in Covert Action and the CIA toward the End of the Cold War

Before the Cold War, competition with the Soviet Union justified heavy militarization of the country. The American people in general never really felt comfortable with overwhelming military institutions and a large standing army in peace time. Americans felt that the large military presence in the country would ultimately undermine civil liberties at home and lead to militarization of society and culture. (Larswell, 1997)

From the founding of the nation, through the late 19th century, the foreign policy stance of the United States was essentially isolationist in nature. American elites and public believed that an active foreign policy would increase the power of the federal government at the expense

of individual liberty and autonomy among citizens in local government. The outbreak of World War I justified a more active foreign policy role for the U.S., but the public was still not enthusiastic about entering what they perceived to be a European war. Woodrow Wilson, then the president of the U.S., had a difficult time mobilizing public support for American participation in WWI, as many Americans did not view any core national interests at stake in a war-torn Europe. Indiscriminate German submarine attack and subsequent American casualties provided rationale for Wilson to call for a 'war to save democracy.' After the war ended, the U.S. quickly demobilized its foreign military presence and drew back into an isolationist foreign policy stance. Woodrow Wilson lost the presidential election to a Republican presidential candidate, Warren Harding, who ran his campaign under the banner of a 'return to normalcy.'²⁶ Harding's 'normalcy' implied a limited military presence and an isolationist foreign policy posture. (Lee, 2001)

With the outbreak of World War II, the U.S. once again broke from the tradition of isolationism and became an active participant in world conflict. After the war, the country was once again poised to revert to isolationism, but ensuing competition with the Soviets and the heightened security threat brought on by the Cold War justified heavy military buildup and strengthening security apparatuses. At this time, U.S. had serious shortcomings. The British, not U.S. agencies, were considered to be the world's best in intelligence collection and analysis. After WWII, however, the U.S. restructured its intelligence community, policies, and activities, thereby developing the most advanced intelligence capabilities in the world. (Frank & Weisband, 1989) As mentioned earlier, U.S. decision makers used covert action extensively during the Cold War as a middle option between diplomacy and open military aggression. Still, some Americans

²⁶ "HARDING FOR WORLD COURT; Would Confer With Nations But Make No Advance Commitments," *New York Times*, March 5, 1921. (Retrieved January 10, 2010)

had qualms about using covert action as a foreign policy tool of government in a liberal democracy. One of the key characteristics of a democracy is the ability the public to hold decision making elites accountable for their policies. In this system, policy decisions are reached after open public debate and the most popular policies are favored. If elites enact policies that do not reflect the popular will of the people, they can be held accountable for those policies. By contrast, covert action intentionally conceals policy and action from public scrutiny; covert action allows elites to circumvent the process of open public debate and political accountability for policy choices among governmental elites. Here lies the dilemma of covert action in a democracy. On one hand, if we remove the ‘covert’ aspect of covert action, it loses its appeal as a means to achieve unpopular objectives. On the other hand, if elites choose to use covert action, they violate one of an important norm in democracy: accountability. By and large, security threats posed by Soviet communism justified the use of covert action by the U.S. General James H. Doolittle and his committee’s conclusions in their report to President Dwight D. Eisenhower on October 19, 1954 supported the idea that the Cold War changed the way the U.S. should conduct foreign policy:

“It is now clear that we are facing an implacable enemy whose avowed objective is world domination by whatever means at whatever cost. There are no rules in such a game. Hitherto acceptable norms of human conduct do not apply. If the United State is to survive, long standing American concepts of “fair play” must be reconsidered. We must develop effective espionage and counterespionage services and must learn to subvert, sabotage and destroy enemies by more clever, more sophisticated means than

those used against us. It may become necessary that the American people be made acquainted with, understand and support this fundamentally repugnant philosophy.”²⁷

With the demise of Cold War competition with the Soviets, covert action lost much of its appeal as a legitimate foreign policy tool of the U.S. First of all, with its archenemy gone, the CIA was going through an identity crisis. Up to this point, the *raison d'être* of the CIA was to fight against Soviet communism. The collapse of the Soviet Union therefore disoriented the CIA with regard to its future responsibilities. Without a obvious enemy, presidential findings under President George H.W. Bush authorizing covert operations dropped from over thirty to less than ten (Daugherty, 2004: 216). Under President Clinton, the CIA faced new regulations and significant downsizing due in large part to his personal distaste for covert actions. As President Clinton left office on January 20, 2001, covert operations were only being used in a limited manner in combating weapons proliferation, counternarcotics, and counterterrorism (Daugherty, 2004). Second, as many covert wars that the CIA had waged in foreign countries became public knowledge, Americans became disenchanted with the nature and methods that the CIA used to intervene in the domestic affairs of other countries. The U.S. lost international respect because of notorious tricks (i.e., covert action) that the CIA was involved with. Although these activities accomplished some short-term political objectives, they also sowed seeds for anti-American sentiment in the longer run in parts of the world. For these reasons, CIA was saddled with the nickname of ‘the rogue agency’ in the U.S. Third, the technological revolution, with its concomitant emphasis on TECHINT (i.e., SIGINT and IMINT), degraded the status of CIA as the lead intelligence agency of the U.S. (Kim, 2005)

²⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Secret To James Harold Doolittle, July 26, 1954, in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, ed. L. Galamobos and D. van Ee, doc 993, quoted in Leary, ed., (1984: 144).

The end of the Cold War was a major challenge not only to the CIA and covert action but also to the U.S. intelligence community as a whole. The Clinton Administration reduced the military budget (and hence the intelligence budget) as President Clinton had promised during his election campaign.²⁸ The American people felt that the burden of maintaining international peace as well as the budget for intelligence community should be drastically reduced (Hass, 1994: 7). The CIA and other intelligence organizations were struggling to redefine the size and scope of their responsibilities during this period. After 9/11, however, those responsible for crafting U.S. foreign policy came to an understanding that the most sensitive intelligence information is best retrieved and analyzed by human agents. (Lilley & Downes, 2007) As the 9/11 commission report points out, “A principal conclusion is that the U.S. human intelligence capability must be improved across the board.”²⁹ In order to infiltrate and subvert terrorist networks and the regimes that harbor them, the U.S. is once again focusing on HUMINT to address the problem of international terrorism and terrorists. Covert action, which had become virtually obsolete after the Cold War (mainly because of its inherent moral dilemmas), seems to have re-emerged as a necessary foreign policy tool to defend American national interests. The roles that American covert action played, both in the Afghanistan War and Iraq War, testify to the fact that covert action is once again a legitimate foreign policy tool in the War on Terror. Let us briefly examine the roles that covert action played in Afghanistan and Iraq.

2. War against Terrorism and CIA Covert Action

President George W. Bush’s War on Terror began as an effort to dismantle the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which had harbored Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda, and was unwilling

²⁸ For further information, William O. Studeman, “Remarks by Admiral William O. Studeman, Acting Director of Central Intelligence at Marquette University,” available at https://www.cia.gov/news-information/speeches-testimony/1995/dci_speech_42095.html (Retrieved April 17, 2010).

²⁹ Eric Schmitt, “Pentagon Sends Its Spies to Join Fight on Terror,” *New York Times*, January 24, 2005.

to relinquish them to the U.S. American aerial bombing of Taliban strongholds started on October 7, 2001 and lasted roughly 40 days. After the bombing campaign, the U.S. initiated a ground war. The U.S. military operation on the ground turned out to be a very swift and decisive victory for the U.S. Within a month, the U.S. toppled the Taliban regime and drove the Taliban out of Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. U.S. Army forces then swept over the fortified cities of Kunduz and Kandahar in less than two months. Some claimed that the overwhelming superiority of air power had basically won the war for the U.S. before its effort on the ground began. (Blum, 2004) For instance, Loren Thompson, a military analyst at the Lexington Institute in Arlington, VA, said, “Air power has enabled us [the United States] not only to win quickly, but to do it humanely... We get the war over quickly and, generally speaking, we don’t hit civilians.”³⁰ Others claimed that American ground forces equipped with surgically precise weaponry brought on swift victory for the U.S. As John Pike pointed out, “new U.S. ‘smart bombs’ are much more accurate than those used in the Gulf War 10 years ago or even in Kosovo two years ago. U.S. surveillance technologies are more efficient at finding targets. The time between spotting a target and dropping a bomb on it, which a decade ago took days, is now a matter of minutes.”³¹

Prior to the invasion, quite a few military experts had anticipated a long and drawn out war that would produce substantial American casualties. First, they reasoned that the Taliban were seasoned veterans of armed conflict, with a long history of wars in the region. Afghanistan is also riddled with hillsides and valleys of caves. Afghanistan has one of the world’s harshest geographers, which makes it a perfect setting long and grueling guerrilla warfare. Aerial bombing had a limited effect on enemies – the Taliban – who hid in caves and valleys, as air

³⁰ Nancy Benac, “War in Afghanistan demonstrates air power’s new ability,” The Associated Press, December 19, 2001, available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2001/011219-attack02.htm> (Retrieved April 20, 2010); More opinions of military experts are available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news2001/011121-attack02.htm> (Search date:

³¹ Fred Kaplan, “High-Tech US Arsenal Proves its Worth,” The Boston Globe, December 9, 2001, available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2001/011209-attack01.htm> (Retrieved March 28, 2010)

power has shortcomings when used against enemies in static defensive positions. (Blum, 2004) Aerial efforts are far more affected when used against enemies on the move.³² *The Washington Post* illustrated this in a report released on November 2, 2001: “the attacks have not eliminated any measureable number of Taliban troops... a major chunk of the 50,000 Taliban army and much of its arsenal are pretty much intact after three weeks of bombing.” State of the art weapons also have limited effects in guerrilla warfare. (Blum, 2004) Russians had warned the U.S. of the difficulty of the ground war in Afghanistan based on their humiliating defeat in Afghanistan in late 1980s, which earned Afghanistan the nickname of, ‘the Soviet graveyard.’³³

The swift victory by the U.S. actually owes a great deal to covert action that was initiated in Afghanistan months before President Bush declared War against the Taliban. In the months leading up to the war, the U.S. sent several hundred CIA operatives into Afghanistan with the objective of toppling the Taliban regime. President Bush signed a series of directives authorizing the CIA to conduct a covert war against Osama bin Laden’s Al Qaeda network after the 9/11 attacks.³⁴ Authorized to kill or capture Al Qaeda leaders, CIA agents infiltrated Afghanistan and launched covert operations. One of their missions was to connect with the Northern Alliance, tribal militias opposed to Taliban rule in Afghanistan. These groups were eager to retake power from the Taliban in Afghanistan, and therefore expressed an interest in helping the U.S. military effort. CIA operatives provided the Northern Alliance with monetary aid and military equipment, activities typical of covert paramilitary action, and similar to the operations launched in Nicaragua by the Reagan Administration in early 1980s. Logistical help provided by the

³² Aerial bombing of coalition forces in Kosovo and during the first Gulf War had limited effects as well because the enemies were in static defensive position. (Blum, 2004)

³³ In 1979, the Soviet Army carried out a conventional assault on Kabul in order to depose President Amin and establish the new Afghan government of Babrak Karmal. The Soviets failed to take control of Afghanistan because they knew neither their enemies nor the Afghan natural environment. (Salin. 2007. “The Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989.”)

³⁴ “The Struggle for Iraq: Detainees; Harsh C.I.A. Methods Cited In Top Qaeda Interrogations,” *New York Times*, May 13, 2004. (Retrieved May 1, 2010)

Northern Alliance proved to be crucial to U.S. military victory because they were familiar with the maze-like geography of the region. In this proxy war, the Northern Alliance actually took the lead in American ground operations in Afghanistan. In fact, the first American casualty in Afghanistan was not a regular member of the U.S. Army, but CIA operative, Johnny Spann. This attests the depth and intensity of American covert action in Afghanistan.³⁵

In March of 2003, the military front of the War on Terror moved to Iraq. The American invasion started with intense aerial bombing that lasted around 3 days. After the aerial campaign, dubbed “*Shock and Awe*,” U.S. ground forces entered Iraqi territories. Many military experts anticipated difficult ground operations that might produce sizeable American casualties and drag on for long period of time. Unlike the 1st Gulf War, in which most of the battles took place in open deserts, the 2nd Gulf War (the Iraq War) had to be fought in streets of Baghdad and in other major Iraqi cities. During the 1st Gulf War, open desert was terrain that worked to the advantage of American ground troops equipped with state of the art weapons. Also, the objective of the 1st Gulf War was to drive Iraqi soldiers out of Kuwait, while the objective of the 2nd Gulf War was to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein. Resistance by Iraqis was expected to be more desperate than it was during the 1st War. More than anything else, the warfare during the 2nd War was expected to take on the nature of bare-knuckle street fights where state of the weapons advantage held by U.S. forces would have a limited effect. Contrary to expectations of many, overthrowing the Hussein regime and claiming Baghdad was a relatively simple ordeal for American military forces. This swift victory can be also attributed to CIA covert action that was initiated months before war was declared. Without a formal agreement by the UN Security Council, President

³⁵ But American ground operations to capture or kill Osama bin Laden and remnants of Al Qaeda and Taliban was not successful. Northern Alliances, once overtaking power in Afghanistan, were more interested in consolidating power in Afghanistan rather than helping Americans pursue additional objectives of rounding up remnants of Al Qaeda and Taliban. The US did not commit enough ground troops to accomplish remaining policy objective for fear of putting American soldiers in harm’s way. Also diversion to Iraq War forced the Bush administration to withdraw American military commitments from Afghanistan prematurely. (Blum, 2004)

George W. Bush had already ordered a broad range of CIA covert actions.³⁶ Given its importance in the success of these recent wars, covert action appears to be back at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy options as the world faces the increasing threat of international terrorism.

3. 9/11 and Creation of National Clandestine Service (NCS)

The 9/11 terrorist attacks were the worst failure in the history of American intelligence. Consequently, the attacks served as a catalyst in the reevaluation of the importance of maintaining proper intelligence capabilities and prompted officials to restructure the American intelligence community. On November 27, 2002, the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (the 9/11 Commission) was set up at the request of President Bush and Congress in order to investigate why the attacks were not prevented and to suggest improvements to the U.S. intelligence community. According to the Commission's final report, which was issued in July of 2004, chain of intelligence and law enforcement failures were responsible for not preventing the 9/11 attacks. The Commission's suggestions were: (a) the creation of a Director of National Intelligence over both the CIA and the FBI, (b) weakening the role of the CIA and DCI, (c) the provision of incentives for sharing intelligence, (d) proper funding for intelligence activities and public accountability of intelligence policies, and (e) a plan to place all the paramilitary capabilities of the CIA under the authority of the Pentagon.³⁷

However, the White House advisory panel, led by the retired Air Force General Brent Scowcroft, was preparing a rival intelligence reform proposal, would strip several intelligence agencies from the Pentagon and empower the CIA director. Under the proposal, the NRO, NIMA,

³⁶ Douglas Jehl and Dexter Filkins, "AFTER THE WAR: COVERT OPERATIONS; U.S. Moved to Undermine Iraqi Military Before War," *New York Times*, August 10, 2003. (Retrieved May 1, 2010)

³⁷ "The 9/11 Commission Report One Year Later." Congressional Briefing, July 22, 2005, p.84-88, available at <http://www.911truth.org/downloads/McKinney-911Commission-OneYearLater.pdf> (Retrieved April 13, 2010). In its final report, the commission recommended, "Lead responsibility for directing and executing paramilitary operations, whether clandestine or covert, should shift to the Defense Department. There it should be consolidated with the capabilities for training, direction, and execution of such operations already being developed in the Special Operations Command." (Kibbe, 2007)

and NSA would each come under the control of the CIA director.³⁸ In fact, Scowcroft was in conflict with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, as Rumsfeld wanted the DOD to be much more powerful than the other agencies. He was even opposed to the idea of creating DNI because this development could decrease his power as the Secretary of Defense. At the time, Rumsfeld controlled nearly 80 percent of total intelligence spending, but the control would be shared if the DNI were established.³⁹ The end result of the clash between the Rumsfeld plan (the plan advocated by the 9/11 Commission) and the Scowcroft plan was a compromise. It was decided that the DOD would retain the NRO, NIMI, and NSA, essentially keeping American TECHINT capabilities, while CIA would remain the major American HUMINT agency and the agency in charge of American covert action.

Beginning the intelligence agency reform, John Negroponte, the first DNI, established the National Clandestine Service (NCS) in the CIA as a replacement of the Directorate of Operations (which was in charge of covert action in CIA). This meant that the CIA would restructure its covert action responsibilities. Initially, the NCS was supposed to function under the DNI, but in the end, it was established under the CIA. This decision was critical to the CIA in that the CIA was able to remain the lead agency in charge of American covert action. Ultimately, President Bush sided with the CIA and approved the placement of the NSC under the authority of the CIA. Unlike its predecessor, the Directorate of Operations, the NSC enjoys a certain degree of autonomy from the Directorate of the CIA. (Keane & Warner, 2007)

³⁸ John LeBoutillier, "Rewarding CIA's Failure," *Newsmax.com*, November 9, 2001. (Retrieved May 13, 2010)

³⁹ Daniel Eisenberg, "Bush's New Intelligence Czar," *Time*, February 21, 2005. (Retrieved April 29, 2010)

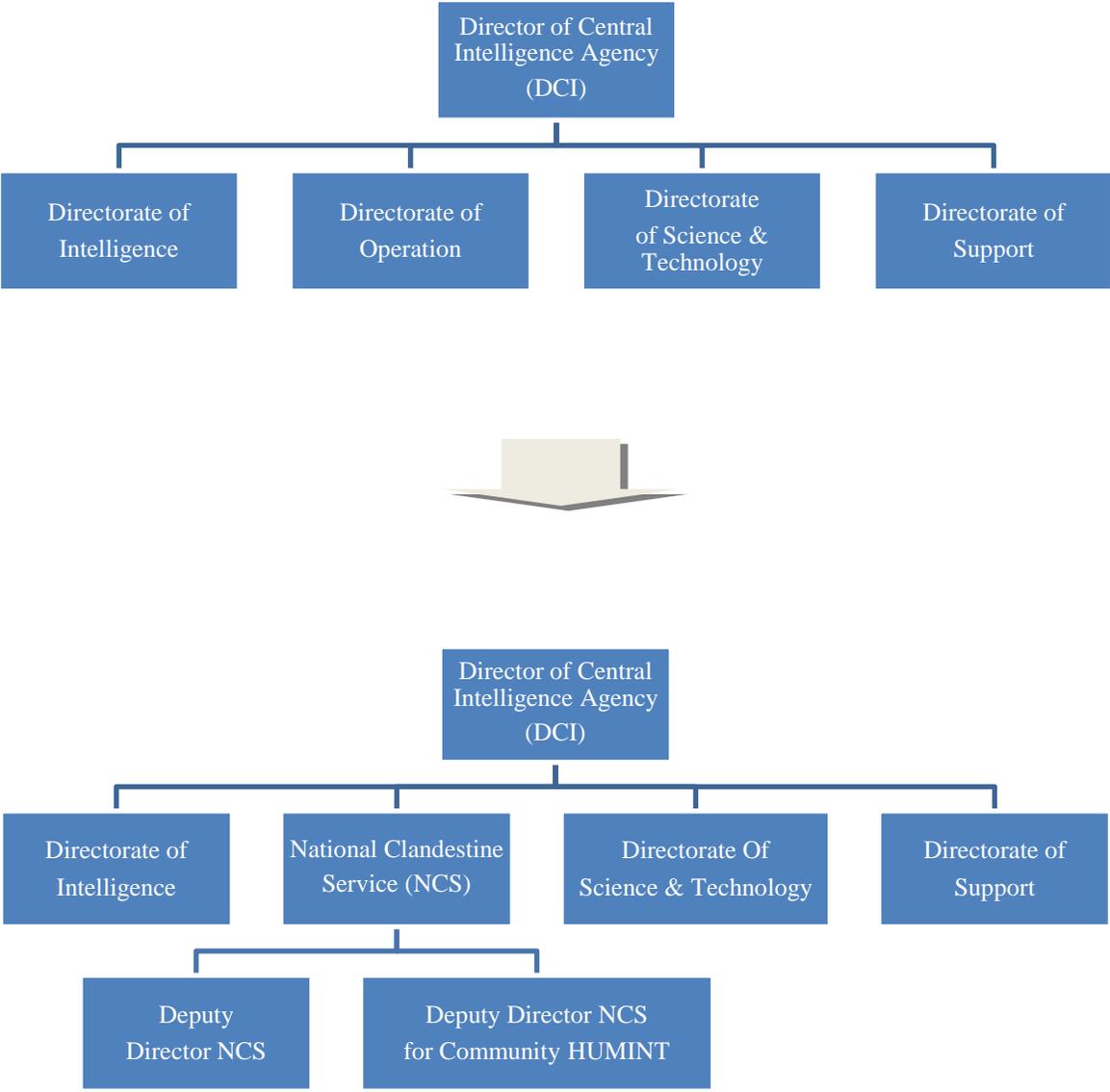


Figure 4.1 CIA Organization Chart (Before & After 2005)

Source: <https://www.cia.gov/about-cia/leadership/cia-organization-chart.html>. (Retrieved April 4, 2010)

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

During the Cold War period, American decision makers made extensive use of covert action to bring about regime changes in Third World countries. Covert action was an attractive middle option for American officials when neither diplomacy nor open military engagement was deemed viable. One of the most important elements of covert action is the idea of ‘plausible deniability.’ When Cold War tensions reached their peak in the early 1950s, suspicions of U.S. involvement in coups to overthrow neutral or pro-Socialist regimes in many parts of the world arose. Still, American decision makers were able to deny American involvement in secret operations that toppled many legitimate regimes. In fact, they took great pains to keep American involvement in those plots secret long after those missions ended. Why did American officials go such great lengths to safeguard secrecy? Why was secrecy necessary? Was it because of the adverse international opinion that might have arisen in response to unpopular campaigns? Or were domestic institutional constraints the most pressing concerns? By examining two cases of Cold War covert action initiated by the U.S., this paper assessed the motivations of American decision makers as they opted to use covert action as means to achieve their foreign policy objectives.

1. Summary

Covert action is a term-of-art which entered the jargon of the American intelligence community around the 1940s. The Objective of **Chapter I** was to place American covert action in the context of larger the role that the American intelligence community has played in since

World War II. Within the sixteen intelligence organizations that make up the American intelligence community, the CIA is the organization responsible for covert action. American intelligence activities can be divided into TECHINT and HUMINT, with many subcategories of intelligence activity fitting within these main groupings, including covert action is a particular type of HUMINT. Chapter II also discussed some of the changes that took place in American intelligence community and listed notable cases of American covert action that brought about regime changes in foreign states.

Chapter II examined two divergent hypotheses explaining the motives of decision makers when they opt to use covert action. The external constraint hypothesis stipulates that decision makers use covert action in order to evade negative publicity and repercussions in their dealings with other states as a result of pursuing unpopular objectives. According to this explanation, secrecy allowed American decision makers to avoid direct confrontation with the Soviets over the states that the U.S. intervened in. In addition, secrecy is necessary to protect agents and agencies that have infiltrated the target states of American covert action. By contrast, the internal constraint hypothesis stipulates that American decision makers attempt to skirt domestic institutional constraints by using covert action. By this logic, the reason for secrecy in these operations was concern about a domestic audience, not international scrutiny. The two case studies included in **Chapter III** evaluated the validity of the external constraint and internal constraint explanations of covert action. The results of the case studies indicate that American leaders used covert action to evade both negative international and domestic publicity.

Chapter IV summarized some of the changes that the end of the Cold War has brought about in American intelligence policy and in covert action, specifically. In the wake of the sudden end to a Cold War international order, the CIA had an identity crisis. Covert action was

no longer a legitimate foreign policy tool for use by the U.S. as it lost much of its justification – as a means by which the United States could cope with the communist threat. But 9/11 once again brought CIA and covert action at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy making.

2. Implications for U.S. Foreign Policy

American covert action to overthrow the legitimate leader of Iran, Mohamed Mossadeq, in 1953 was considered a huge success within American foreign policy circles. Operation AJAX (the code name for American covert action in Iran) was the first attempt to unseat a popularly supported regime through American covert action (Lilley & Downes, 2007). Operation AJAX set the mold for many more covert actions that followed and instilled confidence in American decision makers that the U.S. would be able to bring about regime changes with the ease of Operation AJAX.

Unfortunately, covert action poses an important challenge to democratic principles. In a democracy, mass public should be able to constrain decision making processes of elites. Public policies of the democracies are it domestic or international, should be subject to open debates and public scrutiny. If public policies fail to reflect majoritarian will of mass in democracies, decision makers should be held accountable for those policies. But covert action is meant to be hidden from open debates, public scrutiny, and checks and balances inherent in democratic political institutions. Here lies the problem of covert action as legitimate foreign policy tool of democratic state.

In the early Cold War period, American decision makers were quite successful in keeping domestic as well as international audiences in the dark with regard to the nature and scope of American illegal interventions in foreign states. The mass media in the U.S. during the early Cold War period basically followed the cues and facts provided by the American government

and accepted them without any reservations. For this reason, American decision makers were able to keep secrets about American involvement in the covert plots toppling legitimate regimes in foreign states.

In the 1980s, the American mass media was becoming increasingly skeptical of the government. In the wake of the Vietnam War, the American media and public alike became questioned the credibility and competence of governmental leadership. Media outlets began to investigate American covert action and immediately blew the cover for American covert action. For instance, *Newsweek* divulged the Reagan Administration's covert action in Nicaragua in support of the Contras. American covert action after Reagan's Contra War in Nicaragua took on an 'overt' tone. Since American covert action has become more susceptible to public scrutiny, American decision maker's use of covert action tends to be limited to the cases where they can garner popular consent for such action afterwards. After the CIA's covert action in Afghanistan War, the George W. Bush administration admitted to its involvement. Public opinion at home and abroad was not critical of the covert action in Afghanistan initiated by the Bush Administration, because such action was not used as an avenue to circumvent the public relations risk. This is a testament to the fact that, so long as the objectives of covert action can be justifiable, covert action remains as legitimate and effective foreign policy tool of the U.S. in the age of international terrorism.

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