

USA Theme A-1

History of US Interventions

The Pitfalls of U.S. Covert Operations.
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Executive Summary

Covert operations, by definition, are difficult to examine. Because they are shrouded in secrecy, one is never sure whether all the relevant data concerning their scope, origin, and degree of success are at hand. Yet it is apparent that governments will continue to insist on having covert operations as an option. What motivates the United States to undertake such actions and how well the United States has been served by these measures are especially crucial issues.

An examination of U.S. covert-action policy since World War II reveals two facts that are not always fully appreciated. First, both the scope and the scale of such operations have been enormous. Paramilitary operations--which can be more accurately described as secret wars, the most extreme form of covert action--have resulted in countless deaths and immense destruction. Covert operations have become the instrument of choice for policymakers who assume that a cold war status quo is inevitable.

Second, the success of U.S. covert operations has been exaggerated. Some operations, such as the one against the Soviet Union in the early postwar years and the later one against Castro, were outright fiascos. Other operations, such as the ones involving Greece and Iran, which were once acclaimed successes, left a legacy of anti-Americanism that continues to hamper the conduct of our foreign policy. Moreover, because such operations have almost always become public--Nicaragua being an obvious example--debates over their legitimacy have fostered considerable domestic divisiveness.

The Elusive Concept of Covert Operations

The covert operations undertaken by the United States have been demonstrated in many ways. A cursory list of the post-World War II operations would include efforts to influence outcome of elections in Western European countries during the early cold war, the 1953 overthrow of Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran, the 1954 overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala, the 1963 attempt to assassinate Fidel Castro in Cuba, the 1963 overthrow of Juan Bosch in the Dominican Republic, the 1964 defeat of rebel forces loyal to Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, the 1965 propaganda campaign to overthrow the Sukarno government in Indonesia, the 1967 provision of aid to overthrow George Papandreu and install George Papadopoulos in Greece, and involvement in the 1970 overthrow of Norodom Sihanouk in Cambodia.[1] More recently, the Reagan administration was accused of engaging in illegal covert propaganda activities designed to persuade the news media and the public to support its Central American policies.[2]

The definition of covert operations differs among countries and administrations. As defined in the 1976 final report of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, such operations include any clandestine activity designed to influence foreign governments, events, organizations, or persons in support of United States foreign policy. Covert action may include political and economic actions, propaganda and paramilitary activities [and is] planned and executed . . . so as to conceal the identity of the sponsor or else to permit the sponsor's plausible denial of the operation.[3]

Former Central Intelligence Agency director Stansfield Turner puts it more cogently: "Covert action is the term that describes our efforts to influence the course of events in a foreign country without our role being known." Turner also notes that covert action "has always been assigned to the CIA to perform, by means of unattributable propaganda, sub rosa political action, or secret paramilitary support." [4]

Still, like other bureaucratic actions, the precise status and definition of covert operations, from an examiner's standpoint, are difficult to establish. For example, on January 24, 1978, President Carter issued Executive Order 12036, which used the euphemism "special activities" for covert operations and defined them as activities conducted abroad in support of national foreign policy objectives which are designed to further official United States programs and policies abroad and which are planned and executed so that the role of the United States government is not apparent or acknowledged publicly, and functions in support of such activities, but not including diplomatic activity or the collection and production of intelligence or related support functions.[5]

President Reagan provided a similarly vague definition in his 1981 executive order on intelligence. The only significant change was the addition of a passage stating that such special activities "are not intended to influence United States political processes, public opinion, policies, or media...." r

Questions of Legitimacy

The answer to the question of whether covert operations are ethical or legitimate also has produced considerable controversy. One commentator writes:

Let us remind ourselves that clandestine acts need not be beastly. Indeed, many forms of "covert operations" are nonviolent and as routine--and as benign--as providing advice and funds to politicians, labor leaders and editors who oppose foreign take-overs in their own countries.[7]

Another observer notes that covert action is an ugly word in the lexicon of many observers schooled in democratic political traditions. Many Westerners have written in terms of bemused horror and morbid fascination about the spectacular expansion of both Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, in which covert political warfare is alleged to have played an important role.[8]

If one is given such widely varying assessments of covert operations, what is one to believe? If one applies a simple, generic definition, that is, an attempt by a government to influence events in another state or territory without revealing its involvements, one sees that seeking to influence the politics of other governments and societies is an inherent element of foreign policy. Moreover, governments usually do not reveal exactly what they seek to accomplish or how they intend to do it. They are to one degree or another secretive or covert. Thus, to some extent, all nations engage in covert actions. Indeed, aside from reasons of ideology, covert actions as a form of intervention have expanded as the growth of trade, the ease and speed of travel, and the technological advances in communications have made it easier for officials of one nation to affect the political climate in other nations.

Americas Third World War-How 6 million People Were killed in CIA secret wars against third world countries
How 6 million People Were killed in CIA secret wars against third world countries

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SOURCE FILE

John Stockwell, former CIA Station Chief in Angola in 1976, working for then Director of the CIA, George Bush. He spent 13 years in the agency. He gives a short history of CIA covert operations. He is a very compelling speaker and the highest level CIA officer to testify to the Congress about his actions. He estimates that over 6 million people have died in CIA covert actions, and this was in the late 1980's.

THE SECRET WARS OF THE CIA:

by John Stockwell
A lecture given in October, 1987

Part I - Part II

John Stockwell is the highest-ranking CIA official ever to leave the agency and go public. He ran a CIA intelligence-gathering post in Vietnam, was the task-force commander of the CIA's secret war in Angola in 1975 and 1976, and was awarded the Medal of Merit before he resigned. Stockwell's book *In Search of Enemies*, published by W.W. Norton 1978, is an international best-seller.